

Relationship Marketing and Sustainable Competitive Advantage at Tema Branch of Zoomlion Ghana Limited

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Abstract

The competitive business environment shows that today's business combat different and more complex factors to remain competitive in their field of endeavour. In the service industry, the emphasis is placed on customer identification, customer retention, customer satisfaction and fostering long term relationship. The purpose of the study was to identify how Zoomlion Ghana Limited can leverage on relationship marketing to create competitive advantage. The study adopted the qualitative research paradigm and a case study research design. The study was conducted in the Tema metropolises with the population being employees and customers of Zoomlion Ghana Limited. The sample procedure used was convenience and sample size comprised of 50 employees and 200 customers of the company. The data for the study was obtained primarily through questionnaire and analysed using SPSS. The study established employees understood their roles in adopting relationship marketing, however, employees lacked the necessary communication equipment to help facilitate the process. This also reflected in the challenges employees faced in establishing relationship with customers. Also, Zoomlions Company Ltd.'s working environment proved not to encourage innovation among employees. The study recommended that Zoomlion should invest in modern communication system that will enhance communication, trust, and commitment as a basis for establishing relationship marketing strategy.

Keywords: Customer Relations, Competitive Advantage, Innovation

Introduction

In this era of globalization, the objective for survival is to build and maintain competitive advantages of an enterprise, which should make it possible to achieve above average results of its business activities (Cegliński, 2016a). In this case, development of competitive advantage is equal to achievement of success by a given organization. Srivastava et al (2013) opined that to achieve competitive advantage, firms need to constantly focus on the identification of differential product strategies, building or reshaping core competencies, acquiring unique technologies, and accumulation of intellectual property, all of which can be harnessed to make the company successful in a highly competitive marketplace.

Background of the Study

In most industries, some firms are more profitable than others, regardless of whether the average profitability of the industry is high or low. The superior performers conceivably possess something special

and hard to imitate that allows them to outperform their rivals. These unique skills and assets (resources) are referred to as sources of competitive advantage. Competitive advantage can result either from implementing a value-creating strategy not simultaneously being implemented by any current or potential competitors (Bharadwaj et al. 1993) or through superior execution of the same strategy as competitors. Sustainability is achieved when the advantage resists erosion by competitor behaviour (Porter 1985, p.20). In other words, the skills and resources underlying a business's competitive advantage must resist duplication by other firms (Barney, 1991).

Competitive advantage is said to be obtained when an organization develops or acquires a set of attributes (or execution actions) that allow it to outperform its competitors (Wang, 2014). Competitive advantage is also said to be revealed, when activities of a given organization are more profitable than those of its market competitors or when it outperforms them as regards other significant results of activities (Huff et al., 2009), including, for example, the share in the market, product quality or technological advancement. Inherently, a lot of enterprises are not able to exceed such prescribed standards (Huff et al., 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Until the early 2000s, the sanitation business was solely handled by government agencies, municipal and the district assembles in Ghana. Zoomlion's entry into the industry was met with speculations and expectations to fail. However, profitability of the sanitation industry has led to new entrants into the sanitation industry. In the Tema metropolis, the environment for competition is keen, with each competing to either create a market a profitable niche for itself (TMA report, 2017). The call for broader studies concerning competitive advantage and relationship marketing within the service industry confirms the interest in the areas of this study (Hatzakis et al. 2010; Srivastava et al, 2013). In tackling the growth in competition, Hoffman (2000) identified that firms need to create competitive advantage in their industry of operation to gain or protect their market niche. Hakkak (2015) confirmed Hoffman's accession but expatiated further that firms should not only strive for competitive advantage but rather a sustainable one for that matter. However, like other referenced studies like Johnston (1999) and Verma et al (2001) these studies were related with the manufacturing sector.

Current trends of practice in the sanitation reveals that mode of operation remains same, with little or no differentiating factor. (TMA Report, 2017). This development makes developing sustainable competitive advantage from the traditional sources keen. Srivastava et al (2013) argued that, in service sector, grounds for competition must do employees and their ability to make customers feel special. With the growing trend of competition in the sanitations, the Tema metropolises has witness four other sanitation service providers between 2016 to 2017 (TMA report, 2017). Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.'s concessions in the sanitation industry are constant threat to competitors as market leaders. How can Zoomlion Ghana Ltd leverage on employee relationship marketing to create a competitive advantage in dealing with growing competition attracted by the recognition of profitability in the sanitation industry.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to identify ways by which sustainable competitive advantage can be created in the sanitation industry through relationship marketing.

Specific objective are as follows:

- ❖ To examine the role of employees in adopting a relationship marketing approach.

- ❖ To determine the effect of relationship marketing on sustainable competitive advantage.
- ❖ To examine the challenges associated with establishing relationship marketing.

Research questions

The specific research questions of the study are generated taking into consideration the unique characteristics of the service industry:

- ❖ What roles can employees of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd play in adopting a relationship marketing approach?
- ❖ How effective is relationship marketing in contributing to a sustainable competitive advantage for Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.?
- ❖ What are the challenges Zoomlion Ghana Ltd, is likely to face in establishing relationship marketing?

Significance of the study

The study adds to academic research purposes of competitive advantage and relationship marketing in the service sector as a strategy to sustain growth and profitability as well as identify customers' perceptions and reaction to relationship building strategy in the service industry. The study also provides further studies around competitive advantage and relationship marketing in the service industry. This is because further studies in this area will identify the areas covered and further dwell on the untapped fields of research.

Limitation of the study

This research may be limited to several uncertainties which may emanate from the methodology adopted, data collection and analysis procedure and the context of the study. This study being an academic study, it is bound to specific timelines. Hence, it will be a challenge in the ability to cover more branches of Zoomlion Ghana limited. However, due diligence is ensured that, best practices were adopted for the conduct of this study.

Delimitation of the study

Despite the broadness of the service industry and the sanitation industry to be precise, the scope of the study covers the activities of Zoomlion Ghana limited in Tema municipality. The study looks specifically at implementing competitive advantage and relationship marketing strategies in building better relationship with customers leading to profitability. The investigations conducted from the point providing better sanitation services. These were the dimensions captured in the objectives, the research questions, and the conceptual framework of the study.

Organization of study

Chapter one is an introduction to the research report. It contains background information to the subject at hand and how information in the research report will be organized. It highlights the research objectives, objectives of the study, the relevance of the study and the scope of the study. Chapter two contains a review of the literature published around the study and provides an insight into relevant views and trends that emerged in the area under consideration. Chapter three details the methods used in the collection of data for the research work and analysing data. Chapter four involves the presentation of information from the data collected from survey respondent. Chapter five looks at the summary of findings, conclusion and recommendation based on the findings.

Literature Review

This chapter of the study reviews theories, literatures and concepts of relationship marketing and competitive advantage. Relationship marketing and competitive advantage concepts date as far back as the 80s. These concepts have stood the test of time and partly contributed to the evolution and application of marketing principles in the service sector. Most current literatures on the topic have been on application of these principles hence most references of the study span beyond the 10 years' requirement of academic essay.

Conceptual Review

The concept of relationship marketing

The American Marketing Association revised definition of marketing in 2004 to state that “marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders” (emphasis added). The revised overall definition of marketing identified the process of managing relationships as one of its key charters, parallel to more traditional marketing-mix factors (Ringold & Weitz, 2007). Grönroos (2004) observed that the phenomenon itself was deeply rooted in the history of trade and commerce. Moller and Halinen (2000) admit that relationship marketing as phenomena dates as far back in history as trading. In fact, buyer-seller relationship is an old-fashioned way of doing business. Relationships have strong historical antecedents from the pre-industrial era (Sheth & Parvatiyar 1995a) where sellers knew each of their buyers individually and suggested appropriate, customized product offerings. This situation changed during the industrial era, in which marketers shifted their concerns towards sales and promotions of goods, instead of relationship enhancement and when individualized practices were replaced by mass marketing. From the post-industrial era on, however, marketers began to realize the limitations of their transaction-oriented strategies under pressure of eroding repeat purchases and intensified competitive pressures in increasingly saturated markets (Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995a). A clear shift took place from marketing to anonymous masses of customers to developing and managing relationships with well-known, or at least somehow identifiable, customers (Grönroos 2004), using highly sophisticated information technologies. Several marketing scholars, like for instance Grönroos (1990), Sheth, Gardener and Garrett (1998), Sheth and Sharma (1997), Sisodia and Wolfe (2000) or Webster (1992) believe that we are witnessing the birth of an alternative paradigm to the prominent exchange paradigm, dominant in mass consumer goods markets, already obsolete and insufficient to explain the current market context. According to Möller and Halinen (2000) these and other scholars have been welcoming relationship marketing as a “saviour from the detrimental impact of traditional marketing or marketing mix theory” and new scientific empires are being built on its shoulders. Gummesson (2002) states that inherent in the definition of relationship marketing, is the relationship with all stakeholders in the value chain. Therefore, relationship marketing encompasses not only customers but also includes suppliers, intermediaries, and other agents in the industry.

Definition of Relationship Marketing

In Philip Kotler's definition relationship marketing includes creating, maintaining, and strengthening a strong relationship with customers and other stakeholders (Kotler, 1999). Nevin (1995) points out that the term relationship marketing was used to reflect a variety of themes and perspectives. Some of these themes offered a narrowed functional marketing perspective while others offer a perspective that is broader and

somewhat paradigmatic in approach and orientation. Thus, Shani and Chalasani (1992, pp. 44) set forth that “relationship marketing is an integrated effort at identifying, maintaining and building a relationship with individual customers and at continuously reinforcing that connection in benefit to both parties through interactive, individualized contacts that contribute added value over a long period of time.”

Despite the various definitions of relationship marketing that can be found under this perspective (Berry, 1983; Jackson, 1985; Grönroos, 1989; 1990), it can be set forth that relationship marketing centres on the individual, buyer-seller relationship in which both parties obtain benefits derived from the established relationship and where this relationship is longitudinal by nature (Peterson, 1995). Relationship marketing is the development of mutually beneficial long-term relationships between a seller and a buyer. From the firm’s point of view, Relationship marketing is the art of creating special personal ties with its customers. Customers on the other hand, view relationship marketing as an opportunity to share information about their needs and to have those needs fulfilled (Nkakanma & Jackson, 2007).

Characteristics of Relationship Marketing

Trust

Trust is one key element for a successful relationship program. Trust deals with the ability of firms to implement privacy policy that will inform customers about what the firm plans to do with the personal data it is requesting from them (Kania, 1999). Trust represents customer confidence in a firm’s reliability and integrity (Buttle, 1996). Confidence, in turn, is associated with consistency, honesty, fairness, helpfulness, benevolence, and responsibility; all qualities of which any (successful) firm should exude. Trust is a key component of the business relationship and defines that each side of the relationship, to what extent can trust on promise of other relationship party. Trust is viewed as a vital factor as important as commitment in relational exchanges (Palmatier, et al. 2007). Literature on trust gives a multitude of definitions. Trust is to “believe in the reliability and integrity of the partner” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). For Gambetta (1988, p.217), to trust implicitly means “the probability that the other party acts in our favour or at least not in our disfavour and is well mannered enough to agree to commit to a cooperation with it” (Gambetta, 1988). Trust encourages marketers to work at preserving relationships so customers will resist attractive short-term alternatives and view potentially high-risk actions as prudent. Additionally, customers must understand that this behaviour will also promote efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness (Buttle 1996)

Commitment

Commitment deals with a firm’s desire to maintain a long-term relationship with its customer base without trust, commitment ‘flounders’ (Buttle 1996). Concern, on the other hand, deals with marketer’s appreciation and understanding of the need to continually strive for the welfare of their customers. The objective should always be to meet, if not exceed, customers’ expectations. Respect includes affording customers the choice on how much personal information they wish to disclose and at the same time giving them something of value (Kania 1997). According to relationship literature, commitment is an important and crucial variable, but not exclusive in an exchange relationship for a company desiring to maintain good relationships with its clients for a long term (Johnson, 1999; Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987; Anderson & Weitz, 1992). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994, p.23) “the commitment of exchange partners is the key to achieve outcomes of great value.” Anderson and Weitz (1992); Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande (1992) and Morgan and Hunt (1994), define commitment as the desire to maintain a valuable

relationship. This definition stresses the importance of the value creation in a relational exchange. This will allow the strengthening and encouragement of both the seller and client to maintain the relationship over time if the latter is beneficial and profitable for both parties involved in the exchange.

Communications and Responsiveness

Consists of formal and informal exchanges that lead to exchange of meaningful and timely information between purchaser and seller. Responsiveness in relationship marketing reflects an attitude of giving instead of getting. Firms put customers more at ease when the customer realizes that the marketer is as concerned with what benefits the customer is receiving as to the profit the firm is making. Additionally, open, and free dialogue requires a communication pipeline through which a firm is alerted to issues and problems before they fester, and more timely and relevant messages can be delivered efficiently and effectively. Consistent active and open two-way dialogue, through which customer-centred, caring, and customer-oriented information is expressed, serves to build overall trust and confidence in a firm overall (Yep et al. 2012).

Paradigm of Relationship Marketing

Pre-Industrial age

The paradigm of relationship marketing first appeared in literature in the early 80's. The domain that dealt with "relationships," termed relationship marketing is often attributed to Berry (1983). Other authorities in the field in assessing Berry's work, recognized the need to formally identify it as an integral part of the traditional marketing. Kotler (1990) and Webster (1992), major authority in the marketing field opined that, marketing as a field of study and practice was undergoing a reconceptualization at the time in its orientation from transactions to relationships. Emphasis of marketing being relationships as opposed to transaction-based exchanges is very likely to redefine the domain of marketing (Sheth et al., 1988). The emergence of a relationship marketing school of thought imminently gave growing interest of marketing scholars in the relational paradigm. However, in marketing literature there is no generally accepted definition of relationship marketing. Although most definitions include similar terminology, there are differences in formulation. A comprehensive explanation of marketing from relational perspective by Grönroos (1997, p. 407) states that "marketing is the process of identifying and establishing, maintaining and enhancing, and when necessary, also terminating relationships with customers and other stakeholders, at a profit, so objectives of all parties involved are met; and this is done by mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises".

Organizational Behaviour

The shift towards relationship marketing is identified to be driven by cultural and customer demand changes, powerful media technologies which is yielding progressive rapidity in business industries. Incorporating relationship marketing into company's strategy does not necessarily attribute immediate gratification. On contrary, there must be an understanding that knowledge is gained over long term customer's relationship duration to respond to customers' desires appropriately and sustain those relationships profitably. Necessary to mention, when relationship marketing of a company is highly recognized and perceived by customers, appreciation of a service and satisfaction are likely to be induced (Palmatier et al., 2009), which form a beneficial basis for long-lasting trust-based relationship establishment (Smith & Barclay, 1997).

Information Technological Age

The rapidly developing information technology has been creating a primarily practice-based and consultant-driven literature on managing long term consumer relationships through databases and direct marketing activities (Gummesson, 2002; Möller and Halinen 2000; Peppers, Rogers, and Dorf 1999; Rao and Perry 2002), with a heavy emphasis on marketing communications, customer loyalty and one-to-one marketing. As Berry (2002) states, “I had no idea that the information technology revolution ahead would enable relationship customization to the extent that it has.” Indeed, a decade ago, thoughts of appropriating the relational perspective and transferring it into mass consumer markets would have been unthinkable, yet today relationship marketing is embraced by both practitioners and academics in a wide range of markets and contexts (O’Malley and Tynan 2000). Marketers now had both the willingness and ability to engage in relational marketing (Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995b). The intention is to treat consumers not like a homogeneous market but as individuals (Gummesson 2004; Sisodia and Wolfe 2000), a challenge difficult to meet without IT and CRM (Customer Relationship Management), “the recent vogue in management literature” (Buttle and Ang 2002; Ford 2002).

Benefits of Relationship Marketing

From the Firms Point of view, relationship marketing can provide the following benefits (Nwakanma & Jackson, 2007):

Profitability: The longer the association between the company and its customer, the more profitable the relationship. From marketing experience, it has been established that retaining existing customers is more profitable than acquiring new ones. Relationship marketing provides a firm with an opportunity to participate in cross selling which increases overall sales volume and potential profit. Goodwill, which results in word of mouth promotion, helps to lower customer acquisition cost, and therefore impacts favourably on profit. According to Frederick Reichheld in his book, the Loyalty Effect, a 5% improvement in a company’s customer attrition rate can push a company’s profits up to 75% higher. This increased profit is a result of reduced acquisition costs, increased cross-selling, a high customer referral rate, decreased price sensitivity, and lower operating costs.

Brand loyalty: Brand loyalty is a benefit produced by an effective relationship marketing strategy. Relationship marketing encourages the customer to build a long- term relationship with a firm and its product. When this relationship results in consistent preferential treatment for a firm’s product, the result is a brand loyal customer. A good example was a 2001 article in the USA Today which stated: with their wings clipped by corporate travel cutbacks, thousands of business travellers may have to scramble this year to earn enough miles to retain their status among the nation’s elite frequent fliers. Some are even paying thousands of dollars of their own money to earn enough miles to qualify for membership in the top tiers of frequent-traveller plans such as Continental Airlines’ One Pass Platinum Elite and United Airlines’ Mileage Plus Premier Executive 1K. (USA Today June 2001). The fact that these travellers are willing to pay several thousand dollars to maintain their elite status is testimony to the nature of brand loyalty that can be created through relationship marketing.

Competitive Advantage and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Company can only gain competitive advantage over its rivals by either performing at a lower cost or performing in a way, that leads to differentiation (Porter & Millar 1985), which creates superior customer value (Huber, Herrmann, and Morgan 2001). Reichheld and Hopton (2000) defines that a company’s

competitive advantage is explained by having relatively lower retention rate than its competitors. A firm is said to have competitive advantage when its profit rate is higher than the average rate of the related industry, and it is said to have sustained competitive advantage when it retains the high profit rate for several years. Numerous perspectives on the determinants of competitive advantage have been proposed. According to Hills and Jones (2007), the profitability of firms depends on industry attractiveness and relative position of the firm in the industry. According to this notion, strategy makes an organization conduct activities in a distinctive way from its competitors, pivotal competences facilitate distinctiveness and diversity adoption, which ultimately provide the organization with competitive advantage (De Toni & Tonchia, 2003). The main goal of an organization in creation of competitive advantage, based on its resources and abilities, is to gain competitiveness and achieve a distinctive position regarding performance in the business market. The key for achieving competitiveness is sustainability of competitive advantages based on identification and perception of customers' demands, concentration on customer, and improvement of the process from customers' perspectives. Sustainable competitive advantage is a kind of competitive advantage which exploits organizational competences- valuable for customers, which is not easily imitated and copied by competitors, and which provides competence and competitiveness for the organization.

Competition in the business world, as we know it today, is dynamic and challenging. Customers have become more aware of the competition that is taking place around them. The rise of the information age has educated individuals to search information from products and services, which has changed the market forces in many industries. One could state that many industries, including service industry, are under the mercy of their customers. Gaining competitive advantage in today's business service organizations is a very serious task for managers because they need to find a way to deliver superior value to their customers (Yep et al., 2012; Yu & Dean, 2001; Oliver, 1997). The importance of customer relationship has got lots of attention during the last decades and different marketing studies highlights the role of customer satisfaction and the positive effect of their loyalty in service organizations (Yu & Dean 2001), such as banks and insurance firms (Peppard, 2000). The basic idea for long-term competitiveness is to manage the customer in a level that is superior, compared to the competition and with that, gain the customer's loyalty (Wirtz et al. 2008).

Sustainable competitive advantage comes from operational effectiveness or strategic positioning. Thus, a company must do what the other companies are doing but better, in a sense of cost structure, or the company must deliver unique value by doing things differently than its competitors. It allows a company to outperform the average competitor (Porter 2001). Barney (1991) argues that organization has it, when it is implementing a value creating strategy that is not simultaneously being implemented by any other organization.

Sustainable Competitive Advantage in the Service Industry

Human Resource

Human resources are identified as a very important factor in the service industry, when relating the origin of competitive advantage to services, as service employees are the conduit pipe between customers and the company (Reichheld 2003; Wirtz et al. 2008). Service employees are the image and face of an organization (Reichheld, 2003) and usually these employees are faced with the most demanding jobs in service organizations, as they are expected to be fast and efficient at performing operational tasks, as well as friendly and helpful in nature (Wirtz et al. 2008). According to human resource management studies,

numerous researchers have stated that people might be the ultimate source of sustained advantage (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002) since traditional resources like financial capital and scale of economics have been weakened by globalization and other economic changes (Youndt et al. 1996). As for service industry, it is said that service employees are a key input for delivering service excellence and productivity and these both are an important source of competitive advantage (Wirtz et al. 2008).

Customer Relationship Management and Customer Value

The competitive advantage is gained by creating a relationship with customers, built on quality, innovation, dialogue, and learning (Nguyen & Mutum 2012; Grönroos 1996). This is considered more sustainable strategy and it's mostly inimitable by competitors. In essence, a strategy, that can create a long-term competitive advantage (Grönroos 1996). Payne and Frow (2005) stated that organization should determine whether its value proposition is likely to result a superior customer experience. Their comprehensive understanding was that customer evaluates various attributes of product or service and these attributes should have a positive effect on the customer. For doing this, an organization must get knowledge from its customers by continuously updating knowledge of their needs, motivations, and behaviour (Gebert, Gebert et al, 2003). Gebert et al. (2003) also underline the importance of customer experience in their knowledge management model. They add that knowledge from customers is because customers gain their own expertise while using service, thus they should be regarded as equal partners when improvements are discussed.

Organisational Culture

Every business organisation operates on a set of principle, values, and norms. These values inform the basic strategic direction of the company (Delgado et al., 2000). To sustain a company's competitive advantage, the source of the competitive advantage and the implementation strategy must permeate all department of the company. This requires that is constitutes the objectives that drives the organisation.

Continues Innovation

Innovation is one of the fundamental processes of strategic management, and it plays a vital role of being one of the main sources of sustaining competitive advantage for organisations (Phillips, 2011). Innovation does not arise from a sudden stroke of genius of the designer or contractor, but rather a long process of research sponsored by the companies themselves, who can exploit the whole structure of associations which are implanted to create ideas that are truly revolutionary. Romero and Martinez-Roman (2012) opined that, innovation that helps sustain competitive advantage most often, springs up from healthy working environment. In respect to this argument, organisations should create the enabling environment to encourage innovation among employees (Romero & Martinez-Roman, 2012)

Theoretical Review

This section of the study provides theoretical framework on which the study is built on. This provides the framework that consists of the selected theory (or theories) that undergirds the study.

Resource dependency theory

This theory identifies the difficulty of organizations to acquire the best of resources. For an organization to be competitive, must get the best of resources and utilize them effectively (Likert, 1961). The more

organizations can harness resources, the more competitive they became. Therefore, resources were seen as the essence of organizational power (Feldberger, 2008). Emphasis was laid on employees being an organization's scarce resources that should be acquired effectively, utilized, developed, and retained (Kaplan & Norton, 2006).

Impact on the study

The theory emphasizes on the importance of human resource to an organization. Just as any resources of an organization, human resources of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd needs be effectively managed to derive the full benefit there off. The ability to derive a competitive advantage through this resource depends on Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.'s readiness to ensure that the best of human resource is acquired and maintained.

Comparative advantage theory

The main architect of comparative advantage theory is the economist David Ricardo who talked of the specialization and division of labor among nations and firms. Ricardo postulated that nations should produce goods in which they have a domestic comparative advantage over others (Ricardo, 1891). Since then, organizations and nations have focused on strengthening internal capacity to have more advantages relative to competitors and hence to reduce production and distribution costs per unit. Improving internal capacities include having the best human resources, who are best utilized to produce cheaper and better-quality goods and services (Porter 1980; Grant 1991).

Impact on the study

The premise of every strategic direction of an organization should be focused on the resources readily available. Thus, how the resources available could be used solve problems the industry is facing.

General systems theory

No organization can survive without interacting with its environment. The system approach to understanding organizations considers the human resource department as a component of the organization's system that also has other departments such as accounting, engineering, marketing etc. For the organization to grow and remain competitive, each department, section or unit should support each other (Robbins, 1990). One of the organization's inputs from the environment is human resources. For example, if an organization makes an error with its recruitment strategy, it will have a negative effect on the whole organization. Similarly, if at the input processing stage, human resources are not utilized in the best possible way, the same will be reflected in the quality and price of goods and services through feedback mechanisms. This may include the failure to sell goods or services at the expected prices.

Impact on the study

No matter what the competitive strategy direction of an organization, its success is dependent on how its internal structures inter-relate with each other. He strategic direction of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd, determines the focus of other resources and the direction of entire departments in the company.

Human capital theory:

Human capital theory was initially well developed by Becker (1964) and it has grown in importance worldwide because it focuses on education and training as a source of capital. It is now widely

acknowledged that one of the key explanations for the rapid development of Asian countries in the 1970s and 80s is high investment in human capital (Robert, 1991; Psacharopolos & Woodhall, 1997). Human capital theory changes the equation that training, and development are ‘costs the organization should try to minimize’ into training and development as ‘returnable investments’ which should be part of the organizational investment capital. Therefore, human resource training and development decisions and evaluations must be done based on clearly developed capital investment models.

Impact on the Study

This theory emphasizes on the importance of training and development of human resource of an organization. This is because change is constant. The human capital development of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd can only be determined by the strategic direction of the company.

Role behavior theory

Role behavior theory aims to explain and predict the behavior of individuals and teams in organizations, which, in turn, inform managers for the purposes of decision making, and what steps they take on people management as well as the expected consequences. Some of the key ideas focus on the need to improve the working environment including the resources to stimulate new behavior in employees for them to cope with new demands (Prachaska et al. 1982), it includes the use of rewards to induce and promote positive work behavior, and punishments to control negative behavior (Rogers, 1983).

Impact on the study

The role behavior theory identifies the role of employees in pursuing the sustainable competitive advantage of an organization, and how employees’ behaviors can be influenced to achieve this strategic direction.

Resource-Based View Theory

A resource is valuable to help firms create strategies that capitalize on opportunities and ward off threats (Ketchen & Short, 2012). Resource-Based View Theory suggests that resources that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable best position a firm for long-term success (Rainio, 2012). In a rapidly changing environment durability, which defines how easy a company's resource is outdated, has proven to be important as well (Grant, 2010). The theory contends that an organization with strategic resources has an opportunity to develop competitive advantage over its rivals (Rainio, 2012) with assumption that resources and internal capabilities are heterogeneously distributed among firms (Njoroge, 2015). When a firm earns above-average profits, its competitors will try to imitate or substitute the company's resources to gain competitive parity (Rainio, 2012). Ketchen and Short (2012) observe that the theory has evolved over the years for ease of understanding how strategic resources and capabilities allow firms to enjoy excellent performance. The best approach of any firm is to consider specific competitive capabilities and environment conditions, and which will lead to valuable performance.

Impact on the study

The resource base view’s impact on the study accesses the competitive advantage strategy being adopted by Zoomlion Company Ltd. Per this theory, Zoomlion Company Ltd can identify their competitive advantage direction by identifying the resources available and how these resources can influence their

strategic direction. Schuler (2000) has summarized these theories into a more manageable framework (see Table 1.1). This framework enables us to compare the human resource theories and their main objectives presented table as follows:

Table 1. Summary of Theories.

Theories	Human Resource lessons/ Assumption/ Implication
Resource dependency theory (Likert, 1961; Flamholtz et al. 2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scarcity of resources determines policies and procedures to be adopted by an organization. • Employees are scarce resources, which should be carefully managed.
Comparative advantage theory (Ricardo, 1891 (Porter 1980; Grant, 1991)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizations should capitalize on the competitive advantage it has over other organizations. • An employee is a rare resource, immutable, non-substitutable and valuable. • To gain from competitive advantage, there should be creation and support of organizational culture that ensures effective management of training and performance management functions.
General systems theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizations are complex systems. • Human resource management is a sub system. • Failure/success of each component will have overreaching impact to the organization
Human capital theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is an economic approach – people are valuable assets. • Invest in people as one does in other assets e.g. machinery.
Role behavior theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The means used by an organization to send role information determines role response (behavior). • Human resource management should focus on improving the role information for employees
Resource Base View Theory (Njoroge, 2015; Rainio, 2012; Ketchen & Short, 2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strategic direction of an organization should be focus on their resources available. • To attain competitive advantage, these resources must be used in solving relevant problems in the industry of operation.

Source: adapted from Schuler (2000).

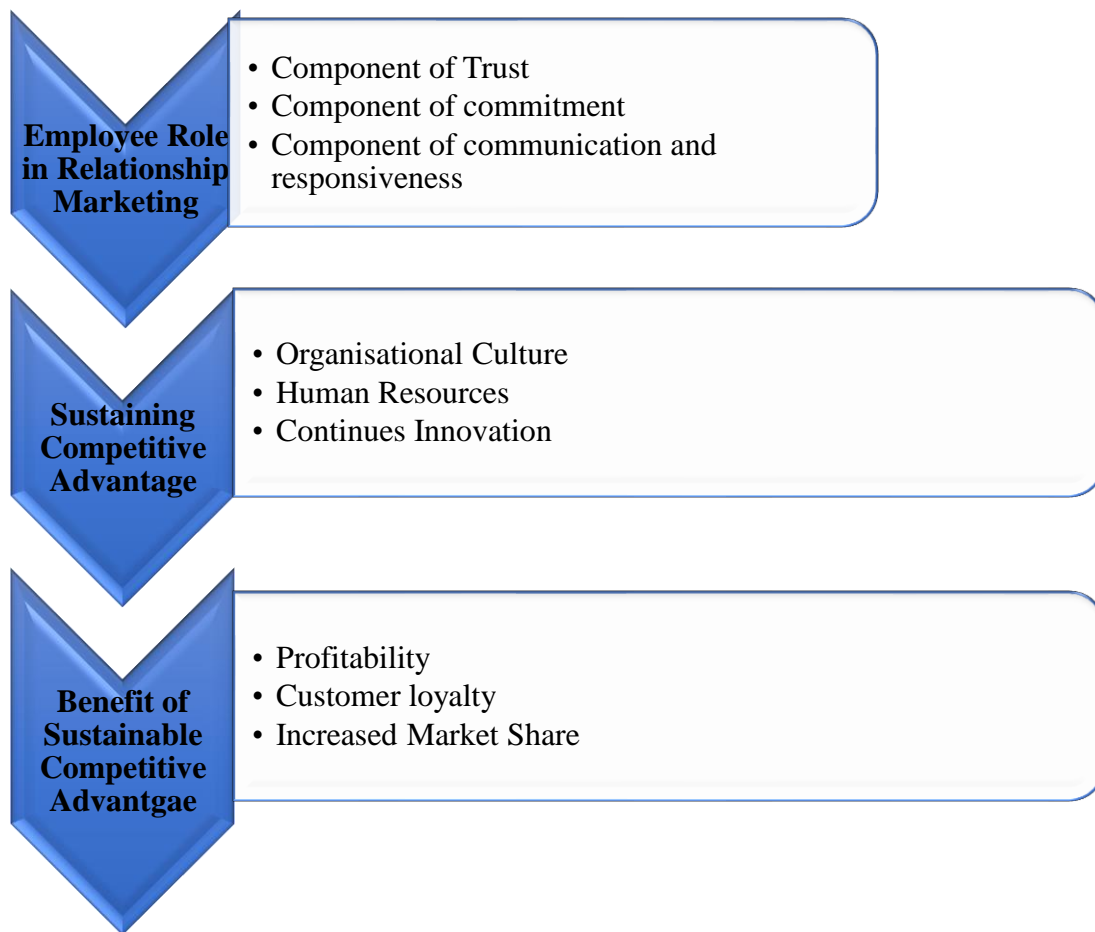
Empirical Study

In Hefferman et al., (2008), the study focus was on developing trust in the banking sector as the basis of establishing relationship between staff and customers. The study method was an internet survey and the main finding of the study identified that three components made up trust: namely, knowledge, dependability, and expectation. The study failed in acknowledge that trust alone was not enough basis in establishing and sustaining relationship between customers and the company.

Also, in Kwarteng, (2015), the study was a quantitative study which focused using relationship marketing

as a tool for Competitive Advantage in Banking Sector in Ghana. The study concluded that relationship marketing was a base that the banks could build competitive advantage. However, the study failed to address the “how” and recognized the role of employees may play on behalf of their respective organizations. Taleghani et al. (2011) study focus was on the role of relationship marketing in customer orientation process in the Banking Industry with focus on Loyalty. The study provided empirical evidence for the influence on customer loyalty of eight underpinnings of relationship marketing: trust, commitment, communication, conflict handling, bonding, shared values, empathy, and reciprocity. The study concluded that customer loyalty can be created, reinforced, and retained by relationship marketing.

Conceptual Review.



Source: Literature review,

Research Methods

The methodology of every research is very important as not only do the validity and reliability of the results of the study depend on it, but also the extent of replication and generalization of the findings. This chapter therefore presents the detailed and systematic research processes that have been employed in the conduct of the study and discusses the techniques applied for the analysis of the data gathered.

Research Paradigm

For this study, the qualitative research paradigm was adopted. This was because not all activities in the industry especially concerning the service delivery base activities in the sanitation industry to develop

competitive advantage and relationship marketing in the industry could be measured. The qualitative research paradigm relies on the collection of qualitative data (i.e., non-numerical data such as words and pictures); deal with realism, with situational and particularistic findings and the data analysis uses descriptive data, themes, and holistic features to provide insider viewpoint for a particular firm (Kothari 2004).

Research Design

The research design employed by the study is the case study design. Case study research narrowly focuses, provides a high level of detail, and can combine both objective and subjective data to achieve an in-depth understanding. The research design adopted also allowed adequate information for analysis pertaining to the subject area and provide indebt understanding of the objectives within Zoomlion Ghana Ltd as an organization.

Study Area

Zoomlion Ghana Limited is a giant in the waste management as well as environmental sanitation business in Ghana and Africa as a whole. The Company was formed under the company's Act in April 2006. The Company which was formed in 2006 as Zoomlion Ghana Limited with a few members of staff has now grown over the past Ten (10) years with subsidiaries. It now has a total core staff of 3,000 and manages about 65,000 workers under various forms of Public Private Partnerships (PPP). Zoomlion also operates in other African countries such as Togo, Angola, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. Zoomlion is very proud of its international services such as offering janitorial and environmental sanitation services during the Africa Cup of nations in Ghana in 2008 and the recent Africa cup of nations in the Ultra-modern 11th November Stadium in Luanda, Angola. Zoomlion Ghana Limited seeks first and foremost to satisfy clients and customers by continuously improving upon operations to make them cost-effective. Zoomlion Ghana Limited is committed to building long-lasting relationships with our private sector customers (industry, etc), Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of Central Government, Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) or Local Authorities, and the communities we serve not excluding even our competitors in the industry, who we would prefer to refer to as partners in the business of keeping Ghana and Africa clean, green and healthy.

Study Population

The population of the study constitutes both employees of Zoomlion and customer located in the Tema Metropolitan Assemble. The employees of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd amounts to 110 staff. This number was attained and certified by the Human resources department of the Tema branch. The population consist of the three Human resource department staffs, eight account officers and debt recovery/bailing staffs, two front desk officers, five maintenance and repairs mechanics, two operations/ purchasing and supply officers three marketing officers and 87 field officers.

Sample Size and Sampling procedure

The sample size constituted the entire population of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd in the Tema Branch. This makes room for the study to access opinions of all employees. The sampling procedure adopted was the total population sampling, this procedure is best suited for the study taking into consideration the subject matter, total population of the study and the objectives of the study. The first objective, which is to examine the

role of employees in adopting relationship marketing strategy in Zoomlion Ghana Ltd warrants for the use of the sampling procedure. Also, literature review of theories supports the total population sampling procedure as employees are viewed as resource of an organisation and irrespective of their department of work, they have a role to play in the strategic direction of the company (Feldberger, 2008; Robbins, 1990; Rainio, 2012; Ketchen & Short, 2012).

Data Collection Instrument

Two sources of data were relied on to achieve the objective of the study, information was sourced from sources like journals, books, business reports and magazine articles. Both published and un-published sources are utilized. The sources of the unpublished data include materials of scholars and research workers. Projects reports and thesis got from different universities at their websites. Closed and open-ended questions provide a more structured response for better recommendation. A five point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” will be used in soliciting for responds of the respondents from the staffs of Zoomlion Ghana ltd. Questionnaires structure consist of employee profile data collection, employees’ opinion on the role of employees in adopting relationship marketing in Zoomlion Ghana Ltd; how effective can competitive advantage through relationship marketing can be sustained and challenges concerns with establishing relationship marketing.

Validity of Instrument

Validity and reliability are to examine how well the collected data covers the actual area of investigation and the extent to which researcher’s biasness could affect the study. To ensure validity of the study, the questionnaires was reviewed by the researcher’s supervisor, colleague students and some staffs of Zoomlion Ghana ltd to ensure that the content were appropriate for the study. The study ensured that data collected represented the content area under study.

Data processing and analysis

The data collected was coded, analysed, and interpreted by use of SPSS software and represented with percentile tables, a pie chart and a bar graphs to make it easier to understand and more meaningful. They showed the frequencies, percentages, standard deviations and means of the results.

The first objective of the study which sort to examine the role of employees in establishing relationship marketing ensured that employees could identifying relationship marketing as the strategic direction of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd and their role in ensuring its adoption by ascertaining central tendency of employees’ responses. Through categorization of responses based on data obtained through questionnaires, employees’ opinion how sustainable competitive advantage can be attained through factors that promote relationship marketing as well as challenges in establishing Relationship Marketing. Data analysed was substantiated by relevant and applicable theories on the subject area.

Ethical issues

Approval of intention to carry out the study at Zoomlion Ghana ltd is made known to the Tema branch manager. Staffs of Zoomlion Ghana ltd were briefed on the study and questionnaires made available for discussion before administration. Last but not the least, data analysis was made available to management of the Tema branch for their perusal to ensure that sensitive issues that may be touch on meets mutual understanding and its availability to the public.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of the study is to identify ways by which sustainable competitive advantage can be created in the sanitation industry through relation marketing. The research questions the study sort to address were identified as follows; what roles employees play in adopting relationship marketing; how effective relationship marketing in is contributing to sustainable competitive advantage for Zoomlion Ghana Ltd as well as challenges they are likely to face in establishing relationship marketing strategy. The study adopted qualitative research paradigm and case study approach. The population of the study was identified and certified from the Human resource department of the Zoomlion Ghana Ltd, Tema branch to be 110. The total population sampling procedure was adopted which enable all the population to take part in the sampling procedure. The study area was confined to the Tema Metropolis and the Tema branch of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.

Results And Discussion

This chapter discusses and analyses data gathered from the field. The analyses were done based on the responses from respondents, using various forms of graphical representation. The outputs are presented in tables and charts. The research findings of the data obtained through questionnaires were defined in-depth and research findings as guided by study objectives discussed. The population of the study recognized two categories of respondents, namely employees of Zoomlion company ltd and their customers. The study targeted 50 employees and 200 customers, and all questionnaires were fully administered, and observation report summarized.

Employee Information Summary

Out of 110 employees 100 employees were able to participate in the administering questionnaires. The sample population who fully participated in the administration of questionnaires consisted of the three (3) human resource department staffs, six (6) account officers and debt recovery/bailing staffs, two (2) front desk officers, three (3) maintenance and repairs mechanics, two (2) operations/ purchasing and supply officers, three (3) marketing officers and eighty-two (82) field officers.

Respondents’ data distribution table as shown in Table 2 gives an overview of gender, age and years of working experience of employees of Zoomlion Company Ltd. A total of 73 male respondents were recorded out of the 100 respondents who participated in the questionnaire administration and the remaining 27 respondents were female. Age distribution of respondents revealed that, 68% of employees fell between 26 to 44 years’ bracket. This age bracket is deemed to be young with experience compared with the age bracket 18 to 25 years which constituted 9% of the sample size. The age bracket of 45 and above recorded 23% of sample size. This age bracket is characterised with high level of working experiences and low level of energy.

Table 2: Employee Information Summary

	Details	Number of respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	73	73%
	Female	27	27%
	Total	100	100%
Age distribution of respondents	18 to 25	9	9%

Age distribution of respondents	18 to 25	9	9%
	26 to 44	68	68%
	45 and above	23	23%
	Total	100	100%
Years of working experience with Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.	1 to 5 years	28	28%
	6 to 10 years	48	48%
	11 years and above	24	24%
	Total	100	100%

Source: Filed Data, Osei (2019)

Years of engaging experience with Zoomlion Ghana Ltd shows that 48% of employees had been working with the company between 6 to 10 years, 28% between 1 to 5 years and 24% between 11 years and above. This generally show that Zoomlion Company is more of a male dominated company with a relatively young employee base and its tendency of low employee turnover rate.

The Role of Employees in adopting relationship marketing

Trust, commitment, and communication are the factors precedent to adopting relationship marketing in an organisation (Palmatier, et al. 2007; Buttle, 1996; Kania, 1997; Yep et al., 2012). These factors formed the basis in Taleghani et al. (2011) in their study the role of relationship marketing in customer orientation process in the Banking Industry. Despite this empirical study found trust, commitment, and communication to be among the factors that the banking industry needs to work on to gain competitive advantage, the role of employees was not specified. In this section of the study, data gathered were analysed to address the first objective which is to examine the role of employees in establishing relationship marketing in Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.

Table 3: Role of Employees in ensuring trust in relationship marketing

	Component of Trust	C ou nt	Total Number of Respondents	M ea n	Standar d Deviation	Cumu lative %
a	As an employee, I am the first point of contact between customers and Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.	88	100	4.26	1.4	88
b	My role as an employee is to always ensure safety of customer information.	90	100	4.26	1.4	90
c	It is my responsibility to establish and uphold customer confidence in Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.	86	100	4.20	1.4	86
d	As an employee, I am responsible in ensure that customers understand privacy policy of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.?	78	100	3.90	1.5	78
e	Trust is a vital part of establishing relationship marketing in Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.	90	100	4.24	1.4	90
f	It is my responsibility to ensure trust is established between Zoomlion Ghana Ltd and our customers.	86	100	4.20	1.4	86

Source: Field Data, Osei 2019

Standard deviation is a number used to tell how measurements for a group are spread out from the average (mean) or expected value. A low standard deviation means that most of the numbers are close to the mean. A high standard deviation means that the numbers are more spread out (Dodge, 2003). A standard deviation of 1.4 was recorded for statement a, b, c, e and f. As indicated in the statement above, the closeness of the standard deviation per table 3 shows that employees understand their role when it comes to establishing trust for relationship marketing. As indicated in Taleghani et al. (2011), trust plays a vital role in ensuring that relationship with customers is strong and long-lasting. Where trust is the basis of the relationship, the company benefits from continues patronage and client referrals which generally leads to profitability and increase in market share. Notable among the responses statement b and e in which 90% of employees opined that they understood their role of ensuring safety of customer data and trust being a vital part of establishing trust in the relationship marketing process.

Employees identified their role pertaining to establishing trust towards customers to include explaining terms and conditions of service to the understanding of customers; seeking answers to questions which will enable the Zoomlion Ghana Ltd deliver to satisfaction; keeping customers details safe and communicating regularly with customers pertaining to changes service schedules or available promotions.

Table 4: Role of Employees in ensuring commitment in relationship marketing

Component of Commitment	Count	Total Number of respondents	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cumulative %
A My commitment to work reflects commitment to customers.	90	100	4.26	1.8	90
B Commitment towards customers ensures customer satisfaction.	65	100	4.26	1.8	65
C Commitment towards customers is the bases of establishing valuable relationship.	68	100	3.06	1.8	68
D As an employee, I understand my role of commitment towards customers.	95	100	3.50	1.5	95

Source: Field Data, Osei 2019

In Table 4, employees’ role in ensuring commitment in relationship marketing process was accessed. A standard deviation of 1.8 was scored in statement a, b, and in Table 3 indicating employees’ acknowledgment of their roles towards relationship marketing with customers as standard deviation remain low. Although Taleghani et al. (2011) rated commitment towards customers as a vital contributor to relationship marketing, employee response as per standard deviation score compared to that trust revealed that employees were less of the opinion that their commitment had much impact to relationship marketing compared to their role of ensuring trust. In statement e of Table 4, only 68% of employees opined that their role of commitment towards customers can serve as a bases of establishing valuable relationship. Sixty-five percent (65%) of respondents agreed that commitment can ensure satisfaction. However, the general overview of employees’ responses can be supported by Buttle (1996)’s opinion that, commitment is a bonding factor between a company and their customers for long term relationship. Employees of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd identified their role of commitment to their customers to include timely delivery of service (in this case timely emptying of refuse bins) and communication of changes in schedule to customers.

Table 5: Role of Employees in ensuring communication and responsiveness in relationship marketing

	Component of Communications and Responsiveness	Count	Total Number of Respondents	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cumulative %
11	Zoomlion Ghana Ltd is committed in ensuring open communication between customers and the company	48	100	4.00	1.30	48
12	Communication is a key component of establishing relationship marketing	98	100	4.20	1.40	98
13	Communication system of Zoomlion enable employees effectively interact with customers.	45	100	4.26	1.40	45
14	Employees can ensure customer satisfaction through communication	48	100	4.20	1.50	48

Source: Field Data, Osei 2019.

Communication plays a vital role in establishing relationship with customers. According to Yep et al. (2012), effective communication and responsiveness of an organisation depicts the customer centric nature they are. In Table 5, employee response showed an interesting score where standard deviation score showed that employee understood their role pertaining to communication with customers as standard deviation score was low. However, employee score on number of counts revealed that Zoomlion Ghana Ltd as a company, falls short in this area. Employees identified their role in relationship marketing of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd to consist of; listening and addressing customer complains; communicating promotions and changes in service delivery schedules as well as billing of customers. Employees of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd scored the company 48% on its commitment towards ensuring an open communication between customers and employees and employees’ ability to ensure customers are satisfied through communication. Employees also score Zoomlion Ghana Ltd 45% when asked if the communication system of Zoomlion enable them to effectively interact with customers. However, 95% of employees acknowledged that communication was a key component of establishing relationship marketing.

Figure 2 illustrate employee perception when asked to express their opinion on which of the factors best forms the basis of a relationship marketing. Employees opined that trust was the basis on which Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.’s relationship marketing strategy was built, represented by 48% of respondents. Thirty-seven percent (37%) opined that communication and responsiveness was the basis for Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.’s relationship marketing was established and the remaining 15% opted for commitment as shown in Figure 2.

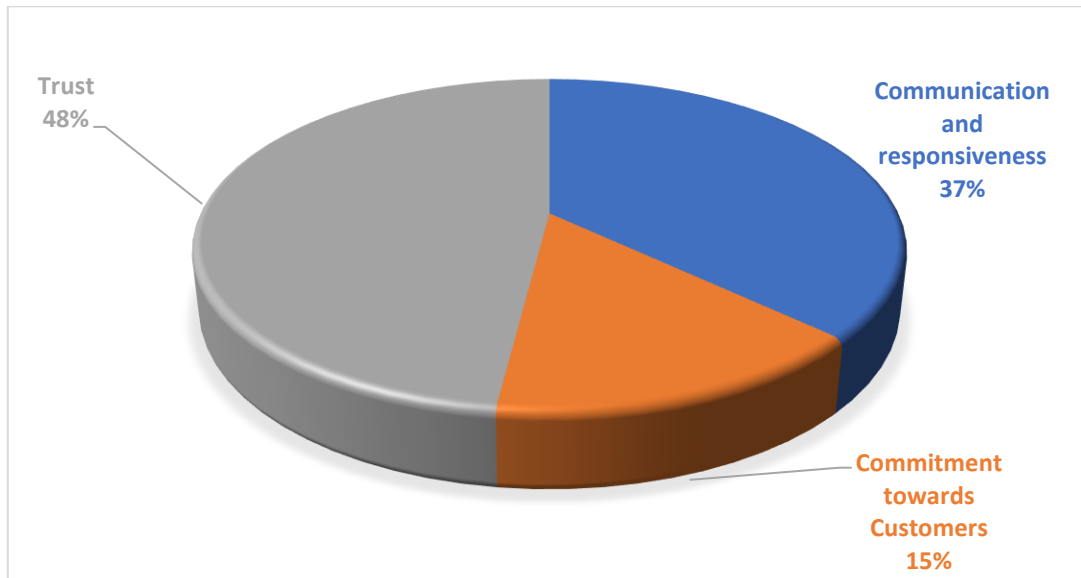


Figure 2: Basis of establishing relationships marketing in Zoomlion Ghana Ltd

Source: Field Data, Osei 2019.

Effect of relationship marketing on sustainable competitive advantage

Human resource, organisational culture and innovations has proven to be the basis on which an organisation relationship marketing can sustain a competitive advantage (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002; Payne & Frow, 2005; Delgado et al., 2000). This section examines the effect of relation marketing on sustainable competitive advantage of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd. Table 6 below examine the effect of relationship marketing on the sustainability of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.’s competitive advantage. Statement was structured to solicit a simple yes or no response from employees. Employees recognized the function of human resource to play a vital role if Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.’s competitive advantage can be sustained through relationship marketing. Eighty-three percent (83%) of employees opined that the quality of relationship established with customers directly affect the sustainability of competitive advantage. Relationship marketing is an end (Payne & Frow, 2005), human resources is one the means to that end. The is proven in the resource theory where human resource said to be a vital resource that needs be managed in other to attain competitive advantage (Becker (1964). The effect of relationship marketing on competitive advantage is highly dependent on the quality of human resource, how well their trained and how well they are equipped. To this effect, employees were asked how well trained they are to enforce relationship marketing and how well they were equipped. Eighty-eight percent (88%) admitted that they well trained to enforce relationship marketing strategy of Zoomlion Ghana ltd, however employees were not well equipped to execute this responsibility because they were not well equipped to. Sixty-five percent (65%) admitted to that effect.

Table 6: Effect of relationship marketing on sustainable competitive advantage

Human Resource of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd			
	True	False	Total
The quality of relationship established with customers of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd can lead to competitive advantage.	83	17	100

Relationship Marketing can sustain Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.'s Competitive Advantage in the sanitation industry?	78	22	100
As an employee, you are well trained to enforce relationship marketing strategy of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.	88	12	100
As an employee, you are well equipped to build and maintain healthy organisational relationship?	35	65	100
Organisation Culture			
Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.'s organisational culture is showing its strategic direction.	72	28	100
All department in Zoomlion Ghana Ltd promotes relationship marketing	68	32	100
Zoomlion Ghana Ltd adopts an organisational culture of relationship marketing.	62	38	100
Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.'s organisational culture can sustain it competitive advantage	48	52	100
Continues Innovation			
The working environment of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd encourages innovation among employees.	34	66	100
Innovation plays a vital role in Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.'s relationship marketing strategy.	75	25	100
Competitive advantage of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd can be sustained through innovation	75	25	100

Source: Field Data, Osei 2019

An organisation is made up of different departments, and these departments operate together to achieve the objective of the organisations and in this study, Zoomlion Ghana Ltd. As indicated in the general systems theory (Robbins, 1990), for organisation to grow and remain competitive, each department, section and unit must work towards the organisational objectives. On this basis, it can be argued that for a relationship marketing strategy to influence the sustainability of the competitive advantage of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd, it should constitute the basic objective to which all department of the organisation should work towards. Thus, to say the organisational culture should promote relationship marketing. To that regards, 72% of employees of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd opined that the organisational culture shows the strategic direction of the company. Also, all 68% of employees opined that all department of the company promotes relationship marketing and 62% opined that Zoomlion Ghana Ltd adopts a culture of relationship marketing. However, 52% of employees were of the view that Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.'s organisational culture can't sustain their competitive advantage. Thus, the current organisational culture has little or no effect on sustaining the competitive advantage of the company.

Continues innovation has been recognized as a core effect on sustaining competitive advantage (Phillip, 2011). Romero and Martinez-Roman (2012) opined that, innovation that helps sustain competitive advantage most often, springs up from healthy working environment. Hence for relationship marketing to have effect on the competitive advantage of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd, the company must ensure that employees work in an environment that encourages innovation. Employee response in this regard showed that Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.'s working environment did not encourage innovation. This opinion was represented by 66% of employees who ticked "false". Seventy-five percent of employees believed innovation plays a vital role in Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.'s relationship marketing strategy as well as sustaining its competitive advantage in the sanitation industry.

Challenges associated with relationship marketing.

Respondents were asked direct question, thus, to list the challenges associated with establishing marketing as employees of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd. Employees anonymously opined that the challenge they face with adopting relationship marketing approach in Zoomlion Ghana Ltd was mainly inadequate communication system to facilitate interaction with their customers. These communication systems ranged from lack of official lines, airtimes, or budget allocation to cater for these. Also, although employees were well trained to ensure their effectiveness in adopting relationship marketing approach, they opined that, they were not well equipped with the necessary to build and maintain healthy organisational relationship with customers.

Another challenge employees of the company were facing was lack of a conducive working environment to encourage innovation. This greatly affects the ability of employees to deliver on their assigned roles.

Chapter Summary

Employees clearly understood their roles in adopting relationship marketing in Zoomlion Ghana Ltd. In respect trust, employees identified the need to be able to communicate regularly with customers. In regards with commitment, employees again emphasize the need to maintain regular communication with customers. Regarding communication, only 48% of employees thought the company was committed to ensuring communication between employees and customers, 45% thought the company current communication system enables the company to interact with customers effectively and 48% employees were of the view that they were able to ensure customer satisfaction with the current communication system. This means that to every 100 customers, an average 62% needs are not met should the possible solution boil down to communication. In communication proved to be a shortfall in the relationship marketing strategy of Zoomlion Ghana Ltd.

Summary

The race among industries to gain competitive advantage requires firms to be fierce, focus and strategic in their dealing. The competitive business environment around shows that today's business combat different and more complex factors in order to remain competitive in their field of endeavours. Factors such as technological advancement and product or service innovation in gaining competitive advantage can be easily copied hence rendering this form of competitive advantage unsustainable. The service industry, in order to be competitive advantage, emphasis is placed on customer identification, customer retention, customer satisfaction and fostering long term relationship. The purpose of the study was to identify how zoomlion can leverage on relationship marketing to create competitive advantage.

The objectives of the study were to examine the role of employees in adopting relationship marketing in Zoomlion company ltd, examine the effect of relationship marketing strategy on sustaining competitive advantage as well as challenges employees face in adopting relationship marketing in Zoomlion Company ltd, Tema branch. The study adopted qualitative research approach and total population sampling was used in justifying the sampling strategy. Out of 110 sampling size, 100 employees participated in the study by fulling administering questionnaire.

Finding of study

Employees clearly understood their roles in establishing relationship marketing in Zoomlion Ghana Ltd. Employee roles pertaining to establishing trust as a basis of relationship marketing to include ensuring that, terms and conditions of service is well explained to the understanding of the customer; provide solution to customer enquiry that will enable the company deliver to customer satisfaction and ensuring the safety of customer details. Based on commitment, employees identified their roles to include timely delivery of service (timely emptying of refuse dump) and regular communication with customers Pertaining to communication, employee role identified include listening and addressing customer complaints, communication promotions and changes in service delivery schedules and timely billing of customers. Hefferman et al., (2008) identified three components in establishing trust as the basis of relationship marketing to be knowledge, dependability, and expectation. The employees' ability to ensure that terms and condition of service are well explained to customers understanding, forms a prerequisite part of providing knowledge. Commitment on the hand can be obtained through what Hefferman et al., (2008) identified as dependability. Expectations on the other hand needs be communicated to ensure both parties objective in the relationship are mutually meet.

Communication has proved to be an integral part of adopting relationship marketing strategy. Employee role in establishing relationship revealed that each point in the process, there was a need to establish and maintain a communication channel between customers and Zoomlion Company Ltd. However, the study found out that the current communication systems in place was not adequate as employees felt they were not well equipped towards this mandate. Communication happened to be the major challenge employee faced in establishing relations with customers of the company. For relationship marketing to have the desired effect on sustaining competitive advantage, there is a need to ensure that the human resource of the company is well trained to that effect, organisational culture and systems are structured to support the objective of relationship marketing and employees are encouraged to be innovative in executing their roles. Although organisational culture was identified to sustain competitive advantage, 48% of employees were of the view that the current organisational culture could not sustain Zoomlions Ghana Ltd.'s competitive advantage.

Conclusion

The role of employees of Zoomlion Ghana Limited in creating relationship marketing is relentless. This is evident in how they understood their roles in dealing with customers by ensuring trust, commitment, and communication. However, Zoomlion Ghana Ltd cannot reap the benefit of relationship marketing because it does not have the collective support of the company. Employees lacked the budgetary and management support in communication equipment that will enable them adopt relationship marketing. this will undermine their ability to fulfil their role in the company (Ketchen & Short, 2012).

Also, an enabling environment to promote innovation among employees was lacking this can be associated with the challenges lack of adequate communication system (Romero & Martinez-Roman, 2012). Innovation is one of the fundamental processes of strategic management, and it plays a vital role of being one of the main sources of sustaining competitive advantage for organisations (Phillips, 2011) Zoomlion Ghana Ltd losses the added advantage that comes along with encouraging innovation among employees. The resource dependency theory identified the for organisations to make effective used of their resources (Feldberger, 2008; Kaplan & Norton, 2006) and per the resource base view theory human resource form part of an organisations' resources (Njoroge, 2015; Rainio, 2012;). These theories together with findings has shown that an organisation's competitive advantage cannot be sustained sole on human resource alone. Despite human resource plays a major role in relationship marketing, they do not operate in isolation. They need the required resources to operate.

Recommendations

In conclusion, the study recommend that Zoomlion Ghana Ltd should take the necessary steps to invest in modern communication system which will not only help employees meet their role pertaining to communication in establishing relationship marketing but will also help strengthen the trust and commitment bond that will be established between customers and employees. Innovation requires a continuity and a conducive working environment. Where innovation is promoted, competitive advantage can be sustained for a long period. The study also recommends that, Zoomlion Ghana Ltd should create an enabling environment to promote and encourage employees to explore their creativity to the benefit of sustaining their competitive advantage in the sanitation industry.

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