

# **The Effects of Customer Relation on Business Success: A Case Study of Hardware Business in Chipata.**

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## **Abstract-**

*The research focused on the effects of customer relation on business success - A case study of hardware business in Chipata. Zambia has had an increase in business foreign investment that tends to outsmart majority of Zambian business due to poor customer relations. The specific objectives of the study are (a) To determine the customer relations strategy practice among hardware businesses in Chipata. (b) To identify barriers in implementing Customer relations in hardware business. (c) To ascertain the Customer relations ability in attracting and building customer loyalty in hardware business in Chipata.*

*Methodology research design was descriptive, qualitative and purposive sampling in nature, using of a structured questionnaire on 50 Participates.*

*Findings found no strategy, poor investing in customer relations, and low technology application.*

*Conclusion, there is need for implementing customer relations among hardware businesses as it is lacking.*

*The recommendation, education requirement for customer relations, Facebook usage as an effective tool, and creating a culture of managers leading in customer relations. These and many more concerns will be addressed in this paper.*

**Key words:** *Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs), customer Relations (CR), Loyalty, Strategy.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Chapter address the introduction the effects of customer relation in business success - A Case study of Hardware Business in Chipata, the focus SME (Small Medium Enterprise) and its impact of business, the background, firstly, the background, statement of the problem, conceptual framework - research objectives, and the ethical consideration.

## BACKGROUND

The customer relation is vital in delivering better customer value, and developing a good relationship that is long term and mutual fruitful to the relationship. The ultimate goal of the SMEs is to use customer – entrepreneur relation for the business success and thus adding value to the general economy of a country. Zambia is developing in business sectors thus the importance of developing and understanding the customer impact to the local community business success which is lacking in local areas. Customer relations is the key competitive strategy businesses need to stay focused on the customers. The relation with the customer – entrepreneur has a belief that establishing a sustainable relationship with customers is vital for customer's loyalty (Dowling, 2002).

Customer impact on the business will result into great benefits of increasing sales, obtaining higher quality products, relationship information easy flow and ensuring long-lasting customer-retention and loyalty (Alomtairi, 2009). Moreover, the customer impact on business has mostly focused on some service sectors, such as banking (e.g. Akroush et al., 2011; telecommunication (e.g. Almotairi, 2009; there is still areas of lack of research on the impact of customer – entrepreneur relation in local community businesses. The dynamics of the

business world is growing from developed countries and now the developing countries have to survive the huge investments of large companies investing in developing countries, thus focusing on the customer is becoming a key factor for SMEs. It is known that it takes up to five times more money to acquire a new customer than to get an existing customer to make a new purchase. Therefore, retention of customers has an impact on the business success due to limited resources a small medium enterprise may have (Baumeister, 2002).

SMEs contributes to a major portion of all economic activity and represent about 95% of all private sector firms in most modern nations (Scharper 2000) and Europe around 90% of all enterprises are small or medium-sized (Hillary 2000). Due to the large number of SMEs in the world economy the collective impact of SMEs on the environment is substantial. A number of research has been done small medium enterprise in job creation, economic growth and development, little has been done on the impact of customer relation in a local community business success. Thus it is cardinal to find a way of encouraging (SME) in improving customer relation, than just focusing on profits, as customers will help to spark energy to innovation within the organization, thus it is necessary to have a sound enterprise strategy in place (Shrivastava, 2008).

The relationship for example, during the 1990s, people became aware of the buyer-seller relations and this brought awareness of the relations consequence for the entire organizations and its impact it has the business (Peelen 2005). In focusing Basfakta, 2006 statistics reports, it is noted that self-employed has increased in comparison to salaried personnel in Sweden, and this has be noted

too countries such as Finland, Ireland and USA. According to Central Statistics by Ryan, in 2008, there are 936,608 small, privately owned businesses who had a workforce of less than 50 employees and this accounted for 99% of the total number of companies in Sweden.

The right management of SME's will result to huge benefits of the economy and business, for example, Ethiopia has more than 73,000 SMEs and employs more than 551,075 workforce; however the survival of SMEs in Ethiopia is still a big challenge because of poor political will, poor attitude towards SMEs and generally poor business environment (Devereux, 2010), therefore, good implementation of customer relations will be of benefit to the business success and customer relations has benefits that have been discussed in decades since its concept was introduced.

SMEs are facing great challenges to survive and sustain in the market due to lack of resources and marketing expertise (O'Dwyer et al., 2009) and business SMEs are to be consider important entities and have to be cognizant of the growing importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as it is becoming a determining factor corporate success, and vital to all stakeholders, including public policy makers, (Nelson 2004). According to Ata & Toker (2012) firms that have adopted customer relations as a strategy are expected to grow at a faster than those who do not in the same industry.

Thus the understanding of customer relations has the ability to give business success and thus increasing government revenue in the long run that would beneficial for the economy, in the case of Norway, there are almost 550,000 companies in Norway as of January 01, 2015. That is a 3.9% percent increase, compared to 2014 (SSB, 2015).

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Small Medium Enterprise has resulted in business growth, and many small businesses starts with little understanding into the reality of the business, this can also be attributed to lack of management skills, and poor business relationship. Zambia has had an increase in business foreign investment that tends to outsmart majority of Zambian business due to poor customer relations, therefore, the importance of customer relations effect on business as this will either make local business succeed or fail.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.

Identifying the effect of customer relations in business success in Hardware.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To determine the customer relations strategy practice among hardware businesses in Chipata.
2. To identify barriers in implementing Customer relations in hardware business.
3. To ascertain the Customer relations ability in attracting and building customer loyalty in hardware business in Chipata.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does hardware businesses in Chipata practice customer relations strategy?
2. What are the barriers for implementing customer relations in hardware business in Chipata?
3. To what extent is the customer relations contributing in attracting and building customers loyalty in hardware business?

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.**

Due to the changing dynamics of business industry globally, the study will contribute to the development of customer relations in developing towns and assist academicians in broadening and providing a deeper understanding of the critical factors that affect customer relations. Additionally, the results of it, will enable to create an environment for sustainable socio-economic development and competitive market share by foreign investment businesses and achieve the 7<sup>th</sup> National Development Plan and Millennium development Goals.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework presents a guide, the major theoretical and research question posed by these new of data is how can they be tapped in to and utilized for Customer Relations Management purposes (Hennig-Thurau, Malthouse et al. 2010). To this reason, building relationships with customer in order to serve them in their preferred manner (Gebert, et al, 2003). Customers are the lifeblood of any organization and without customers a firm has no revenues, no profits and no market value (Gupta and Lehmann 2005). The concept focusses on the customer strategy, barriers of customer relations and building customer loyalty.

### **Customer Strategy**

The strategy for customer relations will be taken from an interactive point the customer has with the organization Chen & Popovich (2003). Though in most firms customer strategy is typically the function of the marketing department. Although Customer relation requires a functional approach of all and this may is effective if all are involved in the organization. Another approach to customer

relations management, is related to customer knowledge management, and this has been the perception as a customer focused business strategy (Osarenkhoe 2006; Sin et al. 2005). When incorporated to the CRM context, the strategic perspective implies that customer's lifetime value to the organization should be the criterion for resource allocation to relationship building and maintenance (Kracklauer et al. 2001). According to Wahlberg O. et al. (2009), Strategic CRM refers to an enterprise wide strategy which is focused on the customer. Core managerial tasks in this approach include the systematic analysis and use of customer information as a platform for marketing and management.

### **Barriers of Customer Relations**

Firms apply technology without business strategy focus on the customer, and the aspect of firms controlling the customer rather than rendering better service to the customers and this can affect the business if better service is not rendered (Stone, 2000). Gartner in 2003 revealed that reduction in customer relations management spending between 1999 and 2003 resulted in 70% project failure (Rigby et. al 2004). The implementation of customer relations even if with no 100 percent guarantee that it will be successful, it is still of convincing reasons to implement (Hackney 2000). A satisfied customer that has value for what they need or want will in return cause the business generate growth (Bateson and Hoffman, 2002). When customers perceive that their private information is being used for other purpose than rendering better service, they lose trust (Deighton 2005)

## 1.6.3 Attracting/Building Customer Loyalty

The attracting and building customer loyalty is necessary, thus why today business is seeking information on how to build customer loyalty. To this reason, customer loyalty has a powerful impact on firm's performance and firms are taking note that that it is an important source of competitive advantage (Lam et al. 2004). Moreover, loyal customers buy more, than non-loyal customers who can easily switch because of slightly higher. The customer recommendation of products to others is a degree of loyalty (Selnes 1993). Customer service is a key for business, and is an act delivering measurable satisfaction and delight to customers. Poor customer experience with the organization can led to dissatisfaction range from displeasure to anger (Govinda Bhat, K, 2009).

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Businesses are commonly encouraged to engage in ethical practices, not only to be morally correct, but having ethical codes. To manage ethically, some specialized knowledge and skills will be needed. First, often ethical issues base on facts must be understood (Boatright, 2003, pp. 19)

## METHODOLOGY.

This chapter aims to investigate the effects customer relations in business success, hardware business. A number of methodology are available to the preference of the researcher and the nature of the problem. However, the qualitative methodology was adopted and considered the appropriate for data gathering as it helps soliciting information from the target audience. Descriptive survey focused on the attitudes and opinion in relation to the study, questionnaires (Orodho and Kombo 2002) were administered to a sampling of 50 respondents

(Kumar, 2008) in a purposive sampling in Chipata District. And MS EXCEL was used to analyze data.

Chapter 4. The Results Obtained from the Survey presents the results of the data analysis utilized to answer the research questions with a 100% response rate of questionnaire administration returns.

## Education.

The findings in the study indicated that the participants had education levels ranging from primary to tertiary school. (n=2 of the total sample (4%) of these reached primary school), and secondary education (n=29 of the sample (58%), and lastly tertiary level (n=19 of the sample (38%) reached tertiary level.

**Table 1. Sample distribution by education level**

Educational Level	Frequency	Percent
Primary	2	4
Secondary	29	58
Tertiary	19	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

## Average Monthly Expenditure in Customer Relations

To understand this, analysis was done to understand how much is spent towards customer relations and the customer aspect to the business. Data collection in which 50 participates was done, and between K1, 000 – K3, 000 it had 13 scores (26%), between K3, 000 – K5, 000 it had 7 scores (14%) and those who did not spend – None had 30 scores (60%).

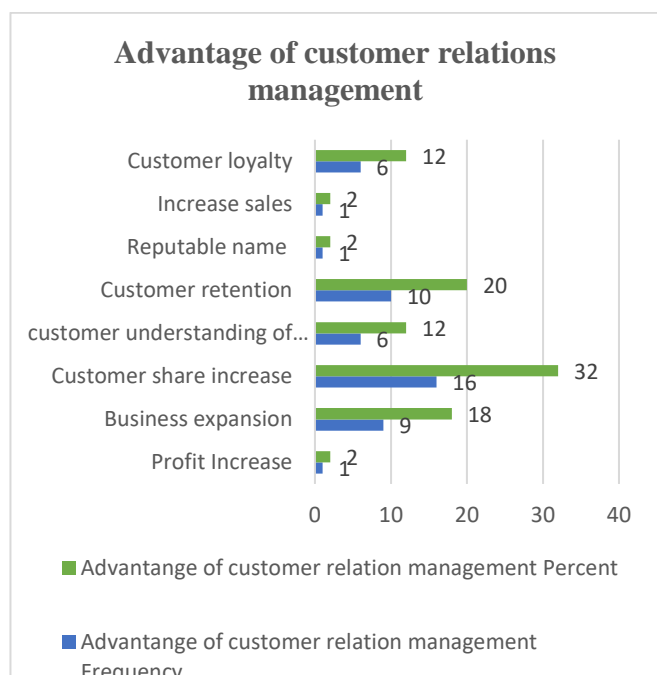
**Table 2. Sample distribution -Average Monthly Expenditure**

Average Monthly Expenditure	Frequency	Percent
K1000-K3000	13	26
K3000-K5000	7	14
No Expenditure	30	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Findings of Research Question 1: Customer Relations Strategy Practice**

**Advantage of customer relation management**

In understanding the advantages of customer relation management the finding shows that 50 participates had different perceptions with that 1 scoring a (2%) indicates it gives profit increase, 9 scoring (18%) gives business expansion, 16 (32%) increase customer share, 6 (12%) customer understanding of the business, 10 (20%) creates customer retention, 1 (2%) it builds a reputable name, 1 (2%) increase sales and 6 (12%) builds customer loyalty. The graph 1 shows the graphical representation of the results obtained.



**Strategy Applied to build Customer relationship**

The strategy mostly applied in building customer relations, the findings indicated credit 1 (2%), Price reduction/discount 5 (10%), Quality 1 (2%), Keeping physical touch with customers 6 (12%), Exchanging fault Products 1 (2%), Demonstrating and explaining the products 4 (8%), Communication 4 (8%), Friendliness/Hospitality 7 (14%), Promotion 1 (2%) and No strategy 20 (40%). Below is the table:

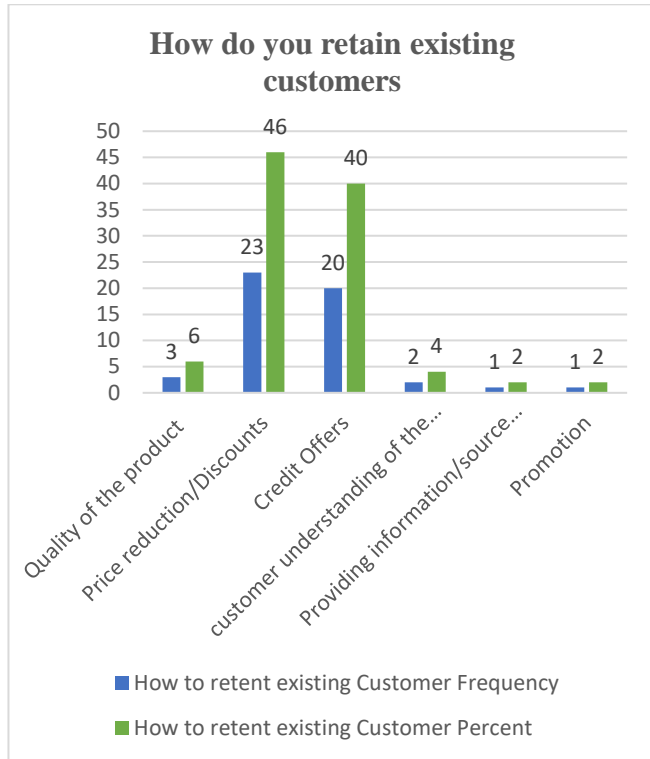
**Table 3. Sample distribution - Strategy to build customer relationship.**

Strategy Application	Frequency	Percent
Credit	1	2
Price reduction/discount	5	10
Quality Products	1	2
Keeping physical touch with customers	6	12
Exchanging fault Products	1	2
Demonstrating and explaining the products	4	8
Communication	4	8
Friendliness/Hospitality	7	14
Promotion	1	2
No Strategy	20	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Retention of existing customers**

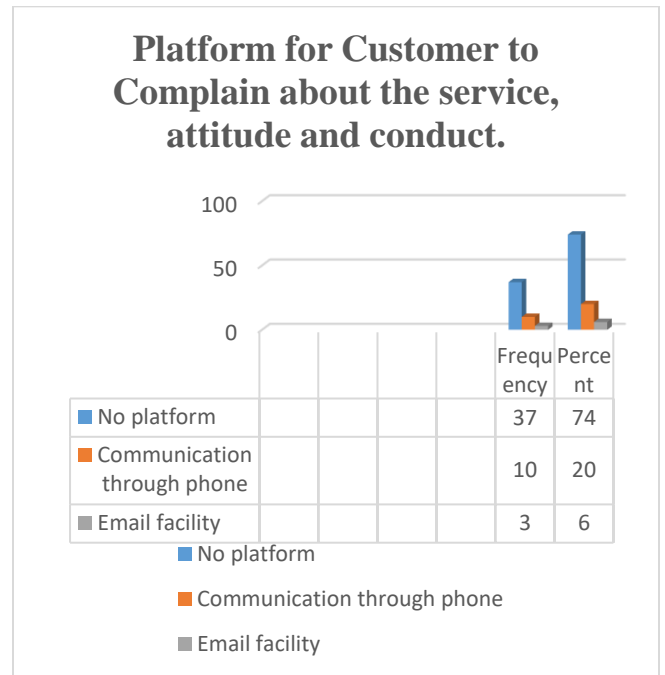
In the application for retention of existing customer's, the study reviewed that the 50 businesses used **quality** of the product having 3 scores (6%), **price reduction/discount** 23 scores (46%), **credit offers** 20 score (40%), customer understanding of the business having 2 scores (4%), providing information/source of the products

having 1 scores (2%) and promotion 1 scores (2%) and below is the graph 2:



## Platform for customer to complain about your service

The business strategy platform for customer to tender their complaints, and a sample of 50 participates, 37 (74%) did not have the platform for customer to address their complaints, 10 (20%) used the phone facility, and 3 (6%) provided email facility for customer's to present their complaints. Below Graph 3:



## Findings of Research Question 2: Barriers to Customer Relation

### Customer service provided

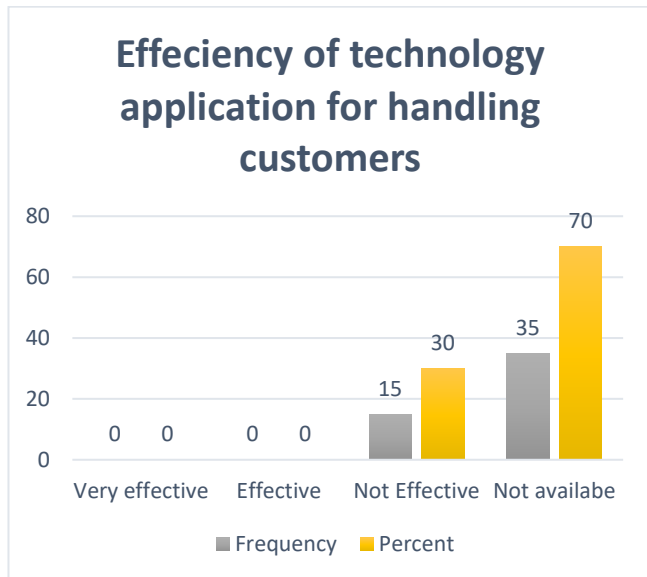
The research conducted on the kind of customer service that id provided among the sample target of the research, and it was noted that 38 (76%) had no service provision for customer service, 3 (6%) did a full demonstration and education on their products to customers, 7 (14%) provided service delivery for the goods bought and 2 (4%) used price reduction as a means of customer relations. Below is the table:

**Table 4: Sample distribution -Kind of Customer service provided**

Kind of Customer service is provided	Frequency	Percent
No Service provided	38	76
Demonstration and Education	3	6
Delivery service	7	14
Price reduction	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**How efficient is your technology application for handling customers.**

The importance of technology application was considered and participates under this were 50, and very effective was none, effective was none, not effective 15 (30%) and not available 35 (70%). Below is the information in the graph 4:



**Findings of Research Question 3: Attracting and Building Loyalty**

**Do you make follow up on goods and service provided to customers for conformity.**

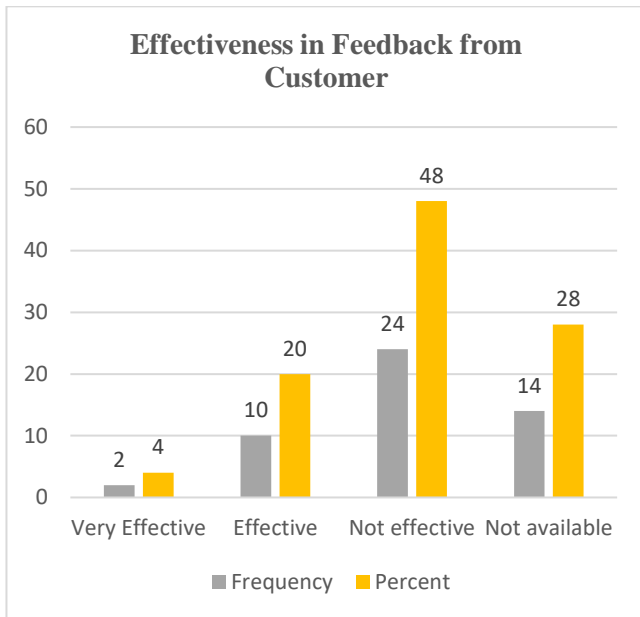
The interview conducted to as to ascertain the follow on the business goods sold and after service with 50 participates, with 6 follow up having a (12%) and 44 non follows having a ( 88%), below is the Graph 5:



**Effective feedback from customers**

In addressing from how effective feedback has been with 50 participates; 2 (4%) very effective, 10 (20%) effective, 24 (48%) not effective and 14 (28%) not available. Below is the Graph 7:





### Levels of Government information and education on the importance of customer relations with the customer.

Findings on how government has helped in information and education on customer relation, 50 respondents had an outcome of: fairly satisfied 10 (20%), neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 1 (2%), very dissatisfied 15 (30%) and no education provided 24 (48%). Below is the table of content:

**Table 5. Sample distribution - Levels of Government information and education on the importance of customer relations with the customer.**

Levels of Government information and education on the importance of customer relations with the customer.	Frequency	Percent
Very Satisfied	0	0
Fairly Satisfied	10	20
Neither satisfied nor Dissatisfied	1	2
Fair Dissatisfied	0	0

Very Dissatisfied	15	30
No education Provided	24	48
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

### Do you have an open accessible suggestion box for business improvement?

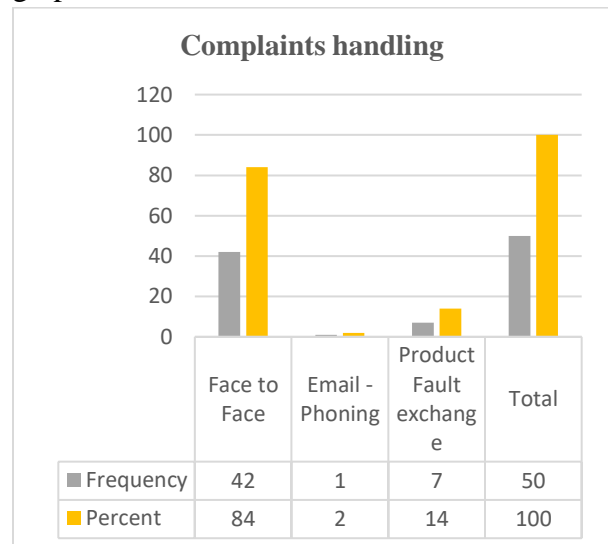
The business usage of suggestion box in their help for business improvement and the data of 50 participates, reviewed 100% no suggestion box.

**Table 6: Sample distribution - Do you have an open accessible suggestion box for business improvement?**

Customer accessible suggestion box for business improvement	frequency	Percent
Yes	0	0
No	50	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

### How do you handle complaints?

The SME - hardware business under study had this in the way they handle complaints that arise in the business day to day operation, face to face 42 (84%), email- phone 1 (2%) and product fault exchange 7 (14%). Below is the data information graph 7:



## Findings

There is a level of education in the respondents, with 4% primary, 58% secondary and 38% tertiary level. The findings showed 60% had no expenditure towards customer relations. The advantages of customer relation management the finding 2% indicates profit increase, 18% business expansion, 32% increase customer share, 12% customer understanding of the business, 20% creates customer retention, 2% it builds a reputable name, 2% increase sales and 12% builds customer loyalty. The business application of Strategy Applied to build Customer relationship, findings shows the highest percentage of 40% having no strategy. The businesses retention of existing customer's shows: price reduction/discount 46% and credit offers (40%) as the strategy applied with high percentages. 74% did not have the platform for customer to address their complaints, 76% had no service provision for customer service, efficient in technology application for handling customers 30% not effective and 70% not available. Follow up on goods and service provided to customers for conformity showed 88% no follow up, effective feedback from customers 4% very effective, 20% effective, 48% not effective and 28% not available, levels of Government information and education on the importance of customer relations with the customer shows 20% fairly satisfied, 2% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 30% very dissatisfied and 48% no education provided, 100% had no suggestion boxes and 84% used face to face in handling complaints.

## CONCLUSION

The level of education, has a higher percentage in that learning must it easy for them to grasp different learning concepts and able to transform business with knowledge. Business have a drive for quality

and business expansion, but contradicts in that they are not ready to spend in customers relations for business expansion, business are built on strategy, and lack of strategy is lack of success, and 40% of hardware business had no direct strategy that is related to the customer. In the analysis price reduction/discount and credit offers seem to be the approach that are highly considered among hardware that customer centeredness is not focused, customer relation's is a business of interaction and listening, but the 74% indicates customer relations is poor. The customer relation service provision is poor in that 76% had no service provision, which contradicts their vision to grow their customer base. The application of technology has not been fully utilized in hardware businesses. Lack of follow up on goods and service provided 88% creates poor business customer relations and thus not having a productivity retention of customers. There is a higher degree of lack of information and education in the given areas by government in that very dissatisfied 30% and no education provided 48% that requires customer relations knowledge. Therefore, customer relations is required for business success.

Peelen (2005) explains the different strategies, the offensive strategy focuses on conquest of market share, acquiring new customers and getting rid of the competition. A defensive strategy is however focused on maintaining the current customers and building barriers. Customer orientation, explicitly placing the customers at the centre of all the firm's activities, is a fundamental element organizational environment required for CRM in general and CRM success in particular (Bentum & Stone 2005). Better and durable relationships with the customer lead to customer satisfaction (Palmer et al. 2005). There is need for building the true understanding of customer relations, thus having the strategies that

are applicable at a given time. The hardware businesses have minor understanding of a customer and customer relations plays important role in SME's, as customers have different needs and customer being on the center gives business a drive.

## RECOMMENDATION

1. Strategies are core for the business, and incorporating customer's centeredness in the business is vital for the business success, therefore, simplified learning materials for SME's will help business understand how best strategy can help develop customer-oriented business in the growing competitive market as a way to promote local business expansion.
2. The usage of Facebook is an effective tool in businesses today not just a chatting site, but also a business's site, this can be used as an effective tool to address customer challenges and complaints, knowing the customer is not enough, or offering credits. Instead of having focused into marketing and increasing sales, the vision and mission of the business can be communicated through Facebook as their marketing efforts. The less the waiting time, the quicker the problems are resolved.
3. Most SME's have not grown into bigger capacity to allow the owners to learn their business for full time studies on customer relations, therefore, government tailored program of workshop, seminars can assist develop the customer mindset for small business in hardware that would give them competitive advantage and local growth of Zambia business sector.
4. In addition to investing in reliable and empathetic employees, the hardware business should create a culture that focuses on quality customer service and customer satisfaction.

Having a high-quality-supportive culture is extremely essential for the business. Managers should display service quality for the employees to understand its importance to the business. With this culture instilled the hardware business would be able to maintain a trust-worthy workforce that helps the customers feel safe when dealing with their products and services.

## Future research

While our research extended the present literature of the effects of customer relations, we need more research into how different elements of customer relations can be best utilized for different respondent groups. And how effective is the usage of women managers in customer relations yielding results in social sector small medium enterprises.

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