UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

EXPLORING RELATIONSHIP MARKETING AND INTERNET TECHNOLOGY IN THE SERVICE SECTOR

BY

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DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that this work is the result of my own research and has not been presented by anyone for any academic award in this or any other University. All references used in this work have been fully acknowledged. I bare sole responsibility for any short comings.

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CERTIFICATION
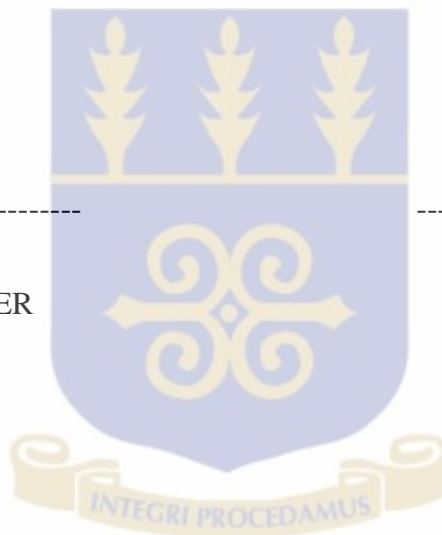
I hereby certify that this thesis was supervised in accordance with the laid down procedures
by the University.

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DEDICATION

To the selfless researchers working untiringly to expand the scope of Relationship Marketing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

My utmost gratitude is to God for the health and wisdom to complete my thesis. Many thanks to the faculty of the Department of Marketing and Customer Management for giving me the opportunity to complete my thesis here at the University of Ghana Business School. Special thanks to Dr. Mahmoud A. Mahmoud (Principal Supervisor), through your time, you have taught me how to be a good researcher. I would not forget the experiences you gave me about academic publishing and your encouragements to see me excel in my area of research. Equally, I am also grateful to Dr. Adelaide Kastner (Co-Supervisor) for the time spent to read and examine my work. Also to Mr. Abdulai Issaka and Dr. Irene Akuamoah Boateng, you have respectively been helpful in my understanding of the basics in marketing and recommending me for a post graduate study. You are both like a light in my academic life.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

HDM: Head of Digital Marketing Department/ Digital Marketing Manager

IT: Internet Technology

MMT: Member of Online Marketing Team

RM: Relationship Marketing

ABSTRACT

Internet-based relationship marketing is progressively gaining global attention. Nevertheless, the dawn of this modernization draws many theoretical debates and practical concerns, some of which have received little research attention. On this premise, this thesis studied the concepts of Relationship marketing (RM) and Internet Technologies (IT) within the Ghanaian telecommunication industry. As one among few studies within the Sub-Saharan region, the purpose was to explore the contemporary use, compatibilities and benefits of internet-based relationships. To address this purpose, the study provides rich qualitative evidence from four (4) telecommunication firms where twelve (12) experts were sampled and probed over a period of 2 months. Findings from a thematic and cross-case analysis disconfirm some conceptual contributions earlier presented in literature. Additionally, it justifies new uses and key benefits including online "virality", a relationship discovery environment, flexibility and credibility. An emerging insight was the role of content marketing in online relationships. Recommendations for practitioners include enhancing online interactions through empathy, value creation via analytic information and managerial openness and support to enhance knowledge development within the area. Significantly, a post study framework was developed to illustrate the use, challenges and benefits of internet-based RM within the Ghanaian telecommunication industry.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Overview

Technology especially the internet is becoming a requisite for successful relationship marketing. The dawn of social media platforms and websites are increasingly affording an unimaginable potential, through which businesses and clients can create, collaborate, inform and personalize relationships better than before. These developments instigated the conduct of this thesis to explore Relationship Marketing (RM) and Internet Technology (IT) within a Ghanaian service sector. As an introductory chapter, this section presents the research background, gaps and research problem, objectives of the study, research questions and scope. This chapter also settles with the provision of a brief overview of the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Background of the Study

Marketing, defined by its components and practice has undeniably remained a tremendous influence. Nevertheless, an imperative development in both the theory and practice of marketing in the past few decades has been the evolution from transaction to relationship marketing (Brennan et al., 2003). Undeniably, such an orientation has provided modern marketing management with the roots to establish, build and manage long term relationships with customers, partners and other key stakeholders (Egan, 2011). In accordance with some earlier scholars, Möller and Halinen (2000) mention that, the emergence and growth of RM has widely been aligned to the rise in service economies and substantial criticisms of the traditional marketing mix. Grönroos (1994) carefully elaborated these criticisms to include the lack of an explicit integration among elements of the marketing mix, an incomplete list of marketing variables and more importantly its base on loose theoretical foundations.

Today, relationship marketing has gradually gained considerable significance in marketing practice. However, such an approach has not been so easy for marketing managers. Building relationships require more than knowing the customer by name, what they buy, how often, why and developing a profile of these customers (Buttle, 2001). Riddled within these conditions, successful relationship marketing is to a modern extent based on the technological capability to build, enhance and maintain long term relationships. Consequently, internet technologies such as websites and social media have emerged as a viable catalyst (Viljoen et al., 2005). However, its compatibility and use with relationship marketing tasks has remained a debate horded with some promises and unintended consequences. As Patino et al. (2012) found, the effects of internet technologies may be clear but what remains unclear are the techniques and approaches in using them.

In previous research on relationship marketing using technology, it has been argued that the changing nature of competition and rapid technological developments has made it pressing and inevitable to establish technologically inspired networks of consumers and partners (Zineldin, 2000). Coviello et al. (2003) have also argued that, technology is affecting, transactions, database marketing, interactive and network marketing which are components of modern relationship marketing. Additionally, research on firm investments into technologies like the internet both globally and in Ghana also appears very promising. A recent study among fifteen (15) Ghanaian banks revealed that, high investment into such technologies significantly increased both return on assets (ROA) and equity (ROE) (Leckson-Leckey et al., 2011). In North America, Bauer et al. (2002) have also demonstrated commitment, satisfaction and trust as potential benefits of building modern relationships via the internet. Moreover, a trending social media report indicates that about 37% of marketers clearly recognize an increasing return on investment in building relationships online (Stelzner, 2014).

Aside this short list, other studies have established the importance of relationship marketing using the internet globally (Zineldin, 2000; Palmer et al., 2005). In fact, some have already recognized the concept as the new marketing paradigm and the future of marketing (Zineldin, 2000; Sheth, 2002; Harwood & Garry, 2006). It is increasingly becoming essential to establish an understanding of relationship marketing and the internet, especially with their compatibility for modern business (Gummesson, 2002).

In attempts to understanding these concepts, relationship marketing has been conceptualized quite differently by various marketing scholars in extant literature. Notwithstanding, earlier researchers including Grönroos (1994) and Harker (1999) highlighted key conceptualizations of RM as identifying and establishing, maintaining and enhancing and when necessary terminating relationships with customers and other partners at a profit; attributing mutual exchanges and promise fulfilment as key to achieving satisfaction among parties in a relationship.

Literature on technology has also been deliberated from different perspectives. These standpoints have encompassed a knowledge management perspective (Stefanou et al., 2003), strategic perspective (Bull, 2003), and a relationship management perspective which includes how the internet is used in engaging customers (Rebolledo et al., 2005). Ralston & Reilly (2000) additionally elaborate that, the concept of technology can be conceptualized as a convergence of different technologies such as information systems and internet based platforms like the website and social media.

In the past few years, worldwide spending on these technologies have been significant. According to Gartner (2013), expenses on information technologies including internet accessibility is estimated at $927 billion, followed by $666 billion on device acquisitions and $147 billion on data centre systems (Gartner, 2013). Obviously, these statistics suggest an empowered platform for the application of the internet in most business

activities including the management of relationships, however a recurring question pertains to its fit or compatibility and how it should be utilized.

Geographically, studies on RM via the internet have been advocated in Asia, Europe, North America and Australia with limited attention from Africa. Some of these studies have attempted to explain the potential of the internet in relationship marketing (Hong & Wang, 2009; Parasuraman & Grewal, 2001), achieving technological leadership in RM (Zineldin, 2000), and also its implementation (Ryals & Knox, 2001).

In Sub-Saharan Africa especially within the Ghanaian domain, it appears a sizeable number of studies in the RM discipline have emphasized on various RM practices, their outcomes and implications in various industries (see for instance Narteh et al., 2013). According to the Miniwatts Marketing Group (2014), internet users in Africa is estimated at over 279 million with over 5 million users from Ghana (1.7%) and nearly 1.7 million Ghanaians on Facebook. With the advent of such significant increase in internet users in Ghana, it is sound to expect businesses integrating internet technologies with various tasks like relationship marketing. It is more so obvious to expect research on the managerial implications to business success over the internet. However, it is surprising that studies concerning relationship marketing via the internet in this context of Africa has been given little attention, leaving the area under researched even in its leading service industry (Okai, 2013).

While the service sector generally remains the strongest growth area for marketing, the Ghanaian service sector accounts for more than 60% of Ghana's gross domestic product (GDP). According to ISSER (2012) reports, the service sector experienced a triumph over other sectors since 2007. Moreover, research into the services sector stands a lot of gain attributed to a sizeable number of beneficiaries like the telecommunications, financial, retail and tourism just to mention a few. Notwithstanding this value, relationship marketing has

also become a key differentiator in the marketing of services, whiles advances in technologies like the internet maintains its position as a powerful force transforming service markets (Lovelock, 2011). For these reasons, it is appropriate that preliminary insights into RM & IT should be located in the context of the service industry, as this will ensure the study gathers appropriate experts and valuable insights to address the research problem discussed in the next section. This has however not been the case, with a number of gaps earmarked to be addressed. The succeeding section therefore details some consequent gaps and related problems.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In extant literature, diverse views have been debated regarding the origin of relationship marketing. Nonetheless, most scholars attribute the concept to Berry (1983) and confess their perception of the RM paradigm as a reincarnation of the pre-industrial marketing era (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). Equally, it is not surprising that, the compatibility and practice of relationship marketing via technologies like the internet has also been found as varied; leaving the concept with a sense of ambiguity (Egan, 2011). Having being in existence for more than two decades, relationship marketing as a relatively new paradigm appears to have been adopted among small, medium and large scale businesses and has been well discussed as supporting a huge array of enviable marketing outcomes (Brennan et al., 2003).

Meanwhile, a pronounced issue within the RM arena has been the lack of a clear and common understanding on its meaning and fundamental terms (Narteh et al., 2013; Brennan et al., 2003). For this reason, some scholars have described relationship marketing as a melting pot for several practices including database marketing, one-to-one marketing and customer partnering (Harker, 1999). Aside this conceptual variance, the use of internet technologies in relationship building and management remains a hot debate as previous

studies on its compatibility and utilization reports mixed results; suggesting both promises and unintended outcomes (Okai, 2013; Egan, 2011). Rebolledo et al. (2005) for instance noted that, such technologies may gradually erode certain key relationship facilitators like face to face communication, trust and commitment. Barnes et al. (2000) also reference privacy concerns, customer worry of confidentiality and unsolicited communication.

Delving deeper into its literature, there have been a dominating number of conceptual contributions which have presented some contradictory views. Some of these studies have argued that, using IT in RM generates improved commitment by partners (Zineldin, 2000), better relationship bonding (Hong & Wang, 2009), loyalty (Iyer & Bejou, 2004) and customer satisfaction (Zineldin, 2000) among other benefits. Quite unfortunately, Grönroos (1994) and Narteh et al. (2013) as part of a list of other scholars, critique a dominating conceptual approach to knowledge development without strong empirical foundations as that with little practical value. Consequently there is a need for more empirical research on how the internet can be used in relationship marketing, its compatibility and empirical benefits.

Moving ahead, while there have been some significant attempts to provide an empirical foundation for using internet based technologies like the social media and website in RM, there have been little attempts towards the development of conceptual frameworks (Okai, 2013). A result of which has characterized the domain with inadequate theories.

Narrowing these issues on an emerging Sub-Saharan country like Ghana becomes more pathetic. According to Hinson & Amidu (2006) the use of the internet is increasing and therefore, leveraging on websites and emerging social media applications via the internet obviously holds a promise for relationship marketing. Meanwhile, internet-based or online relationship marketing in the Ghanaian context appears under researched (Okai, 2013). Discovering these gaps in issue, context and theory, this study is therefore a response to the need to explore relationship marketing and internet technology in Ghana; placing a strategic

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focus on its utilization, compatibility and benefits in the service sector.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

To gain insights into relationship marketing and internet technology, the purpose of this study was:

1. To explore how social media and websites are used in relationship marketing.

2. To understand the compatibility issues that emerge from the use of these internet technologies in relationship marketing.

3. To investigate the benefits firms realize from using social media and websites for relationship marketing and,

4. To develop a framework based on the empirical findings of this research that describes the use of internet technologies in relationship marketing.

1.4 Research Questions

According to Beri (2000), when the interest of a study is to acquire factual information, research questions are preferred over the formulation of hypothesis. These questions guided the study and were considered as benchmarks for conclusions:

1. How do telecommunication firms understand relationship marketing and internet technology?

2. How are social media and websites used in establishing, maintaining and enhancing relationships?

3. What are the compatibility issues in the use of social media and websites for relationship marketing?

4. What benefits are associated with the use of social media and websites for relationship marketing?

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research covers a firm perspective on how internet technologies (websites and social media) are used in relationship marketing among telecommunication firms in Accra. Emphasis was therefore placed on how social media and websites are used in the firms' relationship marketing activities. While internet tools for relationship marketing cover a broad range of technologies including e-mails, micro blogging, podcasts, social media and websites among other tools like mobile networking applications which have kept emerging (Egan, 2011), social media and websites are reported as key technologies used by firms for relationship marketing over the internet (Wong, 2012; Woodside et al., 2011). In a social media industry report, Stelzner (2014) indicated that 92 % of marketers see social media as significant to doing business. This study safely inferred that, an exploration social media and websites were appropriate to unveil the utilization compatibility and benefits of using the internet for relationship marketing.

That being said, this research may be limited to a number of uncertainties which may emanate from the methodology adopted, data collection and analysis procedure and the context of the study. However, it was ensured that, best practices were adopted for the conduct of this study. Practically, the challenge of exploring RM and technologies like the internet may be compared to describing a moving target, attributed to the fact that, the use of the internet for relationship marketing activities is constantly evolving.

Also from a methodological perspective, the qualitative approached adopted limits the study to relatively small samples and hence it may have a weakness in being generalized on large populations (Patton, 2005). Notwithstanding, the aim of this study is to probe and understand the issues of RM & IT. Findings discussed were also limited to the amount of data the researcher was exposed to during interview sessions with respondents.

Finally, this research was an academic study bounded to specific timelines. Hence, it was challenged by the ability to cover more Ghanaian industries. However, the study breaks grounds within the internet-based relationship marketing domain.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is one of the few attempts to investigate the ambiguity surrounding the use of RM and IT within Sub-Saharan Africa. Technology acceptance and use is growing especially in Ghana and considering the current technological era, exploring relationship marketing and internet technology seemed timely and appropriate. To the best of my knowledge, little has been done to explore the use and compatibility of IT in RM within the Ghanaian domain.

Findings from this study therefore provide an additional global insight on RM and IT utilization and compatibility. Aside the theoretical value, social media and websites are practically becoming the 'internet' (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). This study therefore enlightens marketing practitioners on the promises and consequence of social media and websites in relationship marketing. It would also educate service customers and stakeholders on the value of internet technology and serves as a key reference for advance studies on RM and IT within Sub-Saharan Africa.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This study is divided into six (6) chapters respectively; Introduction, Literature Review, Context of the Study, Research Methodology, Data Analysis & Discussion of Findings, and Summary, Conclusion & Recommendations. The introductory chapter introduced the motivation behind the study by establishing current research and business trends and a demonstration of significant scholarly works in the area of relationship marketing and internet technology. It as well covers the research problem, objectives and research questions, scope, and limitations of the study.

The literature review follows the introductory chapter with a discussion on relationship marketing and internet technology; both on a global scale and in Ghana. Previous works on these concepts were reviewed highlighting its implementation, challenges and contemporary opportunities.

Then after, reviewed articles, reports and online publications were further discussed in broad themes to effectively describe the service sector and telecommunication in the Ghanaian setting to make up the context of the study.

Information pertaining to research design, sample and sampling technique, data collection tool, procedures and analysis are discussed in the methodology. The fifth and sixth chapters present analysis of data, summary of the entire study and recommendations for practitioners, policy makers and further research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents an in-depth discussion on the concepts of relationship marketing (RM) and internet technology (IT). Through a rigour discussion of previous and extant literature relevant to the concepts of relationship marketing and internet technology, the chapter provides a theoretical basis on which this research is supported. This review also provided support for the post-study framework developed in Chapter Five. The themes discussed cover the Marketing Mix, Relationship Marketing, Overview and Definition of Internet Technology and Using Internet Technologies for Relationship Marketing. The chapter ends with a summary of various perspectives regarding the use of internet technology in relationship marketing.

2.1 The Traditional Marketing Mix

Over the past few decades, the traditional marketing mix as a universal approach to marketing has dominated marketing thought, research and practice. The concept of the marketing mix and the four P's of marketing (product, price, place, promotion) have been treated among some earlier scholars as an unchallenged basic model of marketing (Kent, 1986). According to Kotler et al. (2014), advocates of this conception have also seen marketing from the point of planning and executing pricing, promotion and the distribution of goods and services. This is to create exchange and as a means to satisfy the needs of consumers.

Though this transactional conception is to some extent relevant in marketing practice today, some researchers are beginning to see this traditional mix as reaching the end of the road as a universal marketing approach (Harris et al., 2003). This effect is giving way to a new marketing thinking described as a paradigm shift. With much rigour, the traditional

marketing mix has also been strongly critiqued with loose theoretical foundations, the lack of an explicit integration among its elements and a functional thinking perspective as opposed to a customer orientation philosophy (Grönroos, 1994). These limitations have placed the marketing discipline in search of a new paradigm and has given rise to the concept of relationship marketing; a paradigm theoretically rooted in building and maintaining long term relationships with customers and partners (Egan, 2011).

2.2 Relationship Marketing

2.2.1 Evolution of Relationship Marketing

Based on the limitations of the marketing mix, relationship marketing emerged in the 1980's and became prominent around the 2000's as an alternative theory for marketing thinking (Leverin & Liljander, 2006). Relationship marketing has been a topic of serious discussion among academics and marketing practitioners for the best part of 20 years (Egan, 2011, p. 16). For clarity, Khalil and Harcar (1999) have divided the history of marketing into three periods based on buyer and seller relationships. These were the simple trade era, mass production era and the new marketing era which represents marketing transformations today. This new marketing era witnesses a growing interest in focusing on customer relationship economics and the long term profitability of customer retention. This is seen as a contemporary theory of marketing counterpoised with the preceding era of mass marketing.

First introduced in the marketing of services by Berry (1983), the concept of relationship marketing is rapidly dominating marketing thought. Meanwhile in significant attempts to document its origin, the ideology behind the concept of relationship marketing still remains a debate, with no clear and common understanding on its fundamental meanings and terms (Narteh et al., 2013). Nonetheless, relationship marketing practice has been justified both theoretically and empirically as a promising marketing paradigm for these present times (Möller & Halinen, 2000). According to Sheth & Parvatiyar (2000),

relationship oriented marketing practices date back to the pre-industrial era (simple trade era). This ensured producers and consumers directly dealt with each other for greater emotional bonding and understanding that transcends economic exchange. They suggest that, the scope of RM was wide enough to cover the entire spectrum of marketing's sub-disciplines including channels, business-to business marketing, services marketing, marketing research, customer behaviour, marketing communications, marketing strategy, international marketing and direct marketing. More significantly, their work identifies certain antecedents to the emergence of relationship marketing including the empowerment of total quality programs, competition, increasing need for mutual cooperation, and the advancements in technologies like the internet which is rapidly shaping modern relationship marketing activities.

While Grönroos (1994) highlighted these technologies as value contributors in RM, Gummesson (1997) also subjected the viability of the relational paradigm to the advent of technologies. He further projected the evolution of relationship marketing to both the Nordic School and Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP) in Europe. This correlates to previous attempts in tracing the evolution of relationship marketing practices to Europe, Australia and to some extent North America. Since its existence for more than two decades, relationship marketing has gradually evolved into one of the most important developments in the discipline of marketing (Brennan et al., 2003). According to Egan (2011) the concept has surfaced the transactional ideology of the marketing mix with a more longitudinal view of marketing as a relational exchange. As Buttle (1996) concluded, modern marketing has now been fine-tuned from simply developing and delivering products, to the maintenance of mutually satisfying long term relationships between parties. Berry (2000) also argues that, RM is beyond the introduction stage and is on a growth curve towards becoming a mature concept. Table 2.1 further compares the characteristics of transactional and relationship marketing. Based on an understanding of the evolution of RM, the next section discusses its

definitions.

Table 2.1A Comparison of Transactional Marketing and Relationship Marketing

Transactional Marketing	Relationship Marketing
Focus on a single sale	Focus on customer retention
Orientation on product features	Orientation to customer values
Short time-scale	Long time-scale
Little emphasis on customer service	High customer service emphasis
Limited customer commitment	Continuous customer contact
Moderate customer contact	Quality is the concern of all
Quality is primarily a concern of production	

Source: Payne et al. (1995)

2.2.2 Relationship Marketing Defined

Subject to the issue of diverse conceptualizations surrounding relationship marketing theory, several scholars have published different definitions. According to Dann and Dann (2001), asking any two relationship marketers for a definition of RM and its core principles will result in at least four definitions and five 'must have' variables. Though disturbing for the purpose of clarity, these variations in some sense attest to the capacity of relationship marketing as an expanded paradigm for marketing thinking (Payne, 2000). For the sake of commonality in definitions, scholars like Egan (2011), have been quick to describe relationship marketing as an umbrella term for a wide range of practices that have a common focus of going beyond a single transaction between a buyer and seller. A content analysis by Harker (1999) also gathers a number of significant definitions on the term. Though valuable, his analysis is more than a decade old and does not contain some emerging perspectives of RM. However, he suggested seven conceptual categories in defining RM (creation, development, maintenance, interactive, long term, emotional contents and output) on which

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this study further embraces some new perspectives of RM and discusses them below:

    i. Attracting, maintaining and in multi-service organizations enhancing customer relationships (Berry, 1983, p. 25).

    ii. Relationship marketing concerns attracting, developing and retaining customer relationships (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991, p. 33).

    iii. Relationship marketing has as its concern the dual focus of getting and keeping customers (Christopher et al., 1991, p. 4).

    iv. Relationship marketing is to identify and establish, maintain and enhance and when necessary also to terminate relationships with customers and other stakeholders, at a profit, so that the objectives of all parties are met. This is done by a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises (Grönroos, 1994).

    v. Relationship marketing is marketing seen as relationships, networks and interaction (Gummesson, 1994).

    vi. Relationship marketing refers to all marketing activities directed towards establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p.22).

    vii. Relationship marketing is concerned with the development and maintenance of mutually beneficial relationships with strategically significant markets (Buttle, 1996).

    viii. Relationship marketing is a technology-based tool used by firms to facilitate the acquisition and management of customers (Brodie et al., 1997).

    ix. Relationship marketing occurs when an organization is engaged proactively in creating, developing and maintaining committed, interactive and profitable exchanges with selected customers and partners over time (Harker, 1999).

    x. The building of relationships based on technology to address the means of providing regular communication and information sharing among participants (organizations or

consumers) to enable them to evaluate progress, modify objectives, and accommodate changing conditions...allows for different types of synergy effects, solutions, different customers, and different types of interactions and relationships (Zineldin, 2000).

xi. Relationship management is a research topic in electronic commerce which includes customer relationships management and supplier relationships management. It adopts information technology to provide support (Liao et al., 2004).

xii. Conceptual contributions portray relationship marketing as an important and necessary condition to the creation, development and maintenance of profitable relationships with clients and customers using information technology (Rebolledo et al., 2005).

xiii. Relationship marketing has a clear emphasis on the importance of developing qualitative, long- term, supportive relationships with existing customers and presumes that energy and resources are better spent on retaining existing customers (customer retention) than on attempting to attract new ones (MacMillan et al., 2005).

After a rigorous review of literature, this study identified 13 key definitions and perspectives of RM from a 22 year span (1983-2005) which was relevant to the conduct of this study. It was brought to light by intensive observation that, some scholars sought to demonstrate an expanded view of the concept whiles others presented a relatively concise view. This may perhaps be one of the underlying reasons for several conceptualizations under the term relationship marketing (Harker, 1994; Egan, 2011). Berry (1983) is alleged one of the early scholars in pronouncing the concept of relationship marketing through his discussions in the marketing of services. His definition highlights the need to attract, maintain and enhance relationships in service settings. Meanwhile, Christopher et al. (1991) only see getting and keeping customers as RM.

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Some scholars may agree that, this definition does not baptize itself in the strategic migration (enhancing) of customers to partners as posited by Christopher et al. (2002). Grönroos (1994) also highlights profit as an outcome of RM and significantly locates mutual fulfilment of promises at the heart of every relationship. Some of the subsequent definitions were deduced from the perspectives of Berry (1983) and Grönroos (1994), including Morgan & Hunt (1994). According to Buttle (1996) all customers do not generate equal value for firms, for this reason his definition of relationship marketing is directed towards strategically significant customers that contribute higher amount of the firm's profit. Though Brodie et al. (1997) were one of the initial advocates to highlight the role of information technology like the internet in building and managing relationships, their ideas are well felt in trending definitions of RM. For instance Zineldin (2000) described RM as an incomplete paradigm shift without information technologies like the internet. Quiet recent perspectives from Liao et al. (2004) and Rebolledo et al. (2005) respectively acknowledge IT as a supportive and necessary condition for relationship marketing. In fact Sheth (2002) confirms that, the internet and information technology are changing the concept and even the definition of relationship marketing.

This study adopts the concepts from the above emerging definitions to explore relationship and internet technology within the Ghanaian telecommunication industry. This is because, their interpretations are more suitable for this research. Table 2.2 chronologically illustrates and identifies these definitions and perspectives of RM. Based on this, the next section discusses where relationship marketing can be applied.

Table 2.2 A Chronological Definition of Relationship Marketing (1983-2005)

Authors/Year	Key constructs from RM definition
Berry (1983), Berry & Parasuraman (1991)	Attracting, maintaining, enhancing.
Christopher et al. (1991)	Getting and keeping customers.
Grönroos (1994)	Establish, maintain, enhance, termination, profit, promise.
Morgan & Hunt (1994)	Establish, maintain, enhance.
Gummesson (1994)	Relationships, network, interaction.
Buttle (1996)	Managing strategically significant customers.
Brodie et al. (1997)	Using IT for customer acquisition and management
Harker (1999)	Proactive, committed and interactive profitable Exchanges.
Zineldin (2000)	RM is IT based and provide synergistic effects.
Liao et al. (2004)	IT provides support in RM.
Rebolledo et al. (2005)	IT is conceptually necessary in RM.
Macmillan et al. (2005)	Emphasizes customer support and retention, long-term.

2.2.3 The Relationship Market Framework

To attain success amidst the complexity of today's marketplace, relationship marketing researchers have recognized a number of key areas to be considered if the customer is to be satisfied. According to Payne (1993) this market framework refers to domains where marketing efforts should be concentrated and where strategies may be needed. Various market frameworks have been examined, and to take examples Doyle (1995) suggests the customer, supplier, internal and external partnerships. Gummesson (1999) similarly examines four categories but in an expanded scope consisting of the classic market relationships, special market relationships, meta-relationships and mega-relationships.

Though these contributions are well acknowledged as significant, Christopher et al. (1991) suggest six kinds of markets that this study considers as more elaborative. These encompass the customer, supplier, internal, referral, recruitment and influence markets. Notwithstanding the slight difference in perspectives, these scholars agree that the customer

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or buyer market is a prime focus in the area of marketing. As per Christopher et al. (2002) ideas, emphasis should be laid on building long term customer relationships. From his view, most managers unfortunately concur with this strategy and enormous amounts of resources are rather spent attracting new customers as opposed to customer retention. Though attraction of new customers is equally important, it is necessary that firms balance attention on existing customers as well. In this study, the customer market is taken as a key focus for exploring RM and IT. Figure 2.1 below illustrates the six market framework and the focal role of the customer. In Figure 2.2, a complex but illustrative diagram of competing ideas on firm partnerships is presented. The succeeding section furthers a review of the components of relationship marketing.

Figure 2.1 Six Markets Framework
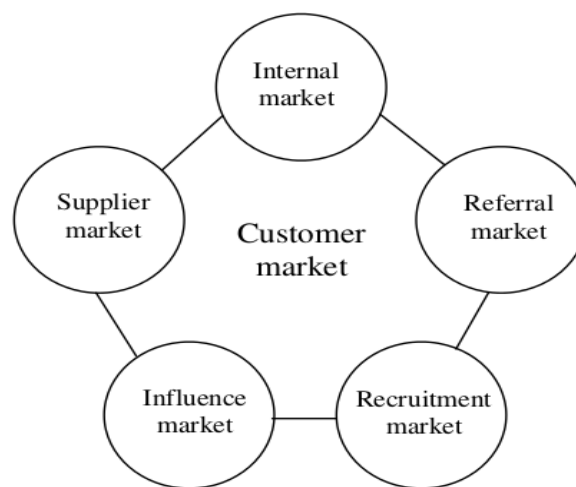
Source: Christopher et al. (2002)

Figure 2.2 The Core Firm and its Relationships
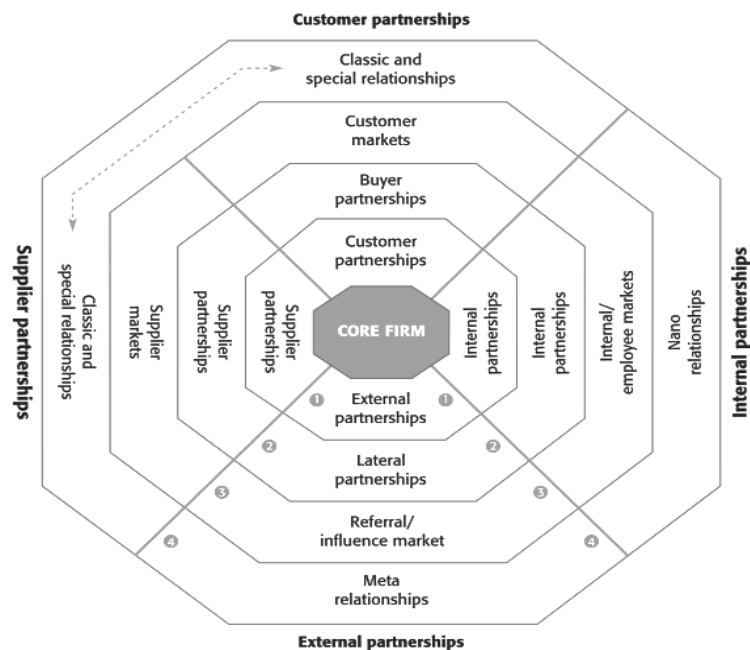
Source: Egan (2011)

2.2.4 Components of Relationship Marketing

Knowing the components of relationships is very useful to RM development as it stipulates what constitutes the concept and which practices are in line with the relational exchange philosophy. According to Gummesson (2002), this knowledge also improves decision making and planning. Harker (1999) claims that, a better look at RM's characteristics in literature may be an initial means of developing an understanding of its components and practice. In the light of this, this study relied on various RM characteristics, in addition to other extant literature to identify key components of RM relevant for this study.

Although many factors have been identified in the literature as being particularly important for successful relationships, these seem to be the most commonly noted; orientation to customer retention, continuous customer contact/ communication, long-time scale, high commitment, concern for quality, building trust, satisfaction and customer service (Conway & Swift 2000, Egan, 2011).

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(a) Continuous Customer Contact/ Communication

Though all relationship components are experienced through communication, this is a vital component in its own right (Baron et al., 2010). Communication should involve a two way continuous dialogue where feedback is key (Grönroos, 2004). This component is particularly important when a new relationship is being established and is essential in relationships as it denotes dependence and commitment (Egan, 2011). Again, communication in relationships should involve the sharing of meaningful and timely information.

(b) Long-time Scale

Another significant component of relationship marketing is its longitudinal view of business. The long-time scale of RM has been echoed in RM's conception and definitions (Harker, 1999). Buttle (1996) explicitly indicates the longevity of RM in his conception of RM as the development and maintenance of mutually satisfying long term relationships with customers. Insufficient understanding of long-time scale may lead to problems, such as attempting relationship marketing when transaction marketing is more appropriate (Ganesan, 1994). Notwithstanding, the longitudinal nature of RM is said to also facilitate the development of trust, a component which is next discussed.

(c) Trust

Trust has been defined as an emotional expectation on the part of the customer or firm that, promises made by both parties are reliable (Chow & Holden, 1997). Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Castaldo et al. (2010) also studied trust as a key component of RM strategies, where they found trust as enhancing relationships between the customers and firm. Dwyer et al. (1987) concluded on trust as the dominant emotion in relationships. Ford (1984) sees trust as an important consideration as many aspects of relations between customers and suppliers cannot be formalised or based on legal criteria but instead be based on mutual trust. Some studies have linked trust and commitment (Egan, 2011). The later component, which is commitment

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is highlighted next.

(d) Commitment

Hocutt (1998) sees commitment as an intention to continue a course of action or activity characterised by the long term concept. According to Blois (1998), commitment can also be viewed as the desire to maintain a relationship which is often indicated by a continuous investment into activities which are expected to maintain the relationship. Baron et al. (2010) observed that parties who have a strong personal relationship are more committed to maintaining the relationship.

(e) Customer Retention

Though RM has a dual focus on acquisition and retention (Christopher et al., 1991), Egan (2011) states that, the latter is given more prominence. Kotler et al. (2014) further elaborated this component and argued that, there should be emphasis on keeping customers to increase business. Baron et al. (2010) also concluded that a customer retention philosophy encourages trust and increases the chance of developing a long-term relationship, thus more business. To strengthen the argument, Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) noted that a 5% reduction in customer defection rate can increase profitability up to 85% depending on the industry. Other empirical studies in the likes of Reichhield (1996) positively correlates longevity of relationships to the company's financial strength.

(f) Satisfaction

Relationship marketing theory suggests that profitability is enhanced when customer retention is high, however, retention is a function of satisfaction (Buttle, 1997). Relationship satisfaction can be seen to be the need for relationship quality (Baron et al., 2010). The scholars further elaborate that, success of a relationship depends on the degree to which relationship expectations meet with relationship performance. Rosen and Suprenant (1998) earlier concluded on the significant influence of customer satisfaction as a key component in

lasting relationships.

(g) Customer Service

In RM literature, customer service is considered as separate though related to the concept in service marketing (Egan, 2011). Though its definitions vary, Clark (2000) ascertains that they are all concerned with relationships at the buyer-seller interface. Gabbott and Hogg (2001) state that service encounters are at the heart of services marketing and hence it is a central theme in RM. An earlier view of Buttle (1996) demonstrated his believe that excellent customer service produces improved profitability, customer satisfaction, relationship strength and hence longevity which is a key focus of relational exchanges. Ying-Yeuh (2009) also gathered an expanded categorization of RM components in his dissertation which is illustrated in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 A Conceptual Categorization of Relationship Marketing Components

Primary Components of Relationship Marketing	Other Common Components
Creation	creation (Sheth&Parvatiyar, 2000), attraction (Walsh, et al., 2004), establishment (Stewart & Durkin, 1999; Grönroos, 2000; Gilbert & Choi 2003).
Enhancement	strengthening (Gilbert & Choi, 2003), developing (Gummesson, 2002; Priluck, 2003), enhancing (Gummesson, 2002; Grönroos, 2000; Parvatiyar&Sheth, 2000), improving (Zeithaml&Bitner, 2003), intensifying (Bruhn, 2003).
Maintenance	maintaining (Gummesson, 2002; Grönroos, 2000), retaining (Gilbert & Choi, 2003; Walsh et al., 2004), keeping (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003), ongoing (Sheth&Parvatiyar, 2000), stabilising (Bruhn, 2003).
Interaction	co-operating (Gruen, 1997; Parvatiyar&Sheth, 2000), interacting (Gummesson, 1999; Gummesson, 2002; Walsh et al., 2004; Chang & Tseng, 2005), collaboration (Parvatiyar&Sheth, 2000), mutual exchange (Grönroos, 2000b, 2004), mutual effort (Tzokas et al., 2002), realisation (Bruhn, 2003), interaction (Harker, 1999), high contact (Kinard& Capella, 2006), take account of (Rao & Perry, 2002).
Emotional Contents	trust (Gruen, 1997), fulfilment of promises (Grönroos, 2000), trust and commitment (Tzokas et al., 2002), satisfying (Gilber& Choi, 2003), satisfaction (Little &Marandi, 2003).
Customer lifetime Value	establishing the mix or portfolio (Steward & Durkin, 1999), reliable customer databases (Khalil &Harcar, 1999).
Customization	flexibility (Hart, 2000; Little &Marandi, 2003), added value (Hart, 2000; Little &Marandi, 2003).
Long-term Relationship	long-term (Steward & Durkin, 1999; Gummesson, 2000; Rao & Perry, 2002), duration (Gilbert & Choi, 2003).
Profitable Relationship	mutually beneficial (Gruen, 1997), high-quality (Khalil &Harcar, 1999), competitive advantage (Tzokas et al., 2002), profitability (Gilber& Choi, 2003; Walsh et al., 2004), positive outcomes (Priluck, 2003), mutual economic value (Bruhn, 2003; Parvatiyar&Sheth, 2000), cost reductions (Parvatiyar&Sheth, 2000).
Growth of Customer Share	growing customer share (O'Malley & Tynan, 2000), focus on increase customer's wallet (Little &Marandi, 2003; Henry &Razzouk, 2006).
Relationship Termination	termination (Grönroos, 2000; Hocutt, 1998; Michalski, 2004), ending (Ping & Dwyer, 1992; Tahtinen, 2001), dissolution, ending or termination (Akerlund, 2005).

Source: Ying-Yueh (2009)

2.2.5 Relationship Marketing Outcomes

After a relevant discussion on key RM components, Baron et al. (2010) recommend that it also becomes necessary to understand their outcomes. As a response, this section is dedicated to reviewing the outcomes of RM from both conceptual and empirical contributions. Though various outcomes have been echoed across RM literature, this study finds the following relevant; long term relationships, profitable relationships, growth in customer share, customer value and relationship termination.

(a) Long-term Relationships

One advantage the firm inherits through the process of attracting, keeping and enhancing customers is the capacity of the relationship to last long enough to recoup its investment. For this reason, Roa and Perry (2002) see satisfying needs and delivering seamless customer value as a means to long-term ends. In ensuring the durability of these relationships, Reddy and Czepiel (1999) emphasized on the commitment component of RM. Some researchers like Gummesson (2002) and Lacey (2007) have discovered long-term outcomes as not an end to itself. To them, relationship longevity offers marketers the opportunity to develop detained knowledge about their customers and also increases purchasing levels.

(b) Profitable Relationships

Another commonly cited outcome of RM is profitability. Profitability has been widely inferred in relationship marketing definitions and remains an underlying reason for the dramatic growth of interest in RM (Alexander & Colgate, 2000). Hunt et al. (2006) reports that, customers enter into relationships with firms they believe they can benefit from. In tune with this report, Rosen and Surprenant (1998) earlier stated that relationships are characterized by mutual benefits and measures must be mutual. Hence in RM, there is emphasis on profitable relationships with customers. Although it is clear that engaging in a

marketing requires time, cost, and effort, it is suggested that RM reduces these costs and risk and brings the mutual profitability for both firm and customers (Grönroos, 2000). In Figure III, the return on relationship model is illustrated with the outcome of profitability.

(c) Growth in Customer Share

Henry and Razzouk (2006) define customer share as an attempt to create long-term relationships and mutual value. This outcome shifts the emphasis from concentrating on gaining share of market to keeping and encouraging customers. Some scholars however contend that a large market share is not equivalent to having loyal customers. Armstrong et al. (2000) for instance demonstrate that, companies could build customer share by alternatively offering a large variety of goods other than building close relationships. Nevertheless, some scholars including Lindgreen (2001) widely maintain that, gaining share of customers can be referred to as an outcome of RM. Customer loyalty has been closely linked with a growing market share and is reviewed next.

(d) Loyalty

For some scholars, customer loyalty and profitability are principal RM outcomes (Palmatier et al., 2006). Lovelock (2011) states that, customer loyalty extends beyond behaviour to include preference, liking, and future intentions. Similar to the outcomes of customer share and longevity, he contends that, loyalty is a means to differing benefits including price premiums, price insensitivity and reduced operation cost. Also, if firms are picky in acquiring the right customers, which are those for whom the firm has been designed to deliver truly special value, loyalty may extend into long-term revenues, continued growth from referrals, and enhanced satisfaction from employees whose daily jobs are improved when they can deal with appreciative customers.

(e) Relationship Termination

In RM research, a status of 'non-relationship' is acceptable via termination of the relationship by either party (Grönroos, 2006). According to Smith (1998), this termination may be interpreted in two ways. Thus by accepting 'customer de-selection' or 'adverse selection' as part of the marketing process. This might be operationalized, according by 'dumping unprofitable customers while selectively seeking and keeping the more profitable ones' or, alternatively, by reducing the appeal of the offering such that, the customer goes elsewhere of their own volition (Egan, 2011). Ying-Yueh (2009) observed that, though relationship termination is an integral part of RM, few researchers have focused on the process of ending business relationships. As Strandvik and Storbacka (1996) have noted, managers must pay attention to the termination of relationships.

Figure 2.3 Return on Relationship Model
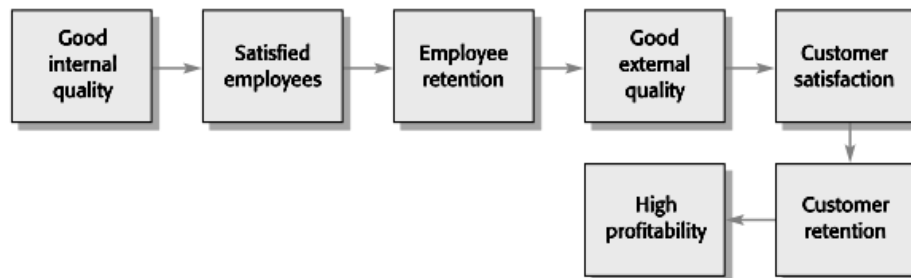
Source: Gummesson (1999)

2.3 Overview and Definition of Internet Technology

Perhaps, Egan's (2011) description of the pace of technology as frantic is well suited to begin this discussion on such a broad area. Developments in internet technology have had some positive contributions on marketing theory and practice, with relationship marketing as no exception (Arslan, 2008). Scholars including Zineldin (2000) and Sheth and Parvatiyar (2000) advocate that without these technological developments, relationship marketing is never a complete paradigm shift. In this section, IT is introduced and defined as a foundation

to better discuss its advances, opportunities and challenges in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Ralston & Reilly (2000) state that, internet technology has evolved into an umbrella term for a span of internet based applications such as social media, e-mails and websites among others. In another perspective by Rebbolledo et al. (2005, p. 59), these technologies include computer hardware, software and communication systems, as well as the personnel and resources dedicated to supporting these capabilities. More concisely, Daintith (2009) explained internet technology as the application of computers and telecommunication equipment to store, retrieve, transmit and manipulate data. Based on these understanding, this study operationalizes IT as:

The use of internet-based communication applications such as social media and websites for efficient conduct and enhancement of relationship marketing activities that require the exchange of information with customers and partners.

This definition also gathers support from Stump and Sriram (1997), where the scholars describe internet technology as an investment intended to facilitate the compilation, analysis and dissemination of task-related information. Moreover, the definition finds itself embedded in Berry's (1995) expectations of internet technology to facilitate the efficient performance of key tasks required to implement relationship marketing. Since an operational understanding of IT has now been established, social media and websites which are the main IT tools investigated in this study are discussed.

2.4 Using Internet Technologies for Relationship Marketing

Sociability via the internet is an emergent field as firms and consumers are embracing the web and its social elements to a degree unimaginable just these past years (Patino et al., 2012; Christodoulides & Jevons, 2011; Finn, 2011). These trends have given rise to the use of websites and social media for firm-customer relationship marketing activities. Keenan and

Shiri (2009, p. 439) defined social media as "websites that encourage social interaction through profile-based user accounts". In exploring the concept, they found that, social media is an alternative major medium for social interaction and that it is increasing exponentially in user numbers. These scholars also recognize the potential of social media in representing a real world where relationships could be established and built. According to them, users of this platform can indulge in both public and private interactions and can also express standard forms of expressions. Boyd and Ellison (2007) have also defined social media as web-based services that allow users to these three main functions:

1. Construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system.

2. Articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection.

3. View and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Preece (2001) has detailed specific technical measures to evaluate the compatibility of such technologies to include: trust worthiness, number of errors, productivity and user satisfaction. Keenan and Shiri (2009) also found out that, Facebook encourages sociability by representing existing social connections in a virtual space. They argue that, it occasionally violates the model of privacy but enables restricted profile access as a distinguishing feature. It encourages users to use their actual names. Twitter is also known to encourage sociability through simplicity, to them, the search power of social media allows firms to quickly locate customers. Aside these views, Hall (2011) also noted that, social media offers a number of applications which relevant to many organizations including telecommunication firms, these include Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Instagram, YouTube and several mobile based networks. However, Keenan and Shiri (2009) find Facebook and Twitter as common social media platforms used by companies.

Though there is an explosion of social media usage for relationship marketing, businesses are feeling extreme pressure to engage with customers through websites. Baird and Parasnis (2011) maintain that, customers are not only enthusiastic to engage with service providers simply to feel connected. Rather they are far more pragmatic, and to successfully exploit them, companies need to design experiences that deliver value in terms of time, attention, endorsement and data. Kumar et al. (1999) previously defined a website as the first field of a URL (uniform resource locator) which manifests itself as a set of interlinked web pages. They also believe that, this may be an artificially established community serving the customers and potential customers of a single entity, rather than a spontaneously emerging web community. Recent definitions have also featured contributions with emphasis on the internet. They portray the website as a group of World Wide Web pages under the same host name or usually containing hyperlinks to each other and made available on the internet by an individual or organization (Poblete et al., 2008). For Patino et al. (2012), websites and social media have displaced traditional media to become less important communication vehicles. Some researchers have identified opportunities with the use of internet technologies for RM (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013; Hall, 2011; Archer & Yuan, 2000). However, some contributions establish that, using IT for the development and maintenance of relationships is not a panacea for all firms and that IT may not suffice to facilitate RM (Rebolledo et al., 2005; Gabbott & Colgate, 1999). These ambiguous outcomes are therefore discussed next.

2.4.1 Opportunities of Websites and Social Media for Relationship Marketing

Technological developments such as the internet and its exemplars have provided exciting new opportunities for developing communications between companies and their customers. It is claimed that without these advances, RM could never hope to be an effective strategy (Zineldin, 2000). Egan (2011) notes that, without these developments few companies would be able to handle the growing complexity of their customers and other core relationships. He

also stated that the speed of change in technology makes a discussion of new technology difficult as even new technology can become out-dated quickly. Notwithstanding this challenge, key technological advances and opportunities in area of internet-based RM are discussed as follows.

(a) Enhanced Trust

Trust is seen as a component of every relationship (Iyer & Bejou, 2004; Winer, 2001). As Warrington et al. (2000) and Al-Weshah et al. (2013) found, it is a requisite for successful relationships over the internet. From studying trust among high tech firms and banks, Graf and Perrien (2005) also found that, trust is a dominant emotion, a result of which creates lasting relationships with customers especially via online platforms. The growing interdependence among business and customers provides added incentive for using the technological approach to strengthen trust (Zineldin, 2000). A body of literature also claims that, enhancing trustworthiness in relations including those online convinces stakeholders that their assets and resources are shared with a trustful counterparty (Hong & Wang, 2009; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

(b) Interactivity

According to Bauer et al. (2002), the internet has turned into an impressive success story with an opportunity to interact between parties in ways not available before. Using internet technologies for relationship building and management allows speed of interaction through a great variety of pieces of information that are interlinked (Ballantyne, 2000). This also provides real time interactivity to companies and customers involved in a relationship. Johns et al., (2009) claim that, interactivity is sufficient, even if this interaction is not carried out face-to-face. The interactivities enabled are also primarily computer interactions where consumers direct the process (Wang & Head, 2005).

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(c) Effective Communication

Communication is positioned at the core of relationship building and maintenance (Grönroos, 2000). Egan (2011) has argued that, customers require both convenient and effective communication in every relationship. Kodish and Pettegrew (2008) earlier ascertained that, RM businesses use technologies to design and align communications as a way to provide more value to customers. Internet technologies especially the website allows users to select information individually (Enrst & Young LLP, 2000). In a way, the advantages of the mass media, especially their easy availability are combined with direct individual communication, specific, relevant, and up-to-date information (Bauer et al., 2002). There is also a likelihood that, effective communication over the social media initiates sharing of meaningful and timely information which is likely to build up both trust and commitment (Egan, 2011). Barnes (1997) noted that most relationships are not likely to be in the eyes of the customer in that, it is mostly one-sided and lacking in two-way communication. To bring a balance extensive use of the website and social media normalizes the response rate among many customers. It improves information flow in relationships and deepens a relationship by advancing ideas and solutions likely to appeal to the customer. (Zineldin, 2000). As Egan (2011) expressively concludes, internet technologies are about improving communication and not frustrating it.

(d) Source of Feedback

Feedback in this context includes comments, complaints and questions from customers online. It may be among the most effective means of establishing what the customer regards as a satisfactory level of performance and what 'dissatisfiers' exist within the operation as it is based on actual performance rather than contrived situations (Jones & Sasser, 1995). Customer feedback is a part of online interactions, it is continuous and in real-time (Rebolledo et al. 2005). Egan (2011) has explained that, the benefit of feedback implicitly

means there is quality of interactions and successful management of customer base. Rebolledo et al. (2005) also concluded that, using internet technologies for RM translates into a greater knowledge about current customers. According to Wang & Head (2005), marketers can also better collect and manage consumer information as social media and websites are efficient in collecting and processing information.

(e) Reduced Cost

Technology has also changed the way many services are delivered often replacing costly face-to-face interaction (Palmatier et al., 2006). According to McAdam (2005), there is an evident benefit for firms since the internet has made the costs and rewards of online relationship marketing more transparent and encouraged customers. Peck et al. (2004) also argue that, firms can take advantage of reduced costs associated with building and maintaining relationships online.

(f) Customer Satisfaction

Viljoen et al. (2005) realized that, the website's content and offerings for instance can be adjusted accordingly to improve the customer's satisfaction. Nevertheless, customer satisfaction is also influenced by the specific product or service features and the customer's perceptions of service quality (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). It is suggested that, customer satisfaction can be increased if value is improved by increasing the benefit or reducing the sacrifice on the side of the buyer (Egan, 2011). In this way, the use of internet technologies provide values including speed and convenience for customers.

(g) Improved Bonding

The internet as a relationship building tool to successfully enhance some aspects of customer relationships such as enhancing services and bonding with customers (Chiagouris, 2000; McWilliam, 2012; Walsh, 2000). Fournier and Lee (2009) observes that, in modern service relationships the company develops an interest to foster longer-term bonds with customers

including using the social media. However, it may be worthless if the customer fails to reciprocate. Hence, firms are required to be skilful to create bonding opportunities over the internet.

(h) Loyalty

Customer satisfaction sustains loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994). An aim of introducing technologies including social media in a relational exchange is to treat your customers as valued partners, to establish their needs and develop their loyalty through quality service. Bauer et al. (2002) acknowledge that, internet customers display a higher sense of loyalty than other customers.

(i) Personalization

Consumers differ in how they value long-term relationships. For this reason, personalizing relationships over the internet provides an immense benefit (Wang & Head, 2005). Okazaki & Taylor (2013) have also added that, social media has global reach holding to the existence of de facto standard applications that represent a powerful personalization tool. According to O'Malley and Tynan (2000), internet technologies also offer new abilities to attend to individual customer's concerns (or one-to-one marketing). This however requires the application of empathy. Studies conducted Parasuraman and Grewal (2001) and Rebolledo et al. (2005) did not show a direct link between the use of sophisticated technologies and relationship orientation. In other words, extensive use of IT in supporting relationships may not necessarily lead to the development of stronger relationships.

2.4.2 The Dark Side of Websites and Social Media for Relationship Marketing

It is debated that, the increasing use of internet technologies such as the website and social media in business-to- consumer relationships can have a negative impact on the development of long-term relationships (Rebolledo et al., 2005; Barnes et al., 2000). This has resulted in debates of unintended consequences including customer concerns for privacy, erosion of

emotional attachments developed from face-to-face confrontations with customers and the propensity of unsolicited communication from internet technologies. Detailed discussions of these concerns are below.

(a) Privacy Concerns

The integration of technology in service encounters can raise customer concerns of privacy or confidentiality (Barnes et al., 2000). Security and confidentiality of private customer data is argued as the foremost concerns of connected parties in a relationship. Some scholars reason that, using internet technologies only increases vulnerability and encroachment from unauthorized personnel (Vlosky et al., 2000). Nonetheless, Pillai and Sharma's (2004) still assert that, privacy in business relations over the internet is not an issue. In a recent IT report (Computer Weekly), it was explained that some 91% of recent generations believe the age of privacy is over, while a third are unconcerned about the data that is captured about them.

(b) Erosion of Key Relationship Facilitators

Interaction with technology rather than with employees can affect the social aspects identified as critical in business-to-customer relationships, mainly affecting trust, commitment or friendship (Rebolledo et al., 2005). Significant components of service quality are also related to the personal interaction between consumer and staff. Some customers prefer the social aspects of interacting closely and developing personal relationships with service providers or other customers during service encounters. The prolonged absence of contact with the service provider can therefore erode the customer's emotional attachment to the service provider, thus decreasing loyalty and increasing the probability of switching (Barnes & Glynn, 1993; Bitner et al., 2000). For Egan (2011), many employees who handle online relationships fail to realise that in social networks, the people themselves are the medium and not the site. Johns et al. (2009) also state that, interaction is sufficient even if this interaction is not carried out face-to-face.

(c) Unsolicited Communication

Whiles constant communication is a requisite for every strong relationship, unsolicited communication especially through the use of social media and subscribed feeds from websites may become a problem (Barnes et al., 2000). As Pinsonneault and Rivard (1998) noted earlier, when firms decide to automate their interface with clients leading to unsolicited communication, their primary concern is not to create or enhance relationships with customers. In fact, much of the investment in IT is directed to increasing productivity.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature reviewed, this study adapts the conceptual framework established in the work of Gabbott & Colgate (1999) as a pre-study framework to explore the use, compatibility issues and benefits of relationship marketing via social media and websites. The key components of the framework are relationship marketing, which is operationalized as how firms establish, enhance and maintain relationships. Internet technology as another component is operationalized as social media and websites used as internet tools for pursuing relationship marketing. Challenges form another component of the framework indicating the compatibility issues which emerge with the use of the internet for relationship marketing. Finally, the benefits of relationship marketing via the internet comprise the outcomes. Figure 2.4 illustrates the framework.

Figure 2.4 Pre-Study Framework of Internet Based Relationship Marketing
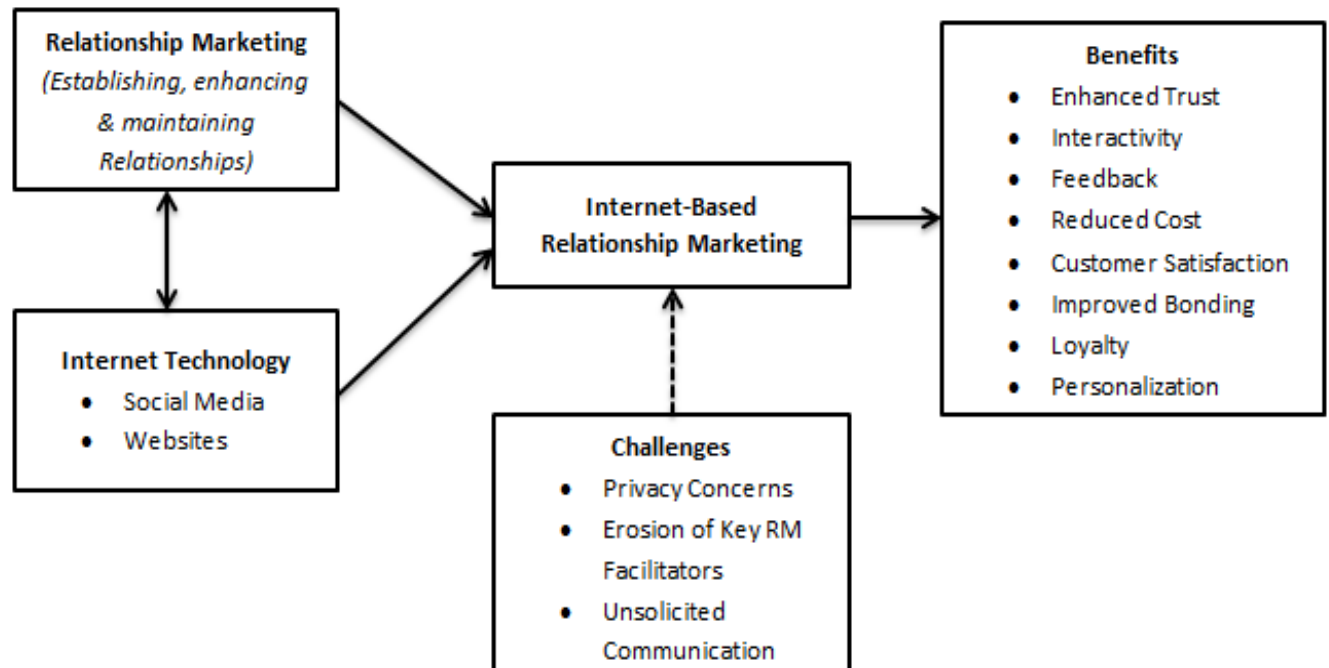
Adapted from: Gabbott and Colgate (1999)

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed existing contributions within the area of relationship marketing and its practice over the internet. It demonstrated the evolution of relationship marketing from transactions to building and managing technologically inspired networks. Mixed results concerning the use of IT in RM have also been reported including enhanced trust, satisfaction, interactivity, erosion of relationship facilitators and concerns for privacy. In accordance with the structure of this thesis, the next chapter discusses the context of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

3.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter sourced information especially from Ghanaian literature to stage the relevance of the context selected for this study. It reviews articles, reports and online publications which are further discussed in broad themes to effectively describe telecommunication in the Ghanaian setting. The chapter begins with a brief on the physical setting of Ghana. Subsequently, it discusses the state of the Ghanaian service sector, an overview of telecommunication, the various policy and regulatory frameworks within the industry and key developments and contributions of the telecommunications industry. Additionally, this chapter includes a foreground to the future of telecommunications in Ghana, after which a concise summary of the whole chapter is presented.

3.1 The Physical Setting of Ghana

Ghana is located on the western coast of Africa, along the Gulf of Guinea and is bordered by Burkina Faso to the north, Togo to the east, Cote d'Ivoire to west and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. The country covers a total landmass of approximately 238,540 sq. km with a population of over 24 million people from 10 regions with Accra as its capital city (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). According to GSS (2010) reports, the population is expected to have a 2% growth per year to reach 27 million by 2016. Ghana is also one of Africa's most developed countries to perform favourably in indexes of governance, stability, peacefulness, and human development by regional standards. Its economy is the sixth largest on the African continent by purchasing power parity and nominal GDP and it is one of the fastest growing in the world (KPMG, 2013; Sassen, 2011).

While the country has been previously pronounced with high outputs from its agricultural sector, there has been a triumph for its services sector as experienced since 2007

(ISSER, 2012). In the next section, the state of its service sector which has been a growing concern for relationship marketing is discussed.

Figure 3.1The Geographical Location of Ghana

Source: http://www.mapsopensource.com
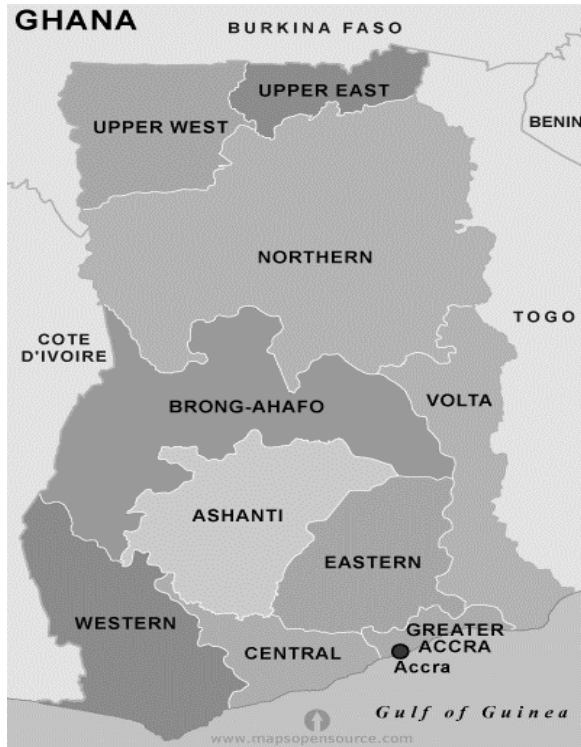
3.2 State of the Ghanaian Service Sector.

The International Monetary Fund (2014) recorded an overall economic growth rate of 5.4 % in 2013. From this percentage, the services sector recorded a 0.7% growth with 12.7% from information and communication services including mobile telecommunications and other internet based services (ISSER, 2013). This growth is followed by the agricultural sector and manufacturing. Recently, the state of the Ghanaian domestic economy is seen to be also revolving around services; which accounts for 50% of GDP and employs 28% of the work force (GSS, 2014). The country is gradually acknowledging the existing trend to invest in infrastructure including a healthy digital supported service economy and is leading the way among its neighbours in West Africa (Ghana National Commission for UNESCO, 2007).

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Ghana was one of the first countries in Africa to achieve the connection to the World Wide Web. As at 2014, the country recorded 5,171,993 internet users out of 297,885,898 for Africa (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2014). For this reason among others, there has been a spark in creation and growth of businesses across the economy with services like telecommunications as no exception. A telecommunications industry performance review by Frempong (2007) has indicated that, the subject has assumed an important position in the contemporary world. According to the report, there have been responses to global changes including substantive reform of telecommunication markets. Some other reports have recognized telecommunications as a significant area in the Ghanaian service sector (PWC, 2014; KPMG, 2013). The subsequent section provides a concise overview on the Ghanaian telecommunications industry, an area in which this study was focused.

3.3 Overview of the Telecommunication Industry in Ghana

Generally, telecommunication in Ghana has been referred to the specific services that support the exchange of information over significant distances by electronic means (Ambali, 2014). The concept has been described to include service related activities; i.e. voice transmissions, data services, text, sound and video which may be based on a single technology or complicated with a combination of technologies such as communication satellites and the internet (International Telecommunication Union, 2010). According to the National Communication Authority (2014), there are 6 main cellular service operators with about 165 internet service providers (ISP) in Ghana. The market continues to grow aggressively in all segments, particularly in the telephony sector with mobile penetration rate increasing rapidly. Internet usage has also increased though connectivity is expensive (KPMG, 2013). In these conditions, the Ghanaian telecom industry is entering its maturity phase, with reducing average profit (KPMG, 2013). Table 3.1 presents the entry year and subscriber base of selected telecom operators in Ghana from which this study sourced

experts. Additionally, it provides key social media statistics on these operators. Subsequently, the following section presents a concise profile of these operators in order of highest subscriber base.

Table 3.1 Information on Selected Cellular Operators in Ghana for April 2015

Service Provider	Year of Entry	No. of Subscribers	Facebook Followers	Twitter Followers
1. MTN	2006	13,852,398	430,000	47.6,000
2. Vodafone	2008	7,069,516	357,000	43.5,000
3. Tigo	2006	4,133,760	358,000	27,000
4. Airtel	2010	3,735,656	455,000	28.2,000
5. Glo	2012	1,450,382	7,211	155,000

Source: Authors Own Construct

3.3.1 Profile of MTN Ghana

Launched in 1994, the MTN Group is a leading emerging market operator, connecting subscribers in 22 countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. According to the group's website, MTN significantly recorded 201.5 million subscribers across its operations in Afghanistan, Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Republic, Iran, Liberia, Nigeria, Republic of Congo (Congo Brazzaville), Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, South Sudan, Swaziland, Syria, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia as of 30 June 2013. In Ghana alone, the National Communications Authority precisely reported 13,852,398 MTN subscribers along with 45.23% market share that makes the MTN the leading telecommunication company in customer base (NCA, 2015). While MTN Ghana enjoys 430,000 followers on Facebook, MTN's brand is currently the most valuable in Africa, and is ranked in the top 100 brands worldwide (www.mtn.com.gh; www.interbrands.com).

As the leading provider of telecommunication services in Africa and the Middle East, MTN entered the Ghanaian market following the acquisition of Investcom in 2006. MTN's overriding mission is to be a vehicle for Ghana's economic growth and development, helping to promote Ghana's strong development potential from the provision of world-class telecommunications products and services, through to innovative and sustainable corporate social investment initiatives. Technological innovation is vital to the company's existence. This has been demonstrated in its emerging service trends including a 3.5G, E-self-care systems amongst others in the quest to satisfy divergent needs of customers. The company is steered by the vision to lead the delivery of a bold, new digital world to its customers and also defines relationships as part of its brand values through teamwork, personalization, warming, caring and friendliness. MTN prides in a number of prestigious awards including brand activation and outdoor advert of the year 2012 by the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

3.3.2 Profile of Airtel Ghana

Airtel in Ghana is a subsidiary of the Indian telecommunications company Airtel that succeeded Zain's operations in Ghana since March, 2010 (www.africa.airtel.com). The company has established its presence in about 20 countries across Africa, South Asia and the Channel Islands. As one of the world's top mobile communication companies, it aims to connect communities across Africa by providing affordable, relevant and innovative mobile solutions. According to NCA (2015) reports, Airtel in Ghana has a subscriber base of 3,735,656. The company has also been recognized with a number awards including the CIMG Social media company for the year 2014 and has the highest number of Facebook followers at about 455,000 and 26,000 on Twitter recorded during the early periods of 2015. Airtel Ghana visions to be the most loved brand in the daily lives of the Ghanaian people.

3.3.3 Profile of Tigo Ghana

Millicom International Cellular is a leading international developer and operator of cellular   services under the Tigo brand (www.tigo.com.gh). Primarily, Tigo operates in emerging markets across Latin America and Africa. The company's services are available to more than 30 million subscribers in 13 emerging markets in these continents. The company started its operations in Ghana in 1991 and was the first cellular network operator in Ghana under the Mobitel brand name which was replaced with Tigo in 2006. Today, Tigo operates in all 10 regions of Ghana with 4,133,760 subscribers and 358 followers on Facebook (NCA, 2015). As an objective, Tigo strives to provide people in emerging markets the freedom to access today's world through affordability, accessibility and availability. The company also focuses on consistently meeting and exceeding customer's expectations and developing an inspirational brand. Tigo prides itself with a number of awards including the best use of social media by the Ghana Telecom Awards (2012) and best TV marketing campaign awarded by the Chartered Institute of Marketing Ghana.

3.3.4 Profile of Vodafone Ghana

Vodafone in Ghana is one of the latest additions to the Vodafone Group Plc, one of the world's leading mobile telecommunications company (www.vodafone.com.gh). This follows the successful acquisition of 70% shares in Ghana Telecommunications Company (GT) on July 23, 2008. Vodafone Group Plc is making significant in-roads in Africa and currently operates in Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and Mozambique. It has significant presence in Europe, the Middle East, Asia Pacific and the United States through the company's subsidiary undertakings, joint ventures, associated undertakings and investments. Globally, the Vodafone Group has more than 315 million customers with 7,069,516 in Ghana and 357,000 Facebook followers from Ghana (NCA, 2015). Operational in 31 countries, the company is ranked among the top 10 global companies.

Vodafone Ghana provides a unique portfolio of products and services including high speed access to the internet, mobile services and fixed lines. The company is known to apply the latest industry technology and is keen on building the most versatile network. Excellent customer care is one of the company's strengths as it prides in being the only telecommunications company in Ghana with as many customer service points. For its efforts, Vodafone Ghana has been awarded CIMG telecommunications company of the year 2013.

3.3.5 Profile of Glo Ghana

Globacom Limited (GLO) is a Nigerian multinational telecommunications company with its headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria. GLO is a privately owned telecommunications carrier that commenced operations in 2003. Currently, it operates in four West African countries; Nigeria, Republic of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. The company has shown unprecedented growth through lower tariffs and other value adding services. In May 2008, GLO acquired an operating license through its Glo Mobile division in Ghana but launched its operations in 2012. In the Ghanaian market, it has focused its efforts on bundled voice and internet services by specifically targeting a number of 'un-serviced' areas.

The NCA (2014) report on mobile voice market figures indicate the company's subscriber base of 1,450,382 at an increasing rate of 4.78% as at November 2014. Glo in Ghana also attracts about 7,211 Facebook followers and 155,000 for Twitter. The company aspires to build Africa's biggest and best telecommunications network (www.gloworld.com). In 2013, it was adjudged the fastest growing telecom network and the most innovative product in 2012 all at the Ghana Telecom Awards. Its mission and vision is to bring on board quality and efficient telecommunications services to Ghanaians.

3.4 Policy and Regulatory Frameworks in the Telecommunication Industry in Ghana

There are a number of regulatory and policy making institutions that play a vital role in actively promoting the effective development of the telecommunications sector, even as

the industry moves closer to a fully private, competitive model. These include the Ministry of Communications, National Communications Authority and the National Telecommunications Policy.

3.4.1 Ministry of Communications

The Ministry of Communications is responsible for the definition and elaboration of Government policy regarding telecommunications. Its vision is to manage the convergence of communications and technologies to promote a viable integrated national development process within a global setting. Also, it facilitates the development of a reliable and cost effective world class communications infrastructure and services, via appropriate technological innovations to enhance the promotion of economic competitiveness (Ghana National Commission for UNESCO, 2007). It is the responsibility of the Ministry to participate in a consultative capacity in all National Communications Authority public regulatory proceedings in an open and transparent manner. It is also the mandate of the Ministry of Communication to monitor development of the telecommunication sector, and progress toward achieving the objectives of the national policy and to represent the Government of the Republic of Ghana in all international negotiations and proceedings relating to the country's telecommunication policies.

3.4.2 National Communications Authority

Owing to privatization and liberalization, there was the need to assign regulatory roles to an independent body that will oversee the development of telecommunications. Consequently, the National Communications Authority Act (Act 524) was promulgated in 1996 for the establishment of the NCA in Ghana. NCA is responsible for regulating communications by wire, cable, radio, television, satellite and similar means of technology. To create and maintain an efficient, transparent and business-friendly environment, the NCA, among other roles, ensures the compliance of regulations, grants licenses for the operation of

communications systems, assigns, allocates and regulates the use of radio frequencies, provides guidelines on tariffs, and maintains a register of operators in the telecommunications and IT industry (Government of Ghana, 2004).

3.4.3 National Telecommunication Policy

Following the widespread of liberalisation in basic telecommunication services in 1994, the government of Ghana ten years later in 2004, formulated a comprehensive national communication policy with the vision of building upon developments that have been facilitated by the former in the telecommunication sector. The purpose was to define the framework within which Ghana's Telecommunication sector will evolve towards its set vision. Specific objectives that the policy aims to promote include universal access of telephone, internet and multimedia services for all communities and population groups in Ghana, connection of institutions like schools, hospitals and governmental agencies among others to advanced telecommunication services, fully open private and competitive market for all telecommunication services and affordable prices for telecommunication services etc. Nevertheless, the accomplishment of these policy objectives depends on the performance of the private sector since Ghana's telecommunication industry is dominated by private telecom service operators.

3.5 Developments and Contribution of the Telecommunication Industry to the Economy of Ghana

Development of telecommunications in the Ghanaian market has been impressive. With a total of 6 cellular operators, records obtained from the NCA (2014) indicate some 30,360,771 shared subscribers as at the end 2014, which is an increase of 0.47% compared to 2013. The internet sector is also highly competitive with about 165 licensed ISP's, although the bulk of the market is in the hands of only a few. Internet usage statistics report a remarkable increase in internet users, from 30,000 in 2000 to 5,171,993 in 2014 (Miniwatts

Marketing Group, 2014). However, internet penetration is still relatively low (20.1%), mainly due to the poor condition of the national fixed-line network and the high cost of connectivity. Notwithstanding, the emergence of wireless and mobile broadband technologies is now speeding up developments. According to data provided by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning in the 2010 budget, the Transport, Storage and Communication sector registered a gross domestic product growth of 7% in 2009 and projected a growth of 8% for 2010. Currently, the sector contributes about 6% to GDP and is expected to increase in the coming years.

The Ghana National Commission for UNESCO (2007) has also stipulated that, latest developments in the sector have realized an increase in diffusion rates across the country. Internet services are being made available to enhance connectivity in under-served and unserved rural areas. About 120 out of 230 community information centres are being constructed nationwide and are at various stages of completion. In addition, the Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communication (GIFEC) have assisted some first and second cycle institutions with connectivity and ICT equipment. Gradually, e-banking and e-commerce services are also taking root in urban centres of the country. Surfline, which is one of the leading internet service providers has launched its 4G LTE network which will certainly help boost uptake of internet services in Ghana.

Not to side line these developments, certain challenges are present within the industry. The core challenges relate to lack of infrastructure and expertise, poor quality of service and inadequate sector management. Telecommunications is a capital-intensive sector that requires modern infrastructure that can provide world- class high-speed internet services and enhanced telecommunications interconnectivity for both business and personal use. Currently, such high quality is not available in a consistent manner. Whilst the rural and urban areas remain stuck in underdevelopment, there have been unavailability and inconsistency of

modern resources and services like electricity and new communications technologies which poses a problem for telecommunication and IT development.

The lack of smooth coexistence between service providers is also another challenge for the sector. For instance, each mobile phone company erects its own masts and does not share telephony space to ease connectivity problems of users. However it may be safe to say that the efforts by government, the private sector and development partners to build a formidable and robust ICT network for Ghana have had a positive impact in the economy of the country.

3.6 The Future of Telecommunications in Ghana

Information and communication technologies have become critical to the Ghanaian socio-economic system in these recent times. According to Frempong (2007), these technologies continue to significantly underpin the world's business and social organisations and has compelled governments of both developed and developing countries including Ghana, to push the development of the telecommunication sector. One of the major changes projected into the future of telecommunications in Ghana is the increase in diffusion rates across the country. Already services like the internet is being improved and made available in underserved and unserved rural areas (National Commission for UNESCO, 2007).

Not all, other strategic projects are being designed, which if implemented could be of enormous aid in meeting the expanding requirements of the telecom market. These projects include fully digitalizing the telecommunications network in Ghana, rehabilitating, expanding, and modernizing the switching, transmission and local networks, and also attempts towards the development of intelligent networks (NCA, 2014). Also, the importance of strong ICT consumer and civil organisations cannot be overstated due to their immeasurable contribution to ICT development and the future implications for telecommunications. While these organisations serve as the mouthpiece of consumers and

can act as pressure groups to ensure the quality of service provided by operators, a strong and vibrant ICT consumer and civil organisations in the future could also serve as a feedback system by which regulators can solicit opinions for regulations, management and general performance of the sector (Frempong, 2007). Already, Vodafone in Ghana is leading the way to empowering consumers through e-learning platforms.

3.7 Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter located the context of the study within the telecommunications industry of Ghana. While an emphasis was made on key operators and regulatory frameworks that drive the sector, the researcher also presented the developments and contributions of the sector to include improved connectivity like the internet which plays a crucial role in the country's socio-economic development. Nevertheless, some projections which are expected to take shape within the near future of telecommunications for instance the empowerment of civil organizations as a source of feedback to improve the performance of the sector was discussed. The subsequent section therefore discusses the researcher's methodology for collection and analysis of data from this context.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the procedures and the underlying philosophical concepts enclosed in the study. It therefore discusses the theoretical and practical considerations in formulating an appropriate methodology to respond to the research questions stated in Chapter One. Since findings and analysis play a significant role in refining the pre-study framework presented in Chapter Two, careful selection of the methodological choices available for this study was essential. Malhotra (2011) has clearly established that, developing an effective and efficient research design requires deliberating these components; research philosophy, type of research, construction of an instrument for data collection, specifying the sampling process and technique and developing a plan for data analysis.

The following section therefore begins with a discussion of the underpinning philosophical perspectives considered and selected for this research which was an interpretivist paradigm. Following this, the sampling and data collection procedure is explained. The chapter concludes by providing details of how responses were subject to qualitative analysis and the ethical issues considered.

4.1 Research Philosophy

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) have explained that research should be guided by a philosophy that characterises the investigator's particular beliefs about the nature of data collection, analysis, and how phenomena are to be perceived and interpreted. Saunders et al. (2011) have also stated that, a clear philosophy allows the investigator to think critically about the enhancement of knowledge.

The ontological position in this study reflects a view about the nature of the study's setting (Gill & Johnson, 2010). It was believed that there were multiple realities experienced

by firms as they implemented relationship marketing via internet technology. Moreover, there was a possibility that each firm might have had a different experience of RM and IT implementation. Consequently analysing these differing experiences lends this study to objectivity (Saunders et al., 2011). This investigation therefore was not focused on looking for or testing a right answer but rather was conducted to enhance understanding by exploring the concepts and practices of internet-based relationship marketing within the Ghanaian telecommunication industry.

Epistemology refers to the assumptions about knowledge and how it can be obtained (Hirschheim, 1992). The epistemological stance, which is the assumptions about knowledge and how it could be obtained in this research was close to interpretivism. This study chose to interact with participants to deepen insights. In other words, the study adopted an interpretivist epistemology to explore and understand how telecommunication firms in Ghana implemented RM via internet technologies (website and social media). This minimized anticipating conclusion to allow the data speak for itself and offer insightful perspectives regarding the practice of RM via IT (Perry, 1998).

It was also believed that, knowledge or 'truth' was not 'out there' to be found (Jankowicz, 2005). In other words, the phenomena and information could not simply be discovered and measured quantitatively to form statistical generalization. It was important therefore for the researcher to directly interact with service experts to establish a socially agreed understanding. This interpretive approach allowed the researcher to understand how RM was implemented via websites and social media, its benefits and compatibility issues. An interpretive paradigm was therefore deemed most appropriate for addressing the research questions in contrast with a positivist paradigm which would not enable the researcher to capture the richness and complexity of RM and IT practices. The next section discusses inductivism as an approach to refining a post-study framework for the study.

4.2 Research Approach

The research approach is concisely conceptualized as the framework or plan for this study. For its significance, an appropriate approach was selected as a possible way to collect and analyse the data, and reduce the potential difficulties associated with an interpretive study of this nature (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Saunders et al. (2011) identify two major approaches to building and testing of theory; these are deductivism and inductivism. While the deductive approach emphasises on analysis of relationships and use of various controls, physical or statistical, so as to allow the testing of hypotheses (Gill & Johnson, 2010), the inductive approach concerns the explanation of subjective meanings which involves the systematic collection and analysis of qualitative data (Gilmore & Carson, 1996). This research sought inductivism to explore data and develop theories from the findings that will subsequently relate to literature and refine the pre-study framework. Additionally, its justification is based on the identified research questions and objectives (Creswell, 2012).

4.3 Research Strategies

From studying relationship marketing concepts, Ying-Yueh (2009) noted that, majority of previous studies on RM adopted quantitative approaches. This is however not the case in literature on relationship marketing via internet technologies, as conceptual contributions are currently dominating within the domain (Rebolledo et. al., 2005). There have been growing interest in qualitative studies as researchers are increasingly identifying flagship gaps in internet-based relationship marketing literature that require in-depth exploration (Liao et al., 2004; Al-Weshah et al., 2013).

Although literature has guided and informed this study, there are ambiguous conceptualisations on the application of internet technologies in relationship marketing. Methodologically, this study believed that using naturalistic procedures could yield richer

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data that would help explore and understand the telecom industry's perspectives and beliefs in ways not available to researchers using quantitative methods (Robson, 2002). Therefore, a qualitative methodology was used to explore how IT was used in RM and its compatibility to arrive at its benefits. According to Creswell (2012) a qualitative method focuses on the process of meaning constructing and can clarify what and how meanings are embodied through an inductive logic. An additional justification for pursuing a qualitative research was that, the purpose of this research was intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the interpretations of the practices of internet-based relationship marketing within the telecom sector. Three major methods, which were focus groups, case studies and depth interviews were available for this study (Creswell, 2007). Though focus groups were potentially advantageous in listening, steering and moderating a discussion, it was reasoned that participants would not want to disclose potentially sensitive information among their competitors and this would violate the ethical considerations of this study (Ying-Yeuh, 2009). Depth interviews may also have deepened understanding of the research problem, however, they have very little structure and involve the researcher wanting to know or find out more about a specific topic without there being a structure or a pre-conceived plan as to how the topic would be dealt with (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Nonetheless, a good qualitative research required a more formal thought, preparation, conducting and analysing data with care and consideration (Creswell, 2007). Multiple case studies were therefore adopted since it involved the exploration of different single entities or phenomenon and collecting detailed information to show different perspectives on the issue (Yin, 2009). Since internet-based relationship marketing within the Sub-Saharan African region remains investigated (Okai, 2013), it was reasoned that, a more comprehensive strategy to addressing the phenomenon could be achieved by studying cases within a bounded system, i.e. the telecommunication industry (Yin, 2009).

Comparatively, some prior attempts in conceptualizing RM and IT have also sought to a similar approach. Liao et al (2004) used case studies to conceptualize information technology and RM in Taiwan. More recently, Al-Weshah et al. (2013) also used a similar technique to investigate electronic networks and relationship marketing in Jordan.

4.4 Research Population

Malhotra (2011) defined the research population as the collection of elements or objects that possess the information sought by the researcher and about which inferences are to be made. Previous reports on the state of the Ghanaian economy published by ISSER (2012) have identified Ghana as a composition of several service and manufacturing industries. Among these are agriculture, mining, banking, tourism and the telecommunication sector. ISSER (2012) reports a triumph of the service sector over the economy's previously large agricultural sector. This supports an impression of emerging activities within the service sector including an increase in the use of technologies (Hinson & Amidu, 2006). Lovelock (2011), also claims that, the service sector has become a key area for marketing research as it contributes more than 60% of world GDP. The service sector is therefore seen as a rapidly emerging area with relationships and technologies transforming its activities. These concerns provided a justification for this study to be located in the Ghanaian service sector.

To deepen a focus on selecting a particular industry, this study was informed by literature that, the use of relationship marketing via internet technologies have been to some extent explored within the banking industry (Rebolledo et al., 2005) tourism (Al-Weshah et al., 2013) and retail (Liao et al., 2004). It was clearly inferred that, evidence from other least explored sectors such as telecommunications would contribute to understanding the ambiguity surrounding IT use in RM especially from the Sub-Saharan region. Some scholars have also noted that, qualitative studies within this area could provide rich, rigour and meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010). The procedures employed in selecting experts from the

Ghanaian telecom sector are discussed subsequently.

4.5 Sample and Sampling Techniques

After a clear definition of the population from which the sample is to be drawn, Beri (2000) posits that it becomes necessary to decide on the sampling design to be used. Whereas quantitative studies usually strive for random sampling, qualitative studies often pursue purposive or criterion-based sampling (Beri, 2000). Beri (2000) also postulates that, the objective of the sampling process is to choose a sample that would faithfully reproduce the characteristics of the population; this was considered very essential in this research. Two broad choices are available for a sampling technique; probability and non-probability sampling (Malhotra, 2011). While the earlier offered an equal chance of selecting respondents based on statistical methods, the later empowered the researcher's judgement in the selection of sample elements. The selection of a probability sampling technique is often appropriate in quantitative studies where there is interest in statistical inferences other than gaining insights and also in cases where the intent is not to describe the individuals' part of the sample but rather obtain a composite profile of the population of interest (Hair et al., 2007).

Especially in an exploratory research, probability sampling may not be well suited in obtaining deeper insights. Hence specific non-probability techniques were required. Considering these conditions, a purposive sampling technique was deemed appropriate for this research as it is based on the capacity of respondents to provide detailed insights to address the study's research questions. Four telecom service providers were selected as cases. Among six main voice service providers in Ghana (MTN, Airtel, Tigo and Vodafone), only these four service providers were active in website and social media engagements and indicated their interest to part-take in the study. Considering these conditions, using a purposive sampling technique was deemed appropriate for this research, after which four telecom service providers were selected. Among six main voice service providers in Ghana

(MTN, Airtel, Tigo and Vodafone), only these four service providers were active in website and social media engagements and indicated their interest to part-take in the study.

Three (3) experts were interviewed from the four (4) telecom service providers in Accra. The three for each case comprised the head of the digital marketing department, in some cases referred to as an online marketing specialist and members of the online relationship marketing team who were actively engaging with customers. In all, twelve (12) experts made up the sample size. Similar qualitative studies have used sample sizes ranging from 8 to 14 and have produced very significant results (Hinson & Mahmoud, 2011; Blankson et al., 2007; Liao et al., 2004).

4.6 Data Collection

Data collection in this research involved a sequence of systematically planned activities. These activities covered decisions regarding the type of data to be collected, selecting an appropriate source, preparation of research instrument, ethical considerations, data collection from field and analysis techniques. The following sub-sections specify the collection process in detail.

4.6.1 Type of Data

The first step was to identify the type of data required. Corbin and Strauss (2014) have cautioned that, failure to define relevant data may lead to insufficient findings. Qualitative data was appropriate for the study since the research questions under exploration did not seek to measure statistical relationships between the concepts of RM and IT, but rather explore in depth and interpret their use, compatibility and benefits. It was reasoned that, qualitative data could be used to access complex details on internet-based relationship marketing (Creswell, 2012).

Findings from qualitative data were also very important for gaining an in depth understanding of RM and IT, achieving meaningful interpretation, and strengthening the pre-

study framework in order to present the thinking underpinning how relationship marketing and internet technology were understood and implemented within the Ghanaian telecom industry (Ying-Yeuh, 2009; Carson et al., 2001).

4.6.2 Source of Data

Primary data was collected from experts and analysed qualitatively as a means of exploring how relationship marketing was implemented via social media and websites. Gathering primary data was also appropriate as there was limited information on internet-based relationship marketing within the Sub-Saharan African domain (Okai, 2013). It was therefore reasoned that, analysis on secondary data would only have contributed to discovering previous issues regarding RM implementation using internet-based technologies without further exploration of its emerging application, compatibility and benefits.

4.6.3 Research Instrument & Design

Interpretivism, which is an underlying philosophy of this research recognizes the use of naturalistic methods (Angen, 2000). In exploratory research, depth interviews as a naturalistic instrument has produced useful results many times including the richness in data and understanding (Robson, 2002). Interviews were therefore considered as an instrument to deeply explore the concepts of RM and IT within the Ghanaian telecommunication industry. Moreover, relationship marketing via internet based technologies as an emerging area has been under researched especially within the Sub-Saharan domain. To this effect, the study could not have quantitatively measure some fixed relationships, but rather explore and understand through rich subjective experiences from depth interviews with experts. Nevertheless, Saunders et al. (2011) report that, managers and experts are more willing to be interviewed rather than complete a questionnaire, especially when the issue to be discussed is seen to be interesting and relevant to their current work.

A semi structured interview guide was designed to direct and keep interview sessions

in focus. Credibility and validity in gathering qualitative data remains very essential (Silverman, 2011). To ensure credibility and validity in collecting relevant data, the interview guide, objectives of the study and a copy of the study's theoretical framework were presented to two MPhil candidates from the Department of Management Information System and a PhD candidate from the Department of Marketing who was also researching in the area of internet-based relationship marketing. For more rigour in validity, the researcher sought to conduct a pre-test with an IT service expert with over five (5) year's experience in managing social media accounts and websites for a service organization. From the pre-test, certain sections of the guide were reshaped. Again, the guide was subject to critique by a supervisor who had experience with the qualitative nature of this research, useful insights were also derived to shape the guide. Finally, five sections were developed in the guide extensively based on the research theory and purpose of the study. The first section sought to familiarize interviewees on the background and purpose of the study after which details of experts including their job details and experience were gathered. The second section sought to explore respondents understanding of relationship marketing and internet technology. In the third section, the guide sought to find out how relationship marketing was practiced via firm's website and social media platforms. The fourth section probed into the compatibility and benefits of using RM via IT. The fifth section closed the interview by way of asking participants if they wanted to elaborate on other related issues and if they had any secondary materials to aid the researchers understanding of internet-based relationship marketing.

Depth interviews were very involving but provided certain advantages of which this study benefited from (Beri, 2000). The researcher was able to ascertain certain hidden techniques in RM and IT use which may have been considered sensitive via a questionnaire. Furthermore, certain themes were brought to light which immensely facilitated analysis of findings.

4.6.4 Data Collection Procedure

After the research instrument was designed, the researcher proceeded to conduct the field interviews which lasted for two (2) months. The data gathering arrangement involved a face-to-face conversation between the researcher and participants. Prospective participants were personally visited at their work places to submit an introductory letter provided by the University of Ghana Business School and a copy of the interview guide. This was to ensure that, participants were well prepared for the interview. Following this, times were scheduled with participants for interview sessions. All interviews were conducted at break times to ensure maximum attention of the experts and their convenience. Participants allowed for the sessions to be recorded in exchange of an assurance that, information was to be used solely for academic purposes.

A series of open-ended questions were asked with flexibility in questioning style and also to address the nature of the topic without boundaries on the responses (Sekaran, 2003). The researcher also encouraged interviewees to express themselves through real case examples. For instance participants were asked to describe situations where managing relationships via the internet were challenging and beneficial. To conclude, the researcher had to ensure that all the planned questions were asked and then thanked the respondents at the close of the interview. The next section will address the strategy and techniques used for data analysis.

4.7 Data Analysis

Analysing the qualitative data consisted of preparing and organizing the data (transcripts) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in a discussion (Creswell, 2007).

The first step of data analysis began by transcribing recorded interviews of experts from the telecommunication industry into text data through an involving process.

Nevertheless, all interview recordings were solely transcribed by the researcher as it was important to remain close to the data and develop familiarity with the recordings (Ying-Yeuh, 2009). Each interview lasted about 30 minutes on average and took not less than 2 and half hours each to transcribe into text. Once the data was transcribed into text, the second step of analysis was conducted.

Thematic analysis, which is the process of developing categories of concepts, was used to ascertain themes or patterns that related to the data in each of the four cases (Boyatzis, 1998). The development of themes was very essential as the study sought to allow the data speak for itself without anticipating conclusions (Collis et al., 2003). Thematic analysis was considered appropriate for a study of this nature that sought to discover through interpretation (Alhojailan, 2012). It allowed the researcher to determine precisely the relationships between RM and IT and compare them with different sets of evidence that pertained to different situations in this study. This form of qualitative analysis also provided a systematic element to data analysis and conferred accuracy and intricacy to enhance the research's whole meaning (Marks & Yardley, 2004). Thus the study was able to link the various concepts and opinions gathered in different situations.

The development of themes was made feasible through a process of data reduction; which refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appeared in the transcription (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). In this way, the researcher was able to code text data into categories labelled with concepts in internet-based relationship marketing. After the first interview was coded, the developed categories underlying the analysis of further data were noted in order to increase comparability across the interview transcripts (Flick, 2002). According to Miles and Huberman (1994) it was important that, the themes or codes be evaluated to ensure they represent the whole text data. In response to this valid suggestion, the researcher involved six independent MPhil

candidates to evaluate the identified themes or test if the themes the researcher identified were compatible with the whole text or if it were inverse. After an objective review and settlement on the themes, the researcher sought to compare the relative frequencies of themes or topics within the data set, looking for code co-occurrence and graphically displaying code relationships as a third step (Namey et al., 2008, p. 138).

Importantly, this third step focused on visualising the data by tabulating differences and similarities as a technique in clarifying the relationship associated with the complexity of data (Yin, 2010). More so, tabulation of the data increased the overall reliability of the research to make it valid for other researchers and to support and validate interpretations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These tabulations taken together also provided a comprehensive overview of the interpretations of the practice of internet-based relationship marketing and served as a foundation to interpret the findings and conclude in Chapter Five and Six respectively. Because the study involved multiple cases, responses were analysed as an organization than for individuals, this was based on the notion of presenting a collective response from each case and comparing these experiences across cases (cross-case data analysis), other than the experiences of individuals within the industry.

4.8 Research Ethics

In collection of data, analysis and presentation of findings, this study considered potential ethical issues. Denscombe (2009) suggested three ethical principles which were adopted to guide the process of research:

 (a)   Participants' interests were protected,

 (b)   The researchers avoided deception or misrepresentation

 (c)   Participants provided their informed consent.

In accordance to the first principle, this study considered in advance the likely consequences of participation and took measures that protected the interests of those who

participated. An introductory letter and sample interview guide (see appendix A) was sent to the participants to provide prior knowledge of the study. Since the interview questions involved private information regarding IT use in RM, the researcher sought participants' permission before recording the sessions. Participants were also assured that, findings would only be used for this research.

In the second principle, there is an expectation that, the researcher should operate in an honest and open manner. When conducting the interviews, all participants were re-informed about the purpose of the research, the intention was to aid participants understand the nature of the research. The maintenance of objectivity was also vital during the analysis stage to make sure that the data was not misrepresented, but rather speak for itself. This process made participants feel valued for their contributions.

In principle three, there is a general agreement that the participants in any research should never be forced into participation. Therefore, participants in this study were pre informed that, they could refuse to answer uncomfortable questions during the interview, so that they were not coerced into participation.

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter brought to light the methodological considerations and decisions made with regards to investigating the concepts of RM and IT in the Ghanaian telecommunication sector. The chapter also provided a detailed discussion of the overall research process addressing specific areas including research philosophy, and research approach. As internet technologies have become an emerging tool in RM, it was useful to understand subjective interpretations. Therefore the study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the concepts. A discussion of the research philosophy revealed that, an interpretivist paradigm was most appropriate. In-depth interviews were used as a data collection method, after which the study analysed data systematically and rigorously via a thematic approach. Data was further

compared through a cross-case analysis to facilitate an insightful discussion in Chapter Five. The next chapter presents the analysis and a discussion of key findings obtained from the expert interviews.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the analysis and findings obtained from the twelve (12) experts sampled for this study. It therefore provides the interpretations of how relationship marketing and internet technology are being used, their compatibility and perceived benefits to the telecommunication industry. The purpose of this chapter was also to compare the findings of this study with extant or previous literature to clearly understand the ambiguous conceptualizations around internet-based relationship marketing. In the following section, a brief background of each of the cases explored is presented. Following this, responses to the interview questions from participating telecommunication firms were classified under each of the four research questions identified in Chapter One. These responses were then analysed under four central research themes; understanding of relationship marketing and internet technology, the use of internet technology for relationship marketing, compatibility issues in the use of internet technology for relationship marketing and benefits of internet-based relationship marketing.

Significantly, the analysis provides useful insights towards the development of a post-study framework that explained internet-based relationship marketing among telecommunication firms. As part of this study's ethical considerations each of the four cases have been coded with either A, B, C, or D to ensure that, responses are not traceable to specific respondents.

5.1 Analysis of Individual Cases

Table 5.1 Demographics and Interview Details

Date of Interview	Gender	Interview Duration (Approximately)	Position within Organization	Years of Experience
CASE A				
26/02/2015	M	30 Minutes	Digital Marketing Manager (HDM)	4 Years
26/02/2015	F	25 Minutes	Member, Online Marketing Team (MMT)	2 Years
03/03/2015	F	20 Minutes	Member, Online Marketing Team (MMT)	2 Year
CASE B				
12/03/2015	M	40 Minutes	Digital Marketing Manager (HDM)	4 Years
16/03/2015	F	25 Minutes	Member, Online Marketing Team (MMT)	1 Year
16/03/2015	M	30 Minutes	Member, Online Marketing Team (MMT)	2 Years
CASE C				
02/03/2015	F	30 Minutes	Digital Marketing Manager (HDM)	3 Years
02/03/2015	M	30 Minutes	Member, Online Marketing Team (MMT)	3 Years
02/03/2015	M	25 Minutes	Member, Online Marketing Team (MMT)	2 Years
CASE D				
25/03/2015	M	45 Minutes	Digital Marketing Manager (HDM)	4 Years
27/03/2015	M	25 Minutes	Member, Online Marketing Team (MMT)	2 Years
27/03/2015	M	25 Minutes	Member, Online Marketing Team (MMT)	2 Years

5.1.1 CASE A

Introduction

This company is a multinational telecoms operator serving more than forty-five percent of the Ghanaian market. Since its entry into the Ghanaian market in 2006, technological innovation has been a vital issue for its existence. The company also sought to various internet-based relationship marketing technologies of which websites and social media are very significant. Interview participants from this firm included the head of the digital marketing department and members of the online relationship marketing team. These respondents were experts tasked to oversee the day to day operations of the company's website and social media accounts. The digital marketing department within this company was also responsible for online advertising, working with stakeholders and providing online customer care. Managing their digital landscape also involved planning, preparation of budgets, measuring and reporting performance, suggesting improvements and coming up with innovative ways to reach customers online. Their interpretations to the interview questions raised are presented below.

(a) Understanding of Relationship Marketing and Internet Technology

Insights from experts within the company suggest that, the purpose of relationship marketing is to improve their customers and leverage on this relationship to sell their products or brands. They see relationship marketing as a mutual exchange where their customers get what they want, and where they also benefit through a mutual understanding. The head of the digital marketing department (HDM) added that:

"So it is a relationship whereby there is a mutual exchange; the customers get what they want and you also get what you want through a mutual understanding. You give something in exchange for something."

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Also worth to note, it was ascertained that relationship marketing in practice was more of a technique in enriching customer experiences other than an organizational policy, and that, internet-based relationship marketing was quiet a difficult task. However, the customer centric nature of the company makes building and managing relationships quiet inevitable. The following response from a member of the online marketing team (MMT) supports their perspective:

"Relationship marketing is a personal one-on-one thing used by whoever is dealing with the customer to use that technique to build relationship with the customer. It is not necessarily a policy. We are however a customer centric organization. It is difficult to build relationships with everybody but for instance with our brand icons we maintain some sought of relationship with them because as our brand icons they are the ones that carry out our brand out there."

In attempts to explore the company's perspective of internet technologies it was deduced that, websites and social media were being utilized ever since the company entered the Ghanaian landscape. However, its conscious utilization for relationship marketing tasks have not been longer than three years. Apart from websites, social media platforms used by Case A span across more than seven networks, meanwhile only Facebook and Twitter were identified as main internet-based platforms on which customer relationship maintenance was pursued. In addition, e-mails were discovered to be utilized but it was not a specific technology to the digital marketing department. These were the responses in support of these findings:

"We are on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Skype, YouTube, Google Plus and recently we opened an account with Snapchat which is yet to be practicalized" (HDM).

"For e-mails I will say yes, but they are used widely by other departments as well. It is not only limited to the marketing department. Anybody working within the organization can use it for relationship marketing. Customer care can use it; our finance department can use e-mails to communicate with our service providers so there are virtually different departments that use e-mails" (MMT).

More so, interviews with experts from Case A suggest that, communication, customer service and customization of services are main relationship marketing tasks pursed over internet or online platforms. Explicitly, it was known that, providing online customer service was a complementary service to the traditional call centres. These were reflected in their statements below:

"First of all Facebook is used widely for communication to keep our customers up to date on our products and general information sharing, it is also used to a large extent for customer service to customers who are unable to access our call centres. Twitter is also used for customer care. So with respect to relationship marketing, Facebook and Twitter are the main platforms used to maintain our relationship to customers. Case A also uses these online platforms to customize services...So we may customize services through online platforms though I cannot give specifics" (HDM).

Generally, internet-based relationship marketing was perceived as a compliment of the firm's traditional relationship marketing activities other than a full means to build relationships. The digital marketing manager disclosed the following:

"With regards to mirroring what we do traditionally online not really. Because I don't see it, I see it more as a compliment to what you do in real life. You talk to them to solve their issues and after that ... you give them your online access information where further chat goes on. So for me it more or less compliments what you do traditionally."

(b) The Use of Internet Technology for Relationship Marketing

After probing participants on their understanding of relationship marketing and internet technology, experts from Case A were also interrogated as to how social media and websites were practically put to relationship marketing use. It was clear that, the website was used as a "store house" for information and a communication channel on which the company's products, services and terms and conditions associated with their services were displayed. Though analytic information from website visitors were available, it was not a basis to monitor and track customer behaviour; for instance what they looked out for the most. Similarly, customization of services was not actually part of their website's use. What was important to Case A was that, any information the customer might want to access was there. In support, these were their statements:

"For specifics on our website it is almost like a general house for information. So we may not use it to specifically build relationships with one particular individual. We do have analytic information but our website is a storehouse for information so we do not go to track how our customers use the website. We do not necessarily focus too much on when they will be online before we put information. Information is housed there for reference so the important thing is that the information is there" (HDM).

"We use the website to mostly keep our customers updated on call charges, call rates, our coverage areas and our terms and conditions. So the important thing is that the information should be there and as and when they are looking for it, they should be able to find it" (MMT).

Concerning how social media was practically used in relationship marketing, Case A attests that, it is a difficult task. They confirmed communication about their brand or products, listening or gathering customer feedback and providing customer service as key.

The company however dis-confirmed tracking customer relationships via social media as part of their relationship marketing practice, though after continuous probing, monitoring customers was mentioned by an expert as an activity pursued. This may raise key privacy issues for customers. Also as part of communication, a relationship marketing strategy via their website was to keep customers in touch with brand icons or celebrity information. This was a mutual term between the company and its brand icons to promote each other. Transcript from Case A supports this argument:

"It is difficult to build relationships with everybody, but for instance with our brand icons we maintain some sought of relationship with them because as our brand icons they are the ones that carry out our brand out there. We sometimes decide to help them promote their social media as a form of relationship building, we help them to help us. So with respect to social media and let's take our icons as a customer because it is a mutual relationship, we can decide that if they are running a promo our they are launching a new song we can help them push or promote the new song because we know that at a point in time when we also need them they would chip in to promote our services" (HDM).

"It is very difficult to use the social media and website to track customer relationships. But we use social media to monitor our customers to listen to get a fair understanding of what they are saying and what they feel about our services and if there are general issues that need to be addressed then we use social media to listen to what they are saying. But because there are so many of them, sometimes it's difficult to. We are the largest telecom organization...so just trying to pay attention to what one person is saying may be tough unless thy contact us directly. When they do, we do try our best to resolve whatever problem they have. We listen to the general sentiments of our audience and if there are any issues that we should fix, we look

at both negative and positive sentiments, like what makes them happy, upset and we raise the necessary awareness and we solve that" (MMT).

"There are countless software out there but radiant 6 basically is a tool that we use to listen to conversations that are happening online. It fishes out messages in conversations based on keywords that we give the system, then there are people who analyse whether the comments are positive or are negative. They are also able to break it down to demographics; where the messages are coming from" (HDM).

(c) Compatibility Issues in the Use of Internet Technology for Relationship Marketing

Following ambiguous conceptualizations in literature, the compatibility of internet technology in relationship marketing was also investigated. Experts from Case A were interviewed on key compatibility issues which were trust, personalization, satisfaction, frequency of feedback and the difficulty of using websites and social media for relationship marketing. To begin, the digital marketing manager noted the current digitization of the world. He revealed that, mobile penetration is increasing and for this reason, everybody is coming online. The company's perspective about the compatibility of the internet for relationship marketing appears positive with opportunities. For this company, internet technologies allow them to effectively listen to customers as compared to traditional face-to-face conversations. They are able to review communications with customers, analyse it and create valued services based on such information. The digital marketing manager explained:

"The good thing about this platform is being able to listen to your customers. The world is now going digital. Everybody is coming online. Mobile penetration in Ghana is quiet high so using social media gives us an opportunity to listen to what our customers are saying because social media allows you to search through conversations unlike other channels like personal discussions where there is no way you can go back to fish out what people are saying and

analyse the information just to figure out what is it they want, what their problems are. But social media gives us a very unique opportunity to be able to go back and fish out what people have said on different platforms, analyse that information and use it to actually give the customers more value."

They also seem satisfied with these online platforms as it serves as an input for customer intelligence gathering. Nonetheless, personalizing customer relationships over these internet platforms seems a challenging task that requires more specialization and investments. These were their response:

"It is good to gather customer intelligence that can be used by our product development teams to develop more meaningful products for our customers.

Regarding personalization online you can implement that when it comes to using email services. But for other platforms like social media it may be possible but you may need to invest a lot in specialized software to do that kind of personal relation to personalize the interaction for hundreds and thousands of customers. It is very feasible but it needs quite a bit of investment" (HDM).

Also, failures from these online platforms were a 'rare gem' as Case A described the function ability of their website for instance as 98 percent always available. Insights have shown that, this is attributed to the in-house management of the website. They explained their experience as follows:

"So far our website hasn't been taking off line because our servers are managed in house. We have backup servers that take in anytime our servers go down. There haven't been occasions where there is an issue with the website. But there may be one or two occasions where perhaps the website itself may experience some technical difficulties and was redirected to another page, but we resolved the issue very quickly so fairly I would say that the website is about 98% always available.

For some firms, websites are managed by people outside including the architecture. So these agencies may take the power of the information online for granted and they fail. Some have attitudes where by things are not fixed up unless something happens. We take experts to make sure it doesn't break" (HDM).

Social media seemed also compatible for gathering and handling complains. Derived from their interviews, there were dedicated online teams who interacted with customers in real time. Interactions were only delayed when a customer's problem required a back end investigation. This confirmed their experience of receiving a good number of complains through the use online platforms and a signal that, customers trust their problems could be resolved online. However, privacy concerns seemed to influence their mode of interaction with customers online. These were their transcripts:

"We do receive some complains. We have a response team that respond to customer care issues. So on Facebook we have a dedicated team, same for Twitter to respond to customer issues in real time right there on the platform. We only send customers into the direct message (inbox) when it is necessary for us to do some back end investigation. So when we are not able to solve the problem then we direct you to the inbox. On twitter we normally direct our customers to their inbox because you know twitter is more or less very very public, so we do not want to put customer information on public. So we go back end do our investigations and solve them" (HDM).

Case A revealed that, managing communication online was one of the difficult aspects of using the website and social media for relationship marketing. Personalizing messages and proactively anticipating what customers may want to be updated on was not an easy task. They explained their experience as follows:

"Like I said, it is not very easy to customize the kind of messages that we are sending out to the customers because before you can do that kind of thing you need to invest in heavily

specialized software to better enable you analyse customer's needs. Being able to predict human behaviour is a much challenge so sometimes you send out information based on what you think they might want or based on what they have subscribed to. So sometimes you think customer want something but no. So that's how relationships go. There are ups and downs. When you realize a message is not welcome, you just have to draw your attention to it and stop. It happens mostly for off line tools. Because in online we post messages to our pages and not directly to our customers. With online, nothing is pushed into your inbox without permission. But sometimes we send these messages to update the customer, so for the time being there are some messages that we do a general broadcast but some subscribe. We do not spam our customers" (HDM).

(d) Benefits of Internet-Based Relationship Marketing

In Case A, three main benefits were derived from using the website for relationship marketing. These were identified as credibility, establishing trust and location. The company believes that, customers verify information about their services from the website. This was a lead to another benefit which they referred as trust from customers that, the company can be reliable. For them, credibility influences trust, and trust was a prerequisite to establishing relationships. Websites also served as a place or location to find the company. These are their transcripts in support of these benefits:

"The website provides credibility. For any product that you see out there the first place you want to check is online information. You go to "www. wherever.com" to get information to verify the company or service provider if it is legitimate. So in terms of building relationship at least the website provides support for establishing trust. Trust is key in relationship so without trust there wouldn't be any relationship to build on. So anytime you are trying to research on a product the place to go is the website. When the website exists then a certain level of trust is established. It adds up to the relationship building process. If you need more

clarifications, you can decide to start an online chat for instance. So we could respond to you in a very short period of time. It gives a sense that, this company can be relied on. When a company fails to do that you ask yourself, are they for real? In the P's of marketing you have the place or location, there must be a place to find you and if not, there is no way to build relations with the customer" (HDM).

From the interrogation with Case A, it was realized that the company achieves an efficient two way interaction by using social media for relationship marketing. Social media was also an improved communication tool and a compliment for their website. In Case A, they do not fully agree that, building relationships online may be a means to loyalty. For them, customers rather express dissatisfaction on social media platforms. They added that:

"Social media is beneficial for having two way conversations. There is interaction, so social media allows you to have that kind of interaction other than face to face interaction. It is easier for you to be more interactive" (HDM).

"Every year we run a lot of promotions. We run point based promotions so customers can win points. We use social media in communication who the various winners are. So if we have people who have won the product and you post the people then this in a large extent helps us. It also gives people a very good point of record to access and reduces scam where people are send messages that they have won something" (MMT).

"When it comes to loyalty I don't think so, the customer is loyal to you if you are able to satisfy their needs. As far as I know, they are only able to express their disloyalty to us to see what they like. However, you can to some extent. You have to employ other forms of marketing like content marketing for instance...Thus you give them information that you think is valuable to them but not necessarily relating to what you are selling. So that they end up relying on you for valuable information on things that they are interested in that can in a way

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foster loyalty between them and you'' (HDM).

The company also appears to benefit from the flexibility of social media platforms. The digital marketing manager cited an example where a conversation with a customer had to be transferred to another social media platform for better interactivity.

"So a customer went online to check on something he wants and he doesn't find what he is looking for the next thing the dis is he sent an email to our customer care inbox. So once he did that it triggered a dialogue and in a way to make the relationship more valuable, I invited the customer for a skype video call.

We can move the conversation from one platform to another to find a solution that is of interest to the customer...Due to geographical problems we can decide that we will use another platform to help the customer through a Google Chat or Hangout where there is face to face interaction using our online platforms and it ends up as a very typical success story ".

5.1.2 CASE B

Introduction

This company is a leading international developer and operator of cellular services. It operates in emerging markets across Latin America and Africa. The company's services are available to more than 30 million subscribers in 13 emerging markets in these continents. The company started its operations in Ghana in 2006. The freedom of affordability, accessibility and availability are what it strives for within its operating markets. In Ghana alone, it serves more than four million customers and has been recognized with regards to the best use of social media in the past few years. It has been operating on online platforms for almost four years, though they reveal that not until recently, they were just on Facebook and Twitter with no real strategies to engage and understand customers. Interview participants from this firm

included the head of the digital marketing department and members of the online relationship marketing team. These respondents were experts overseeing the day to day operations of the company's website and social media accounts. The digital marketing department within this company was responsible to evangelize about the organization through online advertising, campaign and working with all business units on how to market the company's products and services. Their interpretations to the interview questions raised are collectively presented below.

(a) Understanding of Relationship Marketing and Internet Technology

Generally, Case B sees internet-based relationship marketing as a part of digital marketing. For them, the concept means inviting and engaging customers through conversations of interest for a longitudinal period in order to earn loyalty. The concept is also viewed as dynamic depending on what internet tools are available to the marketer. According to the digital marketing manager, providing the right content on websites and social media was a key focus in internet-based relationship marketing. He added that:

"Well you know now a days it's not about one thing. We have a long cycle in digital marketing, it involves engaging people in conversations, we also have online page media, so there is not one way to do it. It depends on the tool you are using, so if its social you are to use content to bring the conversation and if its online media you have to use the right strategy to be the first and interest the customer...so once we get in touch with someone we do the follow up for loyalty, so the cycling is long but now a days the best way to capture the attention of someone who is online and was not especially looking for you is the content. For me now online is content, giving people the right content that will bring them to engage with you."

Apart from their website, the company operates on four main internet platforms for relationship marketing, they listed Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. However, the company stated that YouTube was not a high focus and that, they were also in a process of relaunching their activities on Instagram. Though these online technologies have been in use for at least three years the company said they were close to finally defining a definite content marketing strategy for these platforms. Another significant insight was the use of blogs which were run by independent bloggers but with consultation with the company. These were their responses:

"Ok so we are on Facebook, twitter, YouTube, but YouTube so far has not been a high focus for us. We have been working more on defining what the content strategy for YouTube, Facebook and twitter but we will start in one month. We also on Instagram, we really want to re-launch the page and use the right content like videos and more engaging content. Not putting content over content, but we just want to make sure that we use it in a right way.

Yes with micro blogging I mean, now a days we are trying to engage with the biggest influencers of the country, we are starting a relationship, we don't want to have a simple relation, so you are a blogger, I pay you and you post for me and then I really want to have a long term relationship with you. We have sought of a consultancy relationship with them and they can give us feedback and when they post about us for instance, it's more like a natural post, a review. So yes we are trying to push micro blogging but not creating a blog for Case A but having an influencer mention our brand on their blogs" (HDM).

More so, online relationship marketing tasks in this firm were ascertained to include communication, customer service, customer tracking and customization which was set to happen later this year. The digital marketing manager also mentioned real-time marketing which seem to be a part of communication. Implicitly, promotion of products and services

was also deduced as a task. These were their transcripts:

"We have priority products so we want to ensure that we communicate about our product online, so if you go to our website now you would know about our last promotion.

We communicate our product and services and based on each platform we make it engaging or push it to have feedback" (MMT).

"You can track a trend for example which type of section people are visiting, you can use Google Analytics to do this but the information on the website is more natural so you know that people are visiting and you know the interest of people.

So yes we do track relationships, but what we are more interested now in doing is understanding the social profile of the community we deal with. So this is more a trend that we are targeting to do. Its social CRM and the idea is to lead the one to one relationship in everything we do on the social media world. So websites yes, it's good to know where people go, how long they stay, what are the more visited sections, how long they stay in a section of your website, but then it's even better to know the customer one by one so you can exactly interact with him based on what are his needs.

Customizing Self-care is going to happen on our website this year, basically digital customers want to log in on your website, they don't want to go to your shop anymore and he wants to know how to solve an issue by himself, he wants to know where is the closest store and he wants to do things quicker, so it's something we are trying to do" (HDM).

Generally, internet-based relationship marketing was mainly perceived as a practice on its own with a separate spelt out strategy but similar objectives with the traditional approach. It was not necessarily a mirror of their traditional relationship marketing activities though promotions on products and services were replicated on the internet. Even in such

instances, the rationale was to make promotions interactive against the traditional objective of awareness. The following response from Case B supports the argument:

"So example yesterday we had some ninjas on the street; a new promo, so we took pictures of them and asked on Twitter; have you seen those crazy guys, spot if you've seen one of them and let us know what they are doing. So this is the type of things we do to engage.

In some cases what you see in the street will be similar in the banner you see on the website, but there is a bit of differentiation. You know the banner on the street lets people know about your product, online there is more call to action, you could see the same banner but you could tell people this is my website and you could find out more on how you can get the product, so it is definitely more interactive. We work with the same objective though" (HDM).

(b) The Use of Internet Technology for Relationship Marketing

After probing participants on their understanding of relationship marketing and internet technology, experts from case B were interviewed as to how social media and websites were practically put to relationship marketing use. It was ascertained that, using these internet technologies for relationship marketing required maintaining consistency and not just posting without a strategy. Aside this, the use of social media and websites was tuned to the company's objective which was to enhance the digital lifestyle in Ghana. For Case B, using these internet technologies also required certain facilitators, some of which the company said it proactively provided. These include increased use of data services and availability of smart mobile devices, the following response attests to this:

"We have to be consistent so it's not about posting about the internet one day and another day posting about flowers. We have business objectives to enhance the digital lifestyle in the country, so we bring more smart phones, we bring more internet usage..." (HDM).

Also from their perspective, establishing relationships with customers and prospects online was made viable through content marketing. This was a practice of putting valuable information including videos on their internet platforms that attracts customers to engage with them. Content marketing was specifically done on social media. More so, customer service was also attested to. On Facebook for instance, the strategy was to ask customers about their experience with the company's services and then unearth issues to be resolved or enter into conversations with them. They revealed that, customers always have questions, issues and queries. As a service company for that matter, they used these Facebook and Twitter platforms to attend to these issues. In addition, they mentioned that, Instagram was purposely used to promote a digital lifestyle among customers. To enhance relationships through these internet platforms, Case B indicated that, they always provided fresh information, listen to customers and also rewarded customers for their engagements. This was evident from the following responses:

"It's also a customer service so people always have questions, always have issues, always have queries and as a service company we must be able to answer to their queries so that what we do...

To enhance our relationship we give them fresh information, second thing is listening to them, because if you have a query or complain I am here to help you and solve your issue, so issue resolution, and the last one be may be reward you, so if you have been interacting with me I might reward you to always interact with me. So it's getting fresh content, have your issues resolved and getting your loyalty rewarded" (HDM).

"On Instagram it's much more a 'digi' lifestyle in relation to us as a brand" (MMT).

Running promotions on these internet platforms to maintain relationships was another explicit way by which internet technologies were put to relationship marketing use. However,

further interrogation revealed that, the company did not have so much technological capacity to maintain relationships online. These insights were interpreted from their responses:

"You would connect to our Facebook page today and you will see about our last promotion...where we give people the freedom to browse more, special bonus so you would go to the page now and you will see a post about the freedom to browse more for example. So yeah, based on what we do drive people back on the business...

In maintaining relationships, for now we do not have so much capability to track where the customer ended the online customer journey, yes now you can tag in your Google Analytics a picture for example and say okay I want to see when the guy clicked on my website and if he managed to go to the section I want to go, so yes we want to do that but for now we don't have the capability" (HDM).

Aside the use of social media for promotion, the company's website was also treated as a discovery channel where promotions were run. However, the following responses from Case B stressed the aim to communicate and call customers to action on their website.

"We have priority products so we want to ensure that we communicate about our product online, so if you go to our website now you would know about our last promotion. So the website is a discovery channel to let our customers know our product and services and makes it the best way for them to think that yes I will like to buy our products and that is why we use the website" (HDM).

"Online there is more call to action, you could see the same banner but you could tell people this is my website and you could find out more on how you can get the product, so it is definitely more interactive" (MMT).

Meanwhile, it was also interesting to find out that, these internet technologies were not an 'island' on their own. Sometimes, it became necessary that, offline technologies like the telephone was used to complete relationship marketing activities commenced over the internet. This was also interpreted from their response:

"...if you look at a lot of issues people have with social media for example, in most of the case we have to take your phone number and give you a call. It depends on the issue, if it's a simple one and can be resolved in one answer you don't need to use your traditional media, if you know the customer as a high value customer may be the interaction deserves a call, so it depends on the type of issue but yes in some cases we have to use traditional media to complement the online media" (MMT).

(c) Compatibility Issues in the Use of Internet Technology for Relationship Marketing

Following ambiguous conceptualizations in literature, the compatibility of internet technologies in relationship marketing was also investigated in Case B. Similar to Case A, experts in Case B were interviewed on key compatibility issues which were trust, personalization, satisfaction, frequency of feedback and the difficulty of using websites and social media for relationship marketing. The company generally agreed to gaining trust from customers through websites and social media. It was realized from their interpretations that, acquiring the trust of customers online was partly linked with the core services of the company, and that if customers perceived quality core services, it was much easier to gain and build trust. They also mentioned that, some customers constantly interact online, therefore the ability of the company to resolve customer issues was key in building trust. Thus if customer's issues were not resolved online, then trust in these internet technologies diminish. However if done properly it becomes a way to get customers loyal. These responses support their perspective:

"Yes for the customers who are always online, from the day you start using internet to interact with friends and companies, if they are able to resolve your issues it becomes a company trust, it becomes a way to get our customers become more loyal...

In the street light it becomes more complex because we depend a lot on our services and the quality of our network, so are you able to make a call?, are you able to browse?, so the trust also depends on the quality of the services provider. If you manage to give the right online customer service, people would be grateful but you also have to make sure that your service as a company works" (HDM).

The possibility of personalizing relationships over websites and social media also received positive sentiments from Case B. To this company, social media for instance is naturally a one to one relation, therefore all interactions are personalized in some way. Another significant insight from this case was their simplistic orientation of personalizing interactions over social media and websites. For them, personalizing an interaction with a customer online simply involved addressing the customer by name and letting them understand that, an agent from the company was available to them. This was however achieved by constantly training the online marketing team to develop empathy, friendliness, and the tone of a joyful brand. Similar to this simplistic view for social media interactions, there was a dedicated tab on their website which featured frequently asked questions (FAQ's) as a way to address personal issues of customers. The following transcripts from the company support this argument:

"To answer how easy it is to personalize relationships, well on social media for example when a customer posts to you, you have his name or his social name so first you just have to call him by his name and say you are available for him" (MMT).

"The nature of social media is one to one relation, so it's always personalized in a certain way. Then for sure you have to train the teams about doing social media service, if you take someone from a random representative from a call centre, it's not very sure he would know how to interact with the customer on social media because you need more of empathy, you have to be friendly, you have to reflect the tone of voice of the brand, we are a joyful brand for example, you have to use all that, so empathy is the key word I think so.

We train our online team that, this is how we post it so maybe you shouldn't have said it that way. What we do is that, we have a frequency in training, each two weeks we meet with the team, we bring our digital agency, we bring the marketing team to create sought of the marketing feeling on the social media agent or the service team to have this marketing flair in him. And the customer service is usually trained on which the frequently asked questions are and which the domain issues that can pop up are. There is a dedicated tab on the website for frequently asked questions too" (HDM).

Moreover, Case B explained that, they could rely on the internet technologies they used. They perceived very minimal technical challenges in using their website for relationship marketing activities and these were even rare. For their social media platforms, they were always working appropriately and the company received hundreds of feedback everyday which they rated as 10 out of 10, i.e. very often feedback. However, they confessed that, the website had not been previously well promoted for receiving more feedback. Meanwhile these internet platforms together provided very valuable feedback to aid relationship marketing activities. These were their responses:

"Facebook is always working, it's always live, twitter is always live. Sometime we can have an issue; the website can be down because of a technical issue in wherever it is hosted but we can rely on the technology we use" (MMT).

"Every day we receive hundreds of feedbacks. It's very often, its every day. Every time we post, we get feedback. And we have people getting to us in the inbox or direct message in twitter for example. So customer feedback is ten out of ten all the time. The website for now, in the past has not been used to push too much, so we never really promoted the website, now we want to do it more and so I guess we would receive more feedback from the website too" (HDM).

Aside the positive compatibility of these internet technologies for personalization and trust building, the company did not perceive any vulnerability with the erosion of face-to-face interaction and unsolicited communication. They believed that they had the capacity to attach an emotional element even in their interactions online. Also the company perceives that, once there is a resolution to the customers issue online they was no need for face to face interaction. Unsolicited communication was also not a challenge for the company because, social media for instance was like a 'big market' where one had to interest the customer with various contents. However online communication was based on what they identified as best and what they expect customers would engage with. These were their responses to the issues:

"In response to erosion of face-to-face not at all, social media is social by nature so when a customer is coming to me, even if he is not in front of me, I can handle his emotional messaging, again, if our team are properly trained, they would know how to use this emotional messaging. So that's one thing, the second thing is sometime the customer just want the resolution of his issue, so he just comes, ask a question, its resolved and he's out. Am not worried about the capability to include emotion in my messaging, it's not a challenge.

With unsolicited communication, we are trying give the most relevant post bases on the content we post, so if we post something that has a very low level of engagement, we would not post the same type of thing so we always listen to our content to identify which content

relate much with people.

As always said, social media is like a big market or a big park, we try to bring interest in most of the people, in some cases it is not always the interest of the people, but based on online communication, we identify what's best and post on what they expect" (HDM).

Unlike social media, bonding on the website was described as a mixed feeling, reason being that, customers can access content but cannot establish a link with the firm like a "hand shake". This was their response:

"For bonding on the website, yes and no, because he sees the content, he can resolve his issue by going to FAQ's or whatever, so you create a link but not as a hand shake. It's not the same thing that you do on social media for example because you interact directly, so it's a bit different" (MMT).

(d) Benefits of Internet-Based Relationship Marketing

Case B described the main benefit of their website as a discovery environment that facilitates relationships with customers. The website also aided the company in completing transactions and providing self-care. The digital marketing manager stated that, it would be more useful to the company's relationship marketing activities in the future as it will enable selling of their products and online. Aside this, they added that properly organizing their website and offering the right content provided a consideration to their clients and prospects which is very necessary in any relationship. They also mentioned it as a means to acquire customers and gain loyalty. These were their responses:

"The website first as I said is a discovery environment. You have different phases when you do a website, you have the discovery phase, then you can get to transactions, self-care we mentioned, and maybe in the future selling. The benefit you get if your website is correctly

organized and then give out the right content is to give some consideration to your client or your prospect.

So customer acquisition, customer loyalty and ermm...selling" (HDM).

Social media was perceived as a great loyalty tool because the company got to constantly interact with customers, listen to them and show that they care. Meanwhile, they also benefited from customer feedback and ''virality'' online. This ''virality'' was directly aiding the company in acquiring new customers and the following responses are in support:

"Then in terms of social, it's much more like for sure, a loyalty tool. Because you can get a way to interact constantly with your customer and resolve their issues and listen and show that you care. So it can be a way to acquire because errrrmm the voice of one customer who is giving a good feedback gets viral so his friend, his social graph gets to know that you say. So we get to know he's happy about our services.

So social is definitely playing on the viralityerrmmm… to bring more people so it can be a way to acquire as well" (HDM).

Practically, the digital marketing manager illustrated how social media was of immense benefit in serving their North American market. This was their experience:

"I remember when I used to work for our parent company in Latin America, once we had a main issue because the customer got to a store and he had an issue with a security guard and this issue was shot by someone from the corner. So it became quite of a crisis because the video went viral and the people were complaining about the brand, but we used social media to answer to this so we had to involve the CEO of the company and we made a post and he explained that he was sorry about the incidence and he will make sure that it will never happen again. Then we got in touch with the customer and the customer re-tweeted our post

saying thank you for the brand, thank you for reactivity.

We can use it without having a crisis but in this case it shows that the brand was really caring about the customer and from any type of employee to the CEO, you could get a reaction from the company. So erhh at the end of the day the crisis went calm down, slow down. The conversation about the crisis slowed down in two days and people were really grateful and saying thank you to us. So I think it's a really good way to show that you care about your customer and that you love them."

5.1.3 CASE C

Introduction

This company is a seasoned telecommunications operator with its presence across 20 African and South Asian countries. It commenced operations in Ghana in 2010 and has since established itself as an organization that aims to connect communities by providing affordable, relevant and innovative mobile solutions. The company serves nearly 4,000,000 customers in Ghana and has been very vibrant on their social media and website platforms. It is not surprising that, the company has been previously acknowledged the social media company of the year. To meet their vision as the most loved brand by the Ghanaian people, relationship marketing especially over the internet has been a key focus for them. This task is manned by the digital marketing department and therefore, participants from this company included the head of digital marketing and members of the online marketing team. These experts take charge of social media and everything related to online. In addition to interacting with customers online, the department also mirrors advertisements from TV and radio to interactive online platforms. Their interpretations to the interview questions raised are collectively presented below.

(a) Understanding of Relationship Marketing and Internet Technology

Interviews with experts from this company suggests relationship marketing as the way forward and a process of developing an empathy of how customers feel or resonate with your brand and making them profitable. For them, this relationship opens an opportunity to obtain insights of what customers think about your brand. The concept therefore enhances continuous engagements with all customers than focusing on which customers' needs to be kept in a relationship and which need to be terminated. These were responses from the company:

"It's the way forward because when you have a relationship with your customers you get first-hand information to know how they feel about your brand. You know how they resonate with your brand and whatever happens they are the first to tell you.

Usually you are at the receiving end you don't see what is happening with your brand. So when you have a relationship with your customers online they tell you, they give you point blank information as to what is happening with your brand and what people are talking about your brand. In relationships, there is nothing like a customer less profitable, it doesn't work like that, every customer is profitable, you can make a customer profitable. So like let's say if you have a customer on your database, if you are doing anything, you can encourage the customer to come back. You can give the customer an offer , tell the customer that hey listen I see you haven't recharged in a while so as soon as you recharge I will give you triple bonus, so it make the customer comes back, it rather enhances than terminate because no customer is non-profitable" (HDM).

More so, internet based relationship marketing was influenced by the above perception. However, the digital marketing manager explained that, it was a reflection of traditional relationship marketing practices over social media and other online platforms. The

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following statements were extracted from Case C's transcript in support:

"It has to do with handling relationships on our social media platform and online channels" *(MMT).*

Interview sessions also explored internet technologies which were employed by the company. Though respondents could not indicate the exact periods when these technologies were introduced, the head of the department confirmed that, they had been in use for at least two years.

"It's been there before I joined, definitely more than two years" (HDM).

Case C also had its presence on more than six online platforms including websites and social media where they built relationships. These included Facebook, Twitter, Vine and Instagram. Meanwhile, they also had properties on some popular websites; www.ghanaweb.com and www.myjoyonline.com.

"So currently for us on social media we have a Facebook page, Twitter, YouTube, Vine; the video for Twitter and Instagram, and we have properties with Ghana web and my joy online where we put our product on there" (HDM).

Though e-mails were also in use, it appears it was not put to rigorous use as the firm established that they only interacted via e-mail with some clients whose addresses were known in their database.

"For emails yes we do, we actually have emails that we send through our database to those who we have their e-mail addresses. So whenever we have an upcoming offer we send them an e-mail that hey, do you know what is about to happen? Ok so this is happening and we want you to be the first in partaking. So we do use electronic emails as well" (HDM).

It was deduced that, relationship marketing tasks over the internet in Case C was to communicate, obtain response rate or feedback, customization, and providing customer service. However, obtaining response or feedback was identified as the most significant. In support, they indicated that they perceived internet technologies as the "king of live", where any single complain not handled well could quickly go viral. The following was their response:

"The most important thing we need is your response rate, we need to have an accurate response rate because online is king of live and as soon as somebody make a complain or talks about your network you should be quick to respond to the person. We also use the website and social media for customizing services. We actually have something...where its actually customized to you. So depending on your usage of the network and the offer we give to you. Also, the social media is more like a customer service point where people come and leave their issues and we resolve it for them" (DMM).

Generally, internet-based relationship marketing was a mirror of some of the company's traditional activities. The digital marketing manager made this statement:

"Whatever is running on TV or radio, we have it running on digital but in a more interactive way and then we use the digital platform as a form of interaction with customers."

(b) The Use of Internet Technology for Relationship Marketing

After probing participants on their understanding of relationship marketing and internet technology, experts from Case C were also interrogated as to how social media and websites were practically put to relationship marketing use. It was discovered that, websites were used to satisfy customer's quest for information. The company indicated that they placed and updated first-hand information that customers might require about their service.

Moreover, information that customers thought they lacked could be requested via a dedicated customer service tab on the website. These tabs were managed by members of the online marketing team who were available on twelve hours response. Also the website was used to track sentiments that helped to enhance the firm's relationship with customers. The following responses are in support:

"Ok, so for the website what we do is we put first-hand information there. Any information about the company, any information about the product, so as soon as the customer logs in the website he should have updated information on whatever product that you need, that way the customer is satisfied. Then if the customer doesn't see what she needs then we have a customer service tab on the website for you to contact customer care so we could assist you with what you need. We have a customer care tab where we have 12 hour response. Form 6am to midnight there is somebody responding to customer queries" (HDM).

We have a tool that we use to track relationships, not just relationships but we use it to track sentiments. We have sentiment of how people think about our network, our positive sentiments, negative sentiments we capture all that, we use the tool to capture that. We use Adobe Social and Social Bakers" (MMT).

For social media, Case C explained that, they provided customer service or responded to customer queries online as a means to maintain relationships. This was also manned by a twelve hour team. Maintaining relationships also involved providing the right offer or giving customers what they want. This was however, attained by listening and gathering customer sentiments from their social media accounts. Providing some rewards as value was also a technique used to enhance relationships over social media. For instance the digital marketing manager indicated that customers were sometimes invited to participate in contest which they rewarded with mobile airtime among others. This was more of investing back into customers

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and these responses are in support:

"We have customer service tab on social media where we mirror what is on the traditional media to online, we also have a customer care tab where we have 12 hour response.

To maintain customers, we always make sure we provide the right offer, we listen to the customers and we try as much as possible to give them what they need. Sometimes we do this by extracting sentiment of how people think about our network, our positive sentiments, negative sentiments we capture all that. So it's like if you have a network and whenever you tell them something they do it for you we maintain a relationship with them because we know that when we speak they hear you.

We do create value for customers through the social media and website. With that one what we do is we give them offers. So I put up a post on Facebook and say the first then people to get this right will be given something in return so they are always looking up for something because they know they can get something up from there. We give you value for something, we tell you to like this post and then your next recharge we give you double, something like that" (HDM).

"We do engage the customers especially online. We have an engagement campaign, sometimes a selfie contest. Sometimes, it doesn't always have to be like people are always investing in our network we also sometimes invest back to the people we make them have fun by using the network or being on our social media page. It's some form of a reward we give to them" (MMT).

(c) Compatibility Issues in the Use of Internet Technology for Relationship Marketing

Following ambiguous conceptualizations in literature, the compatibility of internet technology in relationship marketing was also investigated. Experts from Case C were

interviewed on key compatibility issues which were trust, personalization, satisfaction, frequency of feedback and the difficulty of using websites and social media for relationship marketing. For this company the capacity of building trust over online platforms were relatively viable than traditional face-to-face interactions. Reason being that, some customers are not well attended to in customer service centres, however they receive instant attention especially on social media and websites. Therefore customers tend to build trust from these platforms relative to traditional customer service centres.

"Ok so some people go online when they try to get in touch with customer care people and then they are not attended to. But as soon as you come to our page and you write something you are attended to, that alone helps the customer, he goes like ok so these people actually acknowledge me that I am a customer and I am this so they are attending to me. As soon as you do that the customer would trust you" (HDM).

More so, personalization over websites and social media was perceived as compatible. They explained that, personalizing or customizing online interactions implied dealing with the customer in person and referring to the customer by name other than providing automated responses. This was their response:

"Every message out there is customized. We always make sure that when you ask a question, we respond to you with your name, we won't give you an automated reply" (MMT).

Also important, integrating offline and online platforms in addressing customer issues was not a style in Case C. It was found out that customer issues were addressed through direct messaging if the customer initiated so or on the company's social media wall if the customer opted. The digital marketing manager mentioned that, this was to ensure transparency. Offline tools like the telephone was only used when there was a need for further clarification. These response is in support:

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"We don't integrate platforms, we respond to customer wherever they communicate, we are transparent, we don't take it somewhere to go and attend to them. We will only take it out there to attend to them when we need further clarification, but the moment you put it on our page, we respond on our page, if you take it to our inbox we respond from there. If we need to further give them a phone call we will tell them on our page that we are going to call you to discuss further."

Complains and breakdowns about the website and internet-based relationship marketing tools were also scarce as the company puts it. Though the website was operated more like a system, its failure rate was one out of ten as adjudged by the digital marketing manager. For social media platforms they indicated that, there were no breakdown at all. These were also their response:

"Occasionally, we do experience complains about the website, it is a system, it is managed so sometimes it goes down. We experience breakdown like one out of ten. It is scarce. We do not experience social media attacks, none at all unless may be we have a problem with Facebook itself but none from our end" (HDM).

Customer feedback from the website and social media accounts were also encouraging. The company responded as follows:

"If I am using our sentiment analysis, most of the time, like am giving you a percentage, it ranges between sometimes 60 percent of the positive comments, forty percent negative comments or 70/30 yeah. So we get lots of responses from these online platforms" (HDM).

In case C, erosion of face-to-face communication was not an issue of worry as interacting through online platforms provided convenience to customers. They explained that it was simple and everybody wants convenience. This was their response:

"For now let me give you an example, if a customer has issues with our network, he will need a customer rep to do it. So if he is in Hatso and the customer care centre is in Accra Mall, and he really needs to go there, what happens? He has the option of facing traffic or he has the option of calling the customer care centre or he has the option of writing on social media which you would be attended to, it is likely he would opt for social media. It is simple and convenient, everybody wants convenience" (HDM).

Similarly, bonding and complains of unsolicited communication received positive assessments from Case C. They explained that, customers did not complain about unsolicited communication from their online platforms and that because they interacted on a daily basis, bonding was automatic. These response is in support:

"People do not complain of unsolicited communication from our online platforms. We have the opportunity to also bond with our customers. We interact daily with the customer so there is automatically bonding" (MMT).

Nevertheless, the company confessed that, the difficult aspect of managing these platforms was with handling irritated customers who hid behind social media and spoke about the firm unfavourably. The digital marketing manager expressed this difficulty in this response:

"Sometimes we have some customers who are very irritated, so they turn to express out their feeling, they hide behind their social media accounts to talk to us anyhow and all that, but even when it happens we manage the situation."

(d) Benefits of Internet-Based Relationship Marketing

In Case C, getting first-hand information or feedback was the main benefit perceived from these internet technologies. They explained as follows that, it aided them to improve their

relationship with the customer:

"We get first-hand information, we get constant feedback. Feedback is like the mother of all it is like the key because if you have good feedback then you know what you actually have to work on to make the customer right. So the main thing there is feedback" (HDM).

Practically, a participant narrated an incidence where feedback improved their relationship with a customer:

"Someone came on our Facebook page and went like hey I lost my credits, you guys took my credit, give me my credit blah, blah, blah. We called the person, we told the person can we have your phone number, the person did that, we took the phone number, we did the investigation and we realized the person has actually used the phone on internet pay as you go. The person didn't have a bundle and was being charged on pay as you go so we had to explain to the customer that hey this is what happened and we had to charge you on pay as you go but because you were on pay as you go and you did not know you were going to be charged, we are reimbursing you with the amount that you were charged" (HDM).

5.1.4 CASE D

Introduction

This company is one of the world's leading mobile telecommunications company. They began serving the Ghanaian market for about seven years. 2008. Also it is making significant in-roads in Africa and currently operates in more than four African countries. It serves more than seven million customers in Ghana in and has made a head way with its strong presence over most internet platforms including websites and social media. Their service portfolio includes high speed access to the internet and mobile services. It is known to apply the latest industry technology and is keen on building the most versatile network. For its efforts, the company

has once been adjudged telecommunications company of the year. Managing relationships over the internet has been a focus for this firm. These activities include website, social media and mobile applications management and are handled by an online marketing team. Participants from the company included the head of the team and some members who were referred to as online specialists.

(a) Understanding of Relationship Marketing and Internet Technology

From soliciting their views, relationship management was perceived as inevitable once a company had customers. It required that, the company manages customers throughout their lifetime by satisfying their requirements exceptionally. They also thought of the concept as a way to bond and make customers happy and manage their emotions about the brand. Internet technologies including social media and website were therefore another opportunity to show customers the company was available for them. These were supporting responses from the company:

"As long as we are in the business of marketing, we have no options than to manage our customers throughout the life time of their place as our customers. We are to make sure that anything that they want, we not only provide it but provide it exceptionally.

So the basis of being a marketer is being able to provide or make your customers happy. So then, that charge or that desire to make our customers happy depends on how well we relate to our customers. So managing that relationship or that bond that we have with our customers is so keen and we thank God that, our online channel is another opportunity or another chance to that we have to interface with our customers to make them know that we are there for them. We are able to interact with them anytime that they want, whether they are happy or sad, whatever emotions they have is our duty to make sure that we manage that and make sure it comes out best for us. The customer and also the company, so it's something we

can't do without. We make sure that we do exceptionally well" (HDM).

Though participants could not indicate specifically when these technologies were being adopted by the company, they claimed that, the company had being on the foreground of digital marketing strategies within the telecoms industry. Currently internet technologies used by the company for managing relations with customers include the website, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram and Google Plus. These transcripts are in support:

"As at the exact length of time I really can't say, but what I can say is Vodafone has been at the foregrounds of telecoms marketing strategies and operations within this channel. Issues like the websites and social media especially Facebook was already in operation.

As part of the digital strategy that we have the website and email. We have also delved into a number of social media platforms. Currently we operate on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Google plus by extension of our YouTube account. We are looking at doing some other platforms but as at now we haven't come out yet with those platforms"
(HDM).

As to which relationship marketing tasks are performed on these platforms, it was ascertained that, they are customer service, communication, promotion of campaigns, customization and gathering feedback. These tasks were inferred from their responses:

"Our core aim or our core charge on the digital media is to make sure that, we deal with the customer as often as we can and let them know exactly what the company stands for. So if we have product or services that we want to make them aware of we use that channel as part of our other main channels to interact with them or make them aware if there are campaigns that are coming up or competitions that are coming up. Also one other important thing that we try to do as much as possible is to manage our relationships with customers especially

when it comes to customer care.

We make sure we gather feedback and respond to their claims and delve deeper and provide that customer care. Otherwise, they get on our helpline or retail outlets. These are platforms that we use to also manage that relationship" (HDM).

From these responses, it was also ascertained that, internet-based relationship marketing was not an isolated practice from the traditional approach. Rather it was a compliment to dedicated helplines and retail outlets.

(b) The Use of Internet Technology for Relationship Marketing

After probing participants on their understanding of relationship marketing and internet technology, experts from Case D were also interrogated as to how social media and websites were practically put to relationship marketing use. It was realized that, Facebook and Twitter were used to engage and provide customer service. If customers had issues with the company's services, they were open to interact with dedicated online marketing teams to resolve issues. More so, it was a platform to create awareness about their services and the company itself in order to make an impact on customer relationships. These responses were in support:

"The company has dedicated agents available to interact with customers and our followers on those platforms. So if let's say you come on Facebook or Twitter and complain about your broadband being down, we make sure that we have somebody on standby who would be able to go deeper have a one on one chat with you and be able to troubleshoot the problem and make sure you are sorted.

Not just product awareness or company awareness, we also do customer service, the whole management process or in managing our customers we try to make an impact there too, so it is a wide range of activities that we do to make sure that our customers are happy and are

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satisfied" (HDM).

Also through these technologies, customers received customized services. The head of the online marketing team stated that, customers were contacted through these mediums for several specific orders. He added that, customers were more likely to be open to the company via these platforms. This was the response in support:

"Our customer service teams too do a lot of customization, they try to contact them several specific offers so that they customers will be more open to us."

Case D's website was also designed with features that supported customer relationships. For instance, their website featured a form where customers could request or make inquiries about services. They indicated that, they had created an online chat section and a web-care section to interact and improve their relationships with customers in real time. These were their responses:

"We managed to integrate a feature on our website where there is a support form and also an online chat section and also there is a web-care section that we use to interact with visitors to the site.

We have an online chat session that we can interact with visitors to the site in real time. Also we have a section for support, so if you need information on any of our products and services, there are section that you can go to" (MMT).

Not all, they indicated that insights from social media and websites directed them in creating a number of value added services that enhanced their relationships. These included tracking bill payments and managing SIM cards remotely among others. They see these value adding services as part of managing relationships and this was the company's response:

"These are based on what we call insights, so when we realize that a lot more people on our pages are requesting for a particular service or a particular information on several products or things that they feel are bothering them, we try as much as possible to tailor these things to suit the needs of our customers as per the trends we see emerging. Basically these self-help services that we offer to create value on our websites; tracking bill payments, managing SIM cards remotely and so on. That is all part of the process of managing relationships with them" *(HDM).*

(c) Compatibility Issues in the Use of Internet Technology for Relationship Marketing

Generally it was understood from Case D that, using the internet for relationship marketing may be simulated to a two-way street of positives and negatives. According to the head of the online marketing team, some companies have previously damaged trust and relationships with clients due to inappropriate use of technology. However, he affirmed that the notion behind usage of the intent for relationship marketing was to enhance relations with customers. These responses are in support:

"It is a two way street, it may also damage the relationship that you have with your clients, there are several brands online who have not been able to manage their relationship with clients in a way that will ensure that trust on the other side is attained. But however, these platforms exist to enhance the relationship that we have."

To this company, the world was social and more customers were turning technologically savvy. They expected the firm to be available to them over the internet and for this reason, the key compatibility issue in Case D was if the technology could aid reach customers in real time; their website and social media platforms achieved this. These responses are in support:

"The world is social and especially among young people, tech savvy people, they want to be able to get the information they want in real time. So if people come to your social media page, let's say Facebook page or Twitter page, they expect that no matter the time of day that they seek the information or put that question across to you, they want to get that information seamlessly.

The most important thing is that we do them in real time and make sure that their concerns are heard and addressed as soon as possible" (MMT).

Moreover, being able to track relationships with customers over internet platforms could become an expensive exercise. However, they indicated that, they were able to personalize relationships with customers without sophistication. These response are in affirmation:

"Being able to track or manage relationships online sometimes becomes an expensive exercise. But it can also be less expensive, you don't really need to be so sophisticated with your customers.

The little thing that we do like mentioning their names when we are talking to them, so let's say if its David or if its Nana in a tweet. And also, not just mentioning g their name but also trying to relate to them to give that human or personal touch" (HDM).

"As much as possible what we try to do is to attach a name to all our customer service messages. So we have people who man our customer service channels. So if it is a person responding, the person tries to put their names at the end so that you know that it is not a machine or a computer an automated software that is responsible but it is actually a human being who is sitting at the back responding to your issues and making sure that your needs are addressed and your concerns are heard" (MMT).

They also confessed that though online platforms provided immense benefits, they sometimes

needed to be complimented by offline technologies because customers may not always be online. The illustration below from Case D, supports this argument:

"So in as much as online has its benefits, sometimes it is good to go off line to resolve the problem. So for example if the customer has a fixed line issue, it would need us to contact him by phone to make sure that the fixed line is working or he is at home so that we go there and solve the problem. Sometimes contacting them on social media is not the best because there is also that issue of how often he will be on social media to see that feedback that we are giving him so we feel that sometimes the fastest means of contacting people is to use off line tools like SMS or calling them on phone so that we can easily execute or resolve that problem that we have been presented with.

We try as much as possible to stay online, but if clients are not available, we do not hesitate to engage off line" (HDM).

Also for this company, there were rare failures from their website in managing relationships online. This was their response:

"So far our website hasn't been taking off line because our servers are managed in house. We have backup servers that take in anytime our servers go down. There haven't been occasions where there is an issue with the website. But there may be one or two occasions where perhaps the website itself may experience some technical difficulties and was redirected to another page, but we resolved the issue very quickly so fairly I would say that the website is about 98% always available" (HDM).

They also indicated that, internet technologies were very compatible in gathering relevant feedback. It actually aided them in a 360 degrees management process where they were able to listen, identify trends and provide solutions to customers. This was their response in

support:

"So let's use one of our catchy products for example, we have a program called the health line, so every now and then we run a live chat to make sure that people are abreast with healthy stuff. But them what we try to do is we look at the trends on this platform and try to see the number of complains or the number of issues that have the most queries or the highest number of people asking about it and we try to tailor the topic or the focus of that live chat session to those trends. We do our own 360 degree management process where we listen, identify the trend and then provide the solutions to them in real time. Then again it helps reduce the number of people asking those questions at the call centre" (HDM).

Unsolicited communication through the website and social media was not perceived as a problem. Once the customers accessed or subscribed to their online platforms, it was expected that they were interested in any communication from the company. The following responses attests:

With regards to unsolicited communication, when you sign up for a page like ours, you expect that, all manner of things that we do, you stay abreast with them. So if it's a competition we are doing, if it is an event that we are partnering somebody, or if it is a corporate social responsibility that we are doing, we expect that once you have signed up to be our fan or you follow us, then it means that you want to stay abreast with all these issues.

"It is not much as an unsolicited text, we try as much as possible to get the most number of engagements and we keep it as lively as possible. We also have insights from on page on the kind of people who follow us, the kind of things they are interested in and as much as possible we throw that information to them for them to absorb.

So once in a while we have a photo sharing competition where we just encourage fans to post

wonderful shots that they have taken throughout the cause of the day so people can also see their skills when it comes to photo editing. So it's not only about bombarding them with stuff, we try to engage them to make sure that they are happy" (HDM).

Erosion of face-to-face communication was neither a compatibility issue as internet technologies saved the company some resources. They head of online marketing rather indicated that they were interested in exploiting the fruits of internet technologies, this was his response:

"I don't think erosion of face-to-face communication is a problem because in as much as we don't want to admit it, we are spending a lot of resources on maintaining our retail and customer care shops. So if we have this relatively inexpensive channel of interfacing with our customers and in real time too, it is an option that we should whole heartedly embrace to make sure that we exploit the fruits.

So far as people come with their concerns and complaints, if we are able to resolve these things for them, it means that a lot more people find our website and social media channels as reliable alternative channels that they can also explore to make sure that they are heard and their issues are resolved. So it's something that we should embrace its nothing negative. I don't think it should lead to any erosion of face-to-face relationship, because as much as possible we also try to attach a human face to our interaction with our fans online. It shouldn't lead to an erosion of face-to-face or personalize contact with our customers."

When these experts were interviewed regarding the difficulty of using the website and social media for relationship marketing, they indicated that, identifying trends and relevant content to keep the firm-customer relationship active was challenging.

"Errm, hmm...when it comes to the website, the difficulty is to have the most relevant content

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or making sure you identify the right trends that you need to identify to make sure your website is engaging enough or attractive enough or relevant enough to the visitors. So you need to always be abreast with the trends on your site, the number of pages that people go to, the number of activities that they do when they visit your site, the number of concerns that they have when it comes to your site. So you have to be hands on. Similarly for social media, you have to be always checking out and monitoring their activities to make sure that you are on top of issues and those hidden trends that you might have missed some time back you are identifying them to make your platform the best among competitors in terms of customer service and then relationship management for customers" (HDM).

(d) Benefits of Internet-Based Relationship Marketing

From Case D, the unique benefit of the website for relationship marketing activities was its function as a treasure chest of information for visitors to access whatever information they needed. This was deduced from the company's response:

"Websites are a treasure chest of information for visitors to use for whatever they want to use it for" (MMT).

However, the website shared other significant benefits with social media as internet technologies. They indicated that, the website and social media aided the company in selling its products in real-time. Unlike with traditional media where customers had to wait for specific times to be exposed to information. These were their response:

"For website and social media, I think one important thing is that it helps you to sell your product to fans and in real time. So they don't need to be listening to radio at that point in time or they don't need to wait to watch TV before they see what you have, wherever they may be, once they log on, they see everything that you are sharing" (HDM).

Aside the flexibility of accessing shared information, real time customer care or customer service was an inevitable benefit. The head of the online marketing team added this statement:

"Also, with customer care, real time customer care, it's almost something that you can't go without, you need to be able to use some of these channels to manage the relationship that you have with them and make sure that they are happy wherever they find themselves."

Moreover, listening to these online platforms and gathering intelligence was an immense benefit. The head of the online marketing team stated that, it was almost suicidal not to take advantage of this benefit. These responses support the argument:

"Whether you like it or not the world has become more social, people get to talk among themselves and share information and let other people know what is going on in their space and what the challenges they are facing are. So, if that is where people go to talk and air their grievances, it is almost suicidal not to be there to listen to them and gather intelligence.

Every time we do something, or a campaign or an activation online, on a monthly basis we try as much as possible to look back at what the trends have been and what we could have done better and then take those learnings forward and enhance our activities on those platforms. We learn more from our fans to enhance that relationship that we have with them."

Cost effectiveness of using these internet platforms was another benefit derived by the company. Also, they indicated that, using social media for managing relationships was cheap but not free. This response attests:

"When you look at it historically, the cost involved in social media as a channel as against other ATL channels like the radio, TV and stuff has been very veryveryvery... if it has to do with even advertisement, on these platforms or training of people to know about the platform

and how to respond to them or even buying software or buying licenses to be able to have access to analytics and all that, the cost involved are very very quiet smaller than what pertains to the area of traditional marketing or advertising channels, so its a very cost effective means of marketing your stuff" (MMT).

"So in as much as it is cheap, it is not free. It comes at a cost even though it is much lower than the traditional means yeah" (HDM).

Additionally, the benefit of developing improved bonds with customers was exceptional for social media. The company revealed that, improved bonding resulted in instances where customers defended the company against competing brands. They explained as follows:

"With bonding on social media of course...On a daily basis people are liking your page and following and re-tweeting your stuff, people have that bonding if you are quiet good to them.

Sometimes if may be another competing brand throws a swipe at us, you feel people defending us and people backing us in such instances, so the bonding is always there. We try as much as possible to make them feel good so that they will be our ambassadors and support us when we try to do something" (HDM).

The company also had the opportunity to build a reputable image via these internet platforms. For instance Case D received testimonials from social media which it in turn capitalized on to create a favourable image. This response from the company was in support:

"Anytime you search for the hash tag Vodafone X, you realize that, a lot of people post their testimonials there every day. So what we try to do is may be once in a while we pick one testimonial, make an artwork out of it and post it back so that people know that hey this guy on twitter said this about Vodafone X and then next time you say something about Vodafone X, who know you may be the next poster that we may pick up. We try as much as possible to

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make sure that their testimonials are seen by others" (HDM).

To provide a practical illustration of how social media benefited Case D, the company provided an experience with an unsatisfied customer who the company handled over social media as below:

"So there was this guy who was bombarding our Instagram page with complains about his fixed line. After it went on for a number of days we tried to engage him but he was still not minding us. He started doing the same thing on Facebook, so on Facebook we tried to contact him by message, we tried to find out about the problem, we got to know what the problem was. The agent was also able to troubleshoot from his end and escalated the issue to the respective sections of the business that were in charge of resolving the fixed line issue and within a couple of days it was resolved, I think it was an issue of his line, there was something wrong with his line. Our technicians were there and they fixed it and then he came back on Facebook to thank us and also posted on our time line how happy he was, he was overjoyed that his issues were solved" (HDM).

5.1.5 Summary of Individual Cases

Evidence from individual cases presented earlier provided a brief introduction about participating telecommunication firms interviewed and their responses to the research questions developed from literature. Also, all relevant data gathered from field interviews were interpreted and supported with direct quotations (indicated in italics) towards the development of convincing arguments. In the next section, a cross case analysis has been provided to deal with the identification of commonalities and differences arising out of these individual cases. Table 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 provide a thematic analysis of perspectives regarding relationship marketing and internet technology

Table 5.2 Thematic Analysis of Case A

CASE A			
Understanding of RM & IT	**Use of IT in RM**	**Compatibility of IT in RM**	**Perceived Benefits**
RM is personal or one to one. RM means improving customers. RM involves mutual exchanges based on mutual understanding. RM is a technique other than an organizational policy. Internet-based relationship marketing is quiet a difficult task. Internet technologies used for RM are: website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Skype, Google Plus and Snapchat.	Website and social media are used for communication, customer service and customization of services. There was a dedicated team in charge of managing internet-based relationships. Analytic information was not used for relationship tracking. The website is used as a "store house" for information. Customers are engaged, maintained and enhanced through interactions and relevant content. Internet technologies are used as a complement to traditional relationship marketing activities.	Effective for listening to customers relative to face-to-face conversations. Enables customer trust. Personalizing relationships over the internet require more investment. Failures from website and social media are rare. Internet technologies are effective for handling complains and gathering feedback. There are minimal privacy concerns for customers. Erosion of face-to-face was not a concern. No customer complains of unsolicited communication. Managing the communication is a challenging task. It does not necessarily result in loyalty.	Credibility to the company. Provides a location. Enhances trust. Effective communication. Better interactivity relative to face-to-face conversation. There is flexibility in communication. Feedback generator.

Table 5.3 Thematic Analysis of Case B

CASE B			
Understanding of RM & IT	**Use of IT in RM**	**Compatibility of IT in RM**	**Perceived Benefits**
RM involves inviting and engaging customers through conversations. RM is longitudinal and earns loyalty. RM is part of an organizational strategy. Content marketing is a key focus in internet-based relationships. Internet technologies used for RM are: website, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.	Website and social media are used for communication, customer service, relationship tracking and customization. There was a dedicated team in charge of managing internet-based relationships. The website is used as a discovery environment to engage customers. Customers are engaged, maintained and enhanced through interactions, promotions, and providing fresh and relevant content. Analytic information was used for relationship tracking. Using internet technologies is a practice on its own with a spelt out strategy.	Effective for listening to customers relative to face-to-face conversations. Enables customer trust. Personalizing relationships over the internet require adding a human element or empathy. Failures from website and social media are rare. Internet technologies are effective for handling complains and gathering feedback. There are no privacy concerns for customers. Erosion of face-to-face was not a concern. No customer complains of unsolicited communication. Identifying the interest of customer to develop the right content was a challenging task. Relationships over the website does not necessarily result in bonding.	Customer acquisition. Enhanced trust. Customer loyalty. Provides a discovery environment to facilitate relationships. Better interactivity relative to face-to-face conversation. Provides credibility to the company. Feedback generator. Online ''virality'' on social media.

Table 5.4 Thematic Analysis of Case C

CASE C			
Understanding of RM & IT	**Use of IT in RM**	**Compatibility of IT in RM**	**Perceived Benefits**
RM involves developing continuous engagement, empathy and making customers profitable. There is nothing like termination, all customers need to be kept in a relationship. Internet-based RM is the way forward. Internet-based RM is handling relationships online. Internet technologies used for RM are: website, Facebook, Twitter, Vine, Instagram, popular commercial websites.	Website and social media are used for communication, customer service, obtaining response rate and customization. There was a dedicated team in charge of managing internet-based relationships. The website is used to satisfy customer quest for information. Customers are engaged, maintained and enhanced through interactions, promotions, and providing relevant information. Analytic information was used for relationship tracking. Internet-based RM is a reflection of traditional relationship marketing practices.	Effective for listening to customers relative to face-to-face conversations. Enables customer trust. Personalizing relationships over the internet require adding a human element or empathy. Failures from website and social media are rare. Internet technologies are effective for handling complains and gathering feedback. There are no privacy concerns for customers. Erosion of face-to-face was not a concern. No customer complains of unsolicited communication. Handling irritated customers was a challenging task. Website and social media provides an opportunity to bond with the customer.	Feedback generator. Enhances trust. Better interactivity relative to face-to-face conversation.

Table 5.5 Thematic Analysis of Case D

CASE D			
Understanding of RM & IT	**Use of IT in RM**	**Compatibility of IT in RM**	**Perceived Benefits**
RM is inevitable when you have customers. It involves managing and exceptionally satisfying customer requirements throughout their lifetime. It is also a way to bond, manage customer emotions and make them happy. Using internet technologies in RM was an opportunity to show the firm was highly available. A key focus for internet-based RM was engaging with customers in real time. Internet technologies used for RM are: website, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Google Plus.	Website and social media are used for communication, customer service, gathering insights and promotion, customization. There was a dedicated team in charge of managing internet-based relationships. The website was used to provide information requests, web-care, customer service and customizing offers. Customers are engaged, maintained and enhanced through interactions, promotions, value and providing information requests. Analytic information was used for creating customer value. Internet-based RM is a complement to traditional relationship marketing practices.	Effective for listening to customers relative to face-to-face conversations. Enables customer trust. Personalizing relationships over the internet require adding a human element or empathy. However, it may become an expensive exercise. Failures from website and social media are rare. Internet technologies are effective for handling complains and gathering feedback. There are no privacy concerns for customers. Erosion of face to face was not a concern. No customer complains of unsolicited communication. Identifying trends and relevant content to keep relationship active was a challenging task. Website and social media provides an opportunity to bond with the customer.	Customer satisfaction. Better interactivity relative to face-to-face conversation and traditional media. Cost effective relationship marketing on social media. Enhances trust Feedback generator. Improved bonding on social media. Opportunity to build reputable company image. Online ''virality'' on social media.

5.2 Cross-Case Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings by Research Questions.

Individual analysis provided a case-by-case understanding of how each company practiced internet-based relationship marketing, their perceived compatibilities and derived benefits. Though this stage of analysis was valuable, it also provided a foundation for undertaking a cross-case analysis which further explores emerging themes in detail. The cross-case analysis involved a comprehensive comparison of data.

5.2.1 Cross-Case Data Analysis for Research Question One.

The first research question sought answers to how the four cases in this study understood the concepts of relationship marketing and internet technology.

Case A: Relationship marketing was understood as one to one in nature and that, it improves mutual exchanges with customers. It is perceived as a technique other than part of the organization's overall strategy, this finding was uncommon with the other cases. Relationship marketing over the internet was perceived as difficult task and was practiced mainly over their website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat and Skype.

Case B: Relationship marketing was a longitudinal process of inviting and engaging customers through conversations that aimed at getting loyalty. Unlike Case A, it is part of the organization's strategy. Relationship marketing over the internet focused on creating relevant content through their website, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and Instagram.

Case C: Relationship marketing was perceived as the way forward. It was understood as developing continuous engagements, empathy and making customers profitable. There was nothing like relationship termination to this Case, every customer deserved to be in a relationship. Relationship marketing over the internet involves handling customers online through the website, Facebook, Twitter, Vine, Instagram and selected commercial websites.

Case D: Relationship marketing was perceived as inevitable unlike in Case A where it was perceived as a technique. It was understood as exceptionally satisfying customer

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requirements throughout their lifetime. It also required managing emotions to make customers happy. To them, relationship marketing over the internet was another opportunity to make the company available for customers. It involved focusing on the customer in real time through their website, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Google Plus.

5.2.2 Summary of Findings for Research Question One:

Relationship marketing is a longitudinal process based on mutual exchanges. Though practiced, relationship marketing is not fully perceived as a parcel of strategy in the selected telecommunication firms. Relationship marketing is perceived as inevitable and the way forward. Internet-based relationship marketing means handling customers in real time or online. Content marketing is a significant part of relationship marketing over the internet. Apart from using the website, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are very common social media platforms used for internet based relationship marketing among the selected telecommunication firms. There is nothing like relationship termination among the selected telecommunication firms, every customer is profitable and deserves to be in a relationship.

5.2.3 Discussion of Findings for Research Question One.

Findings pertaining to this research question acknowledges that, relationship marketing is understood among some selected telecommunication firms as a longitudinal process. This is consistent with both early and recent contributions to relationship marketing literature. Grönroos (1994) in his keynote article *"From marketing mix to relationship marketing: towards a paradigm shift in marketing"* posited that, longevity was usually a part of relationships. To deepen this argument, Buttle (1996) also explained that, a major impetus for the development of relationship marketing has been the growing awareness of its potential longitudinal benefits. More recent writings from Egan (2011) additionally debates that, relationship marketing at a strategic level involves the creation of longitudinal relations through several tactics including economic and technological which are evident in the use of

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websites and social media for relationship marketing.

However, the findings identify relationship marketing as not fully perceived as part of strategy in one of the cases used in this study. It is quite surprising because, since the latter parts of the twentieth century, relationship marketing has gradually been recognized as an immense contribution to marketing theory and practice; hence a worthy component of any customer centric strategy (Gummesson, 2001; O'Malley & Tynan, 2000). Nevertheless, this perhaps affirms the argument of Berry (2000) that, relationship marketing is still on a growth curve towards becoming a matured concept.

It is not surprising that, the selected telecommunication firms understand relationship marketing over the internet as inevitable and the way forward. Already it has been advocated that, building value-laden relationships is becoming a movement away from the narrow sense of transactions, and that RM as a paradigm shift is clearly under way (Grönroos, 1994). Again, managers are increasingly regarding the internet as strategic to every company's future (Melewar & Smith, 2003).

To the four cases investigated, relationship marketing using internet technologies, or internet-based relationship marketing, simply means handling customers in real time or online. This is implicitly embedded in a definition by Keenan and Shiri (2009) in their study of sociability and social interactions on social networking websites. They view the concept as a way of promoting socialization online. Though Keenan and Shiri (2009) observed Facebook and Twitter as common social media platforms used for relationship marketing, this study further identified the use if Instagram in selected telecommunication companies.

Findings from this study identifies content marketing as an integral aspect of relationship marketing over website and social media. In support, Narteh et al. (2013) and Harker (1999) both agree that, the concept of RM has become a melting point for several practices. This viewpoint is fully supported by Sheth and Parvatiyar (2000) who suggested

that the scope of RM was wide enough to cover the entire spectrum of marketing's sub-disciplines. Moreover, Mattsson (1997) has established that RM serves as a unifying force within marketing.

As it appears from the findings of this study, the term relationship termination was obsolete in the selected telecommunication companies. Reason being that, every customer is profitable and can be made profitable. This finding seems inverse with the conception of some scholars that, relationship marketing includes the termination of relationships (Grönroos, 1994). Significantly, it contradicts Strandvik and Storbacka's (1996) relationship principles emanating from research within the Scandinavian region, that management must pay attention to the termination of relationships.

5.3 Cross-Case Data Analysis for Research Question Two.

The second research question sought answers to how the website and social media were used for relationship marketing.

CASE A: In this company the website and social media was managed by a dedicated team referred to as an online marketing team. Both the website and social media were put to relationship marketing use through communication, customer service and as a platform to customize services. Though website was generally a store house for information. It was also used along with social media platforms to engage, maintain and enhance customer relationships through interactions and creating relevant content. While analytic information was available, it was not used as a basis to track customer relationships. Generally, using the website and social media was perceived as a complement to traditional relationship marketing activities unlike the other Cases.

CASE B: Similar to case A, this company also had a dedicated online marketing team for pursuing relationship marketing over website and social media. Unlike Case A, analytic information was used for relationship tracking. Hence relationship marketing tasks were

communication, customer service, customization and relationship tracking. In this company the website was used as a discovery environment to engage customers in relationships. Meanwhile, it was also used together with social media to engage, maintain and enhance customers through interactions, promotions and providing fresh information and relevant content. Unlike Case A, using websites and social media is a practice on its own with a spelt out strategy.

CASE C: Similar to Case A and B, this company also had a dedicated online marketing team for pursuing relationship marketing over website and social media. Like Case B, analytic information was used for relationship tracking. Relationship marketing tasks over the internet therefore included communication, customer service, obtaining response rate or feedback and customization. While the website was used to satisfy customer quest for information, it was also used along with social media to engage, maintain and enhance relationships through interactions, promotions and providing relevant information. Like Case A, using these internet technologies were a reflection of traditional relationship marketing practices.

CASE D: Similar to Case A, B and C, this company also operates relationship marketing via internet technologies using a dedicated online marketing team. Unlike Case B and C, analytic information was used as insights to create customer value. Relationship marketing tasks over the internet included communication, customer service, gathering insights, promotion and customization. Their website entailed complex features that allowed customer information requests, customer service or web-care and customizing offers. Meanwhile, the website was also used along with social media to engage, maintain and enhance customers through interactions, promotions, creating value and satisfying information requests. Like Case A and C, relationship marketing over the internet was a complement to traditional relationship marketing practices.

5.3.1 Summary of Findings for Research Question Two:

Relationship marketing via website and social media is handled by a dedicated online marketing team in the selected telecommunication companies. Common relationship marketing tasks over social media and website are communication, customer service and customization. Websites are generally used to provide information necessary to facilitate relationships, it may however be used for customer service and customization of services. When analytic information is collected, it may be used to either track relationships or serve as an insight to create value. In the investigated relationships, customers are engaged, maintained and enhanced through interactions, promotions, creating value and content marketing. Relations over the website and social media are mainly to support traditional relationship marketing practices.

5.3.2 Discussion of Findings for Research Question Two

It was brought to light that, each of the four selected cases shared three common RM tasks they pursued on their website and social media platforms. These were customer service, communication and customization. To begin with, this correlates with the perspective that, customer service since the earliest days of RM has been regarded as a core component of the process (Clark, 2000). As well, identifying customization as a common RM task is significant because, Bhattacharya and Bolton (2000) have concluded that in service markets such as telecommunications, customization is necessary. Researchers including Vargo and Lusch (2004) and Peppers and Rogers (2000) have also proposed that, when customers expose knowledge of themselves to firms through relationship interactions, it is the responsibility of the firm to customize its offers to suit the customer. Regarding communication as a common RM task in the telecommunication companies, Zineldin (2000) posits that, communication over the internet improves information flow in relationships and deepens a relationship by advancing ideas and solutions likely to appeal to the customer. It was therefore expected as a

common RM task over the internet.

The above research question also resulted in findings that, a number of the selected telecommunication firms used analytic information obtained from relationship interactions on website and social media as a means to either track relationships or create value for their customers. In RM literature, there have been arguments from Gordon (1998) in support of using insights from relationships to create and share new value for customers. Reinforcing his argument, he added that the business of RM is to align processes, communication and technology (in this case the website and social media) in support of customer value. Moreover, Egan (2011) noted that companies that religiously track relationships are the easiest to help.

While the website served other relationship marketing purposes, it was generally agreed among the selected telecommunication companies that it is mainly used to provide relationship information to customers. This is consistent with findings from Enrst and Young LLP's (2000) survey of the internet. They concluded that, companies believed internet technologies like the website had an enviable potential to inform and influence customers online. In a similar study of the internet, Richardson (2001) also demonstrated that the website allows organizations to offer supplementary information to their customers. Thus adding value to the services provided such that, visitors can access voluminous support materials and interact. Therefore, providing information on the website for customers is perceived to enhance their whole relationship marketing experience.

As part of findings for this research question, the whole process of RM over the internet which was engaging, maintaining and enhancing relationships were found to be pursued by interactions, promotions, creating value and content marketing. Egan (2011) has previously identified that, at a tactical level, promotions is inclusive of the RM process. Moreover it influences the relationship marketing process. Melewar & Smith, (2003) also

established that, the nature of the internet is known to facilitate promotion which establishes cohesiveness among parties in a relationship. There are also reports in support of interactions as part of relationships over the internet. According to Cumby and Barnes (1998) interactions are evidence of affection in service relationships. To them, messages companies send to their customers are likely to leave them with positive feeling towards the company. Nevertheless, interactions according to Egan (2011) are characteristics of mature relationships where the parties encounter each other. Contemporary service marketers therefore, view marketing as an interactive process within a social context where relationship building and management are the vital cornerstones (Grönroos, 1994). Hong and Wang (2009) have also identified that, interactions between consumers and firms rely to a tremendous degree on technology over the internet. While O'Malley and Mitussis (2002) support the creation of value in mutually beneficial relationships over the internet, content marketing according to Koiso-Kanttila (2004) is increasingly becoming part of the relationship marketing landscape and involves the creation, sharing of media and publishing content in order to acquire and retain customers.

Another key finding was that, the selected telecommunication firms mainly practiced internet-based relationship marketing as a support or complement to traditional RM practices. This turns out to be in line with advocacies by Strauss and Frost (2001) and Melewar and Smith (2003). They claim that, despite the hype of the internet as an advanced platform to execute organizational strategies, it should not be used as a stand-alone marketing tool.

5.4. Cross-Case Data Analysis for Research Question Three.

The third research question sought answers to the compatibility issues in using the website and social media for relationship marketing.

CASE A: The company reveals that, the website and social media were compatible for relationship marketing. They indicated that, it was effective for listening to customers relative to face-to-face conversations. It also enabled trust which was key in any relationship. Failures

experienced for their website and social media were rare. The website and social media are effective for complain handling and gathering feedback. Also, there were minimal privacy concerns from customers. Customers did not complain of unsolicited communication. However, the company indicated that, personalizing relationships over these platforms required more investment; It did not necessarily result in customer loyalty. The difficulty of using the website and social media was with managing the communication.

CASE B: This company also shared similar compatibility issues with Case A. However for them, personalizing relationships was a simple as adding a human element or empathy to conversations. Relationships over their website did not necessarily result in bonding and a difficult aspect of relationship marketing over website and social media was content marketing.

CASE C: This company also shares similar compatibility issues with Case A and B. Like Case B, they felt that personalizing relationships over these platforms simply required adding a human element or empathy to conversations. However, unlike Case B, they felt both the website and social media as an opportunity to bond. A difficult aspect of relationship marketing over website and social media was handling irritated customers.

CASE D: This company also shared similar compatibility issues with Case A, B and C. Like Case B and C, Case D felt that personalizing relationships over these platforms simply required adding a human element or empathy to conversations. Similar to Case C, they felt that the website and social media provided an opportunity to bond with the customer. Both Case A, B and D felt that, managing the content of communication over the website and social media was challenging.

5.4.1 Summary of Findings for Research Question Three:

Relationship marketing over website and social media enables trust among selected telecommunication firms. It is effective for listening, handling complains and gathering

feedback relative to face-to-face conversations. There are little or no privacy concerns for customers. Failures from using the website and social media for relationship marketing is rare. Erosion of face-to-face interactions is not a concern for selected telecommunication firms; Selected telecommunication firms do not experience customer complains of unsolicited communication. Handling irritated customers and identifying trends and content for relationship communication over the website and social media is a challenging task to selected telecommunication firms. Personalizing relationships over these platforms requires adding a human element or empathy, however, it may require more investments for sophisticated personalization which is not necessary for dealing with customers. The website and social media may be an opportunity to bond and create loyalty with customers depending on how the company puts them to use.

5.4.2 Discussion of Findings for Research Question Three.

Key compatibility issues investigated under this research question brought to light that, pursing RM over the websites and social media of the selected companies was compatible with enabling trust. Trust is seen as a component of every relationship (Iyer & Bejou, 2004; Winer, 2001). Castaldo et al. (2010) had also noted that, it was a requisite for successful relationships over internet technologies. Meanwhile, the findings also identify that, there is effective listening to customers, complain handling and gathering of feedback through the website and social media of the selected telecommunication firms. Rebolledo et al. (2005) in support concluded that, internet technologies serve as an informational instrument for many activities, particularly to compile feedback from customers and on the company itself.

These researchers also demonstrated that, internet technologies facilitated personalization in relationships. This study found out that, personalization mainly required empathy or attaching a human element as opposed to investments into the sophistication of

technology which may not be necessary for customer relationships. These are consistent with the argument of Rebolledo et al. (2005) in their study of the role of technology in enabling relationship marketing. They found out that, although strong arguments exist for enabling sophisticated technologies in managing customer relationships, their results similar to that of Osei-Bryson and Ko (2004) did not show a direct link between the use of sophisticated technologies and relationship orientation. In other words, extensive use of IT in supporting relationships did not necessarily lead to the development of stronger relationships. As such, human influences including showing empathy was key in personalization.

The identification of little or no privacy in using the website and social media is fully supported in Pillai and Sharma's (2004) study of business relationships over the internet. They simply assert that, privacy in business relations over the internet is not an issue. Significantly, it disconfirms conceptual contributions by Barnes et al. (2000) who claim the integration of internet technology in service encounters can raise customer concerns of privacy and confidentiality. A recent industry report (Computer Weekly) explains this study's finding that, some 91% of recent generations believe the age of privacy is over, while a third are unconcerned about the data that is captured about them (http://www.computerweekly.com). In the same study by Barnes et al. (2000), unsolicited communication over internet technologies was raised as a concern, however, this study again disconfirms their findings holding to the view that, the telecommunication firms investigated indicated customers did not complain of such issues. Customers willingly subscribed to be exposed to communications from their service providers especially on social media.

Moreover, findings from this study are inverse with conclusions of Bitner et al. (2000) that internet-based relationships erodes face-to-face communications and emotions. While the researchers maintain their argument, this research reveals the customer's concern for convenience over face-to-face interactions. The selected telecommunications companies were

also proactive in instituting human elements such as emotions in their interactions. As Egan (2011) notes, many in the likes of Bitner et al. (2000) fail to realise that in social networks, the people themselves are the medium, not the site. This finding therefore favours Johns et al. (2009) statement that, interaction is sufficient even if this interaction is not carried out face-to-face.

This study found that, the website and social media may be an opportunity to bond depending on how firms utilize it. As Fournier and Lee (2009) observed, such service relationships are those in which it is in the company's interest to foster longer-term bonds with customers. These may be worthless however, if the customer fails to reciprocate and hence firms are required to be skilful to create bonding opportunities over the website and social media.

Another major compatibility issue identified from this research was the fact that, failures from websites and social media were rare. In support Ni et al. (2003) in their assessment of online security explain that, large companies consistently review security policies and are proactive in monitoring and identifying loops in their systems. Therefore, they barely encounter failures in pursuing activities via their technologies.

5.5 Cross-Case Data Analysis for Research Question Four.

The fourth research question sought answers to which benefits the four cases in this study obtained from using the website and social media for relationship marketing.

CASE A: Relationship marketing over the website and social media provided credibility to the firm, a location for relationship marketing, enhanced customer trust, efficient communication, better interactivity, flexibility in communication and a source of valuable feedback.

CASE B: Relationship marketing over the website and social media facilitated customer acquisition, loyalty, provided a discovery environment for relationship marketing, better

interactivity, provides credibility for the firm, enhanced customer trust, source of valuable feedback and provides online ''virality'' on social media.

CASE C: Relationship marketing over the website and social media provided a source of valuable feedback, enhances customer trust and better interactivity.

CASE D: Relationship marketing over the website and social media enhances customer satisfaction, provides better interactivity, cost effectiveness, an opportunity to build company reputation, enhances customer trust, source of valuable feedback, improved bonding on social media and online ''virality'' on social media.

5.5.1 Summary of Findings for Research Question Four:

Using the website and social media for relationship marketing is perceived to enhance customer trust among the selected telecommunication firms, however, this may depend on the quality of the core service. It also provided better interactivity between the company and customers; using the website for relationship marketing provided a source of valuable feedback to the selected telecommunication companies. Case A and B reveal that, using the website and social media provided a location or a discovery environment that facilitated relationship marketing. Case B and D reveal that, they benefit from online ''virality''. Case A and B reveal that, relationship marketing over website and social media provides credibility to the firm; using social media and website for relationship marketing may provide flexibility in communication. It may lead to customer acquisition. It is an opportunity to build company reputation. Using social media may result in improved bonding. Using the website and social media may lead to efficient communication. Social media may provide a cost effective relationship marketing. Using the website and social media for relationship marketing may create loyal customers, however, it may be a platform for customers to express their disloyalty. Using the website and social media for relationship marketing may lead to customer satisfaction.

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5.5.2 Discussion of Findings for Research Question Four.

As part of findings for this research question, feedback was one of the common benefits perceived among the selected telecommunication firms. The website and social media as a source of real time valuable feedback confirms an argument that customer feedback on the internet is in real time (i.e. feedback is part of the interaction) and continuous (Egan, 2011; Rebolledo et al. 2005). Egan (2011) explains that, this benefit implicitly means there is quality of interactions and successful management of customer base. Nevertheless, Rebolledo et al. (2005) concluded that, using internet technologies for RM translates into a greater knowledge about current customers.

Another finding was the benefit of website and social media as a location for RM activities. While this benefit has been implicit but explicitly uncovered in internet-based RM literature, it is well echoed in service marketing literature. Lovelock (2011) states that, search attributes like location helps customers evaluate the service before entering into relationships with a service provider. Not all, they advocate that having multiple locations like online presence aside the physical outlets are control measures to minimize the effects of inseparability of services.

As the selected telecommunication firms attested in this research, the website and social media as a location sometimes resulted in customer acquisition, trust and satisfaction. There is evidence from this research that, trust was partly linked with the customer's satisfaction with the core service and not necessarily via relationships over internet platforms. As Viljoen et al. (2005) realized, the website's content and offerings for instance can be adjusted accordingly to improve the customer's satisfaction. Meanwhile, customer satisfaction is also influenced by the specific product or service features and the customer's perceptions of service quality (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003).

Peck et al. (2004) also support the reduced costs associated with retaining customers

online. This was a key finding for this study. Also the finding that, selected telecommunication firms benefited from online buzz or "virality" is fully supported with earlier findings from Reichheld & Sasser (1990). They argue that, customers who receive excellent service remain loyal and provide free advertising by talking about the organization's products and services. Donaldson and O'Toole (2002) additionally demonstrate the buzz effects of online relationships.

In exploring internet-based relationships in this study, better interactivity which appears to be one of the traditional benefits of using the internet was identified. As noted by some scholars including Ballantyne (2000), the interactivity of internet technologies make it a particularly useful tool in the building and management of relations. Meanwhile, Sheth (2000) and Al-Weshah et al. (2013) have described interactivity beyond a benefit to an obligation. They proposed that, buyer-seller interactivity must be considered part of relationship marketing's obligations. From studying online relationship marketing in Jordan, Al-Weshah et al. (2013) provided qualitative evidence that, internet technologies can provide an interactive online service with account officers who can help in answering customers' queries and offer them new services.

5.6 Post-Study Framework

The findings of this study provided a justification to refine the pre-study framework identified in Chapter Two. While investigated unintended outcomes (privacy concerns, erosion of face-to-face communication, unsolicited communication) were not necessary to militate IT use in RM, handling irritated customers, identifying customer trends and developing the right content for social media and websites were identified as challenges to internet-based relationship marketing. The post-study framework (Figure 5.1) therefore establishes that, internet-based RM can be conceptualized as the use of social media and websites for establishing, maintaining and enhancing relationships. The outcomes of which

are firm-benefits identified from the findings of this study. Nevertheless, using the website and social media for relationship marketing may be constrained by handling irritated customers, identifying trends and content development as illustrated below.

Figure 5.1 Use, Challenges and Benefits of Internet-based Relationship Marketing in the Ghanaian Telecommunication Industry.
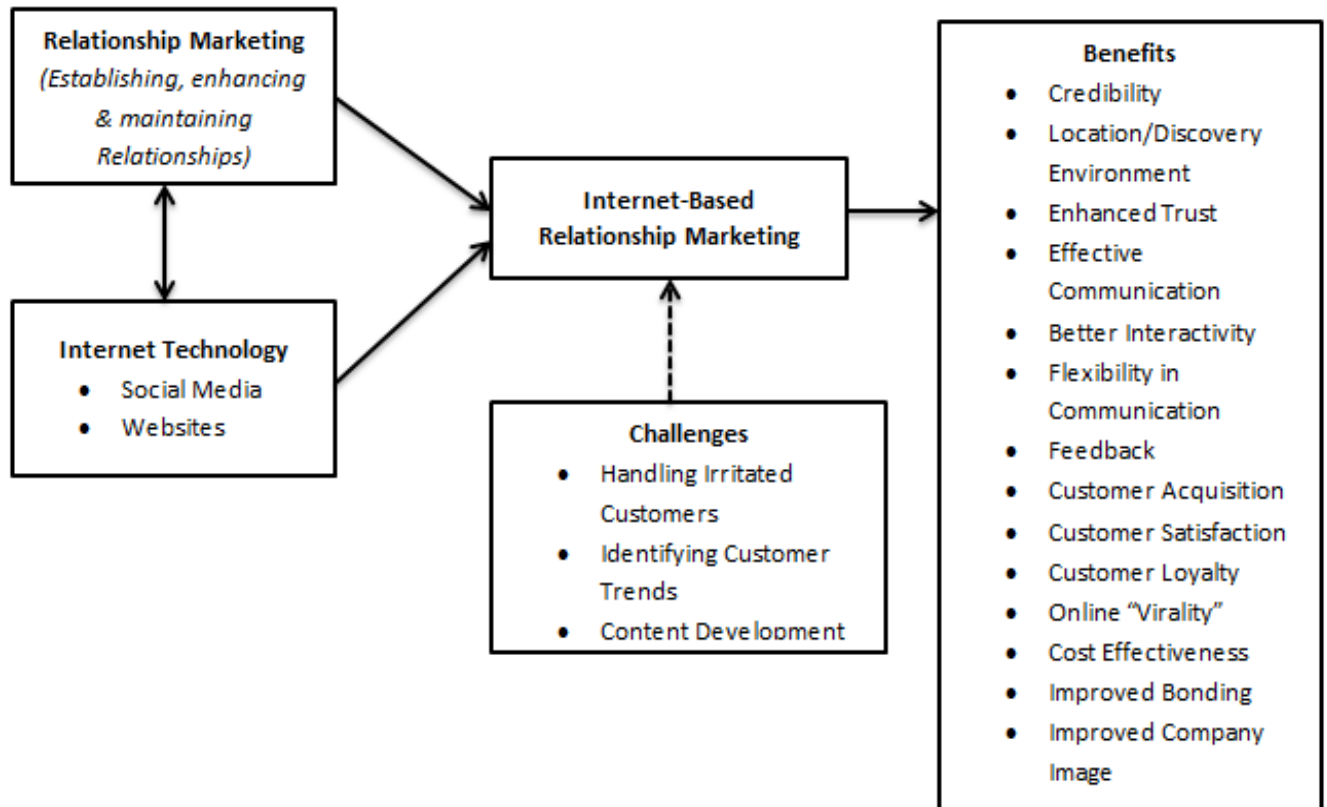
Source: Adapted from Gabbott and Colgate (1999)

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a systematic and interpretive account of findings from interviewing twelve experts from four telecommunication firms. Accordingly, these findings have informed the development of a post-study framework that illustrates the use, challenges and benefits of internet-based relationship marketing within the Ghanaian telecommunication sector. This has been a foundation for the succeeding chapter to provide an entire summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations.

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CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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6.0 Chapter Overview

This thesis has explored relationship marketing and how it has been pursued over the website and social media platforms of selected telecommunication companies within the Ghanaian service sector. This has led to creation of a dearth of knowledge including the design of a post-study framework that can assist a triad of practitioners, academicians and important stakeholders such as customers to understand the reality of internet-based relationship marketing from a firm perspective. This chapter therefore provides a summary of the entire study, conclusions for each of the objectives the study set out to attain and recommendations for practitioners. It was also deemed necessary to indicate directions for further research.

6.1 Summary

This study was presented in six main chapters. Following ambiguous conceptualizations and limited contributions to internet-based RM literature within the Sub-Saharan region, the study sought to investigate three main objectives. These were first to explore how RM was practiced over the internet, which compatibility issues emerged from the use and also which benefits were derived from a firm perspective. Four research questions emerged in response. Additionally, another objective was to develop a post-study framework based on empirical findings from this research.

These developments were followed by a comprehensive literature review which brought out key issues for designing the interview guide and also as a basis for the discussion of findings obtained. Relevant areas addressed in the review covered a trace of the evolution of relationship marketing, existing relationship marketing practices, discussing relevant RM theories, the use of social media and websites for relationship marketing, and the benefits and

challenges of internet-based relationship marketing. From this, it was understood that, relationship marketing as identified in modern literature is a reincarnation of marketing practices in the pre-industrial era. While technology was identified as a key facilitator of RM in extant conceptualizations, it was brought to light that, trust, communication, commitment among other relevant variables were at the heart relationship marketing.

Moving ahead, six different markets were identified in literature of which the customer market was a central focus. This study therefore focused on how the customer market of Ghanaian telecommunication companies were managed relationship wise. Also in literature, using the internet for relationship marketing was characterised with both conceptual and empirically proven benefits including interactivity, feedback, support for one-on-one relationship and reduced relationship costs among several others. It was nevertheless significant to find out that, the possibility of relationship marketing on the internet was to a relevant extent challenged with privacy concerns from customers and the erosion of certain key relationship facilitators including face-to-face communication.

Considering the exploratory nature of this study, it was essential to adopt an interpretivist philosophy. This helped to elicit and interpret subjective experiences shared by interview participants from the Ghanaian telecommunication industry. As a requirement for interpretivism, a naturalistic procedure was used to obtain qualitative evidence from four telecommunication companies. Accordingly, twelve participants were selected based on non-probability sampling, i.e. purposive sampling. This was very vital in identifying specific individuals who had technical insights in internet-based relationship marketing. In all, data collection lasted for two months. Data was transcribed and analysed thematically. Further analysis included a cross-case data analysis to visualize the differences and similarities in the experience of managing RM over the internet. For the systematic and rigorous procedures like a pre-test of the interview guide with an industry expert and validation of themes with

independent researchers, valuable results were obtained.

This study revealed that, the selected telecommunication firms understood relationship marketing as longitudinal and based on mutual exchanges. However, not all the firms recognised the concept as a concrete parcel of organizational strategy. That being said, their website, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were common platforms for pursuing internet-based relationships. Communication, customer service and customizing emerged as key uses of websites and social media for RM. While customer privacy concerns, erosion of face-to-face communication and unsolicited communication did not militate relationships over the internet, handling irritated customers, identifying customer trends and content development were identified as challenges to internet-based relationships. While benefits including enhanced trust, effective feedback, loyalty and personalization were confirmed in previous literature, credibility, discovery environment, improved company image and online "virality" were new benefits uncovered by this study.

6.2 Conclusions

From the findings realized, this study safely concludes that the concept of relationship marketing is still ascending the growth curve as it is gradually being perceived among the telecommunication firms as inevitable and the way forward. Innovations such as the use of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are taking shape within the telecommunications industry. Internet-based relationship marketing strategies are expanding to include content marketing, real-time interactions, promotions, value creation and customer service. While several internet-based RM activities may exist, evidence from this study obviously concludes that, customer service, communication and customization are common among telecom operators in Ghana.

Concerning debates of negative outcomes presented in internet-based RM literature, evidence from this study provides an impetus to conclude that, they do not necessarily militate the use of social media and websites in RM within the Ghanaian telecommunication sector. In that regard, arguments of privacy concerns, unsolicited communication and erosion of the emotional attachments due to limited face to face interactions, may only be conceptual. Internet-based relationships with customers may not necessarily require sophisticated technologies for personalization. Rather, a human element which is empathy can be attached. The next section provides recommendations based on the findings of this study.

6.3 Recommendations for Practitioners and Policy Makers

Experiences gathered from each interviewee provided significant findings from which lessons have been developed. This study therefore acknowledged the necessity of making recommendations for practitioners, policy makers and industry stakeholders on the issue of internet-based RM.

1. Findings attested that, analytical information or insights from the website and social media provided valuable feedback and served as an input to creating customer value. On this premise, it is recommended that, telecommunication companies should capitalize on these insights to develop an improved relational approach and create more customer value.

2. Empathy was found as key in personalizing relationships, it has also been discussed as a pillar in RM literature. Most of the investigated companies indicated that, empathy was implemented by attaching a human element to interactions online to prevent customers from perceiving they were being replied by a programmed response. It is therefore recommended that, telecommunication firms especially employees of the digital marketing unit should reflect empathy in their customer service interactions. Example, by indicating their names and saying they are ready to help.

3. Another insight developed from the findings of this study was that, internet-based relationship marketing was used as a complement to traditional RM activities than a strategy on its own. It is recommended that, despite the hype of the internet, social media and websites should not be used as stand-alone tools for managing customer relations.

4. Despite immense contributions of RM to marketing theory and practice, investigations indicated that RM was not an explicit part of strategy in all firms. As a recommendation, companies within the telecommunications industry should incorporate relationship marketing as an explicit part of strategy. This would beyond doubt improve their competiveness given the deregulation of the Ghanaian telecom sector. It would also enable them to take full advantage of the benefits identified in this study.

5. Though trust may be enhanced through relationships with customers online, it was found as dependent on a company's core service. Telecommunication firms should therefore work towards continuous improvement in their services to facilitate trust building.

6. While this study finds that, some suggested unintended outcomes of using the internet for relationship marketing did not hold within this context, telecommunication firms should be proactive in addressing them.

7. Also important, building relationships on the internet is becoming strategic. Policy makers within telecommunication companies should be more open and support research within the area to advance its knowledge.

6.3.2 Future Research Directions

Since there is also a necessity to instigate further theoretical expansions within internet-based RM literature, research directions have been discussed below.

1. As this study adds to existing knowledge on the benefits of relationship marketing over the internet, there is a possibility of discovering more benefits. Future research may investigate emerging benefits across other industries as an addition to extant literature.

2. Furthermore, comparative studies of different industries within the service sector would richly contribute to literature on use of the internet for relationship marketing.

3. Comparative studies of both firm and customer perspective may be helpful in understanding the impact of suggested unintended outcomes of using the internet for relationship marketing.

4. Future research may focus on investigating how analytical insights instigate personalization and value creation in the domain of internet-based relationship marketing.

5. There is a propensity to derive valuable insights from testing the post-study framework quantitatively to shape and make statistical generalizations. This would help in addressing the lack of adequate conceptual frameworks as identified by some earlier researchers.

6. Finally, content marketing is becoming an inevitable aspect of RM online. As a response, future studies may examine the role of content marketing in building and managing relationships online.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Exploring Relationship Marketing and Internet Technology in the Service Industry.

Overview of Research: Successful Relationship Marketing (RM) is to a modern extent, based on the technological capacity to build, enhance and maintain long term relationships. For this reason, internet technologies have emerged as a viable catalyst. Nevertheless, the compatibility and use of the internet in Relationship Marketing is still a debate that eludes a sense of promises and unintended outcomes. This study therefore intends to explore these compatibility issues, how internet technologies (website & social media) are used in relationship marketing and the associated benefits.

Introduction: Thank you for your participation and valuable contribution in advance. Your participation is vital to the success of this research. Information to be gathered from the firm is purely intended for academic purposes and hence would be treated as anonymous and confidential.

Background of Respondent
1) What is your position and unit within the organization?
2) What does your job entail?
3) How long have you been working with this organization?

Respondent's understanding of relationship marketing and internet technology.

4) How do you understand relationship marketing?
    (identifying, establishing, maintaining, enhancing, termination of relationships with customers)

5) Does your firm use website and social media for relationship marketing? How long have you been using it?

6) What social media networks are employed?

7) What other technologies are employed by your firm for online relationship marketing?
    (E-mails, micro blogging)

8) What are the various relationship marketing tasks your firm executes using the internet?
    (Customer retention orientation, continuous customer contact, customer service, relationship tracking, customization of services)

Exploring the use of internet technology in relationship marketing.

9) How are websites and social media applications used in establishing relationships with customers? (*continuous customer contact*)

10) How are websites and social media applications used in maintaining relationships

with customers? (*continuous customer contact, customer retention orientation, customer service, relationship tracking*)

11) How are websites and social media applications used in enhancing relationships with customers? (*customization of services, value creation*)

Exploring the compatibility issues that emerge in the application of IT in relationship.

12) From your experience, what views do you share regarding the ability of these technologies to facilitate customer trust, satisfaction and personalization in RM?

13) How often do you experience complains about breakdown and failures of your website?

14) How often do you receive customer feedback from your social media accounts?

15) What have you found as the difficult aspect of using the website and social media for relationship marketing?
(Unsolicited communication, erosion of face to face communication, credibility, trust, lack of commitment, security issues, value creation, improved bonding).

Investigating the potential benefits for firms using the internet in relationship marketing.

16) What benefits are associated with the use of websites and social media applications in your relationship marketing activities?
(Customer retention, loyalty, better bonding, customer intelligence gathering, reduces costs).

17) Can you cite some instances where websites and social media applications were beneficial to managing your customer relationships?

Closure:

18) I am done with my questions; do you have any questions to ask me or anything you might have wanted to say that you did not ask?

19) Can you please lead me to another informant if there is any that you know of who can provide me with further information?

20) Are there any available documents (manuals, brochures, flyers) that can provide me with further information?