Royal Docks Business School

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MKM227 Postgraduate Dissertation

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Exploring Relationship Marketing in Nigerian Banking Industry

(A case study of Access Bank Nigeria Plc)

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Royal Docks Business School, University of East London for the degree of:

Master of Science (MSc) in International Marketing Management

September, 2014.

Word Count: 14,726

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award

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EXPLORING RELATIONSHIP MARKETING IN NIGERIAN BANKING INDUSTRY
(A case study of Access Bank Nigeria Plc)

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The past 3 months have been a continuous learning experience for me, working on this dissertation from Nigeria to United Kingdom. I have learnt a lot about International Marketing Management through thorough learning and extensive research works.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – *The purpose of this research is to investigate how relationship marketing is currently practiced in Nigerian banking industry, and its impacts on their performances over the years, adopting Access bank Plc as a case study. Two research questions were posed:* RQ 1: *What are the impacts of Relationship marketing on Nigerian banks?* RQ 2: *What are the challenges of the application of RM in Nigeria banking industry? This research explores these questions through the interactions of people within an organisational setting as they produce patterned relations and actions.*

Design/Approach/Methodology - *The interpretive approach which is exploratory and qualitative method of research was used in the course of this investigation, this is to understand a phenomenon not extensively researched previously. Consequently; a survey was carried out in Nigeria, and data were collected from selected staffs and customers of Access bank Plc on relationship management, through focus group discussions and eight in-depth interviews.*

Findings - *The findings reveal a positive and significant relationship between Relationship Marketing and Banks' Performance indicators. Also; the findings revealed the poor state of RM application in Nigeria banking industry, as it was discovered that 70% of banks' marketing efforts in Nigeria lies on service marketing, only 30% of their efforts go to relationship marketing (RM). It is therefore recommended that banks should improve on their relationship quality to increase customers' loyalty, as findings have confirmed that majority of the banks' customers in Nigeria commonly switch among banks, majorly due to consistent service failures, making customers' loyalty or retention a difficult task.*

Originality/Value – *The main contribution of this study to the relationship marketing literature lies on the fact that it has been able to discover the level of*

RM practice and the resultant impacts on Nigeria banking industry. It also identified the challenges of relationship marketing practices in Nigerian banking industry.

Keywords: *Nigeria, Relationship Marketing, Customers' satisfaction, Trust, Price, Commitment, Banking Industry, Access bank Nigeria Plc.*

Paper type: *Research (Dissertation)*

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CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

Relationship marketing has been propagated as a way of keeping long term relationship with customers, resulting in loyalty (Bush et al., 2007). Many organizations in advanced world have successfully applied this marketing concept over the years. However; in developing countries like Nigeria, Adejoke and Adekemi, (2012) noted that the application of relationship marketing has not been fully studied, hence; the need for this study. This chapter presents the overview of relationship marketing, with various sub-headings. It entails the background of the study, research aims and objectives, research questions, methodology, significance, scope and limitations of the study, as well as research contents overview.

1.1 Background of the Study

It has been established that in today's globalised market, effective relationship marketing is immensely contributing to the overall success and sustainability of any organization (Polat and Donmez, 2010; Ojo, 2011). Thus the discipline is attracting many marketing scholars in the relationship marketing literature, as against marketing mix, which is internally oriented and focuses only on management without interactions with the customers. Thus; the traditional marketing mix is regarded as obsolete and many not achieve high business performance in today's evolving marketing environment (Ekerete, 2005). Hence, the need for a change in product/transaction marketing practices which currently dominate the Nigerian banking industry, to customer retention through enhanced Relationship Marketing (Adejoke and Adekemi, 2012;

Heffernan et al., 2008). This research therefore examines relationship marketing in Nigerian banking industry, using Access Bank Plc as a case study; thereby adding to the body of knowledge in the relationship marketing literature.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Many researchers like (Bush et al., 2007; Sherrell and Bejou, 2007; Oyvind, 2008; Lee et al., 2011) have identified relationship marketing as a means of wining customer loyalty, but the practical performance of the application of RM is faced with various challenges in Nigeria. This according to Ogbuji et al. (2011); Adejoke and Adekemi (2012), includes poor RM practice by Nigerian banks, lack of commitment from the banks' employees and over concentration on service marketing by banks' executive management. Other identified problems are poor state of infrastructural facilities in Nigeria; bad governance, corruption, high rates of unemployment and security challenges as witnessed by incessant robbery and kidnappings in the south and Boko Harram insurgents in the north. Drawing from previous experiential findings, Onaolapo et al. (2011) argued that the major factors limiting the practice of RM in Nigeria could be traced to lack of trust and employee commitment, as well as failure to fulfil corporate promises, and the competitive nature of the Nigerian business environment. The emergence of this study is necessitated in realization of the fact that limited research has been carried out to identify the contributions and challenges of RM in Nigeria.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

This research explores relationship marketing in the Nigerian banking industry, using Access bank Nigeria Plc as a case study. Therefore; the objectives of this research are primarily:

Research Objective: 1

To critically analyse and evaluate how banks develop a long term relationship with their customers.

Research Objective: 2

To critically investigate relationship between relationship marketing application and customer loyalty in Nigerian banking industry

The overall objective is therefore to understand the level of success achieved by Nigerian banks, in their drive to apply relationship marketing to win new customers and retain existing ones.

1.4 Research Questions

According to Saunders et al. (2012), establishing an interesting and feasible research topic depends on the ability of the researcher to link the arising issues to theory. It is on this foundation that the research questions are structured as follows:

RQ 1: *What are the impacts of Relationship marketing on Nigerian banks?*

RQ 2: *What are the challenges of the application of RM in Nigerian banking industry?*

1.5 Research Methodology

The methodology for this research is interpretive, which is exploratory in nature and a qualitative method of research. The chosen method is considered the most appropriate research method for studying and understanding human behaviour from the participants' own frame of reference, in order to aid the researcher in clarifying identified theories in the research (Collis and Hussey, 2003). The secondary research examines past empirical studies with relevant literatures, which present sufficient background for this study. The researcher combines in-depth interviews and focus group discussions which are qualitative research methods as propagated by Burns and Bush (2014), to explore banks and customers' relationship in Nigeria. As suggested by Spiggle, (1994), qualitative research method is employed so that the researcher can gather information from the past and prevailing experiences of the participants. A theme sheet is constructed to conduct the interview. Also; in order to ensure the reliability of the research findings, the data will be digitally recorded accordingly.

1.6 Significance of the Study

According to Ogbuji et al. (2011), the successful application of RM in industrialised nations is not a guarantee to its successful application in developing countries like Nigeria. It is on this indication, as well as similar empirical findings from other developing countries, that this research seeks to identify the relationship marketing impacts on banks' performances in Nigeria. Therefore; the significance of the study can be traced to the fact that; the overall performances of Relationship Marketing in Nigeria have not been fully studied. Despite the abundant literatures on this topic in other parts of the world as pointed out by Gilbert & Choi, (2003), African scholars especially Nigerians, have not been able to make extensive research to provide adequate indigenous literature on the subject, hence the need for this study.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The scope of this research emanated from the previous relationship marketing theories like (Day, 1977; Dick and Basu, 1994; Fournier, 1998; Oliver, 1999; Curran et al., 2010). Therefore; the scope of this research is limited to Nigerian banking industry, using Access bank as a case study. The location of the study is Gombe, north eastern part of Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that relationship marketing building leads to trust, satisfaction and the resultant customer loyalty (Fournier 1998). This therefore inspires the need to investigate the quality of relationship marketing, and the flexibility and adaptability of these theoretical assumptions to banks' operations in Nigerian banking system. Indeed; this research is seen as a major contribution to the body of knowledge in the relationship marketing literature, which can be adopted by industry players to win customers' loyalty forever.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

Even though this research was properly conducted, some limitations were observed. One of these observed limitations is the time frame for the conduct of this research work. The available time frame for data gathering, analysing and interpreting are considered inadequate for in-depth findings as this. Another noticeable limitation is that the study is focused mainly on banking industry, while the location of the study is restricted to Gombe in Nigeria. Also seen as limitation of the study; is the research findings which are based on small sample, using interpretive approach and did not entail the statistical representation of the entire population being studied.

1.9 Brief History of Nigerian Banking Industry

The operations of banking system in Nigeria commenced in 1892, established majorly by foreign expatriates (CBN, 2006). The banking industry later experienced great expansions with indigenous ownership by late 1950s. Banking Ordinance of 1952 was later introduced to regulate banks' activities in Nigeria, while Central Bank of Nigeria was established in 1958, to supervise and control the banks (Fadare, 2010). The indigenization decree of 1970s changed the banks' ownership structure from foreign dominance to more local participation in the industry (Somoye, 2008). The sector was deregulated in 1987; and 100% individual ownership was introduced by the 1990's; motivating the establishment of many banks in Nigeria. (Idowu, 2013).

However; in July 6 2004, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) increased banks' capital base from 2billion Naira to 25billion Naira (Ikenna and Adeyele, 2013). August 14, 2009, witnessed banks' consolidation, leading to merger and/or acquisition of banks, from 89 to 25 in 2005 and 18 in 2013 (Ofoegbu and Iyewumi, 2013). This brought along their trails attendant competitive problems and the need to enhance relationship marketing.

1.10 Case study (Access Bank Nigeria plc)

History of Access Bank Nigeria Plc

Access Bank Plc started as a small unknown bank in Nigeria on the 8th of February, 1989 and was later transformed into a world class financial institution. Today; Access Bank has metamorphosed to be among the top 10 largest banks in Nigeria. Between 1989 and 2013; Access bank has rebranded on four different occasions to reflect a new preferred identity that has improved the bank's corporate image and attract more customers over the years (Access, 2013). The evolution of the bank's brand is shown in figure 1 below:

Figure: 1

Our logo evolves

We have evolved a simpler, more exciting and re-energised brand.

access

2013

1989 2003 2006

This was accomplished through rigorous implementation of aggressive direct marketing, by mass recruitment of young graduates in 2003 to embark on mass marketing across Nigeria. As at today, Access Bank, through its merger with Intercontinental Bank has become a major player in the Nigerian Banking industry, ranking number 10 in the industry (Access, 2013). The following table 1 illustrates the bank's 10 year growth story between 2002 and 2012:

Table 1:

10 Year Growth Story

access

2002	2007	2012
65th out of 89 banks	9th out of 25 banks	4th out of 21 banks
90,000 customers	600,000 customers	6.5 million customers
ROE: -0.9%	ROE: 25%	ROE:18%
ROA: -0.6%	ROA: 2.6%	ROA: 2.4%
CIR: 93%	CIR: 62%	CIR: 61%
Deposit: N6.5Bn	N86bn Deposit	N1,306bn Deposit
Assets: N4.8Bn	N409bn Asset	N1,745bn Asset
No risk rating	Risk Ratings: S&P: BBB; Fitch: BBB; Agusto: A-	Risk Ratings: S&P: AA-; Fitch: A-; Agusto: A
Market Cap: N4bn	Market Cap: N68bn	Market Cap: N241bn
Number of Branches: 32	Number of Branches:118	Number of Branches: 349

1st 5 Year Plan | 2nd 5 Year Plan

 5

1.11 Research Content Overview

This research is divided into five chapters. The following is a brief description of each chapter for a better understanding of what is expected in this research work:

Chapter1. Introduction

Here the direction of the entire research is outlined; identifying research questions to be answered and objectives needs to be achieved. The research methodology is also described.

Chapter2. Literature review

In this chapter; the researcher '' critiques '' the previous empirical findings on the role of relationship marketing in organisations' success, in order to ascertaining gaps and contributions in the relationship marketing literature.

Chapter3. Research Methodology

Following the critical review of the relevant literature, the focus of this chapter is to explain the data collection method employed by the researcher in the course of this study. Also highlighted in this chapter for further clarification are the research questions and objectives.

Chapter4. Data Analysis

This chapter is regarded as the most significant aspect of this study. Here; the data collected are analysed and the findings explained by the researcher, to address the research questions and objectives posed at the beginning of the research.

Chapter5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This is the last chapter in this research work, where the researcher summarises the explained findings and the managerial implications. It also explains how the research questions and objectives posed were eventually addressed. Finally; the researcher provides useful recommendations for managers and practitioners in the Nigerian banking industry. Knowledge gap was identified and suggestions for further research areas were made for future students.

1.12 Summary

Considering the above explanations on the theoretical assumptions on relationship marketing concept, this research intends to contribute to the empirically evolving construct on relationship marketing in the banking industry in Nigeria. Thus; this chapter highlight the research aims and objectives, research questions posed, scope and significance of the study, methodology, research contents, and the observed limitations.

CHAPTER TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter looked into relevant literatures and past studies on relationship marketing concept. It is based on certain theoretical constructs intended to provide a better understanding for the study. Therefore this chapter entails topics such as research overview, relationship marketing, historical perspectives, dimensions, relationship marketing and corporate image, critical assessment on assumption of relationship marketing, comparable empirical evidences and relationship marketing in corporate banking,

2.1.1. Research Overview

Relationship marketing as advocated by Andaleeb and Conway (2006); Cruz and Laukkanen (2010); Vegholm (2011); Sangle and Awasthi (2011); Awasthi and Sangle (2012), is more than just getting the customers, but it also includes maintaining the existing customers for continuous patronage and eventual loyalty. Loyalty in marketing refers to the favourable attitude towards a brand in addition to purchasing it repeatedly by the customer (Omar and Ali, 2010). Narteh and Nana (2011) assert that in a credence-based industry like banking system, assurance, trust, kindness and reliability are important factors that shape customers versus banks' relationships. Thus; the quality of the services of the frontline tellers, customer care officers, account officers, relationship officers, the role of relationship managers, and waiting times, all have impacts on patronage, relationship building and customers' loyalty.

2.2 Relationship Marketing

It has been established that relationship marketing philosophy has to do with promoting long-lasting relationship with present and prospective customers. According to various marketing scholars like (Dwyer et al.,1987; Gummesson, 1994; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Tyler and Stanley, 1999; Gro¨nroos, 1997, 2004), it involves a high level of commitment, collaboration, interdependence and intimacy, with emphasis on the continuous customer satisfaction. Gro¨nroos (1998) defines relationship marketing as 'procedures whereby potential customers are identified in order to establish, maintain, and improve the already established relationship'. Berry (1995), also describes relationship marketing as 'an approach employed by organisations to win, retain, and improve customer relationships'. Gro¨nroos and Ravald (1996); in their own opinion, see Relationship marketing (RM) as a way of developing sustainable mutually beneficial long-lasting relationships with customers. Ismail (2009) asserts that relationship marketing connotes affiliation, stressing on co-operation, joint problem solving, sharing resources and activities, and building relationship on mutual benefits, as most of the studies are discovered to be concentrated more on the benefits of relationship marketing to organizations, without considering the benefits to the customers.

However; various scholars like (Gummesson, 1996; Gro¨nroos, 1997; Palmer, 1994; Mohr and Nevin, 1990) observe that relationship marketing requires good communication skills for it to be successful in any industry. As noted by Anderson and Narus (1990), a good communication enables parties in the relationship to understand the intentions of each other, and thus shape the basis for relationship development. In this study, communication is defined as the process of meaningfully transferring a message to others in the most understood way. It is therefore seen as a precondition for building long-lasting relationship in any industry (Mohr and Spekman, 1994). The quality nature of any information shared influences the success of relationships, and is a vital part of the relationship building (Andersen, P. H. 2001). It is therefore important for banks to create good communication channels with both internal and external customers, to actualize this relationship management goal.

2.3 Historical Perspective of Relationship Marketing

Marketing discipline emanated from the field of economics, stirred by lack of interest in marketing by economists of that era (Bartels, 1976; Hunt and Goolsby, 1988; Houston, *et al.,* 1992). Early marketing scholars lay more emphasis on operational issues as against relationship building (Bartels, 1976), which is focused more on efficiency of marketing channels in the distribution of merchandise from the producing companies to the final customers (Shaw, 1912; Weld, 1916, 1917). Thus, marketing as a discipline was structured on the idea of the institutional school of thought, as pointed out by Butler (1923), Breyer (1934), Converse and Huegy (1940), Alderson (1954), and the major concentration is on the functions of distributors and retailers as marketing institutions (Sheth *et al.*1988). Although marketing history emerged in the early 1900s (Bartels, 1962), however; Relationship marketing course was quite prevalent before the 1900s, as relationship is found to exist among families during trade by barter era.

Today; relationship marketing is playing a significant role in the field of marketing as against transaction based marketing (Nalin and Jayakody, 2011). The origin and development of the concept overtime can be traced back to the Pre-industrial era; which was characterised by Direct Marketing, the Industrial Era; which witnessed industrial revolution that led to the emergent of mass production and mass consumption of goods and services, as well as the Post-Industrial Era; when the orientation of marketing was changed from transactional to relational orientation (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2005; Sherrell & Bejou, 2007; Agundu and Olotu, 2011).

2.3.1 Marketing Orientation in the Pre-Industrial Era

According to Fullerton (1988), the pre-industrial era was characterized by agricultural economy and the trading of arts and artefacts. This period witnessed the farmer playing the role of 'producer' and 'retailer' of his or her products and involves in direct marketing and selling to the final consumer (Nevett and Nevett, 1987). This constant face to face interaction between the farmers and consumers in this era resulted in trust, cooperation, and reliance, leading to relationship marketing orientation during this era (Pryor, 1977). Kingson, et al. (1986) suggests that the relationships of that period continued for generations as both the farmers and consumers build bonds among themselves, their families and clans over the years.

2.3.2 Marketing Orientation in the Industrial Era

The introduction of mass production due to the associated economies of scale and mass consumption during the industrial era forced the marketers to espouse transactional approach to marketing (Churchill, 1942). During this period; producers were battling to cope with persistence increase in inventory of finished products and the rising need to find markets for their finished goods. It was in this era that wholesalers, distributors, retailers and other marketing intermediaries, were introduced to play the role of middlemen, and were engaged in buying and storing the excess products, while helping to identify and influence prospective buyers to patronize them (Womer, 1944). Also; it was in this era that the recent marketing tradition, like promotion and advertising, emerged to increase products' awareness and influence new purchases, in order to absorb the excess goods left from mass production (Barrels, 1965). Thus marketing was influenced more by the transactional marketing approach and academic theories, throughout the industrial era (Barton, 1946).

2.3.3 Marketing Orientation in the Post-Industrial Era

The Post-industrial era marketing practice was tailored towards the emergent of relationship marketing among marketing scholars and practitioners alike. It was in this era that marketing scholars started appreciating relationship marketing as a better alternative means of showing empathy to customers, as against transactional marketing orientation which dominated the industry over the years (Shapiro and Wyman, 1981). As noted by Sheth et al. (1988), the development of relational marketing approach in post-industrial era is as a result of the renaissance of direct marketing, influencing marketing efforts towards customer retention orientation due to increased competition.

It was in this era that marketing scholars are now beginning to understand that it is less costly to keep existing customers than to compete for new customers (Rosenberg and Czepiel, 1984). Accordingly; the idea of engaging existing customers for long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships emerged, as opposed to short term benefits witnessed in transactional marketing (Cannie and Caplin, 1991). Thus; relationship marketing orientation has finally staged a comeback (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2005).

2.4 Dimensions of Relationship Marketing

According to Egan (2001); Veloutsou *et al*, (2002) and Ndubisi and Chan (2005), relationship marketing consists of six dimensions, which are considered necessary in order to understand the concept. These includes: *Trust, Marketing communication, Shared value, Empathy, reciprocity, and Bonding.* These identified variables enables organizations to predict customers' loyalty and are discussed in details below:

2.4.1. Trust: Sheedy (1997) described trust as 'the ability to develop confidence and rely on, someone or something'. Morgan and Hunt (1994) viewed trust as 'the readiness of an individual to build confidence on a business associate'. The role of trust to the growth and profitability of any firm is enormous, as its helps the organizations to retain and win customers' loyalty overtime. Trust is therefore seen as critical for banks' survival in today's competitive environment.

2.4.2. Bond: Sin et al. (2006) defined bond as 'the unity that exist between two parties, resulting in collaboration towards a desired goal'. Ahmad and Buttle (2001) suggested that bond that exists between parties can be categorized into three in the service industry. These are financial, social and structural bonds. However; Yau, et al. (2000); Sin, et al. (2006) argued that social and structural bonds are the two most important bonds.

2.4.3. Marketing Communication*:* Schiffman and Kanuk (1995) describe marketing communication as 'a means of informing and convincing consumers to patronize a product or service'. Kotler (2011) defined it as 'a process of informing, persuading, and reminding consumers, directly or indirectly about their products and services'. Hawkins et al. (2001) and Kotler (2011) concluded that; the success of Relationship Marketing depends on the incorporation of all marketing communication elements, so that relationships with customers can be established, sustained and enhanced.

2.4.4. Shared Value: It has been argued that the success of relationship marketing efforts depends on its ability to deliver the perceived values which satisfy the target customers. Kotler and Keller (2011) describe 'value' as the perceived physical and non physical benefits and costs to customers. Thus; Vierra and Ennew (2004) describe value as paramount in relationship marketing concept, it is therefore expected that banks will add value to their customers through relationship marketing, other than the products or services rendered. As it is belief that a satisfied customer will be loyal to the brand, can help to build the bank's positive image through word of mouth advertisement and ultimately contribute towards the success of the organisation.

2.4.5. Empathy: Agundu and Olotu (2011), viewed relationship marketing as the ability to understand, share, and feel what the customer is feeling in a relational situation. Ahmad and Buttle (2002) portrayed 'empathy' as a business relationship process that encourages two parties to view the situation from the other's perspective. For example; the front desk tellers in the banking operations hall, must put themselves in the customer's shoe when providing services to the customers in order to keep satisfying them.

2.4.6. Reciprocity: Agundu and Olotu (2011) also described reciprocity as 'a kind of relationship in business that encourages parties to offer favours for the other, in return for similar favours to be received at a later date'. This is built on the premise that people are indebted to one another because of their previous deeds.

2.5 Relationship Marketing and Corporate Image

The theory of relationship marketing stresses that marketing involves relationship exchange, characterized by communications between a firm and its customers (Gummesson, 1996; Gro¨nroos, 1997). Here; the workers are regularly conveying an image of the firm, during interactions with the customers (Balmer and Stotvig, 1997; Gro¨nroos, 1998). Hence; how customers are delighted when they interact with bank workers, influences their perceptions about the organisation, which enables them to form the bank's corporate image overtime.

Therefore; corporate image is seen as a component of relationship marketing, and various authors like; (Dichter, 1985; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Dowling, 1993; Van Heerden and Puth 1995; and Alvesson, 1998), describe it as 'the general depiction of a firm's values and perception of various stakeholders about a firm.' According to Nguyen and LeBlanc, (1998); Abratt and Nsenki (2001), the way the workforce relate and react to customers' needs, influence their perception about the organization. Positive perception of the firm leads to positive corporate image, which would lead to continuous patronage and loyalty. This is in consistent with; Balmer and Stotvig, (1997) and Gro¨nroos, (1998) postulation that employees' participation is vital in the development and preservation of lasting relationship, through consistent transmission of a positive image of the banks to the banks' customers. Thus; Agundu and Olotu (2011) conclude that how the employees treated and serviced the banks' customers when they interact, have effects on their perceptions about their banks, which form the bank's corporate image in the customers mind over time.

From the above analysis, Corporate Image is therefore seen as the perceptions of the stakeholders about the doings of a company (Fatt et al., 2000). Gro¨nroos (1984) relates relationship management theory with that of corporate image and suggested two image scope of service management: the functional and the scientific aspects. Gro¨nroos (1998); Kang and James (2004) refer to the functional element as the perceptions of customers about the service rendered. While Gro¨nroos (1990) sees the technical dimension as the outcome – "what" is finally received by the customers in the process of service delivery. Indeed, Vegholm (2011) concludes that; the image is a growing phenomenon that is constantly updated when the consumers transact with the company. Gro¨nroos (1994) however; argued that customers' perceptions about an organisation's image is largely influenced by how the firm has managed its relationships, as most customers prefer assessing relationship as a whole, rather than separate product offerings.

2.6. Critical Assessment of the Assumptions of Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing is determined by many philosophical ideology and assumptions, theorized by experienced marketing scholars who have investigated its importance in theoretical as well as empirical findings. Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) assert that relationship marketing is a philosophy of doing business, which focuses on keeping and maintaining existing and prospective customers. The philosophy presumes that customers favour establishing a long-lasting relationship with a firm, instead of switching perpetually from one firm to another in their quest for quality service. Satoshi (2006) citing Frederick (2003) argues that the major prerequisite for executing relationship marketing is a high "regularity of customers' patronage". Mosad (1995) further buttress the argument of Satoshi (2005) by insisting that without frequent interactions, it will be difficult to develop relationship to convince such customers to patronize the firm. Morgan and Hunt (1994) theorized that relationship marketing is all about mutual cooperation that is devoid of conflicts and competition, resulting in higher value creation. This theory is seen as challenging the classical marketing theory which sees self-interest and competition as the drivers of value creation.

Another basic assumption behind this viewpoint of relationship marketing is the opinion that it is better for the two parties to equitably contribute to relationship, rather than delegating the responsibility of customer management exclusively to the marketing staff to manage. This was rightly proclaimed by Williamson (1985) and Heide and John (1992) in their findings when they argued that the reliance of two parties on each other is likely to decrease transaction costs and produce higher quality. Even though this may appear plausible, observations have revealed that some customers may not be interested in active involvement in establishing long term relationship with a firm. This finding is consistent with the findings of Kotler and Keller (2006) when they posit that "it is not everybody in the consumer world that likes the idea of keeping lasting relationship with a company, as such; they may frown at a company wanting to collect much personal information about them". However; Hui (2006) concludes that company's policy and staff empowerment determine the extent of customer involvement with an organization.

Another assumption is the belief that "it is five to ten times cheaper to retain existing customers than to acquire new ones" (Paul & Jongbok, 2001). Although this assumption is devoid of empirical backing because; no study has been able to reveal its practical reality. Kotler and Keller (2006) in their own reaction to this assumption argue that at times; providing service to loyal customers might not be less costly as proclaimed by other authors. According to them; high-net-worth individuals often take advantage of their value to the organisation to extract premium services and/or price discounts.

Therefore; the strategic swing from transactional to relational marketing strategies in the banking system as observed by Ehigie (2006), is on the assumptions that customers who are engaged in a mutually beneficial relationship will stay with the bank and will be loyal to the bank over time. Heffernan, et al (2008) conclude that; financial service providers should imbibe this new marketing approach to address the needs of the customer, increase a competitive advantage and encourage customer loyalty in this era of technological advancements, where customers are well informed and have easy access to their financial information.

2.7 Comparable Empirical Evidences on Relationship Marketing

Researchers all over the world have been attracted to the concept of relationship marketing in recent years. Studies have also emphasized on the need to swing from the transactional to the relationship marketing model. Most current studies are equally persistent on hypothesizing the strategic inference of relationship marketing, recent advancement, and its relevance in service industry. The relevance of this theory of relationship marketing in Nigerian banking industry is the main focus of the present study.

Thierry and Stefanie (2009) investigated the strategies used by cheaper European airlines to study the role of relationship marketing in business developments. The findings reveal that most of the airlines are applying relationship marketing approach in a varied level. However; the study argues that relationship marketing alone cannot provide the overall solution to companies' success. They conclude that RM is only part of the collective marketing strategy aimed at maintaining existing and prospective customers in the quest to achieving success.

Also; in a study carried out by Srinivas, et al (2007), exploring two Swedish banks as a case study, with the main purpose of having a better clarification on the benefits of electronic customer relationship management (E-CRM) to customers and banks in Sweden. Findings reveal that the applications of E-CRM have positive impacts on Swedish banks' performances. Also; the electronic platform enables banks in that country to develop and maintain good relationships with their customers online, while ensuring the protection of transactions of their customers. However; the findings of these studies are not applicable to developing countries because the business environment in Europe differs greatly from that of developing nations like Nigeria.

Roya (2008) examines the impacts of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) on the hotel industry and results reveal that its application has positive impacts on guests' satisfaction, loyalty and retention. Thus; information gathering for personalised services, helps to improve customers' satisfaction in the industry. However; personalizing services in a country where consumers are highly price sensitive as Nigeria may be difficult, as customers may switch to companies that offer cheaper price. Also; a survey by Phallapa (2010), shows that the Japanese market is characterized by trust which is one of the important variables in relationship building. This is contrary however; to what is obtainable in the Nigerian markets, where various parties do not trust one another (Nalin & Jayakody, 2011). Further research also reveals that relationship marketing is faced with numerous challenges because of the unethical business practices prevailing in the Nigerian market (Adejoke & Adekemi. 2012). Finally, companies implementing relationship marketing in Nigeria must therefore constantly interact with its customers to be successful; as this was found absent in Nigerian banking industry.

2.8 Relationship Marketing and the Banking Sector

According to Nalin & Jayakody (2011), financial industry's competitive pressure is compelling banks to modify their marketing tactics to include the concept of relationship marketing, in order to differentiate themselves from competitors. Recent findings have also revealed that bank customers desire personal contacts with their banks as means of communication (Tyler and Stanley, 2001). Banking can therefore be described as a process of rendering various financial services to large companies, governments and the general public (Weitz and Bradford, 1999). Colwell *et* al. (2009) suggest that the role of bank marketers (known as account officers) can be considered as a major factor behind customer loyalty. Therefore; account officers' role in customer retention cannot be ignored in the banking industry. Also; recent researchers like (Nalin & Jayakody, 2011) have also positioned trust as a major determinant of relationship commitment. Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009) also identified satisfaction in addition to trust, as the major variables of relationship quality. Li, et al (2009) opined that, bank employees also play a major role in building this trust and satisfaction, as the way they attend to banks' numerous customers contribute to confidence and relationship building, which invariably improve the image of the bank. Therefore, the higher the customer's confidence in the bank employees, the higher is the customer relationship commitment with that employee and invariably the bank (Jackson, 1985).

However; Lee, et al. (2011); Vieira, L.A. (2010) noted that the key survival of any service provider is the quality of the services rendered, and the measurement of this service quality is seen as the most influential factor on relationship quality in the banking industry. Colton and Oliveira, (2009); Kuehner-Herbert (2009); Wu et al., (2009); Stiles (2009) suggest that bank employees (from the security personnel to the management team) require greater knowledge and technical skills with good working condition and other motivational factors, to actualize and maintained the banks' relationship quality and help develop long term customers' loyalty. Wilson et al. (2008) conclude that 'bank employees are *the brand*', as customers' perceptions of employee performance have effects on their identification with the service organisation. Conversely; Hess et al. (2007) and McColl-Kennedy, et al. (2010) observed that customers' dissatisfaction with the employees of a bank, will lead to dissatisfaction with that bank, resulting in the diminishing of the service brand.

2.9 Summary

This chapter discussed previous relevant theoretical concepts on relationship marketing. Here existing theories on the concept of relationship marketing were discussed, its dimensions, assumptions, the role in the banking sector and corporate image, and empirical evidences. Thus; Relationship Marketing is discovered to play a major role in wining new customers and retaining the existing ones over a long period of time. However; these concepts have not been fully studied in Nigeria, necessitating the need for this research to investigate its impacts and challenges in Nigeria context, using Access bank plc as a case study.

CHAPTER THREE

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Overview

Having considered previous relevant theoretical concepts on relationship marketing, this chapter explains the methodological process used to ascertain and find answers to the research questions and objectives. Elements such as the research strategy, research philosophy, research design, sampling, approach to data collection, analysis and interpretation, data validity and reliability, in-depth interview and finally research limitations are explained in this chapter to provide a better understanding of this research drive.

3.2 Research Questions and Objectives

The research aims and objectives may be exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive or the combination of them, based on the questions and objectives of the research (Saunders et al, 2012). Marshall & Rossman (2011) define explanatory research as that mode of research employed to explain the model associated with a trend. While Daymon and Holloway (2011) see exploratory as a research method used to probe "a trend that is not understood" or areas that have not been researched previously, in order to detect significant kinds of meanings and create theory. While descriptive method of research is considered most appropriate when the goal is to describe the phenomenon of interest (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As Daymon and Holloway (2011) put it; when the problem is clearly structured and when there is no intention of investigating causal relationships, a descriptive angle is suitable.

Since the objective of this study is to examine the role of relationship marketing in the banking industry in Nigeria, the study is therefore exploratory. This is because the researcher is trying to seek a better understanding of a phenomenon, not extensively researched previously. Thus, the research questions are:

- *RQ 1: What are the impacts of Relationship Marketing on Nigerian banks?*

- *RQ 2: What are the challenges of the application of RM in Nigeria banking industry?*

And the research objectives are:

- *Objective 1:*

To critically analyse and evaluate how banks develop a long term relationship with their customers.

- *Objective 2:*

To critically investigate the application of relationship marketing in relation to customers' loyalty, in the Nigerian banking industry

3.3. Research Strategy

According to *Saunders, et al (2012);* two major approaches to research exist, The *Quantitative and Qualitative* method of research. *Q*ualitative studies are descriptive and exploratory and build rich information on subjects previously not extensively researched. It is usually carried out in a natural world and applies several techniques that are interacting and humanistic (Denscombe, 2010). Its focal points is on situations, it is evolving instead of predicting and is basically interpretive (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Conversely, a quantitative mode of research is a positivism approach classified as "scientific method, where objectivity is employed in the evaluation of various social relationship and with the assumption that; there is only "one truth" (Holme and Solvang, 1997). Quantitative methods are more formalized and prearranged with the use of questionnaire, with the assumption that the theoretical concepts are measurable (Malhotra et al., 2012). The researcher predetermines the nature of information required; questions that are considered relevant to the information are determined in advance and do not consider other questions from the participants as relevant (Malhotra et al., 2012).

According to Webb (2002); Cian (2011), research methodology preference is largely influenced by the research questions and objectives, while also considering research approach that will generate the best results. The chosen research approach for this Thesis is interpretive, which is a qualitative method of research. The reason is that the researcher wants to understand and expand a profound knowledge in relationship marketing discipline, on a topic that has not been completely thoroughly explored, using Access bank Nigeria Plc as a case study. For this reason, a formalized and structured approach such as the quantitative would not be suitable, making qualitative method of research most suitable for this study.

3.4 Research Philosophy

The chosen philosophy for this research is interpretive approach, tailored to provide precise answers to the research questions and objectives posed at the beginning of this study. Since the study tries to examine the impacts of relationship marketing on banks performances in Nigeria, using interpretive approach is considered a better option aimed at providing a better understanding of human behaviours (Bell and Bryman (2011). Schutz (1962) observe that different meanings are usually attached by people to themselves and the world in which they interrelate. Interpretive approach is thus considered as the most suitable means to understanding these meanings and consumer behaviour. Therefore; this research philosophy will provide a clearer knowledge on the existing relationship between customers and the banks, from both the employees and customers' point of view.

3.5 Research Design

Research design provides a master plan on how the research will be done, which is usually guided by the research questions. It considers various fundamentals of research that are relevant to the study, such as sampling method, research techniques and the likely challenges. It offers a platform for the provision of answers to the research questions posed in order to meet the objectives of the study (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). According to Malhotra et al (2012), 'there are huge arrays of alternative research designs; the key is to create a design that enhances the value of the information obtained, while reducing the cost of obtaining it'. Therefore; research design may be broadly classified as exploratory or conclusive (Malhotra et al., 2012). The exploratory design provides handy information about happenings in marketing discipline. It is mostly used in situations where quantitative method of design cannot be used to measure the subject of the study. On the other hand; conclusive research design objective is to use measurement to test specific hypothesis and examine relationships (Malhotra et al., 2012).

Therefore; the study is exploratory in nature because; an important element of Bank-Customer-Relationship in Nigeria needs to be examined and understood, as only limited research has so far been done in the context of relationship marketing in Nigerian banking industry. A theme sheet will be constructed and the researcher will try to develop a good relationship with the participants before the interview. The interview will be digitally recorded, to accord the results the much needed reliability to aid the analysis and presentation of the findings. Secondary data will also be employed to serve as a means of comparing and interpreting collected data. As pointed out by Cooper and Schindler (2014), 'it is insufficient to put total reliance on only primary data'. Therefore secondary data should be used to compare primary data collected in order to arrive at a more credible interpretations and conclusion.

3.6. Method of Data Collection

According to Daymon and Holloway (2011), one of the essential parts of an efficient research is the application of the most suitable techniques for data collection. Consequently; the adopted data collection method is determined by the researcher and research objectives. Zikmund (2003) identifies different research techniques and data collection methods, which includes questionnaires for quantitative research, semi-structured and unstructured interviews and focus groups for qualitative research.

In this research; A Semi-structured interview is used because of the need to control the direction of the interview, by guiding the target group towards the main subject of the research. Semi structured interviews aid the researcher's efforts at probing more intensely during information gathering and allow the participants to freely discuss their thoughts and experiences (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). In order to achieve this; a list of topics to be discussed were prepared in advance, although; the participants will still have the opportunity to create their own ideas without any interruption from the interviewer. The research data was collected in Gombe, north eastern part of Nigeria, with diverse cultures and ethnicity. In-depth interviews and a focus group that is made up of twelve participants, were organised for this study, with about 60 minutes worth of information gathering; accruing to around twelve hours worth of information gathering, that are assumed to be sufficiently enough for detailed interpretations and analysis of the information gathered.

The interview started with focus group discussions, comprising five female and seven male participants, organised in a conducive environment, to encourage interactions among the participants. Light refreshment was offered as various opinions of the participants were transcribed and recorded accordingly. The outcome of the focus group discussions, guide the researcher during the conduct of the in-depth interviews, as participants revealed general perceptions and opinions about the relationship between banks and their customers. The topic and theme-sheets were used as a guide to keep the discussions in context, while few questions were asked during the discussions to encourage participants to talk at length about their experiences and perceptions.

The in-depth interviews were subsequently held until the saturation point was reached, this allows for extensive one-on-one elaborations on personal opinions. The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent. The analytical procedure begins with paying attention to the discussions and writing them down. Eight in-depth interviews were eventually conducted in a semi-structured manner, comprising five men and three female participants. After interviewing the eight participants, opinions and feedbacks of various participants appeared to be similar, leading to a conclusive end that the data would be sufficient for analysis, as saturation is found to be reached theoretically for the study.

3.7 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analytical process as described by Malhotra, et al (2012) was applied in the data analysis and interpretation stage, starting with the transcription copied from the focus group discussions. The findings later provide guidance and direction towards the amendment of the topics prepared for the in-depth interviews, as some of the discoveries from the focus group discussions aided the restructuring of the themes and the format for the conduct of the face to face interviews. According to Spiggle (1994) interpretive approach is considered the most appropriate, when conducting research on consumer behaviour, the researcher therefore applied interpretive method in this research, in order to have a clearer picture of customers' experiences in the Nigerian banking industry. This approach comprises two parts, namely analysis and interpretation, which are expected to be used for the explanation of the collected data.

The analysis phase is where the collected data will be assessed to arrive at a viable conclusion (Malhotra et al., 2012). As posit by Spiggle (1994), data comparison guides researcher in grouping gathered information in a more sophisticated form, in order to aid adequacy in the outcome of the research. After data analysis phase, the researcher will then engage in data interpretation to prepare the report of the findings for final presentation. Spiggle (1994) concludes that data interpretation presents a more theoretical conceptualization of the analysed data. This enables the researcher to grab meanings by evaluating new findings with the existing ones, for better interpretation and understanding of the concept of relationship marketing in Nigerian banking industry.

3.8 In-depth interview

Interviews, which are often linked to qualitative research method, are common research design, associated with the field of management and marketing (Daymon and Holloway, 2011). It is normally used in an interpretive approach to examine certain phenomenon, in order to have a profound knowledge and understanding about attitudes, opinions, intentions and feelings that are commonly attributed to human behaviour (Collis and Hussey, 2009). It serves as a means of exchanging views with individuals or group of individuals, to share from the world of their experiences and believes about certain phenomenon (Daymon and Holloway, 2011). Interviews are usually organised physically through face-to-face interactions, or through telephone conversations, exchanging emails, or video conferencing methods (Ndubisi and Tam, 2007). In-depth interviews were proposed in the course of addressing the research questions posed at the beginning of this study, so; the interviews were conducted until the theoretical saturation point was reached after the conduct of the eight (8^{th}) interviews.

Saunders et al. (2012) categorize interviews into *Structured, Semi structured and Unstructured/in-depth.* A structured interview utilizes questionnaires with a benchmark and prearranged questions (Saunders et al., 2012); this is not suitable for this research. The Unstructured/in-depth interview as also explained by Saunders et al. (2012) is more profound than the semi structured category, without direction and not really focused on the exact issues under investigation. This type of interview is also time consuming and requires a lot of time to complete and as such; not suitable for this research because the time frame given for the submission of the research report is too short. A Semi structured interview is instead considered most appropriate for this study because; it will afford the researcher the opportunity to guide the direction of the interviews towards the ultimate aim of the research within the time limit, by guiding the participants towards issues that are considered relevant to the study. However; the participants are not restricted to a predetermined and structured questions, they are allowed to freely express their views during the interviews. Without any pressure to concur to responses from peer group, participants can be profoundly questioned in a situation that permits them to actually express their feelings (Malhotra et al., 2012).

3.9 Sampling Techniques

Having identified the research questions, it is important for the researcher to choose the most appropriate data collection method for the research. The next step is to decide on the sampling strategy to be applied, as well as the kind of participants that would provide relevant information required for the study (Saunders et al., 2012). This includes the demographic nature of the would-be participants and their profession. However; the research questions and objectives should determine choice of a strategy to be adopted (Solomon et al., 2013).

Therefore; Sampling is the selection of individuals or group of individuals within a given population, to evaluate the features of the whole population and draw results that would represent the entire population (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). This provides economic benefit for the researcher, as data is accurately collected and results obtained as quickly as possible (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). It also enables the researcher to utilize a sample size that is found to be reliable and valid to meet the objective of the study, by interviewing participants until the point of saturation point, when there are no new ideas.

While the number of participants may be decided before embarking on the research, a final sample size is usually determined in the course of the research (Saunders et al., 2012; Solomon et al., 2013)

Thus; this research applied the combination of self-selection and judgemental sampling, in the course of information gathering as opined by (Collis & Hussey, 2003). For the focus group discussions, the researcher applied judgemental sampling so as to produce a sample size that would represent each of the twelve leading banks in Nigeria. The self-selection method of sampling was used for the conduct of the in-depth interviews, selected among interested individuals who have shown interest to participate in the study.

3.10 Reliability and Validity of Data Analysis

The validity of any research as demonstrated by Crouch & Housden (1996); is one of the most significant aspects of any study, if it must be generally accepted by scholars and managers alike. Researchers must therefore avoid being biased in the course of their research, to ensure its validity and reliability. However; researcher's bias in any study cannot be entirely avoided, due to the assumption that it is impossible to totally separate the researcher from a phenomenon under investigation. However; the researcher should avoid over reliance on commonsense, personal opinion and previous life experiences during data analysis and interpretation (Saunders et al., 2012). It is on this premise that an effort was made by the researcher for further authentication of each progression made, by asking the participants to elucidate more on the intended meaning for responses given.

The researcher commenced data analysis using the transcriptions obtained from the focus group discussions, discoveries from this discussion further provided an insight into new clues that later guided the researcher during the in-depth interviews. As some themes found to be reoccurring during the focus group analysis assisted the researcher to adjust the format for investigation during the in-depth interviews exercise. However; the researcher try to reduce the level of partiality while interpreting the analyzed data, as the interpretation was tailored towards the background of the topic under investigation. (Crouch and Housden, 1996; Saunders et al., 2012).

The research conclusion is drawn after careful interpretation of the focus group and the in-depth interviews findings. According to Papista and Dimitriadis (2012); individually conducted in-depth interviews offer an opportunity to monitor the participants' attitudes, providing an avenue to control and direct the flow of information towards the main topic of the study. As Saunders et al. (2012) observe; 'valid data is one with the closest meanings to the required findings'. Therefore; the extent of proximity to this research questions and the method adopted to meet its objectives, provide validity for this research.

3.11 Research Limitations

One of the observed limitations of this study; is that it is restricted to Gombe state in Nigeria, and devoid of activities of banks in other parts of Africa. The study is also confined to banking industry only and does not reflect happenings in other service industries.

3.12 Summary

Marketing research can be conducted and analysed using two approaches, positivist and interpretive (Malhotra et al., 2012). The interpretive philosophy is adopted to accomplish the research objectives. Consequently; focus group discussions was conducted, comprising twelve participants, followed by in-depth interviews. However; the research is restricted to the banking industry in Nigeria and does not include banking activities in other developing countries, which is seen as a limitation to the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1. Introduction

Having used the appropriate methodology and approach to eventually conduct this research, this chapter's main objective is to thoroughly explain the results, developing models, ideas formed, and possible conceptualisation and established facts. Using an interpretive approach, this research was executed and compiled for interpretation and presentation in order to understand the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, findings were examined based on meanings intended and derived. This will then lead to the final chapters where the findings, recommendations and the conclusion will be presented.

4.1.1. Demographic Information of Participants

The study consists of eight in-depth interviews comprising three female and five male participants, while the focus group is made up of twelve participants, five women and seven men, conducted in a semi-structured manner. The participants are within the age range of 18 to 55 years, and they are all residing in Gombe, north eastern part of Nigeria. Therefore; the scope of the study is restricted to banks within Gombe metropolis in Nigeria. The complete description of the participants for the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews are illustrated in table two and three below:

Table 2. Participants for Focus Group Discussions

PARTICIPANT	OCCUPATION	SEX	BANK
1st Participant	Civil servant	Male	Access & diamond
2nd Participant	Trading	Male	Access & Skye bank
3rd Participant	Student	Female	Access &GTBank
4th Participant	Wholesaler	Female	Access &FCMB
5th Participant	Timber dealer	Male	Access, FBN & FCMB
6th Participant	Palm oil dealer	Male	Access &GTBank
7th Participant	Maize Dealer	Male	Access, UBA &Ecobank
8th Participant	Electronics dealer	Male	Access, FBN & UBA
9th Participant	Importer & Exporter	Female	Access & Union bank
10th Participant	Food stuff dealer	Female	Access, FBN &Ecobank
11th Participant	Lecturing	Male	Access, Unity &GTBank
12th Participant	Farming	Female	Access, Sterling & Zenith

Table 3. Participants for In-depth Interview

PARTICIPANT	OCCUPATION	SEX	BANK
1st Interviewee	Branch Manager	Male	Access and Union bank
2nd Interviewee	Head, Retail	Male	Access, Unity bank
3rd Interviewee	Marketer	Male	Access and FCMB
4th Interviewee	Marketer	Female	Access and Diamond bank
5th Interviewee	Unilever Distributor	Male	Access, FBN & FCMB
6th Interviewee	Cadbury Distributor	Male	Access & Zenith
7th Interviewee	Cow Dealer	Male	Access, UBA & Ecobank
8th Interviewee	Marketer	Male	Access & Skye bank

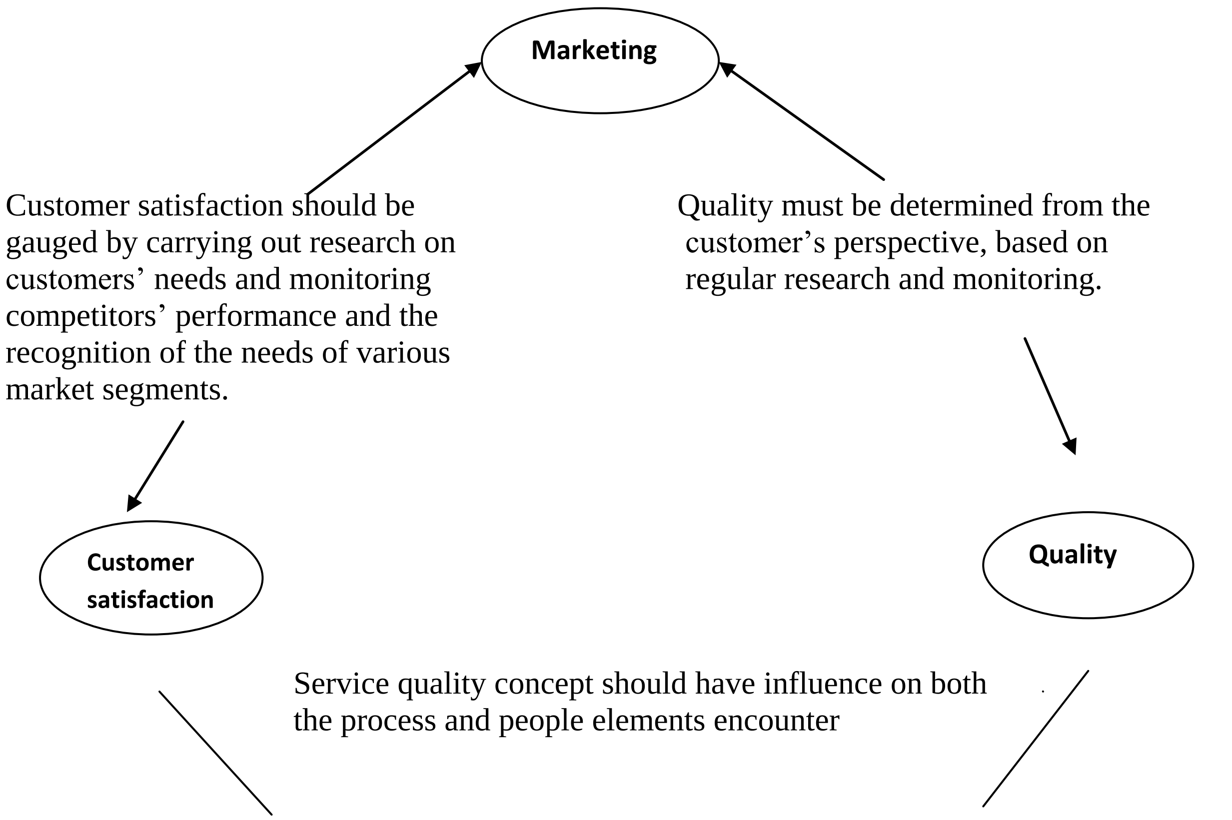
4.2. Interpretations of Findings

The adoption of a qualitative research approach enabled the researcher to conduct focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with questions tailored towards investigating relationship marketing among banks in Nigeria, using Access bank Nigeria Plc as a case study. Through focus group interview; the researcher was able to identify important variables that are relevant to customer/bank relationship in Nigerian banking industry. Thus; Service quality/Customer Satisfaction, trust, price *and* employees' commitments were identified as the main variables required for relationship marketing success in the Nigerian banking industry. These findings agree with the previous theoretical assumptions identified in the literature, as propagated by Geyskens, et al. (1999); Ndubisi and Chan (2005). It is on this premise that the interviews and data analysis were developed. For understanding and analysis, a theme sheet is constructed, consisting of the above stated 4 themes: *Service quality/Customer Satisfaction, trust, price* and *employees' commitments*.

4.2.1. Service Quality/Customer Satisfaction

One of the most significant decisive factors for customer loyalty as opined by Anderson, et al. (1994); Farrell, et al. (2001), Fullerton (2011), is customer satisfaction. Modern studies have revealed that customer satisfaction enhanced repeat purchase intents than general service quality (Liljander and Strandvik, 1995). According to Parasuraman *et al.* (1988), a customer that is satisfied tends to be loyal to a firm for a longer period of time, engaging in repeat purchases and referrals. Although in traditional quality models, Parasuraman et al. (1988) argue that perceived service quality paves the way for customer satisfaction. Grönroos (1982) defined perceived quality as 'the difference between expectations and actual performance'. The following figure 2 illustrates the relationship between marketing, service quality and customer satisfaction:

Figure 2. Relationship between marketing, quality and customer satisfaction



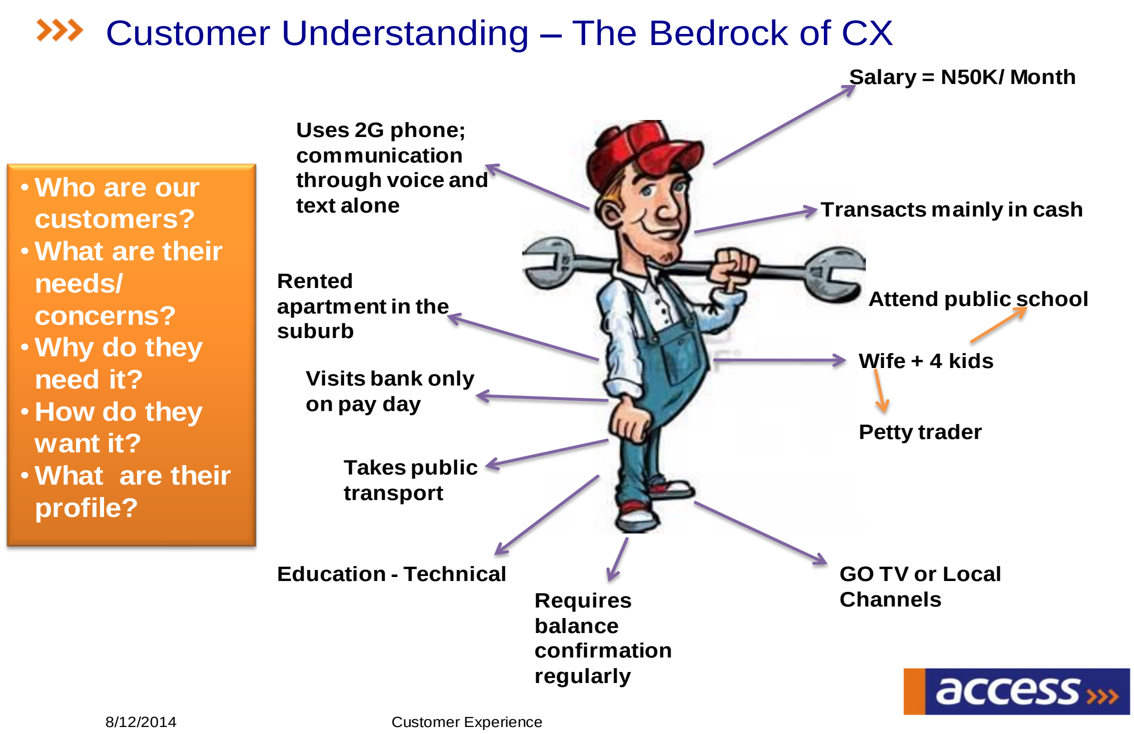
Adapted from Grönroos and Ravald (1996)

When the researcher ask the participants during the focus group discussions about service quality and customer satisfaction, all the participants gave more importance to customer satisfaction, to them; perceived service quality is usually determined by the customer.

1. Eze Egwuatu: *'A satisfied customer sees service rendered as of best quality'.*
2. Mohammed Otaru: *'Customer satisfaction is key'*
3. Musa Abduljalalu: *' A satisfied customer tends to be loyal to the bank'*

These participants clearly identified customer satisfaction as the engine room for continuous patronage, relationship building, and the eventual customer loyalty in Nigerian banking industry. These findings conform to the previous findings of Fournier (1998) which stated that repeat purchase of a product or service does not indicate true loyalty. Instead; the author argue that; loyalty comes from commitment, trust, service quality and satisfaction. This is because findings have shown that customers evaluate services rendered by banks differently, based on their cultural orientations and knowledge (Grönroos and Ravald 1996). Therefore; what is regarded as quality by one customer may be seen as inferior by another. However, it was discovered that Access bank has a strategic plan aimed at understanding their customers, in order to serve them better. This is illustrated in figure 3 below:

Figure 3:



Adapted from Access (2013)

The above illustrations provide a better understanding of the bank's customers, for excellent service delivery. Therefore; it is important that banks in Nigeria understand their customers' needs in order to serve them better.

4.2.2. Price

Customers' perceived price has also been found to have effect on the customers' judgement of the quality of services received and one of the major determinants of customers' loyalty in the banking industry (Howard and Sheth, 1969). Kotler and Levy (1969) suggest that customer's satisfaction is determined by the perceived value received. Monroe (1991) defines perceived value as 'the ratio of perceived benefits in relation to perceived sacrifice'. Thus; if customers' satisfaction is largely determined by the value received, then the total cost of obtaining such value must also be considered, as consumers use reference prices in most purchasing circumstances (Monroe, 1991), and even reference values (Berkowitz et al., 1994), during the evaluation of the services received. Iacobucci et al. (1994) however conclude that efforts should be made to modify the traditional quality models, to also include financial considerations, because most customers compare the quality of the services received to the financial sacrifice made.

1. Chiroma Haruna: *'Banks have lots of inexplicable hidden charges'*
2. Abiathar Maryam:*' The general interest rate of 28% on loan is too high'*
3. Abraham Imoroa: *'COT and monthly maintenance charges are ridiculous'*

Monroe (1991) further observed that customers appreciate price reduction more than a corresponding increase in the benefits. In line with this observation; the research findings have also shown that most banks' customers in Nigeria are price sensitive and may discontinue their patronage of any bank, whenever they feel being over charged for services rendered to them. All the participants clearly demonstrated above that bank charges influences their patronage, and is one of the factors responsible for their constant switching from one bank to another, in the quest for quality service at lower costs. This is demonstrated in table two and three above, with customers having accounts with more than one bank. In view of this; new approaches are recommended to build customer loyalty, thus; the customers' needs for quality service and their willingness to pay for it should be the main focus of the banks in Nigeria, instead of concentrating on only service quality to enhance customer satisfaction, without price consideration. This finding is similar to the findings of Christopher et al. (1991); Grönroos and Ravald (1996), when they argued that 'the value given to the customers should not be the major consideration, rather; the concentration should include the sacrifice the customers are willing to make for the valued service received'.

4.2.3. Trust

Trust has been viewed as one of the major variables that foster firm-customer relationship quality and customer satisfaction (Fullerton, 2011). However; its impacts on customer loyalty have not been given much attention in the literature. Abratt and Russell (1999) posit that corporate entities need to build trust in the minds of the general public, if they are to have relationship commitments from their target customers. Schurr and Ozanne (1985) defined trust as 'the belief that a partner's word or promise is reliable and a party will fulfil his/her obligations in the relationship'. Moorman et al. (1993) also defined the term as 'a willingness to depend on a trade partner in whom one has confidence'. Also; Bitner 1995) described it as making and keeping promises. Gronroos (1990) suggests that the resources of an organization should be channelled towards maintaining and strengthening customer's trust. Ndubisi & Capel (2011) conclude that; 'trust' is likely to improve customer's confidence in an organisation, and the resultant customer loyalty. A betrayal of this trust by the banks can lead to customers' dissatisfaction and defection.

1. Herbert Omuya: *'I bank with Access and Zenith to avoid disappointment'*
2. Mohammed Sulaiman: *'Banks do not deliver on their corporate promises'*
3. Idia Saka: *'Nigeria banks deceive prospective customers in their adverts.'*

Most of the participants as demonstrated above; are clearly giving priority to trustworthiness, in their dealings with banks. Omar & Ali (2010) found trust to be one of the most important variables in banks and customers relationship. As also theorised by Rakesh (2012), marketing can be said to be better only when it increases customers' patronage and customers' patronage can only be guaranteed when mutual trust exist between the firm and the customers through relationship marketing. Nigerian banks should thus; endeavour to build trust in the minds of their staff, present and prospective customers, as customer's trust in the bank employees improves bank's image and can lead to brand loyalty.

4.2.4. *Employees' C*ommitment

Commitment has also been considered as one of the most significant variables that strengthen relationship marketing, and a valuable means of determining the level of customers' loyalty to the firm. It enables the firm to forecast future regularity of purchase (Dwyer et al., 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Wilson (1995) argued that commitment is the soul of any relationship building measure, without which no organisation can successfully win and keep their target customers for life. In the field of sociology, the concept of commitment as explained by Becker (1950) is usually applied to the analysis of both individual and organizational behaviour, while psychologists such as Kiesler, (1971) defined commitment as a means of connecting people to a behavioural disposition. In marketing, Moorman et al. (1992) described it as a lasting aspiration to preserve a valued relationship. Therefore; for relationship marketing to succeed in the Nigerian banking industry as explained above; banks' employees must show commitments, as absence of employees' commitments could retard the growth of relationship marketing in the industry. Just as some of the participants put it:

1. Alhaji Mai sleepers: *'At times; banks' employees are not committed, they often delay or disappoint us when called upon for cash evacuation. That is why we opened accounts with three different banks, so that when one disappoints, another can be called upon.'*

2. Abdul Jibril: *'As bank employees; banks' unrealistic set cash deposit targets are negatively affecting our relationship management commitments because; we are constantly under pressure to meet the set targets to retain our jobs or be forced to resign for non performance.'*

3. Rabiat Saadu: *'Job insecurity is also hampering commitments, as banks' policies on employees negatively affect our passion for the job, making bank employees to view banking industry as survival of the fittest, where values are thrown to the winds in other to survive.'*

Employees' commitments are therefore discovered to have immense impacts on relationship marketing building in Nigerian banking industry. Bell et al. (2002); Bell and Sara (2004); and Caruana and Peter (1998) observed that employees flourish, when they are part of the brand identity. Thus; employees that are contented will be more committed to the bank, identify with the brand culture, and build relationship with their target customers (Mukherjee and Neeru, 2006; Palmer, 2008; Wilson et al., 2008; Ndubisi and Capel, 2011). The bank's brand image is thus sustained by customers, through employees' performance (Adejoke and Adekemi. 2012). As Gronroos (1994) argued; a relationship between an employee and a customer can be established to attract and build long term relationship with the customer, in order to achieve the economic goal of the organization.

4.3. Interview with Gombe Branch Manager of Access Bank Nigeria Plc

The Gombe branch manager of Access bank Nigeria plc is the overall head of the branch, saddled with the responsibility of the day to day running of the businesses of the branch. The branch manager gave detailed information about the bank's mode of business operations, their products as well as their marketing strategies.

It was discovered from the interview with the branch manager that Access bank Nigeria Plc is involved in direct marketing of its products and services, through its marketing staff, setting high cash deposit mobilization targets. The bank also applies limited relationship marketing activities to keep selected customers. But with the present customers' base of over 6 million as at 2013, the bank is now having serious challenges in its relationship marketing management to keep the existing customer base. In view of this; the bank re-strategized and marketers at the branches were moved to regional offices and the head office in January 2013, while three units were created to oversee the management of the bank's customers from these cluster areas. The three newly created units are Tele-marketing, Value chain management and Personal banking.

While this might look effective in the short term, the application of relationship marketing management will be constrained over time. This is because face to face interactions with banks' customers is considered most effective in relationship marketing building, especially in the face of significant transaction marketing activities from their competitors. As observed by; Daft and Lengel (1987) the best and the most effective medium of communication is personal encounters. This enables firms to better understand the challenges faced by their customer's and offer an immediate solution that would delight them. Thus; paying visit to customers in their homes, offices and business premises, will provide a clearer insight into customers' needs and wants.

Relationship marketing is therefore seen as most appropriate for firms that are rendering services, where there is personal interaction with customers, a high degree of involvement and where the customer is willing to engage in the actions and behaviours necessary to form and maintain a relationship (Leverin and Liljander, 2006). Thus; banks are now becoming relationship marketing oriented to increase customer retention and loyalty (Coughlan et al., 2010). Therefore, absence of RM will reduce the positive corporate image and customer loyalty and patronage. To improve RM efforts and avoid corporate image crisis, Access bank should therefore return relationship managers to various branches across Nigeria for effective RM application, to encourage patronage and retain the existing and prospective customers.

Although Zeithaml et al. (2001); Carson et al. (2004) observed that Banks may find it difficult to direct their relationship marketing efforts at every customer of the bank. But Ndubisi & Wah (2005) argue that retail banks customers can be classified into either profitable and unprofitable individuals or group of individuals, where the former subsidised the latter and direct relationship efforts towards the profitable customers. However; keeping the profitable customers is increasingly becoming complex in a competitive financial institution as bank (Leverin & Liljander, 2006). Therefore; considering the customers' base and since not all customers are profitable, it is advisable for banks to direct their relationship marketing efforts only at the most profitable customers defined by, for example, income and wealth (Abratt and Russell, 1999). Thus; according to the branch manager, Access bank Plc has categorized their customers into 'Corporate Banking, Business Banking and Personal B***anking'***. Concluding that; Forty six percent (46%) of the bank's customers are women, forty eight percent (48%) men and six percent (6%) corporate.

4.4. Interviews with Access bank**'s** customers.

Banks can also use various technological tools to build relationship with their customers. For example; Dickie (2011) examines the role of mobile banking on relationship building and found that mobile devices improve the quality of service, as banks' customers can now perform transactions from the convenient of their home or anywhere at all times. Thus; Laukkanen (2007) concludes that a mobile banking service promotes stronger relationships between existing customers and the bank. This is consistent with our findings during the in-depth interviews with Access bank customers.

Researcher: *'Which area of services do you prefer most in your bank? And why?'*

Alh Mai Katako: *'Internet and mobile banking services, because it is convenient'.*

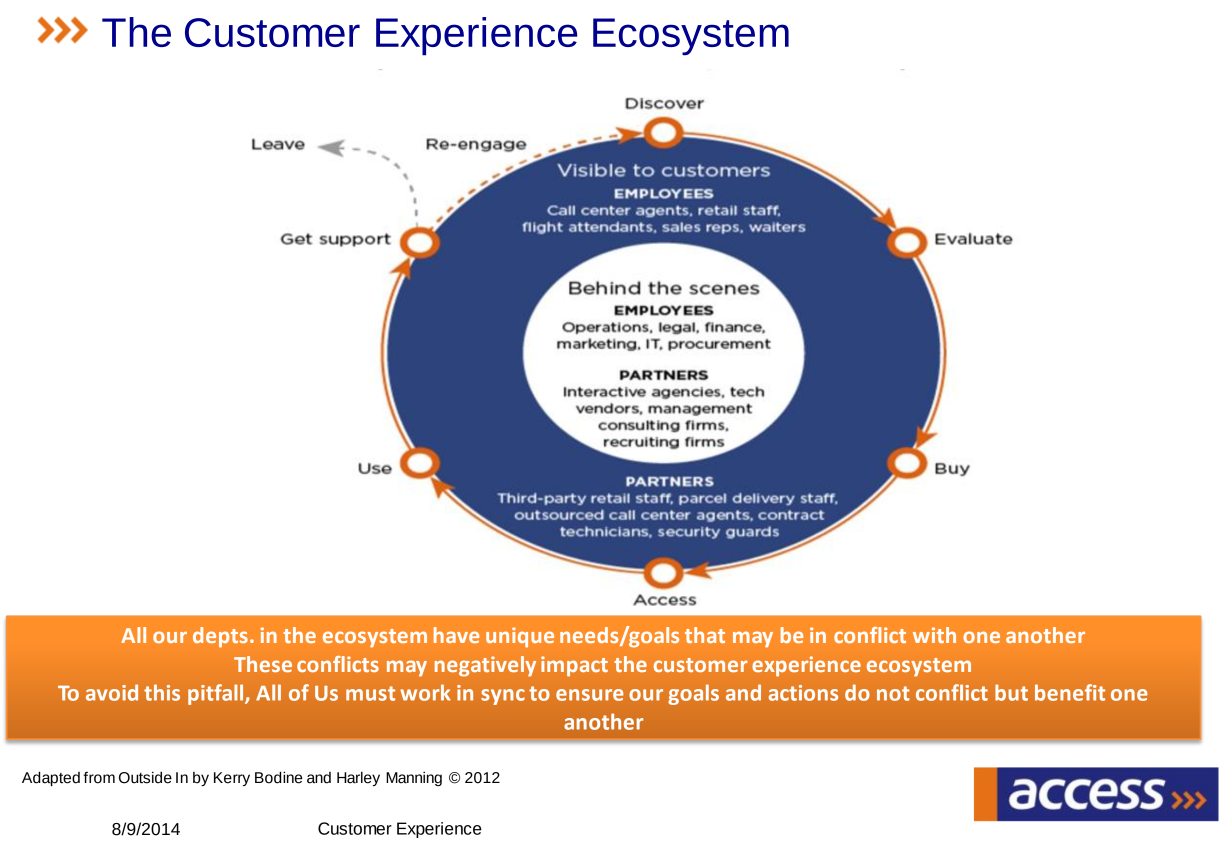
But despite all the benefits, Silberer & Schulz (2010) noted that consumers are reluctant to adopt mobile banking services, which according to Gillespie (2007) and Kwiatkowski (2010) is as a result of inferior user experience. In Nigeria, different cases of fraudulent activities associated with internet and mobile banking are discouraging its usage.

Also; the findings of this research have revealed that most of the banks' employees are not happy on the job, because of management policies. This is having negative impacts on their performances, as most of the participants complained about their negative experiences as customers in the banking hall.

Researcher: *'How will you describe your experience with your bank?'*
Idris Ishaku: *'Incessant delay in attending to customers could be frustrating'*

Even though Access bank has a carefully designed customer experience ecosystem to ensure the deliverance of excellent services to delight their customers as illustrated below; the issue of employees' dissatisfaction should be addressed if it must be successful in rendering the target excellent services to their valued customers. The following figure 4 below is Access bank customer experience ecosystem as at 2013:

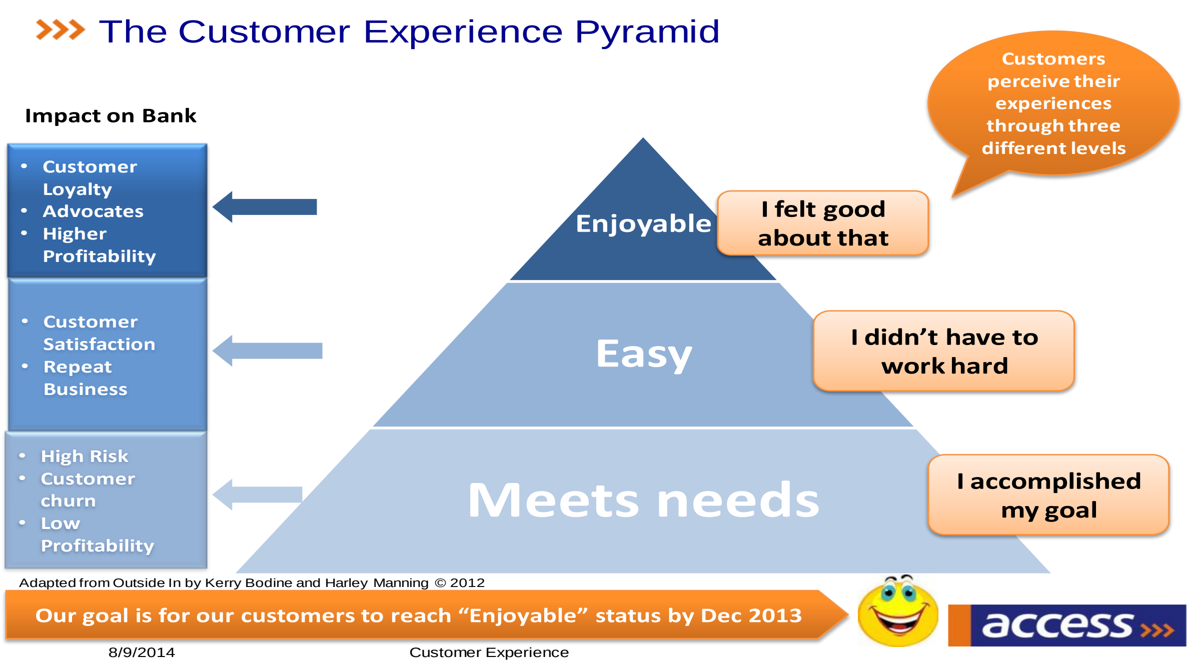
Figure 4:



Adapted from Access (2013)

From the figure 4 above, it is obvious that employees constitute the power house of any customer experience in Access bank, this buttress the need for adequate care for staffs to boost their morale and motivate them to put in their best efforts towards customers' satisfaction and retention. In addition; other partners that provide supportive services to the bank, also contribute either positively or negatively to customer experience in the bank. For example; failure of the *Flexcube* (network) service provider to deliver on their promises to the bank could lead to network failure and the resultant service failure which could lead to negative customers' experience (Hess, 2008), even when the employees are committed. The vendors in charge of deposit/withdrawal slips production and other office items could also contribute to the negative customer experience when they refuse to supply the needed items as at when required to service the banks' customers. The following figure 5 is the illustration of customer experience pyramid as set out by Access bank in accordance to their vision:

Figure 5:



Adapted from Access (2013)

Therefore; for Access bank to attain the above set goal (which is the enjoyable level in the pyramid); relationship marketing principles should be employed and all hands should be on deck to ensure the smooth and successful implementation and attainment of the set targets before the end of 2015.

Researcher: *'How will you describe the relationship between you and your bank?'*

Mercy Ojochide: *'Not too cordial, because the staffs are not friendly and uncommitted to the job'*

Researcher: *'Are you satisfied with the level of relationship so far? If not; why?*
Hafsat A. Bello: *'Partially satisfied'*

Researcher: *'Which aspect of the bank's products/services mostly meets and exceeds your expectations?*

Amina Yusuf: *'Banks in Nigeria render similar products/services, so; none of their products/services exceed my expectations'*

Researcher: *'Do you have accounts with other banks? If so; why?'*

Ibrahim Ahmed: *'Yes, I have accounts with other banks to reduce the frustration from service failure.'*

Based on the above findings from customers of the banks, it is advisable that the bank policies should be staff friendly to get the best commitment from the employees, if it must win customers' loyalty. Thus; the issue of unrealistic cash mobilisation targets given to employees of the bank (Adejoke and Adekemi, 2012) should be reviewed and job insecurity caused by persistent and indiscriminate retrenchment of staff should also be looked into by the banks' executive managements. This is considered necessary in order to enhance commitments that seems to be lacking among the banks' employees in Nigeria

4.5. Relationship Marketing Challenges in Nigerian Banking Industry

Many factors have been identified in the course of this research, as challenges militating against the smooth application of relationship marketing in Nigerian banking industry. These challenges can be broadly observed to be due to lack of proper regards for ethics.

According to Wellman (1961); ethics has to do with the idea of good or bad, by distinguishing what is right from wrong. Rue and Byars (2000) defined "ethics as principles of conduct that are being employed to govern the decision-making and behaviour of an individual or a group of individuals." Thus, Guy (1990) refers to ethics as values by which individuals evaluate their own conduct and the conduct of others". Francis (2000) asserts that businesses are established primarily to make money, without which the aim of business establishment is defeated. However; making such money unethically, will be in violation of our social norms. In view of this; applying ethical concept in Nigerian banking industry is paramount, as unethical business deals especially in a bank can be harmful to the banking sector of the economy. Therefore; this research finding reveals that banks in Nigeria are neglecting ethics in their day to day running of their businesses. But competition and the struggle for customers and profits are not enough reasons to justify unethical practices in any industry.

Abubakar Kola Waheed: *'I think corruption is one of the banes of relationship marketing in Nigeria. For example; getting juicy government's accounts is increasingly difficult without bribing top government officials. This is against the ethics of relationship marketing and has negative effects on its implementation in Nigeria'.*

John Sunday: *‘In my own opinion, majority of the banks ignore ethical marketing practices in their dealings with customers’*

As stated above; most of the banks’ employees who took part in the in-depth interview segment, agreed that corruption is negatively affecting relationship marketing practices in Nigeria, as banks engage in unethical practices in the quest to have a competitive edge in the industry. Solomon (1993) posits that one of the most unethical myths in business conversation is the impression of “survival of the fittest”. Business managers must therefore ensure that business practices are executed in an ethical manner to preserve the integrity of the organization (McDowell (1991). Bank employees in Nigeria are equally expected to abide by this ethical norm when performing their duties, so as to protect the integrity of the banking profession. As Sanusi (2005) points out, “the quality of corporate governance has impacts on the image of any organization and can make a difference in a competitive environment as Nigerian banking industry. McDowell (1991) defines Corporate Governance as ‘the level of openness and honesty displayed by organisations, in the discharge of their business functions’. Thus, the practice of good corporate governance will result in transparency, honesty, accurate reporting and compliance with statutory regulations, among others.

4.6. Summary

This chapter present the most important aspect of this research, here the primary data collected through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews are analysed and presented. It consists of demographic information of participants, interpretations of findings; analysis of the interviews held and its overall application in Nigerian banking industry. The study further found some challenges facing the application of RM in Nigeria. Thus; relationship marketing is considered better than service marketing, as it creates a competitive edge and helps banks to keep their customers for life; even in the face of service failure.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings and conclusions will be presented, to provide answers to the two research questions posed in the beginning of this study. There will be implication for theory, practitioners and for future research. Recommendations will also be made for practitioners as well as for future researchers.

CONCLUSION

5.1.1 Overview

The significance of this project is to increase our knowledge on the importance of relationship marketing in the service industry, focusing on the banking industry in Nigeria. It examines the concept and offers cues on how the application of relationship marketing theory will be successful in Nigeria, drawing from past theories and empirical studies that relationship marketing proffers opportunities for the growth of lasting relationship with customers (Gro¨nroos and Ravald, 1996; Veloutsou et al., 2002; Ndubisi and Chan, 2005; Onaolapo et al., 2011; Adejoke and Adekemi, 2012). The findings will be useful to academics as it will add to the body of knowledge in the marketing literature, and proffers a better understanding on how relationship marketing (RM) is theorized in Nigeria.

Reviewing the outcome of the research; there are emerging findings identified as similar to the theoretical assumptions in the literature, while few other findings challenge the existing theories. Thus; the conclusive explanation is guided by the objective of this research, in order to provide adequate answers to the two questions posed at the beginning of the study.

5.2. RQ 1: What are the impacts of the application of RM on ***banks'*** performances in Nigeria?

The performance of relationship marketing in Nigerian banking system is eventually assessed on the basis of the bank's overall performance. According to Hwang and Chi (2005), the banking industry uses certain performance indicators such as goal, deposit targets, sales targets, quality services, good corporate image, and employee satisfaction. The research findings indicate that many banks have been able to keep cordial long term business relationship with their customers, using the above mentioned strategies. These have sustained their businesses over the years as observed in their annual profits declarations, running into billions of Nigeria Naira (NGN).

After thorough in-depth interviews and data gathering, findings have revealed that most of the banks' customers in Nigeria, like their counter parts in other part of the world, consider Service quality/Customer Satisfaction, trust, price *and* ***employees' commitments*** as important elements that motivate them to patronize banks. The entire discussions, explain the integration of findings with inference made by theory. Thus; discovery revealed the following:

Service Quality/Customer Satisfaction: Service quality is discovered to motivate customers' preference for banks that offer higher quality service, as defined in customer's own terms and that; what is offered as quality by the banks may not be seen as quality by the customers. Thus, perceived quality as observed by Grönroos (1982) is found to be important determinant of relationship building in this research finding and has contributed to the positive relationship impacts on bank performances in Nigeria.

Trust:, Trust is also identified as the pillar upon which the relationship management of any business is built. Findings from this study also reveal that customers patronize banks of their choices based on the trust and confidence they have in those banks. This is in accordance with the existing theories (Bitner 1995; Omar and Ali, 2010; Ndubisi and Capel, 2011; Rakesh, 2012). Although Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009) argued that trust alone cannot win customer loyalty, it has to include customer satisfaction. This agrees with the research finding, as it was discovered that the most trusted and reliable bank in Nigeria (which is First Bank Nigeria Plc), as widely proclaimed by all the participants, still loses its dissatisfied customers to the competitors. Bank management executives must therefore build trust to align with customer satisfaction in order to ensure relationship management success in the banking industry.

Price: It was also obvious in the analysis that consumers consider the use of reference prices in most purchasing circumstances (Monroe, 1991). The research findings revealed that excessive bank charges are hampering relationship building in Nigerian banking industry. This is consistent with Christopher et al. (1991); Grönroos and Ravald (1996), argument that 'the value given to the customers should include consideration on the sacrifice the customers are willing to make for the valued service received'. However; Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) observed that, banks adopt distinct strategies to manage customers' relationships. This is also in accordance with the research finding which reveals that Nigerian banks employ some strategies to win customer loyalty. This includes; the reduction in bank service charges, introduction of zero commission on turn over (Free COT), low lending rates and attractive fix deposit rates. This has contributed to the positive impacts of relationship marketing on Nigerian banking industry.

Commitment: Employee commitment is also seen as an essential contributor towards building stronger customer relationship with banks (Dwyer et al., 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Ekerete, 2005). Most of the banks' employees interviewed stated that marketing programs are being prepared by top management at the head office in Lagos, without carrying them along. They only receive directives to act in certain order. This is contrary to the previous findings by Bell et al. (2002); Bell and Sara (2004); and Caruana and Peter (1998), who observed that employees are more committed and thrive when they are part of the brand identity. Bank executive management should therefore involve the employees in the relationship marketing decision making process, to guarantee their commitments towards relationship marketing.

5.3. RQ 2: What are the challenges of the application of RM in Nigerian banking industry?

One of the major challenges of the application of relationship marketing in Nigerian banking industry as observed in this research findings; is that most customers do not trust services rendered by Nigerian banks, as it is assumed that most of the banks have hidden charges in all the services rendered, without prior notification to the customers. This is in consistent with the existing literature as theorized by Ekeng & Ewah (2009); when they argued that most Nigerian banks often disappoint their customers, by not fulfilling promises made at the beginning of their relationships, this erodes trust and confidence from the minds of the customers. More so; inscriptions like: “baggage at owner’s risk”, “vehicles are packed at owner’s risk and confirm your cash before leaving the banking hall” are found to be part of the major challenges of relationship building in Nigerian banking industry.

Moreover, Nigeria as a developing country is not yet fully ready for relationship management. This is true because; even when banks put enormous efforts in relationship building, they are often faced with challenges as most bank customers in Nigeria are highly sensitive to price and may not be willing to bear the cost of relationship services, thus; posing a challenge to its application in Nigeria.

Further findings also reveal that poor corporate governance, resulting in corruption; is another challenge facing relationship marketing in Nigerian banking industry. This is similar to the previous findings by Solomon (1993); Oghojafora, et al. (2010), who noted that some banks involve in bribery to get juicy accounts from high net-worth individuals and snatch them away from their competing banks. For example, to get juicy government accounts in both Federal, state and local governments in Nigeria, banks that are pursuing those accounts must be ready to bribe government officials to get those accounts.

This is against the ethics of relationship marketing and has negative impacts on its application in Nigeria.

Also identified in the research findings as impediments to relationship marketing are issues like low level of marketing knowledge, low patronage, (as few Nigerians are transacting with banks), high cost of production (caused by inadequate supply of electricity as most banks use 'Generator set' to power up their branches across Nigeria) and inadequate infrastructures. Others include excessive interference and regulations by federal government of Nigeria, security challenges, and unfavourable business environment caused by poverty, weak investment culture, and banks' unethical marketing practices.

Finally, this research findings and proposition is perhaps a likely addition to the existing theories, and could potentially develop the prospect of how relationship marketing is impacting on service industries in the world.

5.4 Summary

This is where the analysed data are compared to the existing theories, to answer the two questions posed at the beginning of the research. Thus; the concept of service quality/customer satisfaction, trust, price and commitment were identified as important variables that impacts positively to relationship marketing practices in Nigerian banking industry. These major findings are consistent with the prevailing theories on relationship marketing concept, and if properly applied; could contribute to the success of any organisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5.5 Recommendations for Management Practice

The research findings attained has shown to be consistent and in inconsistent with the existing theories in the literature, therefore; it can be argued that there could be academic and management implications. Thus; for relationship marketing to be operational in Nigeria as championed by various scholars like (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995; Smith & Higgins, 2000; Gronroos, 2004; Hui, 2006), Nigerian banks should coordinate their internal structure, such as job functions, measurements of staff performance, better reward scheme and provision of adequate training for staff, as well as their external operations with customers to meet their target goals.

A change of attitudes from the past and prevailing betrayal of trust and confidence that has damaged the reputations of most banks in Nigeria should also be pursued. Thus; Nigerian banks should abstain from advertisements and sales promotions that are misleading, as well as overstatement of products' benefits and be more focused on a more credible program that will enhance confidence and promise fulfilment.

They should also enlightened and guarantee the use of internet banking as a secure means of financial transactions and allay insecurity fears among banks' customers. Satoshi (2006) confirmed that the quest for privacy has increased in today's society, and firms should treat customers' personal details with tremendous care.

Emotional Intelligent has also been identified as a means of increasing height of customer orientation (Rozell et al., 2004), and performance in sales (Heffernan, et al., 2008) among employees of banks. Thus; banks in Nigeria should train their relationship marketing team on how they can best handle their feelings and the feelings of others; during relationship building.

Previous bank-customer relationship findings like (Adamson et al., 2003; Lam and Burton, 2006) demonstrate that most customers prefer to patronize banks with better customer-centred marketing strategy, which meets their individual needs. Therefore; Nigerian banks should be more focused on relationship marketing strategy that is customer-centred, in order to meet the specific needs of the individual customers. This according to Vegholm (2011) is essential for banks' image building, as it influences customers' perceptions about the bank.

Moreover; since relationship quality can encourage life-time commitment from customers, Crosby et al. (1990) and Olotu et al. (2010) suggest that relationship quality which comprises trust and satisfaction should be developed to keep loyal customers in the banking systems. Therefore, it is recommended that banking principles in Nigeria should be based on the seven dimensions of relationship marketing (RM) mentioned earlier in the literature review chapter, to improve the customers' confidence needed for continuous patronage.

According to Ford (1980), reducing the unfamiliarity between banks and their customers entails a combination of single as well as two-way oriented marketing communication tools, such as advertising and branding, to develop an attractive corporate image in a pre-relationship phase. Nigerian banks should also lay more emphasis on mutual benefits and communicate the good deeds done for customers in improving their business performance. Salminen (1996); Helm and Schlei (1998), argue that the banks can also use reputational and referrals managements to complement one-way communication practices. Therefore; Nigerian Banks should also formulate programmes for managing referrals, encouraging loyal customers to introduce the bank to their relatives and friends.

Customer visit, which permit face-to-face communication with customers, is another means of communication available to banks. Daft and Lengel (1987); McQuarrie (1993) and Andersen (2001) investigate the benefits of customers' visit efforts as a way of developing relationships with esteemed customers, and found personal encounters to be the most complete and effective medium of communicating to customers. Thus; Nigeria banks should imbibe the idea of visiting customers at their own premises for face to face communication, to afford the banks the ability and opportunity to experience and interpret customers' needs and wants in their natural environments.

5.6 Strategic plans proposed for Nigerian banking industry

It was discovered from the research findings that; for banks to get the best commitment from their employees; the issue of unrealistic targets given to employees of the bank as observed by Adejoke and Adekemi (2012), should be reviewed and job insecurity caused by persistent and indiscriminate retrenchment of staffs should also be looked into by the banks' executive managements. This is considered necessary in order to enhance commitments that appears to be missing among employees of banks in Nigeria

According to the ***'80/20 rule'***, as theorized by Reichheld and Kenny (1990), 80% of business profit comes from 20% of its customers. Therefore, since many Nigerian banks are found to have over 6 million customers, it is advisable for them to apply this rule and categorize their customers into Ultra High Net-worth Individual (UHNI) with turnover of 1billion naira and above, High Net-worth Individual (HNI) with turnover range of between 500 million to 999 million naira, Affluent Professionals (10 to 499 million naira), employees in the value chain (100 thousand to 10 million), and mass market (inclusive banking) which include students, pensioners and informal traders, with turnover of 100 thousand naira and below. This is to ensure that relationship management efforts are concentrated on their profitable customers, for long-term mutual benefits.

Srirojanant and Thirkell (1998) describe relationship development as comprises increasing positive interactive experience between the customer and the bank, thereby reducing the fear of uncertainty and distance. Therefore; banks' web sites are found to be supporting customers' interaction with their banks and encouraged relationship development. However; Lee, et al. (2011) argued that Internet-based loyalty, which is e-loyalty, depends on the degree of online interactions and is also essential for banks' survival. Nigerian banks should take advantage of this new technology by improving on their internet banking services and create a user-friendly websites for their products and services to satisfy and meet customers' needs. They should also consistently study their customers' online activities and educate the customers of the benefits of online banking, to increase customers' online interactions with the banks and invariably build relationship and customer loyalty.

The banks should also embark on extensive marketing research on 'Know Your Customer (KYC)' and 'Know Your Customer's Business' (KYCB) as theorized by Davenport, et al. (2001); Lindgreen et al., (2004), to aid relationship marketing efforts. Knowledge about the customers should be used to determine what motivate them to patronize a bank and should also serve as a guide to satisfying them (Gebert et al., 2003). This according to Salomann et al. (2005) should be properly managed by banks, as the information can help in the identification of ultra high net-worth and high net-worth customers in Nigeria.

5.7 Practical Implications for Nigerian Banks

Nigerian banks' executive management can make use of the findings of this research to re-strategize, reenergize and modify their marketing efforts towards wining and maintaining long term relationship with their valued customers.

5.8 Recommendations for Future Research

This research is restricted to Gombe state in Nigeria, and does not capture the attitudes and activities of banks' customers in other parts of Africa. Future research should therefore expand the research to include the entire Africa and other developing countries, so as to have wider views of relationship marketing practices in those areas.

The study is also confined to banking industry only; future research should explore other services industry like hotel, tourism, transport, entertainment and so on, in order to have a better understanding of the dynamics of relationship marketing in other service industries.

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7. APPENDIX

Appendix 1:

Theme 1: Service Quality/Customer Satisfaction

1. How do you describe the term 'service quality'?
2. What does 'Quality' mean to you?
3. Which bank do you prefer?
4. Are you always satisfied with your banks' services?

Theme 2: Price

1. Why do you prefer your chosen banks?
2. Is your preference has to do with price?
3. Are the bank charges moderately okay or too high?
4. Do bank charges influence your patronage and why?
5. Do the services rendered meet and exceed your expectations?
6. Are the services received equalled the financial sacrifice made?
7. What sort of benefits do you derive from your banks?

Theme 3: Trust

1. What level of trust and confidence do you have in your chosen banks?

2. Do your banks always fulfil their corporate promises?
3. Can they be regarded as reliable partners in business?
4. Does mutual trust exist between you and your chosen banks?
5. Does 'trust' influence your level of patronage?

Theme 4: **Employees'** Commitments

1. How will you describe the employees of your banks?
2. Are they customer friendly?
3. Do they go extra mile to satisfying you?
4. Are they helpful and show empathy?
5. Are you emotionally attached to any of these banks?

Appendix 2:

Interview 1:

Participant: Abubakar Kola Waheed

Q. Briefly introduce yourself?

Answer: I am a professional banker, presently working with Access Bank Nigeria PLC. I am jovial, outgoing, and friendly. I am a graduate of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria, Nigeria.

What is your life Ambition?

I wish to be successful in my chosen career, rising through the ranks in the banking industry till I get to the peak of my career and become an executive director. Abubakar Kola Waheed is the current Branch Manager of Access Bank Nigeria PLC in Gombe, North Eastern part of Nigeria.

When did you start your career in Banking?

I started my banking career with the defunct Intercontinental Bank Nigeria PLC in 2002, as an Executive Trainee (ET).

How will you describe the relationship between your bank and the customers?

The relationship between Access bank and its customers could be described as cordial, largely driven by service/transaction marketing, with little relationship marketing approach. One of our core values is to provide excellent services to our valued customers.

What determines your level of commitment to Access bank?

Staff friendly policies, good salary scale and promotion as at when due are the main determinants of commitments to satisfying the bank's customers. As the popular saying; 'You don't give what you don't have'. Therefore; a happy and satisfied employee will surely delight customers. Conversely, an unsatisfied employee that is not happy on the job will not be able to delight customers. This will surely have negative effects on the bank's corporate image and profitability.

Do you have work life balance?

The idea of work life balance depends on your job function as a banker and the bank itself. In Access bank, the issue of work life balance has been a major challenge to employees of the bank. More often; we work 12hours daily, Monday to Friday and travel virtually every Saturdays to Abuja for meetings, return to Gombe on Sundays and still resume work the following Monday. This in most cases; leads to staff fatigue. Although; as a relationship marketing officer, I think I have a better work life balance than those in the banking operations.

Do you plan to leave the bank anytime soon?

Every employee aspires for career developments in their working life, if my bank refuses to promote me to the next level when I am due for promotion, I will definitely look for the promotion elsewhere. But for now; I am not planning to leave the bank anytime soon.

Interview description 2:

Participant: **Rabiat Sa'adu**

Tell me something about yourself?

I graduated from Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU) Bauchi, Nigeria. I am an Industrial Chemist, but have passion for marketing. I enjoy marketing people and building relationship with them for my bank.

What are your life Ambitions?

One of my life ambitions is to become a practicing industrial chemist, after obtaining masters degree (MSc). Rabiat Saadu is one of the relationship marketing staff in Gombe branch of Access Bank Nigeria PLC.

When did you start your career in Banking?

I started my banking career with the defunct Oceanic Bank international Nigeria PLC in the year 2007, as an Executive Trainee (ET), before joining Access bank in May, 2011.

How will you describe the relationship between your bank and the customers?

The relationship between my bank and its customers is pleasant, based on mutually beneficial relationships and consistent provision of excellent services.

As a Marketing Staff, how do you contribute to the bank's profitability?

As a marketing staff; my major responsibility is to convince prospective customers to bank with us. This is usually done through direct marketing, as we do go out for marketing; looking for new customers for the bank. The bank also set out cash mobilization targets for all marketing and operations staff, the target amount is however varied according to individual grade.

What determines your level of commitment to Access bank?

What determines my total commitment to any organization is a good employee welfare package and job security. As we the employees tend to be more committed to an organization when they feel secured on the job.

Do you have work life balance?

It is the dream of every employee to have a work life balance, but considering the time consuming nature of my job, I don't think I have the much needed work life balance in Access bank. This is a very serious issue for a married woman like me, as combining bank work with taking good care of my husband and the children have been a very difficult task.

Do you plan to leave the bank anytime soon?

Presently, I am enjoying my job, but I may be leaving in the nearest future for a postgraduate studies abroad.

Interview description 3:

Participant: Mohammed Sulaiman

Can you please introduce yourself?

I am a Chartered Accountant, an ACCA holder, a graduate of Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa, Nigeria. I am presently the Head of Transaction Banking in Gombe branch of Access bank.

What is your life Ambitions?

As a chartered accountant, I have the aspiration to be financially independent through an establishment of an auditing firm in the nearest future.

When did you start your career in Banking?

My banking career begins with First City Monument Bank PLC (FCMB) in 2003, as a fresh graduate, with Assistant Officer 2 grade (AO2), before joining Access bank in 2007.

How will you describe the relationship between your bank and the customers?

Access bank has a cordial relationship with its customers and we in transaction banking always ensure that customers get satisfied before leaving our banking hall.

As an Operations **Staff, how do you contribute to the bank's profitability?**

Our responsibility in operations unit is to provide excellent services to customers, as they work into the bank premises to transact with access bank. This value adding services satisfy the customers and generate income to the bank and helps to retain the customers. Recently; the bank introduces cash mobilization targets for all operations staff, the target amount given depends on the level of the staff.

What determines your level of commitment to Access bank?

Staff friendly policies, promise fulfillment and attractive salary package will normally motivate and enhance my commitment to the bank.

Do you have work life balance?

Having a work life balance in a bank like Access is a serious challenge, especially for those of us in operations/transaction banking and in a branch where the volume of transactions is so high as ours.

Do you plan to leave the bank anytime soon?
I am not planning to leave anytime soon.

Interview description 4:

Participant: Hebert Omuya
Can you please introduce yourself?
I am a business entrepreneur, a major distributor to UNILEVER Nigeria PLC in Gombe. I have been in business since the year 2000, that is about fourteen (14) years ago.

How long have you lived in Gombe?

I have been living in Gombe since the year 2000, that is about fourteen years (14) years ago.

Which banks are you banking with and why?

I am presently banking with Access and Zenith bank. This is because I am enjoying Access bank internet banking services (ACCESSONLINE) more than that of Zenith bank. But I am also banking with Zenith bank because they give loan to support my business.

When did you start banking with your bank?

I started banking with Zenith in 1996 and later opened another account with Access bank in the year 2000 when I became UNILEVER distributor in Gombe.

How will you describe your experience with your banks?

My relationships with my banks have been somehow cordial, but we do experience challenges at times, especially during transactions processing. However; Zenith staffs are friendlier and render more supportive services than Access staff.

Which of the **banks'** services do you prefer most and why?

I prefer internet banking services because it is convenient. It makes it easier for me to transfer money to our major supplier (UNILEVER) in Lagos, without necessarily carrying a 'Ghana must go' sack full of money to deposit in the supplier's bank account.

What is your most valued experience in your bank?

One of my most valued experiences is the daily cash evacuation service. Virtually all the banks provide this service, by visiting our business premises every evening to pick up cash realized from our daily sales.

Would you recommend your banks to your friends?

Of course yes, I will recommend my banks to my friend, depending on what they want, as each of my banks is better in certain aspects of service rendered to customers than their competitors. So, my friend's needs and wants will determine which bank to recommend.

Interview description 5:

Participant: Abraham Imoroa

Can you please introduce yourself?

I am a trader, a major dealer in palm oil in Gombe. I used to travel to the southern part of Nigeria to buy the palm oil for reselling in Gombe metropolis, with over 10 years experience in the business.

How long have you lived in Gombe?

I came to Gombe about Nine (9) years ago, when I brought palm oil for the first time from Onitsha.

Which banks are you banking with and why?

I am presently banking with Access and GTBank. Though their services are almost similar, but I open account with Access because they have a branch in the village where I normally purchase my goods (palm oil), but I am still maintaining an account with GTBank because of the wonderful relationship I am having with the staffs.

When did you start banking with your banks?

I started banking with Access bank as far back as when I was a student at the University of Benin (UNIBEN) Nigeria. I was later convinced by GTBank marketers to open another account with them when I started my palm oil business.

How will you describe your experience with your banks?

Most banks do have one service challenge or the other, so; at times we do experience some issues while transacting with the banks. But personally, I always ignore such service failure especially in GTBank, because of the good rapport I have with the staffs.

Which of the banks' services do you prefer most and why?

The idea of depositing my money in Gombe and cashing it back anywhere in Nigeria is what I enjoyed most in bank services, as it reduced the risk of travelling with huge sum of money within Nigeria.

What is your most valued experience in your banks?

One of my most valued experiences is the good relationship that exists between my bank (GTBank) and I. Since almost all the banks provide the same services, good relationship makes the difference, and that is why I am a loyal customer to them.

Would you recommend your banks to your friends?

I have been recommending my two banks (Access and GTBank) to my friends and family members and will continue to do so.

Interview description 6:

Participant: Ahmed Ibrahim

Can you please introduce yourself?

I am a business man, I am into cow trading. I convey my cattle from the north to the southern part of Nigeria, where there is high demand for cow meat. I have been in this business for more than twenty (20) years.

How long have you lived in Gombe?

I am an indigene of Gombe, born and brought up here. So, I have lived virtually all my lives in Gombe.

Which banks are you banking with and why?

I am a customer to Access, FCMB, and UBA. I opened accounts with these banks to make it more convenient for my customers to pay money into my accounts in any of the banks nearest to them. I recently open another account with Jaiz bank because most of their accounts have no bank charges, they are all COT free. Unlike most other banks that charge *five naira* (N5) *per mille* on individual and corporate current accounts transactions.

When did you start banking with your bank?

I started banking with these banks many years ago, but can't remember the precise dates. This is to facilitate the smooth running of my business.

How will you describe your experience with your banks?
My experiences with most of the banks I patronize can be regarded as smooth and mutually beneficial.

Which of the banks' services do you prefer most and why?
Mobile banking is what I prefer most in bank services, as it affords me the opportunity to carryout transactions anywhere, anytime, any day and even while in the bush rearing cattle.

What is your most valued experience in your bank?

I so much appreciate the kind of rapport and understanding between myself and the account officers who are managing my accounts in those banks.

Would you recommend your banks to your friends?

I will always recommend my banks to business partners, neighbours, friends and relatives.