A STUDY ON SALES PERFORMANCE OF LIQUEFIED PETROLEUM GAS DEALERS IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

This study is an empirical investigation into the extent to which LPG dealers are market oriented and the degree of their sales performance. For the convenience of analysis, study was restricted to seven provinces namely Central, North Central, Eastern, Southern, Western, Sabaragamuwa and Uva Provinces. With the aid of nonrandom convenience judgment sampling technique which helped to get sample on comparable basis 198 LPG dealers were selected. For collecting data, 198 questionnaires which were received back without rejection were administered among the selected respondents. In reviewing the scores obtained by LPG dealers over five year time period ranging from 2004 to 2008 it seems that the scores obtained by LPG dealers above 100% and between 100%- 80% are less than marks scored between 80%-70% and below 60% as revealed by the annual dealer scorecard evaluation process, 2004-2008. Further it was noted from preliminary data survey that customer expectation has not been satisfactorily fulfilled by the LPG dealers. (A.C. Nelson's Report, 2008). Thus, the central problem of this study was why such poor situation has taken place in this sector. The key objective of this study was to examine the extent to which LPG dealers are market oriented. Specific objectives were to identify the marketing practices of dealers to retain existing customers, to identify the endeavor made by the LPG dealers to attract new customers, to identify how often LPG dealers share customer feed-back and competitor information with staff and to provide a better set of suggestions to get LPG dealer market oriented and to get their sales performance higher. Consistent with these objectives research questions were also raised. They are; what is the degree of market orientation? What is the attempt made to retain existing customers? What is the endeavor made to attract new customers? How often do LPG dealers share customer feed-back and disseminate competitor information with staff? In addition to descriptive statistical tools. Which were used to present data, correlation analysis was employed to test the respective hypotheses. For more clarification SPSS computing software version was associated. Bused on the results of discussion it was able to make a conclusion that intelligence collection, intelligent dissemination and response to intelligence highly affect the sales performance subject to the moderation made by market orientation.

Keywords: Intelligence collection, Intelligence dissemination, Response to intelligence, Market orientation, Marketing Mix, Relationship marketing and Market intelligence

1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing is the process of planning and executing the concepts, pricing, promotions and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchange that satisfy individuals and organizational goals. (American Marketing Association, Marketing Management, Philip Kotler, 2000 P.8) Another definition is that marketing is both a relationship with a customer base upon a series of transactions, which should result in mutual benefits and a parallel dialogue between marketers and customers which communicates the information necessary to develop the relationship. (David Mercer, 1999, New Marketing practice P.3) Later, Philip Kotler amended his original definition. Accordingly he has defined marketing as a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups satisfy their needs and wants by creating and exchanging products and values with others. (Philip Kotler, Marketing Management, Millennium Edition, P.8) This definition rests on the concept such as target market, market needs and wants exchange of transaction relationship, segmentation, value and satisfaction, networking, marketing channels, supply chain, competitor environment and marketing mix. There are certain marketing concepts namely production concept, product concept, selling concept, marketing concept and societal marketing concept. Production concept is one of the oldest concept. Production concept holds that customer would prefer product that are widely available and inexpensive. (Philip Kotler, 2000, P.17) Product concept holds that customer would favour those products that offer the most innovative, quality and performance features. (Philip Kotler, 2000, P.17) Selling concept holds that consumers would ordinarily not buy enough the organizations show products therefore undertake an aggressive selling and promotion efforts. (Philip Kotler, 2000, P.18) Marketing concept holds that the key to achieving its organizational objectives consists of the company being more effective than competitors in creating delivering and communicating customer value to its chosen target markets (Philip Kotler, 2000, P.19).

Societal marketing concept holds that the desired satisfaction more efficiently and effectively than competitors in a way that preserves or enhances the consumer's and society's wellbeing (Philip Kotler, 2000, P.25) The key assumption underlying the marketing is that, to be successful a company should determine the needs and wants of specific target markets and deliver the desired satisfaction better than competition (Schiff man, G, and lazer Kanuk, 2004. P.10.). More specifically say, Marketing is a management process that is responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer with a profile to the organization. (Pater Blood, CIM Annual Report, 1996, P.13.).

Thus, marketing should begin with the production of products as per customer expectation. This involves deciding basic segmentation, targeting, positioning, and designing marketing mix decisions. In this case being marketing oriented is essential due to the fact that it facilitates the customer relationships. Customer relationship is developing into major element of corporate strategy for many organizations, which is also known by the other terms such as relationship marketing or customer relationship management. Customer relationship, management is concerned with creation, development and enhancement of individual relationships with carefully targeted customers and customer groups in order to maximize total customer lifetime value (Ray perry 2001. P.74.).

The concept of marketing orientation is relevant to any organizational scenario as customer is the salient and focal component of any organizational step. Various scholars have identified a number of paths that pave the way for market orientation irrespective of industry types or scale of operations. The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer well in

order to sell the products. Ideally, marketing should result in a customer who is ready to buy on a regular basis. All these marketing characteristics are needed to make a product available. (Peter Drucker, 1973). Felton (1959) has described marketing as a way of thinking and doing business that is based on the integration and co-ordination of all marketing activities which in turn would integrate with the rest of the organization's activities in an effort to maximize organizational profitability.

On the other hand the concept "Micro Marketing" is another similar concept, that refers to the performance of activities seeking to accomplish an organization's objectives by anticipating customer's or client's needs and wants by directing a flow of need – satisfying products from producers to customers or clients. (Maccarthy, E.J. and perreanit, 1987.). In this case heterogeneity in needs and wants arrives business organizations to look for distinctive group of customers with rather homogeneous needs are wants that exist potential market when aggregating (Dibb, 1998). The role of Macro Marketing is to efficiently and effectively match these heterogonous supply and demand and at the same time to accomplish society's objectives. Here especially market orientation is essential. Market orientation refers to the ability of an organization to generate, disseminate and make use of superior information about customer and competitor. (Kohil and Jawarshi, 1990). Another definition is that the coordinated application of inter functional resources to create superior customary value. (Narvaer and Slater, 1989) It has been argued that the adaption of true market orientation requires a synthesis of both and disassociation of both may lead to an erroneous viewpoint. (Avionitis and Gounaris, 1997) Market orientation is all-pervading in marketing (Dawes, 2000 and Workman, 2004, Kirca, 2005, and Jaworski, 1993, Naver and Slater, 1990). Particularly, models concerning market orientation, organization performance relationship and its varied moderators are legion in both marketing and management literature. (Gounaris, 2004, Kauda and Buatsi, 2005). Kholi and Jaworski (1990) defined market orientation as the organization- wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs, dissemination of intelligence across other departments of the organization and organization- wide responsiveness

Trout and Rics (1985) Perceive market orientation as an effort to compile market intelligence upon the marketing efforts to the competitive advantage of a business organizations. Elliot (1987) adopted a behavioral approach in explaining market orientation from a different view point. He suggested that although the concept market orientation and the philosophy to set a priority to satisfy customer's needs and wants is important. A strategic behavioral approach in explaining the concept of market orientation has found acceptance that is supported by other authors. (Benoma, 1985 and Berioma and Clark, 1992). A market oriented company seeks to put together its entire organization in a unified and consistent system so that the market's environment grasped and the company as a mobilized in order to produce satisfied customers (Kotler, 1997 and Day, 1998) in the hope of achieving customer loyalty and improved market position in long-run (Day, 1998) Market oriented companies require strategic marketing planning in order to develop strong customer relations, customer value and thus, customer. Loyalty (Dalgic, 2000) while remaining focused on serving its targeted markets (Webster, 1994).

In becoming a market oriented paying attention on marketing mix is valuable. This mix was proposed by Chekitan Dev and Don Schultz in the Marketing Management Journal of the American Marketing association and presented by them in market leader the journal of marketing society in U.K. All these concepts and theoretical matters pointed out so far are

almost applicable to LPG dealer to achieve higher sales performance. The initial role of LPG dealers in the country is to store and sell LPG refilled cylinders to end- customers. LPG dealers are agents of LPG marketing companies. LPG dealers should be able to supply a variety of related services that can be categorized under customer service or after sales services, which are of paramount significance to build customer loyalty. Thus this study attempted to investigate into the extent to which an appreciable marketing mechanism is practiced by LPG marketing companies and LPG dealers in Sri Lanka.

2. METHODOLOGY

As this is empirical in nature a huge attempt was made to collect primary data as much as possible by administering a detailed questionnaire. Before administering questionnaire among total selected sample people, at initial stage a pilot survey was made for the purpose of clarifying the reliability and validity of questionnaire. Having based on the responses made by the respective selected respondents represented in the pilot survey, amended questionnaire was administered among all sample people. Furthermore, additional information were obtained through series of interviews held with the LPG dealers.

The survey was conducted in seven provinces in Sri Lanka. And also, unit of observation was at individual level. The following table shows the distribution of sample selected.

Table 01: Distribution of sample

| Province	Number of LPG dealers
North central province	36
Eastern province	18
Central province	18
Sabaragamuwa province	36
Uwa province	18
Southern province	36
Western province	36
Total	**198**

3. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was carried out subject to the following limitations.

- Due to the convenience of analysis the study was restricted to a selected sample.
- Certain LPG dealers had a great fear of providing data due to business and official secrecy.
- In administering questionnaire and holding interviews some communication barriers were met.
- Some security problems were met in collecting data from North and Eastern provinces.
- Some LPG dealers very often close their business and new LPG dealers come into operation.
- There is a deviation of understanding some fewer number of ventures.

4. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

In building the conceptual framework, major three independent variables namely intelligence collection, intelligence dissemination and response to intelligence and one moderation variable called market orientation were concerned with dependent variable sales performance. Accordingly, following schematic diagram was constructed having taken their interrelationships into account.

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┌─────────────────┐
│   Intelligence  │────────────┐
│    Collection   │            │
└─────────────────┘            ▼
┌─────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────┐    ┌─────────────────┐
│   Intelligence  │───▶│ Market orientation│───▶│      Sales      │
│   Dissemination │    └──────────────────┘    │   Performance   │
└─────────────────┘            ▲               └─────────────────┘
┌─────────────────┐            │
│   Response to   │────────────┘
│   Intelligence  │
└─────────────────┘
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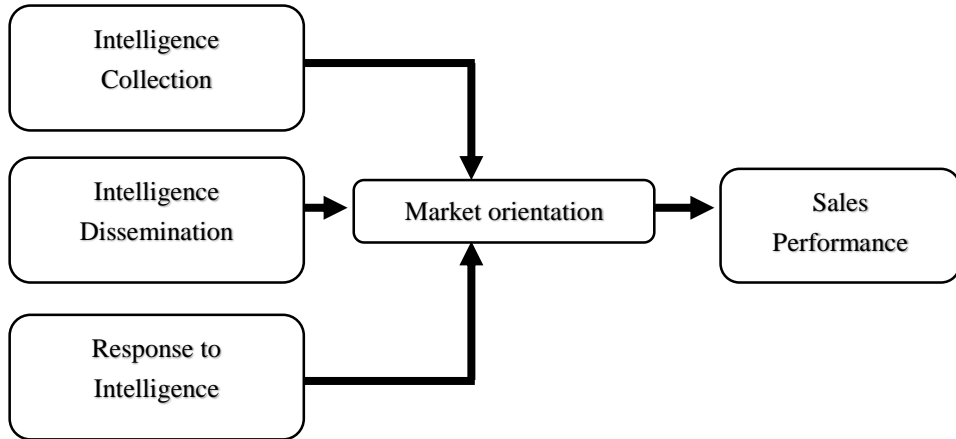
Based on the above conceptual framework following hypotheses were formulated.

H1 - There is a direct relationship between market orientation and sales performance
H2 - Intelligence collection is positively correlated with sales performance with the influence made by market orientation.
H3 - Sales performance is positively affected by intelligence dissemination through market orientation.
H4 - Response to intelligence makes influence on sales performance through market orientation.

Mean values and standard deviations were computed with the aid of five point scale in respect of independent variables used to present data. The respective continuum was worked out by including the range running from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Weightages or values of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 were allocated to responses taking direction of the questions into consideration. With regard to 30 questions on operationalizing the extent influence, the following score values are presented.

30 x 5   = 150 satisfactory responses
30 x 4   = 120
30 x 3   = 90 Neutral responses
30 x 2   = 60
30 x 1   = 30 unsatisfactory responses

Unsatisfactory responses lies between 30 and 70, any score between 70 and 110 refer to a mediocre response. Also, scores between 110 and 150 would mean a satisfactory response. Accordingly, other variables were also scaled out along with a continuum.

5. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The reliability of a measure indicates the extent to which it is without bias (error free) and hence ensure consistent measurement across the different items in the instrument (Umasekaran,2006) In other words, the reliability of a measure is an indication of the stability and consistency with the instrument measures the concept and helps to assess the "goodness" of a measure.

Under the validity the euthenics of the cause - effect relationships (internal validity) and their generalizability to the external environment (external validity) are concerned (Umasekaran, 2006) validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure (Kethari, 1999) The most popular test of inter item consistency of reliability is the cronbach's alpha (cronbach's alpha; cronbach's 1946) which is used for multi-point selected items, and the Kuder- Richardson formula (Kuder and Richardson, 1937) was used for dichotomous items. The higher the coefficients, the better the measuring instrument would be reliable when it gives consistent results (Tuckman, 1972, Kothari, 1995).

The reliability of the scores obtained at the two different times from one and the same set of respondents was tested with test - retest method. The test - retest coefficients were 0.90 and 0.94 for scales performance of LPG dealers and other three variables respectively. A very good inter item reliability was identified as the cronbach's alpha was 0.8510 for each.

6. RESULTSAND DISCUSSION

Under this, at first, each independent variable was taken into consideration with the view to examine the degree to which LPG dealers make responses on those variables. Accordingly, in case of intelligence collection the following data were computed.

Table 2: Intelligence collection

Intelligence collection	Frequency	Percent
Highly collect customer and competitor intelligence	00	00%
Moderately collect customer and competitor intelligence	93	48%
Low collection of customer and competitor intelligence	105	52%
Total	198	100%

Source: Survey Data

As indicated by the above table, it was noted that more LPG dealers do not make an effort to collect intelligence from both customers and competitors. With respect to high category all LPG dealers score zero value which reveals their poor attention paid on intelligence collection. In all respect, considering LPG dealers are in a poor situation in respect of intelligence collection.   The following descriptive statistical enumerations demonstrate more information regarding LPG dealer's poor attempt made to collect intelligence relating to customers and competitors.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of intelligence collection

Measure	Value
Mean	23.0101
Standard Error of Mean	0.53095
Median	23.0000
Mode	30.00
Standard deviation	7.47109
Variance	55.817
Range	23.00
Sum	4556.00

Source: Survey data

According to the mean value in the above table it seems that LPG dealers have a less involvement in collecting intelligence from both customers and competitors. The median and mode values further confirm this unpleasant climate well. The following table reveals the degree to which LPG dealers make an effort to disseminate intelligence among their staff and other related persons.

Table 4: Intelligence dissemination

Intelligence dissemination	Frequency	Percent
Highly disseminate intelligence	00	00
Moderately disseminate intelligence	73	36.87
Low level of intelligence dissemination	125	63.13
Total	198	100

Source: - Survey Data

As revealed by the above table noticeable matter to be taken into consideration is that all LPG dealers are almost poor with regard to high dissemination of intelligence. In case of moderately dissemination of intelligence the frequency as well as percentage is high in respect of low level of intelligence dissemination, so in all respect intelligence dissemination made by LPG dealers is almost poor.

The following table further reveals the situation relating to this particular matter.

Table 5: Descriptive statistical enumerations corresponding to intelligence dissemination

Measures	Values
Mean	13.8687
Standard Error of Mean	0.32233
Median	3.0000
Mode	19.00
Standard deviation	4.53558
Variance	20.572
Range	12.00
Sum	2746.00

Source: Survey data

As indicated by the above table it can be noted that median and mean and mode values are 13.0, 13.8687 and 19.0 respectively. Though mode value represents the moderately important score category both median and mean belong to, low level dissemination category. Thus majority of LPG dealers have less involvement in intelligence dissemination among respective persons.

In reviewing data pertaining to response to intelligence represented in the following table in all respect it is also at almost a poor level.

Table 6: Response to intelligence

Response to intelligence	Frequency	Percent
Highly Response to intelligence	00	00
Moderate Response to intelligence	127	64.14
Low Response to intelligence	71	35.86
Total	198	100

Source: Survey data

This table shows that making high response is almost zero. Compared to low category majority of LPG dealers show moderately response to intelligence. Whatever the situation is not at appreciable level due to the fact that high response category scores zero value. Relatively to other two independent variables this is somewhat at satisfactory level as it takes high values in respect of moderately response to intelligence.

The following descriptive statistical measures show the above situation clearly.

Table 7: Descriptive statistical measures of response to intelligence

Measures	Values
Mean	22.9293
Standard Error of Mean	0.36290
Median	24.0000
Mode	24.00
Standard deviation	5.10649
Variance	26.076
Range	17.00
Sum	4540.00

Source: Survey data

In checking all above values it seems that all measurements of central tendency belong to moderately response category. Accordingly, LPG dealers are somewhat good in respect of response to intelligence. In concerning market orientation made by LPG dealers, the following results were found.

Table 8: The degree market orientation

Market orientation	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Market oriented	00	00
Moderately Market oriented	93	46.9
Not Market oriented	105	53.1
Total	198	100

Source: Survey data

In marking a review of above figures, the poor situation to be noted is that majority of LPG dealers are pertaining to not market oriented category. They are almost nil in respect of strongly market-oriented category. Compared to not market-oriented category moderately market oriented category is also at poor situation. The following table depicts descriptive statistical computations made relating to measurements of central tendencies.

Table9: Descriptive statistics of overall market orientation

Measures	Values
Mean	58.257
Standard Error of Mean	0.99605
Median	58.0000
Mode	41.00
Standard deviation	14.01571
Variance	196.440
Range	38.00
Sum	11535.00

Source: Survey data

As indicated by mean value, it is understood that LPG dealers have low tendency to become market-orientation here the central tendency values also belong to low score category. It is also a better evidence. In that sense it can be said that in all respect LPG dealers market orientation is highly poor.

7. TESTING HYPOTHESES

H1 - There is a direct relationship between market orientation and sales performance. Based on the following test result this hypothesis was checked.

Table 10: Correlations (i)

	Total Market orientation	Sales
Total Market orientation	1	.712
Pearson correlation	198	.000
Sig (2-tailed)		198
N		
Sales		1
Pearson correlation	.712	198
Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
N	198	

Here Pearson correlation between sales performance and total market orientation is .712. This is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed). Therefore, it seems that there is a considerable relationship between sales performance and total market orientation. Accordingly respective hypothesis can be accepted.

H2. Intelligence collection is positively correlated with sales performance with the influence made by market orientation. Following table shows the respective test results.

Table 11: Correlations (ii)

	Sales	Intelligence collection
Sales Pearson correlation	1	.558
Sig (2-tailed)	198	.000
N		198
Intelligence collection		
Pearson correlation	.558	1
Sig (2-tailed)	.00	198
N	198	

Since correction coefficient is .558 and it is significant at.0l levels, it is understood that 95% confidence level, there is a relationship between intelligence collection and sales performance across market orientation. Thus respective hypothesis can be accepted.

H3 – Sales performance is positively affected by intelligence dissemination through market orientation. The following test results imply the influence made by intelligence dissemination on sales performance.

Table 12: Correlations (iii)

	Sales	**Intelligence dissemination**
Pearson correlation	1	.766
Sig (2-tailed)	198	.000
N		198
Intelligence dissemination		
Pearson correlation	.766	1
Sig (2-tailed)	000	198
N	198	

The rest results show the correlation coefficient is .766 at .01 level and at 95% confidence level so, there is a relationship between intelligence dissemination and sales performance. Accordingly respective hypothesis can be accepted.

H4 – Response to intelligence makes influence on sales performance through market orientation. The following table reveals the test results.

Table 13: Correlations (iv)

	Sales	**Response to Intelligence**
Pearson correlation	1	.457
Sig (2-tailed)	198	.000
N		198
Intelligence dissemination		1
Pearson correlation	.457	198
Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
N	198	

Here Pearson correlation coefficient is .457 and it is significant at 95% confidence level. Based on these test results respective hypothesis can be accepted.

8. SUMMARY

More specifically say, under the present study an attempt was made to seek how far Sri Lankan LPG dealers are oriented in their respective business. In this case, a well-formed methodological choice was applied to work out the overall study within the self-constructed theoretical model. Entire study was systematized as per the research methodology. The individual characteristics such as age, educational level and the number of years of service in the related field were not associated as they are not relevant to the problem that was focused. The primary determinants of the market orientation were considered as intelligence collection, intelligence dissemination and response to intelligence which are more related to the individual characteristics of LPG dealers in Sri Lanka. Thus, the overall data analysis part was geared up by the theoretical model built.

Along with the contextual texture of the variables represented in the model, data were analyzed by testing hypotheses, which explicitly confirmed the theoretical aspect of marketing in the context of LPG dealers in the Country.

Eventually, it was noted, that a stronger relationship appeared among the independent variables such as collection of intelligence, dissemination of intelligence and response to intelligence moderating variable, market orientation and dependent variable, sales performance. Based on the test results, it was able to provide a better set of findings as well as a set of suggestions mentioned below.

9. FINDINGS

As per the study, it was able to discover the salient points that affect the sales performance of LPG dealers in the industry.

- The finding shows that only 9.1% of respondents have achieved 100 percent sales targets and other 90.9% of respondents are below the expected level of sales performances. In other words, there is a considerably higher number of LPG dealers who have failed to achieve their sales targets. Furthermore, about 45.5% of LPG dealers have not sold the entire product range of LP gas. Therefore, the findings confirmed that the sales performance of LPG dealers are far below the required level. The reason behind the above situation is directly attributable to poor market orientation of LPG dealers, which was measured statistically. As indicated by the test results, the LPG dealers are poor in case three elements such as collection of intelligence, dissemination of intelligence and response to intelligence, which eventually has led to poor sales performance of LPG dealers.

- Another finding is the poor marketing and management practice which is prevalent over majority of LPG dealers in the Country. Especially, it should be mentioned that the overall management style of the dealers have been considerably inflexible and traditional. This is highly visible in making efforts to collect information, disseminate intelligence and respond to intelligence and in the overall context of their day-to-day operations. This is where the LPG dealers seemed to have failed in the inter-functional coordination in terms of collection, dissemination and response to market intelligence. Similarly, the crewmembers of dealers seemed lack of participation, that, has led to poor product offering to the customers. Therefore, this has caused to poor market orientation that eventually has led to poor sales performance.

- The LPG companies too have poor in market intelligence in terms of their customers, potential users and their needs and wants, that has adversely impacted on their relationship with respective LPG dealers in the Country.

- On the other hand, it seemed that the lack of willingness of LPG dealers to sell the LPG accessory range not only highlights the lack of enthusiasm of LPG dealers to become market-oriented, but also to go the extra mile to perform in terms of sales. The lack of LPG dealers to place emphasis on market-orientation was unquestionably apparent.

- In case of overall management function of LPG dealerships, some of the key pessimistic factors such as supply issues, poor site maintenance, lack of capacity planning and functional delays were too noted and they have added to the issue of poor market orientation. This has invariably led to lack of sales performance, which has been numerically shown under the statistical data.

- The labour management of the LPG dealership too seemed far below the expectation and that has contributed to the so-called lack of market-orientation and poor sales performance. This has not only impacted on their role in collecting market and customer information but also on the side of the delivery of customer satisfaction through their product/service offering. This must be improved, which leads to improve the quality of their service levels. This is one of the elements that have caused blockages in the overall market-oriented function.
- On the other hand, the tendency to collect intelligence by LPG dealers is an implication of their degree of customer orientation and competitor orientation. The statistical evidence presented has explicitly highlighted that fact the LPG dealers are poor in the context of the collection of intelligence which stands as a blockage in becoming market-oriented, In other words, the LPG dealers seemed careless on the side of getting to know their customer better.
- The tendency to disseminate intelligence too seemed considerably poor which has been statistically explained. Hence, this shows that the inter-functional coordination and communication among dealers are at very poor level. In other words, the failure of LPG dealers to disseminate information stands as a blockage in the path to become market-oriented. The failure dissemination of intelligence under the respective hypotheses testing was explicitly shown as a key factor that has made LPG dealers less market-oriented.
- In the context of responding to intelligence, it shows that the responses of LPG dealers regarding different aspects of their business to responded to market intelligence stands at a considerably low level. This shows that the high significant category is zero and the moderate response category represents 64.14% of LPG dealers of the sample. Accordingly, 35.86% of the sample is in the low significant category.

Overally say, the degree of market orientation of LPG dealers is considerably poor, which has adversely impacted on the sales performance of LPG dealers. From marketing point of view, it can be said that their marketing practice and the selling mechanism are almost ineffective. The test results showed that the all independent variables are strongly correlated with market orientation and sales performance of LPG dealers.

10. CONCLUSION

The study produced a great deal of insights relating to the degree of market orientation and sales performance of LPG dealers who are dispersed in the Country. Thus, the in depth analysis of the facts revealed some interesting insights, which can be beneficial not only to the LPG dealers but also to the customers and the industry as a whole.

The influence of market orientation on LPG dealer's sales performance is rated high as per the statistical analysis that is presented in the data analysis section. In other words, the marketing practices of LPG dealers such as collection of LPG dealers, dissemination of intelligence and response to intelligence is crucial for becoming market oriented, that eventually get transformed into sales performance as numerically shown in the data analysis section.

The so-called market-orientation consists of three elements such as Intelligence collection, intelligence dissemination and repose to intelligence. successful test of the model shows that adequate variations exist in market orientation and other constructs in the model.

Thus, market orientation may not be culture bound. This study confirms that further attention to most scales in market orientation is essential.

In order to investigate the convergent validity of the measurement, the extent of influence of intelligence collection, Intelligence dissemination and response to intelligence were examined in relation to sales performance. The behavioral dimensions have been validated for measuring behavioral aspects of market orientation. It was concluded that the market oriented organizations outperform all others in their dimensions as motioned in the theoretical model of this study. It can be further concluded that market orientation is known to have a positively impact on organizational performance.

In the context of LPG dealers, the analysis shows that the majority of LPG dealers have failed to practice the principles of market orientation. In other words, they have failed in all aspects of market-orientation such as collection of intelligence, dissemination of intelligence and response to intelligence. This shows that the LPG dealers have been poorly focused in terms of collecting. Information relating customers and competitors. Eventually, this leads to lack of response to customer needs and competitor activities.

The result of the Pearson correlation analysis that were performed for each variable explicitly and numerically shows that a strong relationship exists between market orientation and sales performances of LPG dealers. In other words, the numerical explanations explaining the degree of influence are as follows.

When one unit of market orientation positively varies, the corresponding positive variance of sales performance of LPG dealers is 71%.

When one unit of collection of intelligence positively varies, the corresponding positive variance of sales performance of LPG dealers is 56%.

When one unit of dissemination of intelligence positively varies, the corresponding positive variance of sales performance of LPG dealers is 77%.

When one unit of response to intelligence positively varies, the corresponding positive variance of sales performance of LPG dealers is 46%.

Finally, it comes the implementation of their strategies to become market-oriented so as to enhance their business performance. This includes a change the way they operate in terms of getting to know the customer better and responding through a planned manner, which must be originated within the organization. By introducing such Changes, dealers can progressively increase their orientation and thus the value they deliver to the customer. Further by monitoring the results of re-orientation efforts and managing the knowledge that they develop from their experience, the LPG dealers can further fine-tune their practices and enhance their adoption to the market environment in which they operate.

11. IMPLICATIONS

As analysis of data revealed, the knowledge of LPG dealers on basic and operational marketing aspects is the key to include them to marketing and customer service and basic business management practices which eventually lead to sales and profitability. Therefore,

the LPG marketing companies should take the following steps to inculcate the importance of being profit-oriented.

- Awareness session by way of regular meeting on operational aspects of marketing.
- Assigning targets in each business function such as quantitative, i.e. – Sales targets and qualitative i.e. expected marketing and customers service levels.
- Launching a reward system and recognizing best performance.
- Evaluating and suggesting, areas for development by way of development plans.
- Replacing poor performers with new dealerships.

12. SUGGESTIONS

The following are the suggestions to transform the LPG dealers to become market-oriented.

- The LPG dealers should be educated with regard to the intelligence collection, intelligence dissemination and response to intelligence and so on. Indeed, this should be measured and rewarded via a competition among LPG dealers.
- A better monitoring system should be introduced to LPG dealers to monitor their performance on regular basis.
- The dealers should be trained well on the marketing philosophy and the societal marketing concept via workshops, lecture sessions, training programs and vocational and career development programs.
- The LPG dealers should be educated on the concept of customer sovereignty, business ethics and social responsibility.
- Dealers' inter functional commitment and linkage should be further enhanced and a sound policy should be followed to maintain and develop dealer customer relationship.
- The LPG companies should play a key role in making dealers market oriented by regular monitoring, performance measurement and rewards and recognition.
- Finally, a thorough and broad based understanding should be given to LPG dealers on need analysis, customer and competitor orientation, inter and inter functional orientation, market orientation, mass customization, market positioning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and evaluation , designing of marketing mix, determining promo tools and core marketing concepts.

13. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Throughout the study, an endeavor was made to make a search of the degree of market orientation of LPG dealers in Sri Lanka. During the period of making the data survey in this particular study, further researchable areas were found. Accordingly, some noticeable researchable areas are cited below for the purpose of facilitating to those who are interested in this particular field.

- Market potentiality for LP gas dealers in Sri Lanka.
- The degree of commercialization of LP gas dealers in Sri Lanka
- Buyer behavior with LP gas dealers in Sri Lanka
- Market orientation of the LPG companies in Sri Lanka
- Effect of monopolistic behavior of LP gas industry in Sri Lanka

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