

## **The Relationship between Customer Knowledge Management, Customer Relationship with Organizational Innovation and Customer Loyalty (Case Study: Consumers and Manufacturers of Protein Industry in Isfahan Province)**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study was aimed to assess the relationship between customer knowledge management and customer relationship management, with organizational innovation and customer loyalty (for consumers and retailers of protein industry in Isfahan province). The statistical population consisted of all employees (1385 people) and customers of nine production and distribution groups of the protein products in Isfahan province. Corresponding to the number in each group, stratified random sampling was made based on the contributions made, and 451 questionnaires were analyzed regarding the number of people in each group. The findings showed that there was a significant correlation between customer loyalty and customer relationship management, customer knowledge management and organizational innovation ( $P < 0.01$ ). The values of effective coefficients;  $\beta$ , showed that for every unit increase in innovation, knowledge management, and customer relationship management, the customer loyalty was increased 0.332, 0.331 and 0.331 units, respectively. According to the results of this study, it could be suggested that the protein industry retailers, must incorporate knowledge based and relationship marketing tools, such as customer relationship management, and customer knowledge management, for implementing customer loyalty strategies. Results of this study showed that organizational innovation should be considered as the first priority for implementing loyalty strategies of the organization.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Customer Knowledge Management, Customer Relationship Management, Innovation, Customer Loyalty*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, the concept of market competition is much deeper and more professional. The least negligence in keeping up with market changes and needs can lead to organizational death. Since market competition is becoming more intense day by day, responding to customer needs aiming at attracting and satisfying customer needs and creating loyalty is of high importance. Accordingly, companies should emphasize on the maintenance of current customers and the establishment of long-term and profitable relationships with them. Nowadays, we are seeing a fundamental change in how top companies are organized. Organizational structure is shifted from product-oriented to customer-oriented approach and the main factor driving this change is the emergence of a phenomenon named Customer Relationship Management. In fact, Customer Relationship Management Approach requires organizations to go beyond the basic needs of customers, meet customers' expectations and shift their main focus from customer satisfaction to the establishment of customer loyalty. In the business framework, organizations should have loyal customers who are committed to do business with the particular organization and regularly buy goods or services.

Organizations try to penetrate customer's tacit knowledge and transfer it bilaterally to the organization and customer and its customers by interactive relationship with them (customer relationship management). In addition to providing welfare services to meet the customers' needs, organizations have access to customers' source of knowledge by customer knowledge management and can reach innovation which can be a competitive advantage in today's turbulent business world. In this way, organizations could provide customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. In many previous studies that have been undertaken in the context of CKM, the impact of applying CKM on competitive advantage, innovation in products and services, and increasing customer loyalty has been investigated. In these studies, there has been many emphasizes on the integration of CRM and KM and the need to consider CKM is well represented in today's competitive world, but the way it affects and its

implementations still remain unknown in today's competitive world, and its strategies have not been well understood. Establishing innovative strategies in representing products and services, how to present services, and how to introduce them to the market can all lead to success in growing global competition with customer knowledge management considering customer knowledge that was achieved through interactions between customers and organization. The main objective of this study was to determine the relationship between customer knowledge management and customer relationship management with organizational innovation and customer loyalty, and follows the following sub-goals:

- [1]. To determine the relationship between customer knowledge management and customer relationship management
- [2]. To determine the relationship between customer knowledge management and organizational innovation

## **II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Main research question

Is there a relationship between customer knowledge management, customer relationship management and organizational innovation, customer loyalty?

Secondary research questions

Are customer knowledge management, customer relationship management and innovation capable of predicting customer loyalty?

## **III. RESEARCH THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

**customer loyalty** : Although there is no comprehensive definition for customer loyalty, earlier research suggests that loyalty is attitudinal commitment and behavioral [1]. Based on attitudinal approach, loyalty comes when there are positive beliefs about a brand [2],[3]. Attitudinal approach is conceptually rich but large-scale data collection is problematic for researchers. As a result, most empirical research has focused on behavioral loyalty [4]. Usually, behavioral loyalty is defined based on customers' intend to purchase a brand based on the past experiences [5]. Loyalty is a deep commitment to buy a favorite product or service again in the future despite environmental influences and marketing efforts of competitors to change behavior [6] or the existence of a positive attitude to a brand, service, market or a dealer and supportive behavior [7] or developing commitment for doing transaction with a certain organization and buying goods and services frequently [8],[9]. Loyalty is when customers surely feel that an organization is able to satisfy their needs in the best way, so that the organization's competitors are out of the customer's consideration and he only buys from this organization [10].

**The concept of innovation** : Bates & Khasawaneh(2005) have defined innovation as the acceptance and application of innovative methods and new knowledge, including the ability to accept or create a new concept and application of these ideas to develop and refine products, services, procedures, new work processes, as well as an intangible resource which is impossible to imitate [11]. In another definition, innovation is any type of thinking, behavior, or something that is qualitatively new compared to existing forms [12]. From a competitive point of view, organizations which encourage innovation to achieve competitive advantage, the knowledge and new ideas of employees and managers are used in order to produce new products and services according to customers' requirements. Some innovations are used in new products, services, technologies and management methods [13].

**The concept of Customer Relationship Management** :Customer Relationship Management is a holistic approach to managing customer relationships and creating value for shareholders. Customer relationship management integrates marketing strategies and the use of information technology to create profitable, long term relationships with customers and other stakeholders [14],[15],[16],[17]. Using CRM, a company can increase its knowledge about customers and thereby enables higher capacity to meet customers' needs and increase customer value and profit [18],[19],[20]. Different definitions of CRM have been proposed by researchers. Some researchers defined Customer Relationship Management as strategy; some as technology, some as process and other considered it as information system [21]. CRM consists of methodologies, processes, soft wares that assist in organized management of customer relationships [22]. Customer Relationship Management means creating and maintaining profitable customer relationships by identifying appropriate use of information and communication technologies [16]. Customer relationship management, as a process, consists of monitoring customer, appropriate data collection, management and evaluation of data, and finally, creating real advantage of the extracted data in their interactions [23]. Benefits of using CRM Benefits of using CRM tools are not just for the organization; they also include customer benefits. Increasing the reliability, employees' familiarity with customers and developing friendly relations with them, enjoying more services and higher

priority than other clients which are positive things that comes with CRM customers. Moreover, since customers are one of the main organization assets, using this approach helps to maintain current customers and encourages them to buy back which is the underlying goal of any organization. Another advantage of using customer relationship management is that collecting customer information in a database enables organizations to classify customers according to organizations' criteria. Removing unprofitable customers can increase profits and reduce costs. In fact, CRM creates a database of customer data to identify and classify customers according to various criteria such as the amount of purchases, types of tastes and interests, lifestyle and with the analysis of this data loyal and profitable customers are identified for the organization. Accordingly, the organization can communicate with target customers and analyze the results and achievements [24].

### **The concept of Knowledge Management**

Due to the development of a variety of products and services offered by the organization, the competition is more intense among market populations. Consequently, the success and survival of organizations have been under numerous challenges. In the meantime, the organization's ability to absorb and apply knowledge inside and outside of the organization is a simple but practical way, to create a competitive advantage. Managers are able to create competitive advantage by managing hidden and obvious knowledge properly [25]. Knowledge management can be understood as a creative, effective and efficient use of knowledge in order to attract and retain customers and improve the organization [26].

**The concept of customer knowledge management :** Nowadays, customer is the most important source of knowledge for the organizations. Researchers believe that customers gain a large amount of knowledge and experiences by using a product or service. This knowledge has become an important resource for organizations, and achieving it has become the new competition for the organizations. On the other hand, customers need knowledge to make the best purchase which should be provided by organizations. Knowledge management and customer relationship management both rely on the resources to support company's business processes. Customer Relationship Management looks at customers as the current and future success of the company, while knowledge management considers knowledge availability in a company as a success agent. However, in recent studies, organizational knowledge about the customer and the knowledge it provides for the customer have been recognized as major factors in the success of the company. Therefore, combining both customer relationship management and knowledge management, identified as customer knowledge management, is known to be an appropriate solution for achieving knowledge of the customer and providing the best and most relevant knowledge. In the previous marketing studies, the main emphasis was on increasing the sale and applying pressure on customers to purchase, but in customer knowledge management, the emphasis is on providing the best needed customer knowledge to allow him to make a proper decision. When presenting this knowledge, organizations should try to gain customer knowledge and use it in their business processes. In fact, customer knowledge management applies knowledge management as a supportive tool in customer knowledge management to provide customer's needed knowledge and facilitate the access to knowledge. On the other hand, customer knowledge management tries to earn customer knowledge. Customer Knowledge Management tries to accumulate knowledge, facilitate access to knowledge, cultural knowledge and knowledge capitals to make better use of this knowledge.

In knowledge management literature, little attention has been on customer knowledge. Collection, handling and sharing customer knowledge can be a valuable competitive tool that businesses companies and professionals paid less attention to. We are looking to provide a conceptual model of the customer knowledge merge customer knowledge as a part of company's knowledge and suggest a process of knowledge exchange with customers. We focus on a part of knowledge that comes from interacting with customers [27]. It seems that personal interaction with the customer, as opposed to transaction data, lead to richer contents and can help to explain consumers' behavior. Companies can directly ask questions from customers by personal interactions, and achieve an idea of the source of their problems, preferences and needs. Customer knowledge deals with two different aspects of knowledge: a) the customer knowledge on topics that are related to products or services which he is interested in buying, b) knowledge that the company should have to assist customers in purchasing decisions. The quality of communicating with customers is a central ability which can be gained through marketing functions. A few firms are able to effectively organize these conversations and use what they know to add more value for customers and ultimately improve their performance. Customer knowledge management is the best process by which integrates concepts and knowledge management technologies to help organizations understand their customers as well as representing services and learning from them [28]. To respond customer needs, organizations need to have technology-based information and knowledge about the customer's perspective [29].

CRM and KM are complementary and enable companies to create strong and beneficial relationship for both parties. Knowledge Management enables CRM to move from mechanical, data-driven technology approach to create customer knowledge which is more complicated and holistic [28]. Customer Knowledge Management in comparison with Customer Relationship Management and Knowledge Management At first glance, CKM may appear to be just another name for KM and CRM, but customer knowledge managers need different ways from the methods used in KM and CRM. Table (1) compares CKM with KM and CRM. As an indication of CRM, customer relationship managers focus on knowledge from customers more than customer knowledge. In other words, smart organizations have found that customers are more aware than employees who seek knowledge in direct interactions between the customers and search knowledge about customers from sale representatives. Similarly, common knowledge managers focus on training employees to share knowledge instead of collecting it [28]. KM specifically focuses on encouraging and strengthening the productive relations and partnerships in line with the motto "if we only knew what we know", while CKM suggests another dimension "if we only knew what the customer would know." But why would customers want to share their knowledge with the company and then pay for their knowledge which developed in the products? This attitude is related to a shift towards considering customers as the source of knowledge. This change in attitude has a broad meaning. The most important thing is that customers have changed from passive recipients of products and services (as in traditional knowledge management) and has been released from common applications in the chain of CRM.

CKM is also different from traditional KM in pursuing goals. Considering the fact that KM is seeking to efficiency and productivity, CKM is in line with innovation and progress. Customer knowledge managers seek opportunities to collaborate with customers as value creators. This is obvious in the tendency to maintain the existing customer in CRM. Note the proverb that says "customer retention is cheaper than finding one" Unfortunately, customer retention is extremely hard in an era when similar products of competitors are only a few clicks away from the customer. Thus, customer knowledge managers are less concerned about the customer. They are more concerned about how to develop an organization to gain new customers and increase the value of using an active dialogue with them [28].

**Table 1: Comparison of Knowledge Management, Customer Knowledge Management and Customer Relationship Management**

	<b>KM</b>	<b>CRM</b>	<b>CKM</b>
<b>Knowledge source</b>	Employees, Team, Company, A Network of Companies	Databases related to customer	The creativity and customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction about goods or services
<b>General Rule</b>	wish we already knew what we know now	Customer retention is more cost effective to attract customers	wish we knew the things that our customers know
<b>Rational reason</b>	Integration and the emergence of knowledge about customers, sales process and research and development	Extracting knowledge about customers in company database	Direct acquisition of customers and sharing knowledge and developing knowledge
<b>Goals</b>	Increase in efficiency, reduce costs, avoid duplication	Fostering main customers and maintaining core customers.	Collaborate with customers to gain added value
<b>Measurement Indicators</b>	Performance as compared to funds spent	Performance in customer satisfaction and loyalty	performance in innovation and growth, the role of failure in customer success in comparison with competitors
<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Customer Satisfaction</b>	<b>Customer retention</b>	<b>Customer success, innovation and organizational learning</b>
<b>Recipients</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Customers</b>	<b>Customers</b>
<b>The Role of Customers</b>	<b>Passive, recipient of products or services</b>	<b>Bound, dependent on the product or service due to his loyalty</b>	<b>Active participation in the processes of value creation</b>
<b>The Role of Company</b>	<b>Encourage employees to share their knowledge with their colleagues</b>	<b>create former relationships with customers</b>	<b>converting customers from absolute users of goods to value creators</b>

#### IV. RESEARCH VARIABLES

The need for knowledge management for customer loyalty : In the era of knowledge-based economy where firms have to move towards knowledge, customers are essential sources of knowledge for firms. Achieving knowledge from customer to understand their needs and their impact on the improvement or development of new products may be necessary and useful for the firms. Thus, representing a model to show the process of accessing to customer knowledge would be useful to achieve competitive advantage in firms. Key

area for customer satisfaction is when the customer has a problem and needs a respond for it. This creates a strong relationship with the customer. Nevertheless, it is not simply possible without knowledge management.

## **V. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOYALTY AND INNOVATION**

Nowadays, identifying and anticipating customer needs is necessary for the firms to get competitive advantage and market segmentation. Customers are key factors in enhancing organizational agility and orienting organizational goals, strategies and resources revolved around attracting and retaining customers. Increased customer loyalty leads to enhanced market share and profitability. Market understanding and planning strategies for loyal customers causes long-term benefits for firms [30]. An important issue that has an impact on customer satisfaction, and ultimately his loyalty is company's focus on innovative products and services. Innovation is not merely creating new and innovative products; it is also the development of new concepts in business. Marketers play a critical role in triggering innovation, estimation and identification of potential compounds and their properties and applications of new supply [31]. Goods and services are presented to the market in order to satisfy and meet the needs of each customer. On the other hand, customers support manufacturers and service providers.

The relationship between knowledge and innovation Knowledge is the basis and important factor of competition. In addition to knowledge, innovation is the most important factor for survival in technology and knowledge based companies. The process of knowledge creation is knowledge production, and eventually turns it into products and services through innovation concept. Innovation research suggests that companies require complementary assets such as innovations to turn new technology into commercial success. Credited with inventing firms with larger, in response to changing environments and the development of new capabilities that allow them to achieve better performance will be more successful [32]. Knowledge management has a key role in supporting and fostering innovation. Knowledge management is a very important concept that provides the context for innovation. Knowledge management is necessary for the successful production of new products and innovation in companies. Innovation is also able to convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge [33]. Therefore, companies need to have an organizational value structure help the transfer (transfer of tacit knowledge into explicit). The first task of innovative companies is re-combining the knowledge and resources to discover new knowledge [34],[35].

## **VI. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In this study, we followed characteristics of a group (consumers of protein industry) in a particular situation and aid in decision making by examining the relationship between knowledge management, Customer relationship management, organizational innovation and customer loyalty as a model. The present study is practical in method and data collection is descriptive correlation. Population and statistical sample The population in this study consists of all employees (1385) and customers and distributors of nine groups of protein products.

**Sampling :** The stratified sampling was done according to the population in each group. With regard to the involvement of employees Statistics, the sample size was estimated 451 individuals and 451 questionnaires were distributed to the research groups. 451 questionnaires were returned and analyzed.

## **VII. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

In Data collection, we calculated the sample size ( $n = 451$ ) referred to 9 companies mentioned in Table 3-1. Based on sampling formula and according to the sampling frame, the required number of customers and staff in each group was determined using stratified random sampling based on the selected portion and the questionnaires were distributed among them. The researcher was present in General Administration for 1.5 months to distribute the questionnaires and collected the required data.

### **Research tools**

For data collection two questionnaires were used in this study:

- A) The questionnaire for the staff which consists of two main parts.
  - 1) The first section included questions to collect demographic data (sex, marital status, position, education) and consists of 4 questions.
  - 2) The second section contains specific questions related to employees on a Likert scale (standard questionnaire has been used as described in Table (2)).

**Table 2: The combination of parameters of questions in the questionnaire (A)**

Variables	
Customer Relationship Management	Technological Dimension
	Process Dimension
	Human Dimension
	Strategic Dimension
Customer Knowledge Management	Gaining Knowledge
	Creating Knowledge
	Sharing Knowledge
	Applying Knowledge
Organizational Innovation	Technological Innovation
	Executive Innovation
	Innovation Culture

B) The questionnaire related to the customers which of consists of two main parts.

- The first part includes questions to collect demographic data (sex, marital status, history, dating, education, occupation) and consists of 5 questions.

The second section contains specific questions related to customers on a Likret scale (standard questionnaire has been used as described in Table (3)).

**Table 3: The combination of parameters of questions in the questionnaire (B)**

Variables	
Customer Loyalty	Trading
	Perceptual
	Compound

In this study, Cronbach's alpha was applied to determine the reliability of the test. This method is for calculating the internal consistency of the measurement instrument used to measure different attributes.

For this purpose, an initial sample consisted of 30 questionnaires were pre-tested and then test reliability was tested by Cronbach's alpha coefficient using the data obtained from the questionnaires and SPSS statistical software. The value obtained for each tool is described in Table (4). These numbers indicate that the questionnaire has the necessary reliability and validity.

**Table 4: Evaluation of model fit indices**

Questionnaire	Cronbach's alpha for total questionnaire	Number of Questions
Customer Relationship Management Questionnaire	0.815	16
Customer Knowledge Management Questionnaire	0.855	11
Organizational Innovation Questionnaire	0.863	18
Customer Loyalty Questionnaire	0.943	15

## VIII. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

In this research, descriptive and inferential statistical methods are used. Descriptive statistics were used to interpret the results of the study and the mean frequency tables. The Data were analyzed separately for each of the demographic variables and questions. In order to test the hypothesis and generalize the results, inferential statistical methods were applied.

**Findings :** In response to research questions, we investigated the hypothesis using correlation coefficient and following results were obtained: In response to the main research question “whether the customer knowledge management and customer relationship management are related to organizational innovation and customer loyalty” based on the output of SPSS software, the following results were obtained: Significant value to

determine the relationship between customer loyalty and customer relationship management, customer knowledge management and organizational innovation is less than 0.5. Therefore, customer loyalty is related to customer relationship management, customer knowledge management and organizational innovation. The level of relationship for customer relationship management is 0.649, for customer knowledge management is 0.674, for organizational innovation is 0.723. On the other hand, the coefficient of determination for customer relationship management is 0.421, for customer knowledge management is 0.454, for organizational innovation is 0.523, which indicates that to what extent any of the above explain the changes in customer loyalty. So far no similar study has been done to determine the relationship between four variables in Iran simultaneously. Therefore, no comparison can be done with similar results. However, the results are consistent with Hosseini and Moonir[36], Hou and Huang [37] in the dual relationship between innovation and loyalty variables

**Table 5: Table of the multiple correlation coefficient of customer loyalty and organizational innovation, customer relationship management customer knowledge management**

Statistical Indicator Criterion variables		Predictive variable	Multiple correlation coefficient	Squared multiple correlation coefficient	Adjusted squared multiple correlation coefficient	F statistics	Significance level
Customer Loyalty	First Step	Organizational Innovation	0.723	0.523	0.552	491.699	0.000
	Second Step	Organizational Innovation Customer Relationship Management	0.823	0.678	0.676	90.641	0.000
	Third Step	Organizational Innovation Customer Relationship Management Customer Knowledge Management	0.823	0.678	0.676	90.641	0.000

The findings outlined in table (5) shows that in the first step, organizational innovation is the best predictor of customer loyalty between the variables in the regression. In the second step, in addition to organizational innovation, customer relationship management, and in the third step, in addition to organizational innovation and customer relationship management, customer knowledge management existed too. Based on stepwise regression analysis, the relationship between organizational innovation, knowledge management, customer relationship management and customer loyalty was significant. So, in the first step, organizational innovation coefficient was 52.2%, in the second step, the organizational innovation and customer relationship management coefficient was 61.2% and in the third step, the organizational innovation and customer relationship management and customer knowledge management coefficient was 67.6% of customer loyalty variance. F-statistic was significant at  $p < 0.01$ , therefore, it is generalizable to the target population. The results show that in correlation between variables, the largest effect on loyalty occurs through innovation (beta coefficient increases customer loyalty 0.332 unit based on the increase in organizational innovation per unit).

### IX. CONCLUSION

The most important and the main results obtained from this research is that earning customer loyalty takes place by means of knowledge-based foundations. Knowledge is a source of innovation. If an organization could conduct ideas and creativity to the company from its source (customers), innovation can happen by means of accumulation of knowledge through analysis and modeling of these sources of customer knowledge management. According to the results of previous research and the results obtained in this study, organizational innovation influences customer loyalty.

### X. DISCUSSION

So far, no similar research has been conducted in order to determine the relationship between four variables simultaneously inside and outside the country. So, no comparison can be done on similar conclusions. However, the results are consistent with the results of Ahmadzade (1392), Munir Husseini (2012), Hu and Huang (2011) who had assessed dual relationships of variables between loyalty and innovation. Pakdel (1390), mainly focuses on the effect of market orientation on business performance and asserts that innovation performance is related to business performance through loyalty. In this study, the effects of innovation

dimensions on the degree of loyalty have not been. The presented model creates an executive framework to increase the level of customer loyalty and create loyal customers. Models presented by Bose and Karagy, Gebert et al, Rowley et al, have assessed the relationship between customer relationship management and customer knowledge management through knowledge management. Our results are consistent with the results of these studies.

### LIMITATIONS

- [1]. This study follows a correlation approach. Since causal relationships are beyond researchers' manipulation in correlational studies, experimental findings cannot be inferred from the results of this study .
- [2]. Due to the fact that the measuring instrument for this study was questionnaire and data were collected by self-report, limitations of insufficient objectivity related to self-report instruments cannot be ignored. However, all principles of questionnaire data collection were followed accurately.
- [3]. The population of this study was selected among protein industry practitioners and consumers in Isfahan province. Therefore, generalizing the findings to groups, organizations and other samples should be taken into careful considerations.

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