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## Research Article

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# Competitive Intelligence: Conceptualising its evolving use as a strategic marketing management tool in Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

Live Competitive intelligence (CI) as practiced today has developed into an applied professional business discipline and has evolved to become a worldwide strategic business management tool. The current descriptive survey study sought to investigate the evolving use of CI in Zimbabwe as a strategic marketing management tool. The study took into account that the application and practice of CI by firms in Zimbabwe is a matter of choice as it is not a product of any legislation and therefore there are no legal penalties imposed on those firms which do not apply any one of its principles. The study deliberately chose to focus on the manufacturing firms. A sample of sixty marketing managers was chosen from a population of two hundred and fifty (250) manufacturing firms who are members of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI). The sample was selected using stratified random sampling. Data was collected through the application of a self-administered questionnaire supplemented by the use of both structured and unstructured interview schedules. These data collection instruments were designed such that they generate both qualitative and quantitative data. The major finding of the study was that marketing managers in the manufacturing firms of Zimbabwe have a clear understanding of the strategic importance of CI to both firms and marketing departments. In addition the study observed that firms generally do not allocate adequate resources to intelligence gathering with the majority allocating far less than the world wide recommended minimum of USD300000 CI budget per annum. The study also revealed that the country general lacked appropriately trained CI professionals. It was therefore recommended that firms should create stand alone, well funded and staffed by qualified personnel CI departments which will continuously gather intelligence for use in strategic marketing management processes.

### Keywords

intelligence,  
competitive intelligence,  
business environment,  
competitive advantage,  
sustainable competitive  
advantage,  
competitive  
environment

## 1.0 Introduction

Behind every successful marketing strategy there has been a sustained and company wide effort to collect appropriate, relevant and actionable intelligence (Gilad, 1989). Intelligence gathering is not a new concept; it is as old as man in the world. It has been in existence since the ancient increase in the numbers of human inhabitants on earth. For time immemorial empires, countries, kingdoms and states have been gathering intelligence for military or defense purposes and also to meet conquest objectives and ambitions of Emperors. It is a truism that intelligence networks of the past centuries and decades were focused on military intelligence and was collected using both overt and covert methods. In most cases these secret methods employed a broad net work of spies. In the field of military defence priority was placed in gathering critical information on the enemy's capabilities, strategies and tactics. Competitive intelligence (CI) as practiced today has developed into an applied professional business discipline and has evolved to become a worldwide strategic marketing management tool. It is clear this discipline has borrowed heavily from both political and military intelligence in its development.

CI has become so important to strategic planning and strategic marketing management today due to the influence and impact of the turbulent global business environment. In today's unpredictable turbulent global business environment it is clear no business is an island. In order to succeed a firm needs to deal with customers, suppliers, employees, government departments and other organizations. In almost all cases it has to compete with other firms selling similar products and services, including those firms offering substitute products to similar customers. These other firms are competitors who have similar objectives and ambitions to those of the firm, that is to capture the largest market share, grow, make money and succeed.

The turbulent competitive global business environment obtaining today can be equated to a business war. In a typical business war firms are fighting to gain the same resource and territory, that is, the customer and market share. In a business war it is equally important to understand the enemy (competitor). In a competitive business environment it is unavoidable for companies to monitor their external environments for intelligence information which enables managers to come up with winning sustainable competitive strategies. Studies conducted in the Western World, show that the application of CI enhances the abilities of a company to avoid surprises, in the process enabling it to identify early, threats and opportunities.

According Cook and Cook (2000) in the 1970s Xerox assumed that IBM was its greatest threat while Kodak was branching from photography into copiers in the process becoming a direct competitor. Miller (2000) also points out that in the 1980s; Apple Computers thought that their chief competitor was IBM in the meantime Microsoft proceeded to take over the computing world. Apple had not anticipated such a situation. Application of CI as a strategic marketing management tool helps to reduce likelihood of such surprises. A business enterprise that ignores to monitor and analyse competitors is indeed poorly equipped to formulate and execute a sustainable competitive business strategy. It is clear that to survive and succeed in today's turbulent global business environment companies should increase their use of CI as a strategic competitive tool. By understanding their competitors companies in Zimbabwe may be able to:

- ) To proactively detect opportunities and threats;
- ) Eliminate or reduce blind spots, risks and surprises;
- ) To gain foreknowledge of competitors' plans.

Knowing competing companies' activities and projects gives a firm an edge to continue improving so that it is able to set itself apart. This knowledge about competitors programs enables the company to use information as an important planning tool going forward. Those companies which do not use intelligence in most cases meet a lot of surprises and even fail to identify opportunities and threats. As Frederick the Great said; "It is pardonable to be defeated, but never to be surprised." Gary Castley, Kellogg 's former North American Division President (cited in Ettore, 1995) stated that " managers who do not do competitive intelligence are incompetent, as it is irresponsible not to understand your competitors." In the same vein Gates (1999) recognizes that "the most meaningful way to differentiate your company from competitors, the best way to put distance between you and the crowd, is to do an outstanding job with information."In addition Gates (1999) observes that, "How you gather, manage and use information will determine whether you win or lose."

Of great concern to the researchers is the observation that there is no evidence of an empirical research having been conducted in Zimbabwe on the application or use of this worldwide evolving strategic marketing management tool. Even major business schools in the country seem to have relegated courses or modules on CI to the peripheral. All major academic programs, majors and degrees offered by the country's top Business Schools do not include specific competitive intelligence modules. Evidence from the burgeoning literature on CI shows that the Strategic and Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP) has been in existence since 1986 but up to this day the Zimbabwe Chapter has not been established. The question arises: Is competitive intelligence an imperative issue in Zimbabwe?

This study moved to explore the evolving use of competitive intelligence as a strategic marketing management tool in the Zimbabwean manufacturing firms. It was the goal of this descriptive survey to examine the evolving use of

CI in strategic marketing management. The study took into account that the application and practice of CI by companies in Zimbabwe is a matter of choice as it is not a product of any legislation and therefore there are no legal penalties imposed on those firms which do not apply any one of its principles. This descriptive survey study is divided into four main parts. Drawing from literature the first part traces the evolution of CI in the process unpacking CI as a concept. The second section focuses on the theoretical frameworks. The third section gives an overview of the study methodology while the fourth section presents the results and discussions.

## **2. 0 Research Questions**

The current study whose major objective is to explore the evolving use of CI in Zimbabwe as a strategic marketing management tool was targeted at the manufacturing firms and had the following as some of its sub questions:

- Do marketing managers in Zimbabwe understand the strategic importance of CI to firms?
- Do marketing managers understand the strategic importance of CI to marketing departments of their firms?
- What is the contribution of CI to the firm?
- Do firms in Zimbabwe allocate adequate resources to CI gathering processes?
- Do firms in Zimbabwe have appropriately trained personnel running their CI units?

## **3. 0 Theoretical Framework**

### **3.1 Definition of CI: the conceptual framework**

Contemporary practice and scholarship is littered with numerous definitions of CI as there are many scholars and researchers who have come before us. Consequently there is no single definition which is precise and universally accepted. In this regard the SCIP (1986) identify CI as the process of ethically collecting, analyzing and disseminating, accurate, relevant, specific, foresighted and actionable intelligence regarding

the implications of the business environment to the organization. On the other hand Vedder and Guyness (2000) define CI as a systematic and ethical programme for gathering, analyzing and managing information about the present and future behavior of competitors, suppliers, customers, technologies, government, markets and general business environment. Fleisher and Blenkhorn (2001) identify CI as the process by which organizations gather actionable information about competitors and competitive environment and ideally apply it to their decision making and planning processes in order to improve their performance. In the same vein Colakoglu (2011) refers to CI as a systematic process initiated by organizations in order to gather and analyse information about competitors and general socio-political and economic environment. Ghanny and Mamlouk (2015) simple define CI as nothing but the process of identifying and collecting relevant information periodically about existing and potential competitors of the company.

The above definitions in summary show that CI is an analytical and systematic process that converts and synthesizes disaggregated data into relevant, accurate, meaningful and usable strategic information about the general competitive environment of an organization which ordinarily include competitors and their competitive positions, their performances, their capabilities and intentions. In addition a summary of the above views portray CI as that organizational function whose key responsibility is to identify early risks and opportunities in the market before they become apparent to others as well. Put differently CI is an early signal of the risks and opportunities available to a company. These definitions also reveal CI as not a high stakes game of industrial espionage targeted at stealing or exposing a competitor's trade secrets and other proprietary property but a desirable, unavoidable, ethical and useful function. The application and practice of CI is clearly captured by all the authorities cited above as meant to assist a firm to outwit, out maneuver, outperform the current, emerging and potential competitors.

### **3.2 The growth of application of CI in strategic planning**

The burgeoning literature on the growth of the application and practice of CI as an integral part of strategic business management, shows that intelligence gathering is not a new practice. It has been used for over centuries in order to fulfill the conquest objectives and ambitions of kings, emperors, politicians and army generals and last but not least to achieve profit objectives of industry leaders. Fleisher and Blenkhorn (2001) trace origins of intelligence gathering to the times of Confucius in China and the Biblical Moses in the West. According to Farrell (2003) the invasion of Asia and Eastern Europe by Mongols under Genghis Kahn relied heavily on a coordinated and extensive intelligence system that enabled planning and execution of military strategies. In addition Fleisher and Blenkhorn (2001) observe that the celebrated Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu believed in the value of foreknowledge about the enemy's strengths and weaknesses in successfully planning and execution of a military strategy. On the other hand Fleisher (2003) recognizes that CI has a long history in national defence and warfare and its use in the realms of commerce and business is only in recent years.

Fleisher and Blenkhorn (2001) argue that CI has existed commercially since the first salesman got wind of a competitor's price reduction and decided to communicate this intelligence to his/her superiors. Intelligence gathering and competitiveness have long association in warfare and have only started gaining prominence in business practice in recent decades. The practice of gathering intelligence has been part of doing business for many years, but it is clear from available literature that it was only in the 1980s that business corporations started intensively applying competitive intelligence techniques to gather information required for strategic planning (Cook and Cook 2000; Fleisher and Blenkhorn 2001; Fleisher and Blenkhorn 2003; Farrell 2003 and Fleisher 2003). But it remains true that CI is

not a recent phenomenon either in business practice or scholarship although its use in the realms of commerce and business is more recent (Fleisher and Blenkhorn 2001, Fleisher 2003). Fleisher and Blenkhorn (2001) further, contend that the boom of CI in last decades was driven by increasingly wide spread recognition that good information has a direct impact on the bottom line of a company.

The evolution of CI to its current levels could be credited to the larger movement towards strategic management of companies. While it is acknowledged that CI is not a discovery of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as it believed to be as old as man doing business in the world it is equally not contested that it only started to evolve as a worldwide strategic business management tool in the last few decades. In its evolution it has been able to borrow heavily from the intelligence cycle as applied in the military and political spheres. The growth of CI into an applied professional business discipline can be summarized as follows: Kelly (1965) introduced the field of CI; Porter (1985) identified CI as a critical business function; Kahaner (1997); West (2001); Tyson (2002); Vedder and Guynes (2002); Calof and Wright (2008) among others contributed to this growth.

### **3.3 Strategic importance of CI**

A number of scholars such as Porter (1985); Prescott (1995); Kahaner (1997); Calof (1999); Miller (2000); Fleisher and Blenkhorn (2001) and Vedder and Guynes (2002) among others have clearly stated a case for CI and its strategic importance in business management. Fleisher and Blenkhorn (2003) provide a good summary of the strategic importance of CI to firms. They state that “CI support organizational decision making and are focused on achieving competitive market place goals, such as proactively detecting opportunities or threats, eliminating or reducing blind spots, risks and surprises.” It is clear that knowledge about competitors gained from CI becomes a useful tool for planning the next move for the company going forward. The information obtained from CI processes allows managers to

anticipate what competitors are planning next in terms of new products they are getting ready to launch or new services they will add to the business. Knowledge of what competitors are doing enables the organization to plan its next move.

McGonagle and Vella (1990) believe that CI can be used in programmes that supplement planning, mergers and acquisitions, restructuring, marketing, pricing, advertising and R&D activities. Gilad (1989) contends that behind every successful strategy there has been a tireless effort to collect intelligence. Prescott and Smith (1989) suggest that the role of CI in an organization is to support strategic decision making. While Ghoshal and Westney (1991) believe CI is there to identify early warnings of threats and blind spots in business. On the same vein Vedder and Guynes (2002) assert that CI is used to support strategic planning and implementing marketing information technology and research and development activities. Caudron (1994) suggests that CI is there to support competitor assessment and tracking. On the other hand Gelb, Saxton, Zinkhan and Albers (1991) believe CI assists in performing industry benchmarking with competitors. While Lynch (2006) argues that CI is the bedrock of strategic planning. Pirrto (1991) contends that an organized CI programme can help to reduce costs, manage the company’s pricing strategies and create products for the market.

### **3.4 Contribution of CI to the bottom line**

Kahaner (1996) points out that a 1993 Price Waterhouse Consulting (PWC) benchmarking study within the aerospace and defence industry noticed that companies with a 67% win on contracts they pursued (industry average win was 18%) included CI in their contract strategy. Another study by Jaworski and CheeWee in 1993 came up with the following observations:

- (a) Companies that engage in high levels of CI activity showed 37% higher levels of product quality that in turn delivered a 68% increase in business performance.



(b) Companies that engage in high levels CI activity showed 36% higher levels of strategic planning. Higher levels of confidence in planning were associated with a 48% increase in business performance.

(c) Companies that engage in higher levels of CI activity showed 50% higher levels of market knowledge. Higher levels of market knowledge were associated with 36% increase in business.

(d) Lack of formally sanctioned CI structure led to less collecting, analysis and use of CI.

Miller (2000) cites a 1995 study by academics at the University of North Texas that found that those companies that emphasized CI in most cases outperformed those that did not in sales, market share and earnings per share. In short the study revealed that there is a positive relationship between emphasis on CI and success in financial performance. Financial performance as measured by three key measures that is, average sales, market share, and profitability.

Gilad (1989) supported by Rouach and Santi (2001) gives examples of companies where CI helped to bring about positive impact on these companies' performance in different areas. These companies were identified as Merck & Company, NutraSweet, Texas Instruments, Shell, East Kodak Company, and Motorola, AT & T, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company etc. The website, [www.fuld.com](http://www.fuld.com) does point out that modern times entrepreneurs like Richard Brandson, Bill Gates and Michael Dell need, want and use CI on a regular basis. Eger (1995) refers to the concept of "cost avoidance as a financial measure of effectiveness of CI. Kahaner (1996) cites Robert Flynn, the chairman and CEO of NutraSweet who place a value of US\$50 million a year on revenues gained in addition to those not lost due to high levels of CI activity.

#### 4.0 Research design and Methodology

This study was located within an interpretive paradigm and it applied both qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach was

informed by the primary objective of the study which was to investigate the evolving use of CI as a strategic marketing management tool. The study applied both qualitative and quantitative approaches so as to benefit from the strengths of two methods at the same time minimizing on the weaknesses of the two approaches. Adopting a descriptive survey approach to generate answers to the primary objective the study used a sample of sixty (60) Marketing Managers from a population of two hundred and fifty (250) firms which are members of Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI). This sample was selected using stratified random sampling. The study preferred stratified random sampling because it considered firms which are members of CZI as heterogeneous as they were operating in different industrial sectors.

The descriptive survey method was chosen ahead of other research methods so that it could assist the researchers to evaluate the evolving use of CI as a strategic marketing management tool. The researchers chose to use this descriptive survey method as it is the best methodology given the extent of the requirements of the research topic. The instruments used to collect data were the self administered questionnaire, the structured and unstructured interview guides. The self administered questionnaire was used to generate quantitative data as it contained closed ended questions only. While both the structured and unstructured interview guides were used to generate qualitative data as they contained open ended questions. The unstructured interview guide allowed the researcher to make follow up questions so as to further interrogate issues.

#### 5.0 Data presentation and Analysis

In this study the presentation and analysis of data was unquestionably a complex process involving inductive analysis of data where critical themes could emerge from the data. The analysis of qualitative data involved a special set of interpretive practices and narrative techniques. Most of the qualitative data was recorded in the form of words rather than numbers, and the

researchers analysed it with words attempting to isolate themes, identify trends explained and undertook some comparisons. The presentation and analysis involved organizing the data and breaking it into manageable units, searching for common patterns. Quantitative data was coded into categories as rationalized according to the research questions. Statistical inferences, calculations, charts and tables were used to analyse quantitative data. There was also need for some creativity, since the main challenge was to place the raw qualitative data into logical meaningful categories and examining them in a holistic fashion.

## 6.0 Findings of the Study

### 6.1 The strategic importance of CI to firms

It emerged from the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data that marketing managers understood the strategic importance of CI to their

firms. This came out strongly from the responses to both structured and unstructured interview guides as well. The majority emphasized the need of good information to produce winning business strategies. They strongly believed CI has become an unavoidable practice for strategic management of firms as it is the only source of good, well analysed and trusted information on the overall business landscape. Analysis of data furthermore, showed that marketing managers believed that lack or inadequate knowledge lead to bad business decisions and therefore they use intelligence information generated from CI activities to improve the quality of their planning and strategic marketing decisions. These findings are general in agreement with the findings of Gilad (1989), Prescott and Smith (1989), McGonagle and Vella (1990), Ghoshal and Westney (1991) and Vedder and Guyness (2002). Responses to quantitative questions are as shown on table 1 below.

**Table 1: strategic importance of CI to a firm**

Role of CI in a Firm	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
CI is the bedrock of strategic planning	21	35	31	52	5	7	4	6	0	0	60	100
CI represents the basis for making right business decisions	37	62	21	34	0	0	1	2	1	2	60	100
CI is used to prevent surprises that could hurt the business	35	58	24	40	0	0	1	2	0	0	60	100
Use of CI leads to Firms to have better appreciation of their competitive landscapes	33	55	23	39	0	0	3	4	1	2	60	100
CI is used to eliminate blind spots, risk and surprises	34	57	18	31	2	3	3	6	3	3	60	100

Firm that ignore CI meet a lot of surprises& even fail to timely identify opportunities & threats	38	62	20	34	0	0	1	2	1	2	60	100
CI is used to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.	37	61	15	24	2	3	3	5	3	5	60	100

Table 1 depicts the responses to various quantitative questions. The responses reveal that Marketing Managers in the manufacturing firms clearly understand the strategic role CI plays in organizations. The results as depicted in table 1 reveal that 96% of respondents stated that CI represent the basis of making right business decisions and another 98% said CI is used to prevent surprises. A further 85% felt that CI is used by firms to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. The same pattern emerged from their

responses to structured and unstructured interview guides.

### 6.2 Strategic importance of CI to marketing departments of firms

The study established that Marketing Managers understood the strategic role of CI to marketing departments. This was revealed from both the qualitative and quantitative responses. The quantitative responses are summarized in table 2 below.

**Table 2: Strategic importance of CI to marketing department**

Role of CI in a marketing department	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Knowledge obtained from CI assist in crafting marketing strategies	18	30	29	48	2	3	6	10	5	9	60	100
Lack of knowledge leads to bad marketing decisions	21	35	18	30	13	22	6	10	2	3	60	100
CI assist to create and sustain marketing competitive edge	21	35	19	32	8	12	9	15	3	6	60	100



CI assist to better understanding of marketing competitive landscape	23	37	21	35	7	12	6	11		5	60	100
CI is a key success element of any marketing strategy	12	20	29	47	5	9	6	10	8	14	60	100
CI assist to gain foreknowledge of competitors' plans	21	35	25	42	7	12	2	3	5	8	60	100

The results as presented in table 2 show a clear understanding by marketing managers interviewed the role CI play in a marketing department with 67% stating that CI assist to create and sustain marketing competitive edge. From the table it can also be observed that 78% of the participants felt that knowledge obtained from CI assist in crafting winning marketing strategies. On the other hand another 67% of respondents stated that lack of knowledge leads to bad marketing decisions. These quantitative responses were strongly supported by qualitative responses where issues such as CI is one of the most fundamental elements in strategic marketing planning and CI helps marketing managers to be able to build and maintain a competitive edge over competitors were also raised. Data analysis also revealed that in general marketing managers

were in agreement that in those firms where CI is implemented it helps marketing departments to better appreciate their competitive landscape than those where it is not implemented. Issues such as CI enables marketing departments to be more knowledgeable and aware of what is happening in the marketing landscapes were also revealed by analysis of qualitative data.

### 6.3 Contribution of CI to a firm

Data analysis seems to be converging at a point that there is a positive relationship between the practice of CI and the financial success of firm. Financial success as measured by sales, market share and earnings per share. Respondents seemed to agree that application and practice of CI adds to the bottom line of their firms.

**TABLE 3: Contribution of CI to a firm**

Contribution of CI to a firm	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
CI contributes to the bottom line of a firm	20	33	24	40	10	17	4	7	2	3	60	100
CI processes lead to improved financial performance	16	27	30	50	12	20	2	3	0	0	60	100

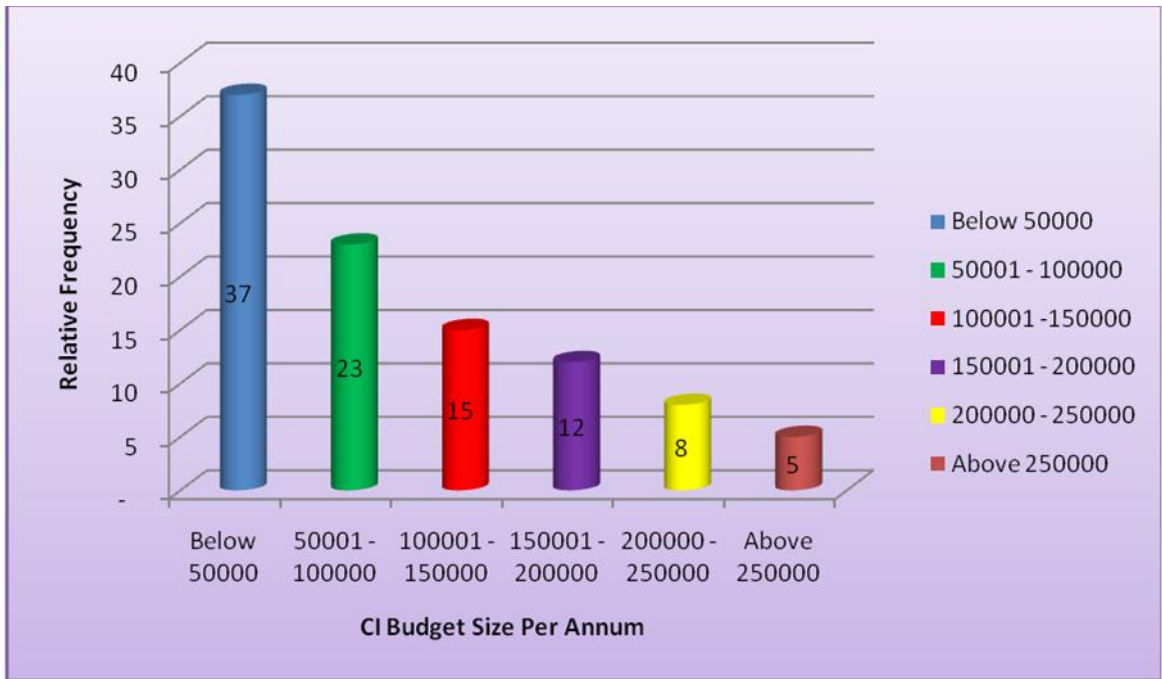
CI processes leads to an increase in sales and market share	31	52	25	42	2	2	2	2	0	0	60	100
Practice of CI leads to increase in earnings per share	19	32	25	42	9	15	2	3	5	8	60	100

Results as presented in table 3 depict that 73% of respondents revealed that CI contributes to the bottom line of their firms. In addition the table depicts that 94% of the interviewed respondents revealed that practice of CI leads to increase in sales and market share. While 77% of the participants revealed that application of CI leads to improved financial performance. A furthermore, 74% of the respondent said that CI leads to an increase in earnings per share. Results as depicted in table 3 are consistent with findings from elsewhere regarding benefits of CI to a firm specifically findings by academics at the University of North Texas. These results were also collaborated by those from the qualitative responses. The responses from qualitative questions also rejected that benefits of CI are abstract and difficult to measure its financial

contribution. In summary these results show that application of CI leads to improved financial performance by a firm. Some of the contributions of CI identified from the unstructured interview guide were: CI is a critical tool to alert management to early warnings of both threats and opportunities and that CI assist an organization to build sustainable competitive advantage.

**6.4 Do firms in Zimbabwe allocate adequate resource to CI processes?**

The data analysis from both quantitative and qualitative responses showed that firms in Zimbabwe do not allocate adequate resources to CI activities resulting in half hearted approach to this critical business activity. Figure 1 depicts the budgetary allocations to intelligence gathering.



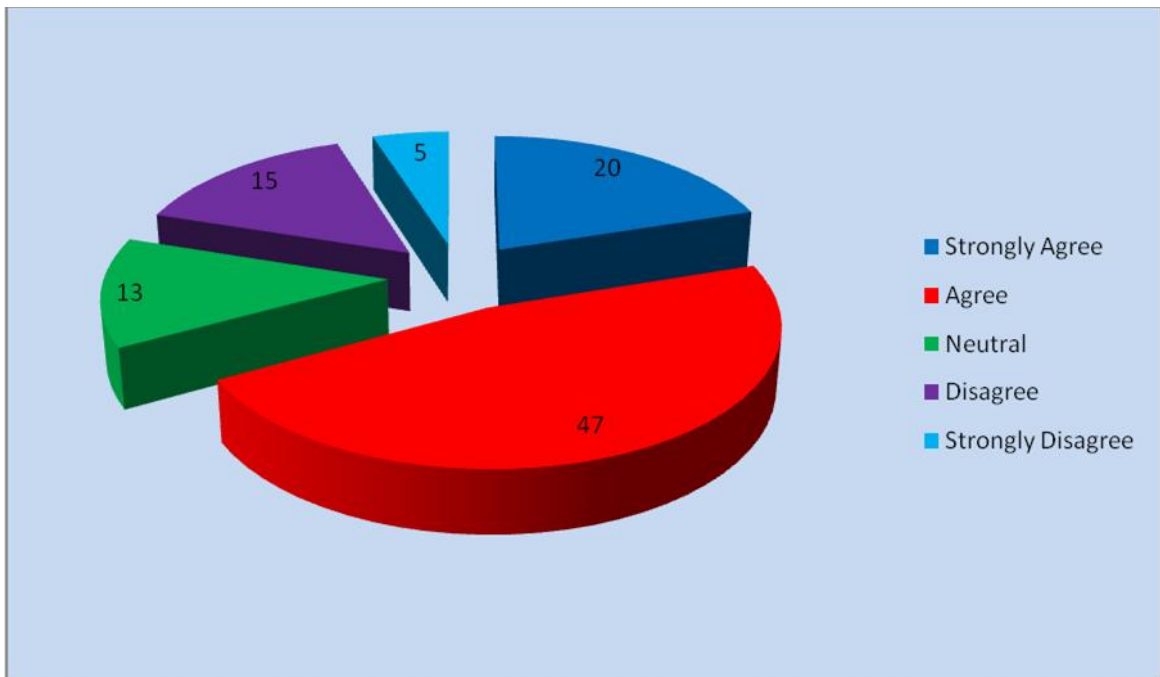
**Fig.1: CI budget per annum in US dollars**

The results in figure 1 clearly show that far less than USD 300 000 is allocated to intelligence gathering. Data analysis show that 60% of firms allocate less USD100000 per annum to intelligence gathering. The results furthermore, reveal that only 5% of firms have an annual budget of above USD 250 000 annum. The Zimbabwean firms' budget allocations for intelligence gathering are far below world standards. Prescott and Bhardway (1995) observed that a minimum of USD300 000 should be allocated to the CI budget. The responses especially on follow up questions on the unstructured interview guides revealed a number of reasons why inadequate resources are allocated to CI processes. These reasons included among others budgetary constraints in most firms. The need to cut costs by firms where departments whose costs cannot be immediately associated with increased revenues such as marketing and intelligence gathering become first victims. Data analysis also blamed the general economic conditions prevailing in the country where firms are struggling to raise operating incomes due to liquidity crunch since the introduction of multi

currency in 2009. The economic reasons may explain why the majority of firms allocate far below the recommended intelligence gathering budget of USD 300000 per annum

**6.5. Availability of appropriately trained personnel running their CI units**

The analysis of data established that the country general lacked the appropriately trained CI personnel as a result those in charge of CI are half baked CI practitioners. The respondents also pointed out this have not been helped by higher learning institutions who do not offer clear cut courses on CI. Data analysis also revealed there is no business or polytechnic college which offer training on business intelligence. In this regard firms are also constrained in terms of costs to train their employees internally as they have to bring in experts from overseas. It would also appear that costs of training of CI professionals are the major contributor to lack of skills in this area. Analysed results are as depicted in figure 2 below.



**Figure 2: Lack of appropriately trained CI professionals**

Results shown in figure 2 reveal that 67% of the participants pointed out that firms and the country in general lacked appropriately trained CI professionals. The skills gap could also explain why very little budget is allocated to intelligence gathering as the CI departments could be lacking those executives who are able to state the case for intelligence gathering at budget meetings and to senior management.

## **7.0 Recommendations**

Firms should create stand-alone CI units. These stand-alone CI units should be provided with adequate funds to enable them to function without hindrance. A minimum budget of USD 150000 per annum should be considered for Zimbabwean firms. In addition these stand alone; well funded CI units should be staffed by qualified CI personnel with relevant expertise and experience in intelligence gathering. The core business of these departments being to gather, analyse and distribute actionable intelligence about products, customers, competitors and any aspects of the environment needed to support executives and managers in making strategic decisions for the company. Furthermore, Zimbabwean firms should be willing to bring expertise from outside the country this should include provision of funds to enable experts from outside the country to come and provide in-house training. It could also assist to use the retired political or state intelligence officers these could be easy to be given short term training refocusing them on business intelligence gathering rather than political and military intelligence. In addition the study recommended that firms should consider accrediting with the Fuld-Gilad-Herring Academy of Competitive Intelligence this will enable them to access latest thinking and best practices in the field. Furthermore, the study recommended that the current CI practitioners and academics should also consider establishing the Zimbabwe chapter of SCIP. This will assist in the professional development and creating awareness of this strategic business management tool. Before the establishment of the Zimbabwe Chapter of the SCIP the study also recommends that firms

should facilitate their CI personnel to join the Global SCIP and also provide resources for them to be able to attend its training courses, workshops, seminars and conferences. Membership of the SCIP will assist to sharpen the skills of these employees and help them to contribute and access latest thinking in the field. In addition it is also recommended that major Business Schools should consider offering CI studies in their various business degrees, diplomas and masters' degrees.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

In summary, it is evident that competitive intelligence has grown to become a must use strategic marketing management tool. The findings of this study have shown that general Marketing Managers in Zimbabwe have a good understanding of the strategic importance of CI to marketing management and marketing department as well. This high level of awareness of the strategic importance of CI to marketing management could have been backed by the fact that most managers have been exposed to some CI training, had the required experience at marketing management levels and had sound academic and professional marketing qualifications. The study also observed that as a result of this high level of awareness of CI these executives were indeed competent participants of this study. In addition the study observed that firms generally do not allocate adequate resources to intelligence gathering with the majority allocating far less than the world wide recommended minimum of USD300000 CI budget per annum. The study also revealed that the country generally lacked appropriately trained CI professionals. In the end the study noted that Marketing Managers believed that there is a close relationship between the practice of competitive intelligence and financial performance of the company. Financial performance as measured in terms of market share, sales, profits and earnings per share. In the process rejecting the notion that competitive intelligence's financial contribution is abstract and difficult to measure.

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