

## **AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE APPRECIATION AND PRACTICE OF COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE (CI) AMONG ORGANIZATIONS IN ZAMBIA**

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper sought to assess the extent to which Competitive Intelligence (CI) was being practiced and appreciated among corporations operating in Zambia. The survey research method was used. 50 corporations in this case were purposively selected and a questionnaire administered to them. 60% (30) corporations successfully answered the questionnaire. The research findings reveal that 73.3% of the corporations in Zambia know about CI. Most of the corporations define CI as the process of gathering information on competitor's activities. Other firms associate the term CI with market research. They define CI as market research. It has been also discovered 73% of corporations interviewed know the importance of CI in their operations. They contended that CI helps them in highlighting the opportunities, and threats; helps in making sound business decisions and strategy formulation thus, helping in gaining competitive advantage over competitors. It was further discovered that despite majority of the firms acknowledging having designated units or departments to gather CI, the research shows that no corporation in Zambia has a standalone CI unit/department responsible for gathering CI. The gathering of CI is done by departments such as marketing, research/planning and business development. The absence departments/units solely responsible cast serious doubt on the corporations' appreciation and practicing of CI in the operations. This implies that CI in Zambia is not widely appreciated and practiced as it relegated to other departments such as marketing and planning.*

**Keywords:** Competitive intelligence; competitive advantage; Zambia

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

History is replete with stories of companies that lost their market share to their competitors due to lack of a sound competitive intelligence practice. For example, Xerox who for many years was a market leader in the printing and photocopying machines industry lost its market leadership to Cannon. IBM (International Business Machines) also lost its market share to Dell and other PC manufacturers. The list of companies is endless. In this twentieth century, where national boundaries have diminished due to improvements in Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), firms whether local or international face cut-throat competition. Market elements are changing very fast. The key to remain competitive and profitable is to fully embrace competitive intelligence (IC) research activities. Any company worth its salt should strive to invest in competitive intelligence-both strategic and counter intelligence in that competitive intelligence research makes an organization to be in tune with its business environment. Competitive intelligence research provides actionable information pertinent to strategic planning of the organization-critical to out- smart the competitors. At the same time, it acts as a sensor which helps an organization to know if there are changes in business market. Adjustments to the business strategies under implementation could be instituted to ensure that the strategies mirror the changed business environment.

### ***1.1 Statement of Problem***

Since the emergency of competitive intelligence (CI) as a field of study world over, many companies have welcomed this profession and have fully embraced and integrated it into their operations. In many countries such as South Africa, competitive intelligence is well recognized and treated as a unit in organizations which collects and analyzes intelligence for both strategic and tactical decision making in an organization. In Zambia, however, the extent to which organizations operating in various industries appreciate and practice competitive intelligence is not known. One cannot tell whether or not organizations operating in Zambia appreciate and practice competitive intelligence because there has been a research carried out to find out if at all companies in Zambia have embraced competitive intelligence in their operations. It is in this vein that a research was conducted to find out if competitive intelligence has been accepted and is being practiced by Zambian companies.

## ***1.2 Justification of the research***

Competitive intelligence is critical practice that enables organizations to remain competitive in the market. It is a practice that provides actionable information to management in organizations about among other things; the next moves, and intentions of their competitors in the market. It enables management to anticipate changes in the environment in which they are operating. In many countries, the practice of competitive intelligence by organizations is well documented. In Zambia however, this practice is not documented in that there has never been a research to find out the extent to which firms in Zambia practice competitive intelligence. The absence of research on whether or not organizations operating in Zambia embrace competitive intelligence has the potential to hinder the emergency and popularization of competitive intelligence as a field of study and an art. This research therefore was conducted to determine the status competitive intelligence in Zambia.

## ***1.3 Objectives***

### **1.3.1 General Objectives**

To find out whether or not organizations in Zambia appreciate and practice competitive intelligence in their operations

### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

1. To find out if organizations operating in Zambia understand what competitive intelligence is
2. To find out whether or not companies operating in Zambia appreciate competitive intelligence in their operations
3. To find out if Zambian companies have established competitive intelligence units or departments

## ***1.4 Research Questions***

1. Do organizations operating in Zambia understand what competitive intelligence is?
2. Do companies operating in Zambia appreciate competitive intelligence in their operations?
3. Have companies in Zambia established competitive intelligence units or departments?

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1 Definition of concepts***

When people hear the term Competitive intelligence, they often think of industrial espionage or spying. This however is not the premise of competitive intelligence. Competitive intelligence is a legal and an ethical business practice. The American Productivity & Quality Center (APQC) in Farida and Paige (20004) defines competitive intelligence as the systematic process of obtaining and analyzing publicly available competitor's information to facilitate organizational learning, improvement, differentiation, and competitor targeting in industries, markets and customers. It further postulates that competitive intelligence is about remaining cognizant of competitors' intentions and unanticipated market place development by scanning public records, monitoring the Internet and mass media and speaking to the customers, suppliers, partners, employees, industry experts and other knowledgeable parties. The Society for Competitive Intelligence Professionals in Ravina (2004) defines competitive intelligence as the process of ethically collecting, analyzing and disseminating accurate, relevant, specific, timely, foresighted and actionable intelligence regarding the implications of the business environment, competitors and the organization itself. Matt (2008) considers competitive intelligence as the process of giving insights in what might happen in the near future.

The three above definitions provide a rainbow understanding what competitive intelligence. From the above definitions, once can define competitive intelligence as a systematic process of collecting, analyzing both secondary and primary information about an organization's competitors and other stake holders who have a bearing on the operations of the firm and turn the collected information into actionable information called intelligence to aid organizational decision making for both long and short term business decisions. It is cardinal to note that competitive intelligence also encompasses counter-intelligence activities-aimed at defending an organization against strategic moves of its competitors. Like what Douglas (2003) observes, competitive intelligence both strategic and counter-intelligence represents the company's first line of defense against threats to its operations, plans and strategic ambitions.

### ***2.2 Importance of Competitive Intelligence in an organization***

Competitive intelligence in an organization serves a number of purposes. Competitive intelligence helps an organization to formulate strategies through the understanding of the industry, the organization itself and its competitors (Matt: 2008; 4). Competitive intelligence anchors strategic business analysis. Through competitive intelligence, an organization is able to isolate performance gaps in relation to the competitors and it enables an organization to benchmark good practices within the industry. West in Odendaal (2004) argues that organizations conduct competitive intelligence for three reasons: to satisfy curiosity by verifying information fed by rumors; to emulate the good practices of good performer in the industry; and anticipate for any changes in the market place as elements in the external environment of an organization change fast.

### ***2.3 Competitive Intelligence gathering Process***

Unlike other process of gathering information, competitive intelligence is a more user centered process by which all sources such as competitor, industry and market information are requested, collected, analyzed and disseminated to decision makers. It is important to note that competitive intelligence gathering involves a number of actions and activities. According to Johann (2004), competitive intelligence's core elements are planning, collection, analysis and dissemination of intelligence. Douglas (2003) further contends that according to the U.S.A Security Agency five phase model of intelligence cycle, competitive intelligence gathering involves planning and direction (where decision makers intelligence needs are established), collection (gathering of "all source" data and information from which finished intelligence is ultimately produced), processing and exploitation (conversion of raw data into finished intelligence), analysis and production of intelligence (integration, evaluation and analysis of all available information and the preparation of various intelligence products), dissemination of intelligence (delivery of intelligence products to pre-defined customers). Other scholars like Ravina (2003), broaden the scope of competitive intelligence gathering by adding two more activities to the first four activities proposed by Johanna. Ravina (2003) contends that other activities involved in competitive intelligence gathering include developing appropriate policies, procedures and an infrastructure so that employees may contribute effectively to the competitive intelligence system as well as gain the benefits from the competitive intelligence process. Instituting organizational awareness of competitive intelligence and cultivating a culture of competitiveness

so that information gathering becomes a shared responsibility of all the workers is a facet of Competitive intelligence gathering process.

#### ***2.4 History of Competitive Intelligence***

Competitive intelligence is as old as civilization. In the ancient days, different ethnic groups used intelligence to learn about the weaknesses and strengths of their enemies so that they can map out strategies to fight and defeat them. For example, the Bible in Numbers Chapter 13 Verse 17, records that Moses sent 12 men to spy out the land of the Canaan; to see what the land was and whether the people who lived in it were strong or weak; whether they were few or many and whether the cities they lived in were camps or strongholds and whether the land was rich or poor. Since then the art of intelligence has evolved with governments all over the world having an intelligence agency with Great Britain setting up the first ever intelligence agency in 1909 called “Great Britain’s Security Service (MI5) and charged it with the responsibility of collecting information about German’s plans to invade the Great Britain (Douglas:2003;9).

It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s did the concept of competitive intelligence emerged. It however remained a black art in many parts of the world. It did not gain recognition among the business community and scholars until the late 1980s when Michael Porter, professor at Harvard University published the first work on competitive intelligence called “Competitive – Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors”. His work is seen as the foundation of modern competitive intelligence. It is salient to note that in its early stages in the United States of America (U.S.A), former governed intelligence officers were preferred for competitive intelligence jobs in the private companies. Today, competitive intelligence is both a discipline and an art being practiced in many parts of the world.

#### ***2.5 The Development and Status of Competitive Intelligence in Canada and South Africa***

Competitive intelligence as a field of study and an art has been well received in many countries around the globe. In today’s a global village, organizations face cut-throat competition in their industries, therefore competitive intelligence is seen as a panacea to remain competitive or gain competitive advantage. Companies in the private and public sectors have embraced competitive intelligence as a source of sound strategic and tactical decision making. In some companies,

competitive intelligence is a function or department on its own headed by a qualified competitive intelligence officer.

In Canada the practice of competitive intelligence can be traced back to the article written by Ian Gorden in 1989 entitled “*easy to use guide on marketing intelligence*”. This article popularized the gathering of intelligence among firms in Canada. Competitive intelligence in Canada is not only practiced by the private sector but also public sector. For instance, in 1992, the Federal government organized training programs on competitive intelligence for all the Embassy staff around the world and all Federal government staff across Canada responsible for reporting on economics and business (Janathan andFrancios:2004). Local government also initiated training programs in competitive intelligence. Later, the Society for Competitive Intelligence Professionals Canadian Chapter was born as a professional body for competitive intelligence officers. According to Janathan and Francois (2004; 2), in 2003, Canada had 172 members of the Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP). 55% were corporate members, 13% represented small consultants, and 6% were for large consulting firms while 13% and 6% represented government and academic respectively. At regional level, there has been the establishment of institutions dedicated to competitive intelligence such as the Canadian Institute for Market Intelligence (CIMI) and the Prairie Center for Business Intelligence. These institutions collect intelligence for both the public and private sectors.

In addition to government efforts in promoting competitive intelligence in Canada, there has been proliferation of small and large competitive intelligence consultancy firms. Some of these consultancy firms have overseas branches. For instance, the Competia-a competitive intelligence consultancy firm has branches in the U.S.A (United States of America), United Kingdom (UK) and India. These consultancy firms provide consultancy services in competitive intelligence to private and public organizations. At organizational level, many Canadian companies have competitive intelligence units. According to a research conducted by Janathan in 1998 among 1025 small and medium enterprises in the technology industry, it was discovered that 32% of these companies claimed to have competitive intelligence units. This shows that competitive intelligence in Canada has been well received and this field is said to be growing.

In Africa, South Africa is one of the countries where competitive intelligence has been established. Competitive intelligence in South Africa emerged early 2000 with former government intelligence officers taking a lead in the establishment and formalization of competitive intelligence as an ethical business practice. The status of competitive intelligence as an ethical business practice is said to be growing. Many companies and scholars are realizing the role competitive intelligence plays in ensuring that a company gains competitive advantage and remains on top of its competition. Ravina (2004;9), observes that a study of competitive intelligence practices of South African businesses, sponsored by the National Research Foundation discovered that 84% of senior managers believed that competitive intelligence can be used to create a competitive advantage and considered competitive intelligence to be a legitimate and necessary activity for business. Muller in Odendaal (2004) contends that competitive intelligence in South Africa is well embraced by companies especially those in the banking sector and former parastatals in the telecommunication and electricity supply sector.

There is also growth in the number of consultancy firms in competitive intelligence in South Africa. “The South African environment has also seen the emergence of competitive intelligence consultancy services and though still small in number, these companies have a significant influence in the development of competitive intelligence as a field in South Africa” (Odendaal:2004; 56), It is also possible to get competitive intelligence related services from large international management consultants such as Risk Management, Knowledge Management, Change management and Human Resource Development consultancy firms.

In addition, competitive intelligence has been accepted by many scholars in various universities and other learning institutions in South Africa as a field of study. It is however in its infancy stages. According to Odendaal (2004), many universities have developed and are currently offering courses in competitive intelligence. These include the University of Pretoria, and Afrikaans University, University of Stellenbosch, University of the Witwatersrand, University of South Africa and University of Cape Town. These universities started providing training in competitive intelligence in 2002. Competitive intelligence courses are available only to post graduate students and the faculties in which they are offered differ from university to university.



They are however mostly offered in departments such as Information Science, Economics, Strategic Studies and other business related departments.

Furthermore, the association for competitive intelligence professionals in South Africa called South Africa Association for Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SAACIP) has been established. This association was established in June, 2000. SAACIP was founded to promote and coordinate competitive intelligence activities in South Africa by organizing and offering training in competitive intelligence through seminars and conferences. This is meant to improve the skills of competitive intelligence practitioners.

### **3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### ***3.1 Research Method***

The study was a quantitative research; to be precise a survey method was used. Data from a sample of the population was collected and the findings generalized to the population. This research design was adopted because it is cheap and fast to collect data from a sample than over a broader population.

#### ***3.2 Population and Sample Size***

The population comprised all the large multinational corporations and local firms in Zambia. 50 companies were sampled and questionnaires sent to them. 30 organizations managed to fill in the questionnaires. This implies that there was 60% retention of the questionnaires.

#### ***3.3 Sampling Procedure and Justification***

The sampling method used was non-probability. Purposive or Judgmental sampling method was used. This is because the researchers had knowledge of large organizations operating in Zambia who can provide the much needed information. In addition, it was difficult to get a complete sample frame for all the companies that operate in Zambia from the registrar of Societies.

### ***3.4 Data collection instrument***

Self administered questionnaires were used to gather information. In addition, oral interviews were used to beef up the data collected through questionnaires

### ***3.5 Data analysis methods***

Data was quantitatively analyzed using computer software called Statistical Package for Social Sciences called (SPSS). Graphical representations such as bar charts, pie charts, cross tabulations and frequency tables were extensively used in the analysis.

## **4.0 PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### ***4.1 Sample description***

Data was analyzed from the 30 firms (table 1) that answered the questionnaires. These came from a wide spectrum of industries. 3 firms were from the banking industry, 3 from the telecommunication industry and one from the health sector. Others corporations include 3 from the hospitality industry, 4 firms were from the food and beverages industry while 16 represented companies from other industries such as broadcasting (media), education, transport (airline) and insurance industries.

*Table 1: Types of institutions for the study*

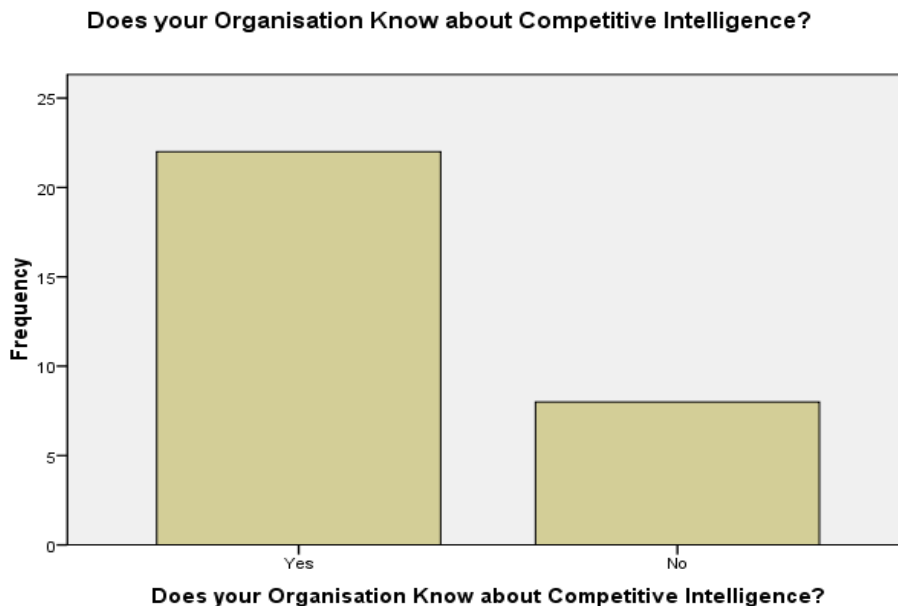
<b>Types of Institutions</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Banking	3	10.0
Telecom	3	10.0
Health	1	3.3
Hospitality	3	10.0
Food & Beverages	4	13.3
Others	16	53.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The research discovered that 16.7% of the companies have been in the industry for less than five years. The majority have been operating in the industry for many years. For instance, 36.7% companies said they had been operating in the industry for more than 26 years.

The majority of the employees interviewed were in middle level management. They came mainly from departments such as marketing, planning and research, and business development. For instance, 40% of the respondents were sales and marketing managers.

#### ***4.2 Knowledge and understanding of competitive intelligence among organizations***

It is gratifying to discover that majority of the organizations in Zambia know about competitive intelligence. 73.3% of the respondents said that they knew about Competitive intelligence. Only 26.7% said they were not aware of the existence of CI. Results are depicted below in figure 1.



*Figure 1: Organization understanding of Competitive Intelligence*

The corporations that expressed knowledge about the existence of competitive intelligence were asked to define what it was. 10% of the organizations considered CI as market research, 6.7% thought CI was about identifying weaknesses and strengths of the organization while 30% considered CI as the gathering of information on competitors' activities while 26.7%

corporations defined CI as the process of gathering, analyzing and distributing information about competitors as shown by table 2 below.

*Table 2: Knowledge and understanding of competitive intelligence*

<b>Knowledge and understanding of CI</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Market Research	3	10.0
Process of identifying gaps & weaknesses of a company	2	6.7
Gathering information on competitors activities	9	30.0
Action of gathering ,analyzing & distributing intelligence about competitors	8	26.7
N/A	7	26.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The above research findings show that majority of the firms in Zambia has an idea of what competitive intelligence is. However, some organizations reduce CI to market research. Competitive Intelligence goes beyond market research. It entails gathering, analyzing and distributing information about competitors’ activities as relate to their pricing structures, customers, future intentions etc.

#### ***4.3 Importance of competitive intelligence in organizations in Zambia***

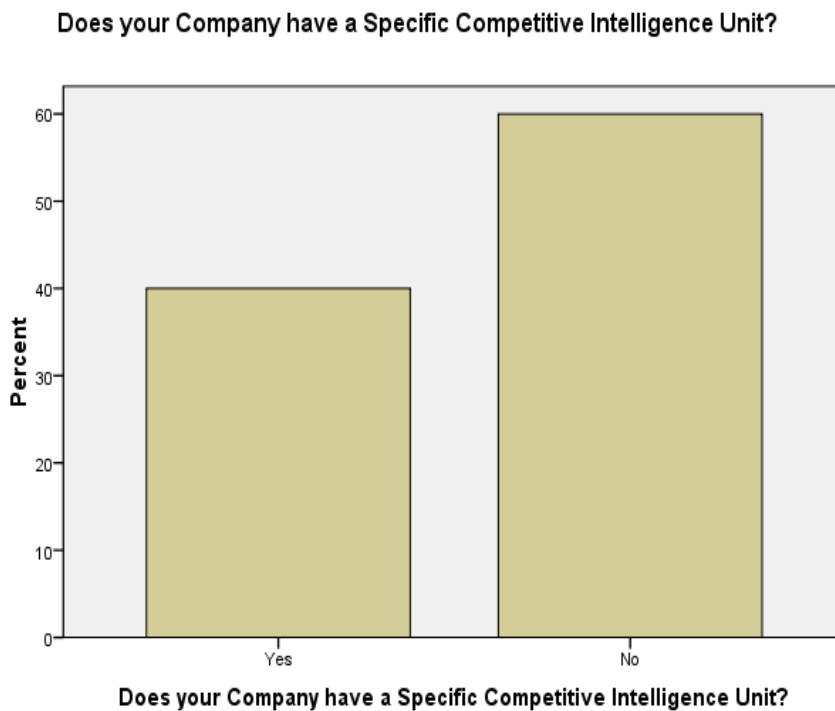
The research further wished to find out what companies thought about CI in terms of its importance in their operations. 73% (representing all the firms that are knowledgeable about the existence of CI) said they considered CI to be important as shown by table 3 below.

*Table 3: Importance of CI in organizations*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	22	73.3
No	0	0
N/A	8	26.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The research revealed that organizations have varied reasons as to why they thought CI was important. 16.7% said CI was important because it helps in highlighting the opportunities, thus enabling an organization to reposition itself. 33.3% of the companies felt that CI help them to perform better than their competitors as it helps in gaining competitive advantage, 23.3% said that CI helps an organization make sound business decisions and strategy formulation.

To gauge how corporations in Zambia value CI in their operations, they were asked to indicate whether or not there was a department or unit dedicated for gathering intelligence. The research shows that 60% of the organizations do not have a specific unit responsible for gathering competitive intelligence only 40% of firms indicated having a designated unit for the collection of intelligence as shown by figure 2 below.



*Figure 2: Institutions with CI units in the organization*

The research further discovered that firms that acknowledged having a unit responsible for gathering CI, majority of them (16.7%) cited the marketing and sales department as being responsible for gathering intelligence. Others cited departments such as business development, operations and reservation and control departments as responsible for gathering intelligence. This

entails that they do not have a standalone department/section purely dedicated to the gathering and analyzing of business intelligence.

#### ***4.4 Willingness to learn and embrace CI in operations***

When firms asked to indicate whether or not they were ready to learn more about CI, 56.7% indicated their willingness to learn more about CI while 43.3% said they were not willing. Results are shown in table 4 below.

*Figure 4: Willingness to incorporate CI in organizational activities*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	17	56.7
No	13	43.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The firms that indicated willingness to learn more about CI suggested main learning methods among them include; workshops, seminars, chat with experts and self study. Organizations generally seemed to be knee in introducing CI in their operations after learning more about it. The willingness is stronger among organizations that initially indicated that they did not anything about CI.

## **5.0 DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The research has revealed that 73.3% of firms operating in Zambia know about the existence of competitive intelligence. These corporations seem to have a narrow understanding of CI and they differ in the way they define it. A considerable number of firms deem competitive intelligence to be synonymous with market research. Other firms consider competitive intelligence to be the process of gathering, analyzing and distributing information on competitors' activities in the market. Competitive intelligence is broader than market research and does not limit itself to gathering information on competitor's activities. Competitive intelligence gathers, analyzing and distribute information not only competitor's activities but also gather information on all other environmental elements that have the bearing of the operations of the firm. These elements

include economy, government laws and regulations and technology. Through competitive intelligence, organizations gather information on so many aspects of the competitor's activities in the market. These include the prices and services and products being offered by the competitors to their customers. CI also involves counter-intelligence activities aimed at insulating an organization against any intelligence gathering on it by competitors.

The research has also undoubtedly established that many corporations that do know and gather intelligence on their competitors and other environmental factors are those operating in unstable and maturing markets in Zambia. These markets include; telecommunication, broadcasting, food and beverages and aviation industries. For instance, all the three mobile service providers in Zambia (Zamtel, Airtel and MTN) strongly believe in the gathering of CI as it helps in monitoring the moves of their competitors. It also helps to understand what their customers need. Companies in the broadcasting industry such as Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) and MUVI TV believe too in competitive intelligence to remain afloat.

What this research has also established is that in Zambia, no corporation has a dedicated department or section for gathering and analyzing CI. All firms who acknowledged to be gathering CI use departments such as marketing, planning, business development and research to carry out CI. This is a clear departure from the way CI is gathered in corporations in other countries such as South Africa and Canada. For example, in Canada, Janathan (1998) reported that 32% of corporations had standalone CI units responsible for the of gathering and analyzing CI. The lack of CI dedicated departments/sections for corporations in Zambia clearly shows that CI is not well practiced and embraced in Zambia. CI is treated as a cindellela activity which can be done within the marketing, planning and other departments. This however is wrong as gathering and analyzing CI require specialized skills that are not similar to marketing skills. CI needs a dedicated department or section with a cadre of qualified staff to collect and analyze intelligence. The department/section should also be providing counter intelligence activities to put off any intelligence surveillance mounted by its competitors.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

The research has shown that CI is not well appreciated and practiced among firms operating in Zambia. This is so in the sense that no corporation in Zambia has a standalone department / unit dedicated to CI gathering and analysis. There none existence of CI departments/ units in corporations is mainly attributable to the inadequate understanding of the meaning and activities of CI. Many of the organizations in Zambia look at CI as market research or an activity that involves gathering information on the competitor's activities in the market. This narrow understanding has made CI activities to be attached to organizational departments such as marketing, research and business development. CI is broader in nature. It encompasses activities of gathering information on competitors' activities and scanning the environment for threats and opportunities. In addition, CI involves mounting counter intelligence activities aiming creating a fire wall against any intelligence gathering on the firm from then competitors. There is however hope for the growth of CI activities among firms Zambia as more than half of the firms surveyed showed interest to learn more about and implement CI in their operations. There is therefore a window of hope for raising awareness and importance of CI in organizational operations through workshops and seminars.



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