# THE DETERMINANTS OF CRM EFFICIENCY IN EMERGING MARKETS: EVIDENCE FROM THE BANKING SECTOR IN SINDH, PAKISTAN

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**Abstract**

*This study examines the effectiveness of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems in the banking sector of Sindh, Pakistan. It addresses a key concern: many banks are not fully aligning their CRM strategies with the fast-changing dynamics of the banking industry and often lack clarity on the factors that contribute to successful CRM implementation. A qualitative approach was adopted, using semi-structured interviews with personnel responsible for developing and executing CRM strategies in commercial banks across Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur. Thematic analysis was applied to identify the major patterns and insights emerging from the data. Findings reveal that although some determinants of CRM success are consistent with those observed in developed markets, Pakistan's unique cultural and institutional environment requires banks to adapt CRM practices to local conditions. Important factors influencing CRM effectiveness include the integration of multiple communication channels, organizational structure, employee training and recruitment, customer information management, and sensitivity to cultural and social dynamics. The study also introduces two practical contributions: a CRM readiness heat map that helps banks evaluate their preparedness for CRM implementation, and a CRM Index developed from 16 sub-themes to assess CRM performance across organizational, institutional, and customer data dimensions. Grounded in Contingency Theory, Institutional Theory, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions, this research offers valuable insights for academics and practitioners seeking to enhance CRM performance in emerging markets.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Customer relationship management (CRM) is essentially about how companies manage their interactions with customers, aiming to boost loyalty and commitment. To truly make a difference with each client, you need to understand their unique situation and take tailored steps to address any challenges they face (Abekah-Nkrumah et al., 2020). Customer portfolio management (CPM) helps make these CRM decisions easier by considering each customer's specific role and value (G & S, 2020).

This approach allows the company to focus on building and strengthening relationships with its most important clients (Thakur & Workman, 2016). CRM can also be seen as a chain reaction sparked by new ways of engaging with customers. describe CRM as something that, even in a vast industry, often involves a small, dedicated group of people (Aramburu & Pescador, 2019). It's important that CRM efforts are visible and implemented correctly for the right teams at the right time.

The foundation movement will truly grasp this understanding only when it carefully examines and clearly explains the reasons behind its decisions whether to continue serving or cease operations at a customer's location. It's clear that maintaining private communication channels is vital, and one effective approach is to envision new activation strategies and enhance the capacity to carry out these actions effectively. Organizations across the globe use CRM systems to gain a competitive edge, boost the long-term value of their clients, and set themselves apart from rivals. They achieve this by fostering and nurturing strong, lasting relationships with customers. This allows them to spot shifts in customer needs, anticipate their behavior, and craft the right communication tools for the job.

CRM helps businesses zero in on the most valuable customer groups and craft customized marketing approaches for each one (Josiassen et al., 2014). (Khan et al., 2024) pointed out that although earlier studies have really highlighted how important customer loyalty (CL) is, it's still a tough nut to crack for the service industry. They noted that a big reason why top management struggles to build loyalty is because the market is so unpredictable. (Aramburu & Pescador, 2019)  previously showed that managers often find it hard to boost customer loyalty and boost profits at the same time. However, because there hasn't been a lot of research on the topic, they've had a hard time figuring out exactly what makes customer loyalty grow.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) decisions are made smoother and easier thanks to Customer Portfolio Management (CPM). CPM takes into account where each customer fits within the company's overall portfolio. This approach helps the company focus its efforts more effectively, strengthening and developing its most important connections with its most valuable customers (Thakur & Workman, 2016). In another view, CRM acts as the "chain" reaction the resulting sequence of events that stems from new, key activities aimed at communicating with customers (Thomson et al., 2002). also describe CRM as something that operates within the vast scope of an industry, even if it directly involves only a small number of people (Neetu Andotra & Deepti Abrol, 2016). This information should be presented promptly to the relevant individuals during the appropriate discussions or review periods once the necessary sections are finished (Mehrbakhsh Nilashi et al., 2023). Understanding this foundational knowledge will truly set in once the reasons behind decisions to either retain or let go of a customer are carefully considered and thoroughly documented (Bavarsad Pegah, 2024; Shaikh, 2022).

It's clear that maintaining confidentiality is crucial, and one practical way to achieve this is by brainstorming ways to activate privacy measures and enhance the capacity to consistently carry out these actions (Chai Zhengmeng et al., 2024).

The main aim with this research is to create a thorough plan for Customer Relationship Management (CRM) that takes into account all the important factors at play in Pakistan's banking world. Our specific goals are to:

1. Find out how bank managers currently understand and put CRM into practice in today's business climate.

2. Look into how keen bank management is to grow client relationships within the industry.

The study is important as it proposes a new framework and offers useful information on the development of customer relationship management strategies that are specific to the diverse environments of emerging markets.

In the case of banks, the results are especially valuable in a number of aspects. They can assist in enhancing customer retention by discovering the major issues that will have a better connection with customers. They are also able to direct banks on how to maximize their resource allocation as the investments in technology, people, and processes have to be more strategic.

Also, the research might benefit training programs and policies, providing the staff with the competencies to use CRM systems successfully.

## 2. Literature Review

In the service world, building strong customer relationships is the cornerstone of any plan, and this is especially true in banking where people handle financial products. So, most research has actually debunked the common myth that technology is the be-all and end-all for managing customer relationships. For instance, Chen & Popovich's work back in 2003 showed that CRM is really about blending people, processes, and tech together effectively. Building on earlier studies like (Sin et al., 2005; Sofi & Hakim, 2018) further explored this, adding two more important angles for the service industry particularly for banks and hotels focusing on key customer focus, CRM organization, information management, and the tech that powers it all. When it comes to finding new customers and tailoring interactions to their needs, studies by (Roy et al., 2018; Sahoo et al., 2023) suggest that four key CRM aspects customer relations, efficiency, empathy, and responsiveness don't really very much in how customers view the overall CRM experience. (Roy et al., 2018) also highlights several big factors that can make bank services more efficient, such as the way banks connect with their customers, automating services, keeping customers informed and positive about the bank, and ensuring customer safety and protection. (Boulding et al., 2005) research points out that some CRM factors in the banking sector are particularly relevant in Pakistan. Moreover, in the service industry, successfully rolling out projects is crucial for a company's success. A study by (Vazifehdoust, H et al., 2012) is noteworthy here, as it identifies nine groups of key success factors for implementing CRM projects, including CRM processes, knowledge management, technical setup, organizational infrastructure, human resource management, company culture, continuous improvement, top management support, and the role of the chief executive officer. (Payne & Frow, 2005) used a strategic CRM framework to pinpoint five cross-functional processes that tie into the performance assessment process. Prior to the performance processes, they

also identified four key processes within strategic CRM: the value development process, value creation process, multi-channel integration process, and information management process. When it comes to the impact of CRM in the banking sector, it's worth noting that certain CRM dimensions such as competence, relationship, showing, and trust have a significant positive effect on customer loyalty. However, information sharing doesn't seem to have a significant relationship with the loyalty of internet subscribers (Umbara & Ariyanti, 2016).

Another study further highlights the influence of customer relationships in banking, showing that relationship marketing strategies grounded in trust, communication, commitment, empathy, financial bonds, social bonds, and cooperation can foster customer loyalty, satisfaction, and retention. These factors ultimately lead to mutual benefits for both customers and banks (Chatterjee et al., 2020).

It turns out that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is also proving to be a key factor in the banking sector in various countries around the world. For instance, a study by (Paudel et al., 2020) in Nepal highlighted that effective communication and relationship management with customers are vital for addressing banking issues faced by clients. Similarly, in South Africa, research by showed that elements like organizational compatibility, a strong customer focus, and a supportive organizational culture are crucial for organizations to implement CRM effectively. When it comes to customer satisfaction, findings by (Joy Eyonam & Pesuah Kofi, 2018) in the Ghanaian banking context indicate that aspects of CRM, such as keeping promises, building trust, and offering excellent customer care, have a notably positive and significant impact on both customer satisfaction and retaining those customers. Alright, let's talk about how the organization is doing. We should really bring up the study by (Elaheh Taghavi Shavazi et al., 2013) their research highlights that how well an organization performs is significantly affected by Customer Relationship Management (CRM), across all its different parts. They looked at CRM in terms of two key areas: starting relationships with customers and keeping those relationships going. On the performance side, they measured it using financial results, how happy customers are, how well

the internal processes work, and how well the organization is learning and growing specifically looking at Iranian banks.

Regarding long-distance relationships, keeping them going often relies on having a central, easily accessible location. This central place acts as a hub that helps build and promote the relationship, encouraging customers to get the best outcomes from the support and preparation offered. This central point isn't just about helping with profitable sales; it's also crucial for handling immediate needs, setting up necessary resources and departments to serve customers effectively, and evaluating, maintaining, and relying on the company's operations (Menza et al., 2024). Essentially, it's a complex tool that really focuses on improving how everything comes together, and it shines by maintaining, encouraging, and strengthening the bonds with everyone involved in the business.

This research is all about looking into the potential and steps involved in rolling out CRM systems. It especially zeroes in on the ongoing discussions in academic papers about CRM in banks, as well as other related areas like research and development, putting CRM into practice, nurturing new businesses, sharing knowledge, and protecting intellectual property with patents (Abibual Getachew Nigatu et al., 2023; Shaikh, 2021). It also covers studies on CRM adoption in developing nations.

To get more specific, the paper uses the situation in Sindh, Pakistan, to examine a particular case in the banking industry. It points out that the reason CRM isn't as widespread in banking within developing countries boils down to three main things: the people involved, the processes they follow, and the technology they use.

## 3. Research Gap
### 3.1 The Challenge
The banking scene in Sindh, Pakistan, is getting more competitive, which makes it crucial for banks to focus on winning and keeping customers happy. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a key tool banks can use to really get to know their customers and serve them better. However, studies suggest that in Pakistan, banks might not be using CRM to its full advantage. The banking sector there

sometimes gets a reputation for being slow to react and not very keen on making necessary changes. The main issue this study tackles is why banks struggle to fully adjust their CRM strategies and why they seem less aware of the internal and external factors that make these strategies work, especially in a developing market like Pakistan. Essentially, CRM is about managing how a company interacts with its customers to build loyalty and commitment. We need a better understanding of customers so they can be treated individually, and effective steps need to be taken to fix this situation.

### 3.2 Theoretical Framework
This study brings together three different theories in a way that makes them work well together—this approach is called theory triangulation.
1. Contingency Theory is the main guide, suggesting that a mix of theories can help explain how things change and evolve over time.
2. Institutional Theory is used to see how external pressures from organizations and systems affect the adoption of CRM.
3. Culture Theory, specifically Hofstede's fifth cultural value dimension which looks at whether people have a short-term or long-term outlook, is used to tackle the research questions about how culture and social factors shape banking strategies.

## 4. Research Methodology
The research took a qualitative approach, using a mix of different research methods. The study looked at commercial banks in the Sindh province of Pakistan, specifically focusing on the areas of Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur. The main way the researchers collected information was through semi-structured interviews. They spoke with branch managers and their team members who are involved in creating and carrying out customer relationship management (CRM) strategies. the information gathered was examined using thematic analysis. This helped the researchers spot the main themes and patterns connected to how CRM systems were put into place.

### 4.1 Key Findings and Discussion
The research shows that making CRM systems work well in Pakistani banks depends on a mix of inside

and outside influences. These can be grouped into three main areas:

**Organizational Factors:** This area looks at internal company aspects, including the way the bank is structured, how employees are trained, and the methods used for hiring staff. Evidence from across the country indicates that banks often had to create their own CRM software because off-the-shelf options didn't integrate properly. They also relied heavily on introductory sessions and training programs to make sure their employees understood and adopted the CRM approach.

**Table 1: Organizational Factors with Impact on commercial banks CRM Program**

| Organizational Factors | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Themes** | **Research Finding** | **Précised Quotes from Research Participants** |
| Vision and strategy | During the initial phase of the CRM program, the vision and strategy weren't communicated very clearly. This lack of clarity made it hard to get buy-in from people, and it also delayed the bank from seeing the benefits of the program. However, once the top leadership was on board, the CRM initiative began to gain momentum across other areas of the business. Everyone at the bank understood that without focusing on the customer, they wouldn't be able to hit their financial goals. | "Lack of management buy-in at the initial stage and lack of expertise for the implementation delayed the implementation of our CRM program." <br><br> "The strong support of management greatly enhanced the CRM program." |
| Banks wide CRM | The team works together closely to make sure customer complaints are sorted out quickly. Also, the way banks are organized encourages different departments to interact with each other. This setup is designed to match the goal of providing an excellent customer experience | A critical factor of our CRM program was to get the overall concept of the CRM program to all members of staff." |
| Operating structure | As a result, when employees go about their daily tasks, they understand how their actions impact customers and also affect their personal performance goals, which are connected to the company's overall objectives. | "The customer service officers follow the bank policy on customer service." |
| Multiple channel integration | With more than 100 branches spread across the Sukkur region, commercial banks are very easy for their customers to reach. Plus, these banks use electronic methods like the internet to share important information with their clients. | |
| Program management | The research participants believed the CRM program was well managed at the commercial banks. If there were any issues or concerns, they were brought to the attention of the | "The CRM process included analytical, operational and collaborative CRM. |

| | leadership and then handled appropriately.. | |
|---|---|---|
| Change management | The change management process was well handled as everyone was brought on board and informed about the CRM model and what it could deliver for the business. Although there were a few disbelievers, they were later turn into brand ambassadors for the CRM program" | "Staff members have come to realize that proper implementation of the CRM program is central to the bank's business." |
| Customer processes | To define customer processes and the types of customer solutions to be provided as part of the CRM program, the banks made use of mystery shoppers" | "The use of mystery customers/shoppers aided the success of our CRM program." |
| CRM measures | A set of key CRM measures were developed and monitored throughout the program implementation. Some of the measures were imposed by the central bank of Pakistan which had the aim of improving service delivery in the banking industry of Pakistan. | "The measures of success of our CRM program included amongst others: results of the bank's rating by independent service bureau, frequency of the service triggers from the service ambassadors and trend analysis from operational risk indicators relating to customer complaints, operational errors, etc." |
| Training and recruitment practices | Effective training on service excellence was critical in the delivery of a successful customer centric program. Also, skills gap assessment was conducted and where there was a gap that could not be filled internally, banks had to recruit externally | "We undertook training on service excellence." "Getting staff to swallow the CRM principles was resolved through orientation classes and training." |
| Adequate technology | Commercial banks experienced lots of problems with the interface of its CRM applications. The banks finally resorted to build its own CRM application with the intent to keep its costs down" | "The lack of software solutions made the monitoring of the CRM activities quite boring." |

**Institutional Factors:** This aspect looks at outside influences and expectations, such as cultural and social factors that impact the country. Using theories about institutions and culture in the study helps clarify how these external surroundings affect the need for and success of CRM programs.

**Table 2: Institutional Factors with Impact on commercial banks CRM Program**

| Institutional Factor | | |
|---|---|---|
| Themes | Research Findings | Précised Quotes from Research Participants |
| Regulatory motives: Regulations: Government laws/Industry regulations | The National Credit Act and Consumer Protect Act have affected how the company promotes its customers. However, the research participants acknowledge that commercial banks run with the understanding of not being in a position to annoy the customer.<br><br>Commercial banks has to request customers' consent before promoting its products to its customer base. | "All these laws are good because they encourage good business practices."<br><br>"Our customers have become more vocal as they are more informed. Legislation has forced them to become more informed and aware."<br><br>"So if you unsubscribe from all electronic communications then you are off the database, and you do not et to email." |
| Mimetic motives: Competitors' Activities | Direct competitor's activities are monitored closely. Their external marketing activities have forced commercial banks on how to engage with its customers.<br><br>Competitors 'activities have reduced commercial market share.<br><br>Retailers way of doing business such as long store opening hours have now been adopted by the company in some of its branches | 'Our competitors is the reason why our CEO when on Twitter."<br><br>"Our competitor was the first one to go on twitter and everyone was just following him"<br><br>"The front end of our competitors is quite slick, but they have other challenges too" |
| Normative: Socio cultural and political environment | The political landscape together with languages did not greatly affect how commercial banks engages with its current and potential customers | "I think, cultural diversity our political background, that is important and it stills plays a huge factor today. I have to have a bit of a community dynamic in my (CRM) approach. I cannot just come here and put out products. It's got to be relevant. It's got to talk to the target market and it's got to have a bit of societal skill." |

**Customer Data Factors:** This dimension pertains to how customer information is stored and used, as well as the need to combine various channels for communicating with customers, including informal methods and social media.

**Table 3: Customer Data Factors with Impact on commercial banks CRM Program**

| Customer Data Factors | | |
|---|---|---|
| Themes | Research Findings | Verbatim Quotes from Research Participants |
| Data quality (recency and | There is voluminous, non-uniform data which at time prevents timely reporting | "There's too much data in the bank. It's taking too long to move the data into our |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| richness of the data) | and the generation of customer insights. Moreover, the velocity of data has increased significantly and data management has become complicated due to data coming from multiple sources.<br><br>This large customer database has not been fully utilized due to regulatory restrictions. In reality, the commercial banks database required for marketing purposes has shrunk to half its size due to legislation which requires customer consent to campaigns" | data warehouse.  Like, some days our batches fall over.  So this does not affect customers, but it affects the people who do the reporting in order to drive performance as well, so you have to get the reporting"<br><br>"The challenge is that 40% of our book is split between "yes" and "no" to marketing." |
| Data storage and mining capabilities | Quality of data is good for new data which makes the delivery of information to customers very high.<br><br>Information that gets undelivered either via electronic or print media is mainly due to poor data capture.<br><br>There are lots of duplicated records in the company database.<br><br>"Customers are not flagged on the systems on the basis of their preferences on how they want to be communicated to and for which products or services" | "The delivery is high because they are new clients, and this is an actual valid address that they gave a month ago."<br><br>"The Electronic billing for the bank is about 75 or 80 percent, which is good for the banking sector."<br><br>"We end up migrating two customers over four, where there's actually only one person.  I mean, personally, I had about seven or eight customer records for me, for one person.  And you have to sit with the guys.  And then they have to combine all of these into only one person.  And we have got a lot of that."<br><br>"It's a big job to initiate (preference centers). To maintain, it takes a bit of work.  But the actual technical kind of makeup is not that hard. The banks implementing at the moment, huge, big SAP implementation where all custom preferences are going to be held there as well." |
| Data storage, security and mining capabilities | The formatting of data as well as its location is a  challenge the company is faced with.<br><br>The ability to mine data to generate new insights for the CRM program is key. | "I did almost say your biggest challenge is migrating the data that you have got from all of these different old systems.  We had so many isolated systems that we used to do the different products on, the different customer files, the different sales systems, different workflow systems, CRM systems. We had to combine all of these systems and get integrated into this one step |

| | | system, which, I think, that was the most difficult thing. We are still migrating data over. And we are finding that there is a lot of data missing."<br><br>"I think you need to use analytics to drive your understanding of the customer. And when I say analytics, it's a mixture of data driven analytics as well as data driven but more survey driven. So not just your pure database data." |
|---|---|---|

The study emphasizes that adapting CRM strategies to the local context is crucial for effectiveness, as simply replicating models from high-income markets is insufficient. The detailed findings for the Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur regions provide a comprehensive overview of the "as is" CRM situation, including current practices, metrics, and outcomes.

## 5. Conclusion and Future Directions
### 5.1 Conclusion
This research successfully pinpointed the crucial factors that drive successful CRM implementation within banks in Sindh Province, Pakistan. By weaving together Contingency, Institutional, and Culture theories, the study crafted a strong blueprint for tailoring CRM strategies specifically for emerging markets. Furthermore, the creation of the CRM Index—which measures success across company operations, institutional environment, and customer data aspects—and the readiness heat map, offer practical, hands-on tools valuable for both academic evaluation and practical business planning.

## 6. Recommendations and Future Research
Based on these findings, it would be wise for banks to use the heat map we developed. This will help

them evaluate their preparedness before starting or revamping their CRM program. It gives them a clearer picture of the effort involved and the time it will likely take.
For future research, we encourage scholars to:

\*    Look into larger geographic regions, going beyond Sindh.
\*   Broaden the study to different sectors, like hotels and retail businesses.
\*    Carry out long-term (longitudinal) studies to follow how CRM effectiveness changes over time.
\*   Conduct quantitative research to empirically test the suggested CRM model and the CRM Index we created.

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