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THE EFFECTS OF RELATIONAL MARKETING ON THE BUSINESS PERFORMANCE: A PRACTICAL STUDY ON THE AUTHORIZED AUTO SALES AGENCIES

Abstract:

With the globalization, the information age has revealed a new understanding of doing business in which the competition is more intense. This new understanding has changed the customers' buying behavior and the factors affecting them. The power in the change relationship established between the company and the customer shifted focus from the manufacturer or the dealer side to the customer side. Today, one of the most important marketing communication tools supporting us to reach information about customers is "relational marketing". This study consists of three chapters formed the axis of relational marketing. In the first three chapters, marketing, modern marketing methods and relational marketing were discussed. In the third chapter, analyzes were conducted to measure the effects of relational marketing practices on business performance. In this section, the methodology and the findings of a research project covering the authorized auto sales agencies in the province of Konya were addressed, hypotheses were tested and some suggestions were presented.

Keywords:

Marketing, Relationship Marketing, Business Performance

JEL Classification: M31, M00, M30

1. Introduction

Emergence of new business transaction approaches, where competition is more intense, with globalization has also changed the purchase behaviors of the customers and the factors affecting such behaviors. The power in the change relation established between the enterprise and the customer has changed direction from the producer or vendor side towards the customer side. The enterprises had to reshape their marketing applications in order to be successful in such an environment. The competitive superiority of an enterprise depends on establishing long-period relations with its customers and creating a customer loyalty. In this direction, one of the most effective models used in customer value creation is seen as "Relational Marketing".

Automotive industry is one of the leader sectors that are positively affecting the income level of the country thanks to the employment capacity and added value it creates and the economic escalations it provides. Automotive industry is shown among the locomotive sectors in Turkey just as the case for the entire globe in terms of its production capacity, employment power, product diversity and the standards it has reached, and furthermore, due to the information accumulation in the sector, the wide product range, high export potential and the geographical advantages of the country.

In this study, which has the target of uncovering the relation between the relational marketing method applications and operation performance, the relational marketing applications perception of the authorized automobile sale agencies acting in Konya province and the relevant effects on operational performance are examined.

2. Purpose of Research

The basic purpose of the research is to determine the effects of relational marketing applications of the authorized automobile vendors acting in Konya Province on their operation performance.

The sub- purposes of the research can be gathered under the following headings

- Purposes for the determination of relational marketing perception
- Purposes for the determination of relational marketing applications

- Purposes for the determination of operation performance

3. Method of Research

In the study, the “applied” research method has been used in general. The applied researches are the researches made for assessing the produced information, controlling the environment, ensuring the solution of the problems (Gökçe et al., 2001: 16). The basic characteristic of the applied researches is to set forth the properties of interest of the main population with tools such as questionnaires, interviews, sampling etc (Seyidoğlu, 1993: 25).

3.1. Choice of Enterprises included in the Research

Taking into consideration the scope of the research, the wide scope of the the data to be collected requires the acquirement of data from an appropriate sample group. In this context, the research has been performed making use of the data for the year 2012 on automobile sales agencies, which use relational marketing applications in an intense way and which are registered at the Chamber of Commerce of Konya. The number of authorized automobile sales agencies registered at Konya Chamber of Commerce is 54. All employees bearing the titles of marketing director, sales director, sales representative and sales personnel at those 54 authorized sales agencies registered at Konya Chamber of Commerce are included within the scope of the research. Besides those people, who are considered to have sufficient knowledge about relational marketing applications and who effectively use relational marketing in application, the questionnaire has also been applied to general directors and vice directors of some companies. In this context, the sample group of the research consists of 216 people working at 54 authorized automobile sales agencies acting in Konya province.

3.2. Preparation of Questionnaire Form

Questionnaire is used as the data collection tool in this research, which has the purpose of examining the ways of application of relational marketing in terms of customer relations at authorized automotive sales agencies and uncovering the existing condition at the authorized automotive sales agencies. The questionnaire, which is targeted to be prepared in compliance with its purpose, has been created as

the result of a literature examination and by obtaining opinions of experts. Taking into consideration that there is a close relation between the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, the operations of arranging the questions included in the questionnaire, the design of the questionnaire and performance of pilot study have all been performed with great care.

3.3. Application of the Questionnaire Form

Direct interview method is used in the research. The questionnaire has been applied face to face after making an appointment and this has positively affected the return ratio and in this context, a return ratio of 86% has been obtained.

3.4. Coding and Analysis of Data

In the assessment of the questionnaire results, "SPSS for Windows 19.0 version" is used, therefore all question headings in the questionnaire form have been coded and then the answers in the questionnaire form have been arranged in the form of data and entered to the program for analysis.

4. Assessment of Research Findings

The statistical analysis of the data obtained as the result of the research in this section shall be explained with the help of tables.

The distribution of the responders of the questionnaire, at the enterprises, which participated in the research, is given in Table 1 hereunder.

Table 1. Titles of the Responders of the questionnaire at the enterprises, which participated in the research

Title	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Sales representative	77	41,5
Sales manager	53	29,0
Sales director	29	15,6
Marketing director	15	8,0
Vice general director	8	4,3
General director	3	1,6
Total	185	100,0

The information in Table 1 shows that the collected data is provided by the people, who are experts of their subjects and that the obtained data is compliant with the purpose of the research.

Table 2. Distribution of Enterprises Participating in the Research in accordance with the Number of Employees

Number of employees	Number of enterprises (n)	Percentage (%)
More than 20	21	38,9
Between 11-20	18	33,3
Less than 10	15	27,8
Total	54	100,0

The values herein above can be interpreted that the enterprises participating to the study are enterprises, which provide significant contribution to employment, which are institutionalized and which act on the basis of departments.

Table 3. Number of Employees, who Are Trained in Marketing

Number of Employees Trained in Marketing	Number of enterprises (n)	Percentage (%)
10-14 people	21	39,8
15-19 people	15	27,7
5-9 people	11	20,3
20 people or more	5	9,2
4 people or less	2	3,7
Total	54	100,0

The ratios in Table 3 can provide information on the importance of trained employees in marketing area. The results are significant in terms of being results that support the importance of marketing departments in automotive sector, which is among the leading sectors, where marketing functions are effectively used.

Table 4. Distribution of Employees in Accordance with Information Level About Relational Marketing

Information Level about Relational Marketing	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	185	100,0
No	-	-
Total	185	100,0

In terms of the reliability of the results of the study performed in relational marketing area, the knowledge of the employees participating in the study, about relational marketing is important. When the responses of the participants of the questionnaire to this question are examined, it is seen that they have knowledge about relational marketing with 100% ratio. This result shows that current models are followed in marketing area by the authorized automotive sales agencies and that relational marketing model among those models, which has found a widespread and effective area of application today, is known by the employees.

The assessment of the enterprises, which participated in the research, in terms of provision of special services, is given in Table 5.

Table 5. Provision of Special Services to the Customer

Services specific to the customer	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	157	84,9
No	28	15,1
Total	185	100,0

Provision of customer – specific services by the authorized automotive sales agencies participating in the questionnaire with a ratio of 84,9% is an important data in terms of significance of this study, which is based on relational marketing foundation.

In all of 45 enterprises participating in the research, there is a database, where records related with interactions with the customers, are kept. In terms of relational marketing applications, recording the interactions with the customers has primary importance.

In table 6 hereunder, the results of the study related with the purposes of use of the information included in the databases of the enterprises participating in the research are given.

Table 6. Purposes of Use of the Information included in the Databases of the Enterprises, which Participated in the Research

Purposes of Use of the Information included in the Databases	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Providing information on new products related with the choices and habits of the Customer,	182	98,4

To provide information about promotion works,	179	96,8
Ensuring feedbacks related with the purchased product,	170	91,9
Celebration messages on special days (birthday, anniversary, festivals, new year, promotion date, etc.)	112	60,5
Ensuring customer focus in new product development,	87	47,0
Invitation to some special days (competitions, lottery, meetings, etc),	55	29,7
Other (Indicate.)	28	15,1

Note: *Since it is possible to mark more than one option, it exceeds 100% in total.*

As can be seen in the table, when the purposes of use of the information included in the database of the enterprises included in the research are examined, it is seen that the option “providing information on new products related with the tastes and customs of the customer” is used by almost all of the enterprises (98,4%). Informing the customer on the products s(he) might buy is one of the basic priorities of relational marketing applications. An enterprise, which continuously measures the expectations and desires of the customer and which can inform its customers about products and services in accordance with this will ensure customer belonging and will take one of the basic steps of relational marketing process. Besides this, feedback from relevant customers about automobile campaigns, new studies on payment conditions and especially in relation with the service and maintenance activities have made important contributions in terms of the enterprises, which participated in the study.

In Table 7, Table 8 and Table 9 hereunder, the degree of effect on the activities related with personnel created by the relational marketing applications, and their distribution in accordance with the activities performed for the customers and in accordance with the activities performed the enterprise are given.

Table 7. Distribution of Relational Marketing Applications of the Participants of the Research in accordance with Activities performed for the Personnel

Activities performed for the personnel	Average	Std. Dev.
The effect of training programs given within the scope of relational marketing on the level of increasing the relation quality of the personnel with the customers,	4,77	0,85
The effect of training programs given within the scope of relational marketing on increasing the performance level of the operation personnel,	4,75	0,78

The effect of rewarding the development in personnel performance as the result of the training on personnel satisfaction,	4,34	0,93
The effect of rewarding the personnel on his/her loyalty to the enterprise,	4,27	1,02
The effect of training programs given within the scope of relational marketing on on increasing the sale and marketing efficiency,	4,22	0,88
The effect of employee satisfaction on customer satisfaction,	4,10	1,13
The effect of organization culture that will develop in the enterprise in developing the enterprise image,	3,97	1,09
The effect of training programs given within the scope of relational marketing on the development of an organization culture within the enterprise,	3,61	0,69

Note: (i) n=185; (ii) On the scale, 1 means very ineffective and 5 means very effective; (iii) In accordance with Friedman bidirectional Anova test ($\chi^2=469,352$ and $p<,001$), the results are statistically significant.

As can be seen in Table 7; the training programs provided at the enterprises within the scope of relational marketing are effective on increasing the quality of relation of the personnel with the customers and on increasing the performance of the enterprise personnel. Furthermore, those trainings play an active role on developing an organization culture.

Table 8. Distribution of Relational Marketing Applications of the Participants of the Research in accordance with Activities performed for the Customer

Activities performed for the customers	Average	Std. Dev.
The effect of keeping profitable customers on the long period profitability of the enterprise,	4,91	0,78
The effect of relational marketing activities on increasing the benefit obtained by the customer and creating more customer value,	4,85	0,97
The effect of compliance with the undertakings of the enterprises on the trust of customers to the enterprise,	4,13	1,13
The effect of relational marketing activities on decreasing the risk expected and perceived in terms of customer satisfaction,	4,11	0,85
The effect of relational marketing activities on the quality of service provided by the enterprises to their customers	3,98	1,07
The effect of focus of enterprises on profitable customers as the result of determining "life long customer value" on keeping those customers in hand,	3,64	0,97
The effect of relational marketing activities on	3,56	0,85

compliance of the enterprise with its undertakings,		
The effect of ensuring customer satisfaction on increasing the number of loyal customers of the enterprise,	3,42	0,78
The effect of loyalty programs on increasing the loyalty of customers to the enterprise,	3,30	1,15
The effect of relational marketing activities on decreasing the costs endured by the customer,	3,27	1,11

Note: (i) n=185; (ii) On the scale, 1 means very ineffective and 5 means very effective; (iii) In accordance with Friedman bidirectional Anova test ($\chi^2=714,935$ and $p<,001$), the results are statistically significant.

In Table 8, it is seen that in terms of the level of effect of relational marketing applications on activities performed for the customers, they are very effective on “keeping profitable customers in hand, long- period profitability of the enterprise” (4,91). One of the basic purposes of relational marketing activities is keeping the profitable customers in hand and continuing long period profitability. However; it is seen that “the effect of relational marketing activities on increasing the benefit obtained by the customer and creating more customer value” (4,85), and “the effect of compliance of enterprises with their undertakings on the trust of customers in the enterprise” (4,13) are very effective.

Table 9. Distribution of Relational Marketing Applications of the Participants of the Research in accordance with Activities performed for the Enterprise

Activities performed for the Enterprise	Average	Std. Dev.
The effect of relational marketing applications on increasing the customer belonging of enterprises,	4,79	0,96
The effect of relational marketing applications on increasing the sales volume of the enterprises,	4,71	0,78
The effect of having loyal customers in terms of the enterprise on increasing the financial performance of the enterprise in long period,	4,67	0,73
The effect of relational marketing applications on increasing the customer number,	4,48	0,56
The effect of feedbacks obtained from the customers as the result of relational marketing applications on new product development,	4,37	1,23
The effect of the enterprise image to be created as the result of relational marketing on the preference of the enterprise by new customers,	4,12	1,17
The effect of quality of the relation to be established with the customers as the result of relational marketing activities on the competitive superiority of the enterprise due to its being unimitable by the competitors,	4,03	0,98

The effect of relational marketing activities on decreasing the purchase decision process of the customer	3,78	0,77
The effect of positive comments of the customers to the other people as the result of relational marketing activities on decreasing the marketing activities,	3,14	1,34

Note: (i) n=185; (ii) On the scale, 1 means very ineffective and 5 means very effective; (iii) In accordance with Friedman bidirectional Anova test ($\chi^2=618,074$ and $p<,001$), the results are statistically significant.

As can be seen in Table 9, the expression having the highest average is “the effect of relational marketing applications in terms of increasing customer belonging of the enterprises” (4,79). One of the basic targets of relational marketing is to ensure customer belonging. As is the case for many sectors today, it is important to ensure a relation that can be continued in long period with the customers in the automotive sales sector. The option “the effect of relational marketing applications in terms of increasing the sales volume of the customers” is included in the table with an average of (4,71). Among the basic targets of relational marketing applications, creating positive contributions in long period to the profitability and sales volume of enterprises is included. Undoubtedly, successful relational marketing applications will positively impact the sales volumes of the enterprises. The expression: “the effect of loyal customers in terms of enterprise on increasing the financial performance of the enterprise in long period” has an average of (4,67). The relational marketing applications are applications that ensure customer loyalty. The loyal customer will ensure positive returns in the financial performance of the enterprise in the long period.

In Table 10 hereunder, the level of effect of relational marketing applications of the participants of the research on the general performance level of the enterprise today in comparison with three years ago is examined.

Table 10. Distribution of Relational Marketing Applications of the Participants of the Research on the Level of Effect on Enterprise Performance three years ago and today

General Criteria	Performance	Three years ago		Today		Variance	Wilcoxon Test	
		Ave.	Std. dev.	Ave.	Std. dev.		Z	P
Ensuring customer satisfaction in comparison with competitors		3,51	0,94	4,28	0,70	0,77	-5,194	<,001
Market share of the enterprise in comparison with competitors		3,37	1,04	4,25	0,79	0,88	-4,998	<,001
Efficiency of enterprise in comparison with competitors		3,25	0,92	3,90	0,88	0,65	-5,946	<,001
Sales of enterprise in comparison with competitors		3,16	0,97	3,72	0,97	0,56	-5,465	<,001
Product quality of enterprise in comparison with competitors		3,12	1,00	3,46	0,83	0,34	-7,171	<,001
Level of reaching the targets of enterprise in comparison with competitors		3,07	0,88	3,39	1,05	0,32	-6,927	<,001
Profitability of enterprise in comparison with competitors		3,14	0,49	3,25	0,88	0,11	-4,264	<,001
Innovativeness of enterprise in comparison with competitors		3,09	0,65	3,21	1,06	0,13	-7,277	<,001
Product and service delivery speed of enterprise in comparison with competitors		2,97	0,78	3,17	1,04	0,09	-5,513	<,001
Service quality of enterprise in comparison with competitors		3,05	0,83	3,16	1,17	0,42	-5,512	<,001
Trademark loyalty of enterprise in comparison with competitors		2,84	0,86	3,11	1,02	0,31	-4,311	<,001
Institutional reputation of enterprise in comparison with competitors		2,69	0,79	3,07	1,06	0,38	-5,497	<,001
Employee satisfaction of enterprise in comparison with competitors		2,65	0,77	2,96	1,13	0,31	-5,37	<,001

Not: (i) n=185; (ii) On the scale, 1 means very bad and 5 means very good.

When Table 10 is examined, it is seen that relational marketing applications have a positive effect on all performance indicators. The relational marketing applications have a positive effect on general performance criteria of the enterprise as well as

customer – focused performance criteria such as increasing customer value, ensuring customer belonging but most importantly ensuring customer satisfaction.

In order to determine whether the relational marketing applications of the enterprises participating in the research have an effect on the general operation performance, efforts have been shown to determine the variation in the enterprise performance in relation with the level of relational marketing applications. In this respect, in a similar way with the method applied by Güleş (1996) and Bülbül (2003), the total performance of the enterprise is found by summing the variation in the performance criteria in the last three years and in order to determine whether total performance varied depending on relational marketing level, the enterprises participating in the research are divided into two groups at median level as enterprises applying a low level of relational marketing and the enterprises applying a high level of relational marketing, and the performance of those two groups are compared. The effect of level of relational marketing applications of the enterprises participating in the research on the enterprise performance is given in Table 11.

Table 11. Effect of Level of Relational Marketing Application of the Enterprises Participating in the Research on the Enterprise Performance

Performance Indicators	Enterprises applying low level relational marketing (n=64)		Enterprises applying high level relational marketing (n=121)		M-W U Test (single-direction)
	Ave.	Std. dev.	Ave.	Std. Dev.	
Ensuring customer satisfaction in comparison with the competitors	3,96	1,02	4,10	1,38	0,086
Market share of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors	3,87	1,10	4,02	1,20	0,02
Efficiency of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors	3,43	0,90	3,77	0,65	0,01
Sales of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors	3,11	1,02	3,56	0,78	0,036
Product quality of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors	3,14	0,88	3,35	0,89	0,004

Level of reaching targets of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors	3,09	1,02	3,22	1,24	0,085
Profitability of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors	2,96	1,05	3,15	0,87	0,003
Innovativeness of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors	2,76	0,77	3,10	0,89	0,004
Speed of product and service delivery of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors	2,51	1,02	3,17	1,24	0,085
Service quality of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors	2,87	1,05	3,04	0,87	0,003
Trademark loyalty of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors	2,94	0,90	3,02	0,78	0,084
Institutional reputation of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors	2,96	3,04	3,02	0,90	0,079
Employee satisfaction of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors	2,57	3,12	2,96	0,82	0,081
Total	40,17	16,89	43,48	12,51	0,58

As can be seen in Table 12, 64 of the employees of the enterprises participating in the research have indicated that their enterprise applies low level relational marketing and 121 of them indicated that their enterprise applies high level relational marketing and the classification is performed in accordance with this criterion. In relation with the performance criteria: The market share of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors, efficiency of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors, sales of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors, product quality of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors, profitability of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors, innovativeness of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors, service quality of the enterprise in comparison with the competitors, these are statistically significant for both groups in accordance with Mann-Whitney U Single – direction test. As can be seen from the results, the performance of the enterprises applying relational marketing at high level is higher.

5. CONCLUSION

Relational marketing, which means creation of a new value for the customers and then making use of this relation for the entire life, is a marketing strategy and policy, which is designed for developing long – period relations including a closer and emotional aspect, with the purpose of increasing customer loyalty and conducting business again with the existing customers. The key to a successful relational marketing is loyalty and trust in the relation. Those two elements constitute the basis of a long – period relationship. The period of relationships is directly proportional with the profitability of the enterprise. The longer the period of relationship, the higher the profitability becomes.

In the essence of relational marketing lies feeling the enterprises, with which the consumers are in a relation, as someone in the family. In this research, the effect of relational marketing applications having a critical importance in terms of the enterprises on the performance of the enterprise has been assessed as the result of performing the statistical analysis of findings obtained from a research and examining them. When the research results included in this study performed on automotive agencies are examined, it is seen that the target of uncovering the relation between relational marketing method applications and enterprise performance has been reached.

However, the coverage of the authorized automobile sales agencies in Konya Province has been an important limitation of the research. The researches to be performed in the future may be applied in other areas of the automotive sector (suppliers, main distributors, independent sales units), which has a very dynamic structure in Turkey. Furthermore, the future studies to be performed in this area may include a comparison research between different sectors.

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