

RELATIONSHIP MARKETING IN BRANDING: THE AUTOMOBILE AUTHORIZED INDEPENDENT DEALERS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This paper focused the relationship marketing in branding within the customer durable goods, specific to the firm-dealer relationship in Malaysia automobile industry perspective. The dealers in this study represented by four main authorized independent sales dealers, which exclusively carrying the firm's brand. The survey method is used in this study. The findings showed that in Malaysia automobile firm-dealers relationship there are moderate to high adoption of relationship marketing among each dealer with their firms. Relations to this, there are differences exist between relationship marketing components among these four automobile sales dealers towards their firm's brand. From the findings, it's tends to suggest that relationship marketing is able to become among of importance factors in proposing why the sales volume of certain brand name is higher than others. Great concerned on relationship marketing will create significance difference in firm's brand sales.

Key Words: Relationship marketing; Branding; Brand name; Brand equity; Relationship trust; Relationship commitment; Relationship satisfaction; Sales Dealers.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Relationship marketing in nowadays market has emerged as valuable strategy for a firm to concern. In relation, a diverse stream of research has evolved and developed around relationship marketing. This consists of relationship marketing in service marketing processes, network and resource management, inter-organizational issues, customer behaviour, and value and supply chain management (Bush et al., 2007). Unfortunately, majority of the study around relationship marketing have been undertaken in the Western country (Fengyi et al., 2007; Ndubisi and Chan, 2005). Seldom of relationship marketing studies is focused on Asian perspectives, for example, in Malaysia country. This includes the investigation of relationship marketing in the context of Malaysia automobile authorized independent sales dealers.

By looking at Malaysia country, the automobile industry is among of the industries that brings imperative contribution to Malaysian economy. Part of this greatest successful is contributed by automobile sales channels, including the authorized independent sales dealers. Concerning on Malaysia automobile brands, there are two main local Malaysia automobile brands which received interesting demand from Malaysian consumers. They are referring to Proton and Perodua. Besides the local brand, the foreign brands also convincing. Two significant foreign brands that receive higher acceptance from Malaysian consumer are referred to Toyota and Honda. In Malaysian markets these two foreign brands are popular brands that are able to capture very interesting market share in the country. Other brands likes Nissan, Mercedes, Hyundai, and Kia are not exempted as well.

Based on the Passenger Car Report, between the year of 2004 to 2008, the passenger car category represented by Proton, Perodua, Toyota, and Honda remarked the contribution of sales volumes for more than 100,000 units for each year. This has revealed the importance contribution of automobile sector towards the Malaysian economy, which cannot be ignored at all. Previously, Proton brand that is the first Malaysia national car was used to be a pioneer in Malaysia automobile market. Unfortunately, the powerful role of Perodua sales channels has proven when lately this brand is able to take away the leading market position from the Proton brand. Since 2006, Perodua brand became the leader of Malaysian automobile market that's contributed the highest of sales volume among other automobile brands. Besides, for foreign automobile brands in Malaysia, the Toyota brand is leading the market in comparison to other foreign brands such as Honda. The increasing level of Toyata's sales volumes, which is higher than other foreign brands explained how motivated their sales channels in fulfil their selling activities for Toyota.

Hence, the success of Perodua and Toyota reflect the effectiveness of their marketing productivity. Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) postulated that relationship marketing would lead to greater marketing productivity. This means that a firm that has great concerned on relationship marketing will create significance difference in firm's brand sales as compare to the firm that not seriously focus on relationship marketing. By looking at Malaysia automobile firm-dealer relationships, to what extent of firms in adopting relationship marketing as important marketing strategy is still questionable. Is there any effect among them in adopting relationship marketing with their sales channels? Besides, the study result also will tend to support the reasons regarding the variation in market acceptance towards the automobile brands in Malaysia. Others, by studying this knowledge gaps will contribute to the generalization aspect of relationship marketing as well. Generalization issue in channel relationship marketing context is largely ignored by channel researchers (Johnson et al., 1993; Ndubisi and Chan, 2005).

Therefore, this paper seeks to study the effect of relationship marketing on four main automobile brands in the context of Malaysia automobile firm-dealers relationship. Specifically, the first objective in this study is to examine the difference in relationship marketing adoption in the context of firm-dealer relationship. There are four main sales dealers involved in this study. Each of them represents as firm's authorized independent sales dealers of four main automobile brands in Malaysia. They are referring to Proton authorized independent sales dealer, which represent for PROTON's sales dealers; Perodua authorized independent sales dealer, which represent for PERODUA's sales dealers; Toyota authorized independent sales dealer, which represent for TOYOTA's sales dealers; and, Honda authorized independent sales dealer which represent for HONDA's sales dealers. Secondly, this study is to examine the effect of relationship marketing components on four main automobile brands carrying by these four automobile sales dealers. The component of relationship marketing in this study is referred to trust, commitment, and satisfaction.

2.0 THE MALAYSIA AUTOMOBILE SALES CHANNELS

According to Rosenbloom (2004), Williamson (2004) and Kotler et al. (2009), retailers such as the dealers are among of importance type of marketing channel and represent as important trade partners for firms. The dealer is someone who aids, supports and serves the manufacturer or firm (Omar and Blankson, 2000). In Malaysia automobile scenario, the authorized independent sales dealers are among of the firm trade partners, which represent the firm's sales channels (or retailers). Essentially, the sales channels are refer to two main groups: *sales branches* and *authorized independent sales dealers*. The authorized independent sales dealer mainly consists of individual independent dealers. However, in Malaysia, some of automobile firms also deal with "superdealer" or independent retail corporation in carrying and selling their brands.

The *sales branch* is defined as , "a firm (or manufacturer)-owned branches that is set-up by firm to deal with all activities involved in carry and selling exclusively the firm's product/brand to final customer". While, the *authorized independent sales dealer* is referring to "*individual independent dealer* and *superdealer* (if have) that are contractually appointed by a firm as important intermediaries that deal with all activities involved in carry and selling exclusively the firm's product/brand to final customer; indirectly represent firm's business "partnership" that perform the important function on behalf of a firm in fulfilling customer needs; and, a firm's business "customer" who bought in a certain or large volume of the product (stock) and tied with the payment arrangement for any stock allocation". Indeed, in Malaysia, the categorization of sales channels is not applied by local automobile firms (i.e., Proton and Perodua) but by foreign automobile firms (such as Honda, Toyota) as well (refer Table 1).

Table 1: The Numbers of Sales Channels Among Selected Car Brands in Peninsular Malaysia

BRAND NAME	SALES BRANCH	AUTHORIZED INDEPENDENT DEALER			
		Individual Independent Dealer	EON Sales Br.	Superdealer DMM Sales Br	Kah Motor Sdn Bhd Sales Br.
PROTON	24	194	30	60	-
PERODUA	37	108	-	-	15
TOYOTA	23	45	-	-	-
HONDA	-	32	-	-	8

Source adopted: Noor Hasmini (2011)

Mainly, the purpose of establishing the sales branch by the automobile firms is for profit generating. This is crucial achievement for every automobile firm, as they basically sold its product brands at the cost price to their dealers. Therefore, for the purpose of firm's expansion and development, the need of profit revenue is important for any strategy improvement including product innovation and differentiation. In other concerns, the need for authorized independent dealer is necessary as well. The firm's reliance on their dealers is not an exemption in further strengthen the firm's selling activities. Besides, it is important to create and expand the network businesses participation, as well as to "enjoy" the dealer's knowledge and skills in selling the firm's brand. This has been proven when 70% of total sales volume is contributed by the authorized independent sales dealers. Nevertheless, another 30% of sales volume is represented by the sales branches. Hence, the explanation also determined the selection of the authorized independent sales dealers as the respondent in this study.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Relationship Marketing

The term of "relationship marketing" was first introduced in North American marketing literature by Berry (1983) in the context of services marketing (Noor Hasmini et al., 2006). The conceptualization of relationship marketing that is represented by the behavior components such as trust, commitment, and satisfaction becomes important relationship assets in that it helps the firm in its effort to achieve a competitive advantage (Fahy & Smithee, 1999; Ford et al., 1998; Harker, 1999).

Trust. The element of trust represents the most important dimension of relationship marketing including in channel relationship such as firm-retailer relationship (Geyskens et al., 1998; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Rosson, 1982; Tajem & Thirkell, 1999). Trustworthy parties are reliable and demonstrate a high level of integrity and the associated qualities, such as consistency, competence, honesty, fairness, responsibility, helpfulness, and benevolence. In a situation where there is risk and incomplete information, trust is critical (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Tajem & Thirkell, 1999).

The significant of trust in developed firm's added value is also has been stressed by many authors. For example, Geyskens et al., (1998) presented that there is a significant relationship between trust and channel performance. In Sin et al., (2005) revealed that trust able to influence the objective performance such as ROI, sales growth, and market share. Similarly, Majdi (2005) found that trust influenced the overall business performance which regards to market and financial performance of the firm.

Despite of trust influence the firm's objective performance as listed above, trust also is found to have significant relationship with firm subjective performance as well. For example, Tajem & Thirkell (1999) found that trust is significantly influenced cooperation. Morgan and Hunt (1994) demonstrated that trust have significant effect toward acquiescence, propensity to leave, cooperation, functional, conflict, and uncertainty. Morgan and Hunt (1994) further postulated that due to the fact that relationships entails vulnerability, therefore the relationship characterized by trust are so highly valued and a major determinant of commitment. Mistrust would serve to decrease the level of commitment in a relationship. This resulted in a shift of the transactions to more direct short-term exchanges.

Commitment. Commitment is defined as 'an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it' (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p. 23). Heffernan (2004) clearly explained that commitment is among the topics most widely focused on in the literature. This argument supports the explanation of some of the past researchers, for example, in Morgan and Hunt (1994), Geyskens et al (1998), and Brian (2007) who postulated that relationship trust and commitment are among the most widely examined and confirmed constructs for relationship marketing.

In relation to marketing channels, commitment is highly important as commitment is the foundation of relationship building. The establishment of commitment in firm-retailer relationship is undeniable for ongoing relationships and maintaining a long-term, valued relationship (Hausman, 2001; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Indeed, the roles of commitment in achieving firm's value added are widely empirically proved by many of past researchers. For example, Armario et al., (2008) in the study of small medium enterprise revealed that commitment able to influence the export performance. Similarly, Abdel Hafiez (2004) in his focus of manufacturing companies demonstrated that, commitment have significant relationship with export performance as well.

Also, Baharom (2008) in the study of manufacturing and services companies found that commitment has significant relationship with business performance. Despite of firm's objective performance, commitment is also found to have significant relationship with firm subjective performance. For example, Leonidou & Kaleka (1998) in the context of international buyer-seller relationship found that commitment have significant relationship with export involvement. Hausman (2001) in the context of manufacturer-retailer relationship found that relationship strength that consists of commitment is found to have significant relationship with perceived performance and cooperation. Others, Morgan and Hunt (1994) in the context of retailer-supplier relationship demonstrated that commitment have significant effect toward acquiescence, propensity to leave, cooperation, functional, conflict, and uncertainty. Even, commitment will lead to satisfaction (Gruen, 1995). Further, Caceres and Paparoidamis (2007) stressed that trust, commitment, and satisfaction are important components of relationship quality. Despite the importance of relationship satisfaction in relationship marketing context, it remains a primal construct which marketing scholars have not address effectively (Andaleeb, 1996; Hong-Youl et al, 2010).

Satisfaction. In relationship marketing, satisfaction is important as high relationship satisfaction can lessen the intensity of blame and anger in damaged relationship (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007). Besides, relationship satisfaction also affect the firm's performance either objective or subjective performance. For example, in BTB context of buyer-seller relationship, Stock (2005) found that there is an inverse relationship between satisfaction and objective performance measurement which referred to price sensitivity. Price sensitivity indicates the degree to which a customer's buying decisions are based on price-related aspects. This means that the higher the level of customer satisfaction, the lower the customer price sensitivity.

Satisfaction also is found to have significant relationship with firm subjective performance as well. For example, Leonidou and Kaleka (1998) in the context of buyer-seller relationship have found that satisfaction is able to influence the export involvement. In firm-clients relationship, Caceres and Paparoidamis (2007) found that satisfaction have significant relationship with business loyalty. In fact, the higher level of satisfaction with a relationship is associated with higher levels of trust and commitment (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007)

3.2 Relationship Marketing in Branding

Mehta et al. (1996), Pelton et al. (2002), and Price (1993) stressed that there are still a needs the research to be conducted in the area of channel relationship marketing. In fact, the investigation of relationship marketing in branding area including in channel perspectives is still need for research attention (Kyung et al., 2008; Hamlin and Chimhundu, 2007).

Branding is a mean to distinguish the goods of one producer from those of another. The word "brand" according to the American Marketing Association (AMA) is a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition". The definition reflects that a brand not only gives the meaning of the product, but also describes the product identity, which differentiates it from other products (Aaker, 1991; Capron & Hulland, 1999; Day & Wensley, 1988; Keller, 2003). The 'differentiation' that is perceived from customers points of view gives equity and represents the added values that make the brands become stronger or competitive (Aaker, 1996a; Blackston, 2000; Hankinson, 2004; Keller, 2008). The strong brand will have a significant impact on the success of the product. This is because the brands with high equity will retain the most power (Norjaya, 2004).

However, for brand success, the relying of brands on relationship marketing is needed. Hamlin and Chimhundu (2007) postulated that the relevance of relationship marketing paradigm in branding context is regards to the "trifecta" of balanced power within relationship of consumer, channel, and firms which has make the relationship marketing has a role to play. Good relationship with the consumers relied on good relationship between the retailer and firm and their respective brands. The success of the firm-retailer relationship (i.e. firm-dealer relationship) is vital as the firm needs support and loyalty from both consumers and retailers. Similarly, the retailers as well need support from both firm and consumer for brand success (Webster, Jr, 2000).

Past researchers empirically showed that relationship marketing able to develop the brand equity. For examples, the relationship marketing component such as trust is able to develop brand equity assets such as brand loyalty (Jones and Soyung, 2010; Chaudhury and Holbrook, 2001). Other component of relationship marketing which referring to commitment also leads to higher brand equity asset such as brand loyalty (Heehyoung et al., 2008). As well as satisfaction component is found to have significant relationship with brand equity assets such as perceived quality and brand loyalty (Hong-Youl et al, 2010).

The brand equity is the added value that a brand name gives to a product. Thus, to a firm, strong brand name affords a differential advantage that enables them to generate greater sales volume and greater margin (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995). Due to brand success is relied on relationship marketing, hence, this present study will investigate how the difference concerned on relationship marketing will create variation in firm's brand sales volume.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Sampling Procedure

This study focused on relationship marketing in branding context. It represents the authorized independent sales dealers of four major automobile brands in Malaysia as the study respondents. There are referring to the authorized independent sales dealer for Proton, Perodua, Toyota, and Honda brands. In this study, the authorized independent sales dealers are referring to "individual independent dealer and superdealer (if have) that are contractually appointed by a firm as important intermediaries that deal with all activities involved in carry and selling exclusively the firm's product/brand to final customer; indirectly represent firm's business "partnership" that perform the important function on behalf of a firm in fulfilling customer needs; and, a firm's business "customer" as well, who bought in a certain or large volume of the product (stock) and tied with the payment arrangement for any stock allocation".

Although relationship marketing from the dealer's perspective is featured in this study, empirical studies in channel relationships that involve the dyadic allow the data to be gathered from only one of the parties (Blesa & Bigne, 2005). This clarification is further enhanced by previous relationship marketing researchers, for example, Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Anderson and Narus (1990). Thus, for the purpose of data collection, a survey method is used. A questionnaire is developed and only distributed to these authorized independent dealers in Peninsular Malaysia and not their firm's brand. There are 132 authorized independent sales dealers which randomly selected. The dealer's sales managers are selected to answer the questionnaire because they are the most qualified informants (Blesa & Bigne, 2005).

The selections of these dealers are followed the procedure proposed by Malhotra (1993), which is based on a random number using Statistical Tables. All respondents were given two-weeks to complete the questionnaire. From 132 responses, only 129 valid responses were received giving a response rate of 97.7 percent.

4.2 Measures

In this study, the relationship marketing components are referring to trust, commitment and satisfaction. The relationship marketing instrument is based on the original scale developed by Morgan and Hunt (1994). Therefore, the relationship marketing in this study is referred to "all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining a successful relational exchange" (Morgan and Hunt, 1994. p. 22). Prior to the main study a pilot test of the questionnaires was conducted. Pertaining to this, the satisfaction dimension is proposed. For dealers, satisfaction is among of critical factors in maintaining their relationship with the firm. Furthermore, Morgan and Hunt (1994) stressed that in addition to trust and commitment components, further replication and extension of other components of relationship marketing need to be studied as well.

Therefore, relationship marketing components in this study are categorized in terms of three important behaviour components: trust, commitment and satisfaction. These representing 9 revised items (after the pilot test): three (3) for trust; three (3) for commitment; and (3) for satisfaction. All of the scale measures presented used a one- to seven-point Likert scale. The definition for each of dimension is as follows:

- Commitment refers to an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).
- Trust is defined as a willingness to rely on an exchange partner to whom one has the confidence (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).
- Satisfaction is defined as the overall feeling evaluation that results from the exchange relationship specific to acceptance, consideration and feedback, and strategy implementation based on any market information sharing of the parties involved.

4.3 Goodness of Measures

The factor analysis and reliability test is conducted for the validity and reliability of the items measures.

Based on factor analysis, the principal components revealed the three extract factors or components of relationship marketing, which are labelled as follows: (1) Trust, (2) Commitment, and (3) Satisfaction. The factor loadings of the items in these three factors are between 0.79 and 0.91. These loadings are greater than 0.50, which is the minimum level required for a sample size of 129. Factor loadings of the items that are 0.50 and below are considered as non-performing items. These non-performing items were deleted and not included for further analysis (Hair et. al., 1998). Once the validity is assured, the reliability assessment is executed for internal consistency of the measurement. The three components of relationship marketing are yielded coefficient alphas of 0.91 for trust, and 0.89 for both commitment and satisfaction. All of them exceed the minimum level of 0.70 suggested by Nunally (1978). So the scales can be regarded as relatively reliable.

5.0 THE ANALYSIS AND FINDING

The result of sample characteristics showed that most of the firms have operated for more than six years with the number of workers being more than 15 people. The majority of sales managers have experience with the brand carried by their firm for more than 6 years. Also, the majority of them have working experience of more than 6 years. As expected, the majority (58.1%) of the dealers are located in the Selangor (37.5%) and Kuala Lumpur (21.1%) area, which is the most modern and advanced region in Malaysia both economically and socially. Indeed, in Malaysia, these areas are where most organizations are located. In terms of firm's location, most of the firms are located in shop lot areas, followed by stand-alone and business lot areas representing 41.9%, 25.0%, and 21.0%, respectively.

In explaining the first study objective, which referring to the effect of relationship marketing adoption in the context of firm-dealer relationship, the one-way ANOVA test is used. The findings showed that the firm's automobile brand in Malaysia that are refer to Proton, Perodua, Toyota, and Honda are considered moderate to high in adopted the relationship marketing with their dealers. From Table 2, it showed that the adoption of relationship marketing is considered high for Perodua and Toyota (mean range from 5.84-6.48). While, the relationship adoption for Proton and Honda is considered moderate (mean range from 5.23 to 6.25) with Honda is slightly higher than Proton.

For second study objective, the finding further identified that there are differences exist between relationship marketing components and the four main automobile brands, which exclusively carrying by these four automobile sales dealers. Particularly, among Malaysian automobile authorized independent dealers, there are differences emerged in terms of how they satisfied and trust their firm's brand.

Table 2: The ANOVA result of Car Brand on Relationship Marketing

RM Var	Car Brand: The Mean Value				F Value	Duncan's Range Test	Eta Square
	PROTON (A1)	TOYOTA (A2)	PERODUA (A3)	HONDA (A4)			
Trust	5.52	6.13	6.48	5.94	8.20*	A1 vs A2, A3, A4	0.20
Commt	5.97	6.13	6.10	6.25	0.36	-	-
Sat	5.23	5.84	5.78	5.33	2.80*	A1, A2, A3, A4	0.08

Notes: mean scores based on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree; *F*-ratios are the result of a one-way ANOVA test; where (*) represent statistical significance at $p < 0.05$.

In Table 2, the dealer of Proton, Perodua, Toyota, and Honda showed the significant differences on how they satisfied [$F=2.80$, $p=0.04$] towards their firm's brand. Although the Eta square, which is 0.08 reflected the medium level of satisfaction differences among them, however, the finding showed that in comparison to Perodua (mean=5.78), Toyota (mean=5.84), and Honda (mean=5.33) dealers, the Proton (mean=5.23) dealers are less satisfied towards their firm.

Obviously, in term of trust level this study has found that there are significant differences among these dealers towards how they trust their firm. The *F* value for trust is 8.20 ($p=0.00$) and based on Duncan's range test, there are significant differences among the group study.

Proton dealers (mean=5.52) are found to be less trust on their firm in comparison to Perodua (mean=6.48), Toyota (mean=6.13), and Honda (mean=5.94) dealers. These three dealers have higher trust in comparison to Proton toward their firms' brands. The Eta square that is equals to 0.20 reflected the large effect of trust differences among them. This demonstrated that in comparison to Proton firm, the Perodua, Toyota, and Honda firm are more success in developing the trust to their dealers. Therefore, the high level of dealers' satisfaction and trust for these three brands in comparison to Proton dealers presented the well adoption of relationship marketing strategy in their context.

In terms of commitment, although the commitment component don't showed any significant effect, however, the insignificant of commitment in this investigation is reasonable. It is the facts that the authorized independent dealers are compulsorily committed towards their supplier firms as they also tied with dealership agreement.

6.0 DISCUSSION

This paper focused the relationship marketing in branding within the customer durable goods, specific to the firm-dealer relationship in automobile industry perspective. Basically, besides the Western context this study is able to further clarify the importance of relationship marketing in branding context, especially in Asia perspective such as in Malaysia. In particular, this study has showed that a good managing of relationship marketing components such as trust and satisfaction is able to enhance the brand name of the firm in comparison to those firm that lack in managing the relationship marketing. Somehow, the findings tend to enhance the reasons towards why some of the firm's brands received good demands from customers and some are not.

In branding, the brand name is a cue for a customer. The customer is not only referring to final customer but the business customer such as the retailers (i.e. a dealer) as well. For dealers, the strong brand name represents the added value that a brand name gives to a product. The emphasis of "added value" in brand name highlighted the brand equity concept (Aaker, 1991; Priluck and Till, 2010). The added value for a dealer, for example the authorized independent sales dealers, representing the varieties of beneficial aspect that they received from the brand based on their past experience with a brand. These added values reflect the equity of a brand which is crucial not only for them but to their supplier firms as well. The reason is due to high equity of the brand represent the strong brand name that account for attractive brand equity outcomes such as the relative price and market share. According to Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), a brand with high market share tends to have high level of repeat purchase. Repeat purchase represents the loyalty of the customers towards the firm's brand. Building customer loyalty especially in competitive markets is crucial as loyalty is a key factor in winning firm's market share, firm's revenue, lower firm's acquisition costs as well as the key to long term, sustainable competitive advantage (Srivastava and Owens, 2010). Even, loyalty leads to customer retention which needed by all of the firms (Little and Marandi, 2003).

Hence, the explanations introduced the importance of brand equity outcomes, which caused the need of firms to search the strategy that able to develop and sustain their brand names. With regard to the present study, managing the relationship marketing component is very important as it tend to differentiate the way the sales dealers value the firm's brand. For example, the findings showed that the relationship trust and satisfaction significantly affect the firm's brand. Among them, trust become the most important as trust give the larger effect of differences in comparison to satisfaction.

Therefore, the importance of trust, which found in this study support the argument of past researchers such as Geysken et al., (1998) and Brian (2007). In Geysken et al., (1998) and Brian (2007), they postulated that trust is among the most widely examined, confirmed constructs and conducive to relationship marketing success. Indeed, trust is considered as an essential ingredient for marketing channel relationships (Geyskens et al., 1998). Geyskens et al (1998) further posited that the focus towards the importance of trust in channel relationships by past researchers began in 1987, when the Dawyer's et al (1987) article implored that trust deserved priority attention. However, there is a need to further researches on trust for generalization purposes.

Another relationship marketing component, which referring to satisfaction, the study results explain that there is significant difference among the dealers towards how they satisfied with their firm's brand. In particular, the sales dealers' for Perodua, Toyota, and Honda are more satisfied with their firm's brand as compared to sales dealers' of Proton. With this finding, the critical conclusion is where the dealers (i.e., Proton dealers) with low satisfaction will create the risk for a firm.

From past literatures, it's been argued that high relationship satisfaction can minimize the intensity of blame and anger in damaged relationship (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007). This means that dissatisfaction will lead to increase the intensity of blame and anger in damaged relationship. Also, Selnes (1998) stressed that satisfaction is important as it will affect the parties' continuances of relationship, reduce the likelihood of exit from the relationship and minimize negative word-of-mouth. In contrast, this means that, dissatisfaction will able to diminish the relationship, increase the likelihood of exit from the relationship as well as negative word-of-mouth.

Hence, dissatisfaction will hardly to achieve relationship quality as satisfaction is among of importance component of relationship quality (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007), create difficulties in achieving firm's value added, for examples, price sensitivity (Stock, 2005), export involvement (Leonidou and Kaleka, 1998), and business loyalty (Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007). Besides, dissatisfaction is also able to deter the achievement of brand loyalty, brand awareness, and brand image (Kyung et al., 2008). As regards to these explanation therefore, the firms need to take serious concentration if they have found that dissatisfaction emerge among their dealers. Better relationship marketing activities need to be focused and implemented in order to create satisfaction component.

For commitment component, even though the evident showed the insignificant relationship but the finding is acceptable as the dealers are firm's authorized dealers which rely on the dealership agreement. Hence, it is the facts that in the context of authorized independent dealers the component of commitment is compulsorily to them. This means that once they have been given authorization to carry the firm's brand, they have to give their commitment to the brand they carry. In addition, the findings support the result of Siguaw et al (1998). In their study context of supplier and authorized distributor market orientation they have found insignificant relationship between distributor market orientation and commitment. Also, in Armario et al (2008) where they discovered that relationship between overall market orientation and foreign market commitment is significant. However, the significance level is very weak at $p = 0.08$.

7.0 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The evidence of this study has proposed the relationship marketing is necessary to be concerned by the firms. Particularly, in Malaysia automobile industry, the firms are still relied on their authorized independent sales dealers in fulfilling the firms' selling activities to the final customers. This have made the relationship between the sales dealers with the firm's final customer are more closed. So, developing the dealers' satisfaction and trust are so much important. The higher the satisfaction and trust are much better as these able to strongly increase the dealers' level of confidence towards the brand they carried-out (Koksal and Apaydin, 2011).

Besides, the relationship trust and satisfaction will able to assist the sales dealers in clearly and confidently communicating the brands' value to the customers. The brand value as either functional and/or emotional is a key driver of attitudes and behaviour. Great brand value in customers-based viewpoints will enhance the equity of the brands. High brand equity enables the firms to generate more sales volume for their brands (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Aaker, 1991, 1992; Lynch & de Chernatony, 2007). Thus, for Lynch & de Chernatony (2007), they further postulated that by focusing toward the strategy that able to increase the brand value is essential as this will enhances the strategic approach regarding brand development and communication, especially in the selling strategy.

Hence, the explanation supported the importance role of relationship marketing in branding context. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated the importance cue of sales dealer's relationship trust and satisfaction towards their firm's brand. Based on the findings, there are differences exist regarding of sales dealer's trust and satisfaction on their firm's brand. More trust and satisfied the sales dealers on their firms will leads to more trust and satisfied they are towards the firm's brand they carried-out. This signifies the increasing of brand equity of the firm's brand. When they have more trust and satisfied with the firm's brand the selling activities will be implemented confidently. Due to brand equity as an equity which incorporates the customer with the name of the brand (Altintas et al, 2011) this highlighted among the reasonable factors toward why certain automobile brands in Malaysia received high sales volume and high market shares. Moreover, trust able to overcome any uncertainty towards the brands (Koksal, 2011).

8.0 CONCLUSION

It is clear that, in future, relationship marketing will become the crucial strategy for the firm. The argument by past literatures towards the tangibles aspect such like price and advertisement that's begins to lost it competitiveness increase the importance intangible element such as relationship marketing. The emergence of relationship marketing strategy in enhances the strategic approach regarding brand development and communication is not something rhetoric for firm (Lindgreen et al., 2004).

In Western part of the investigation of relationship marketing doesn't just stop in the context of industrial market but have been expanded to the consumer markets as well. This paper tried to follow this stream and focus on consumer market products that specific to automobile industry in Malaysia country, which is other than Western context. The findings of the paper determined that relationship marketing begins to practice in Malaysia firm industry as well, for example in Malaysian automobile industry. Even though the practice is in moderate to high level, however, the execution of relationship marketing in Malaysia automobile industry demonstrated the importance role of this approach that will motivate the firm to explore it further.

Somehow the finding is also able to prove that the difference level of relationship marketing adoption suggests the reason for difference market acceptance on the firms' brands. Indeed, this research also has opened up for further exploration in the area of relationship marketing in Asia context, particularly in relation to branding context. Research along this line is necessary, as it's not only able to provide insights but also for generalization purposes as well. Indeed, the purpose of generalization aspect also created the need for other study extension and replication along this line to be executed. Beside, the investigation can also be extended to the perspective of entrepreneurship branding that focuses on small and medium sized companies.

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