

## Respect and Rapport: Do They Matter in Perceived Relationship Quality?

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### Abstract

*In today's competitive era, service businesses seek the most creative but effective means of attracting and retaining customers. In doing so, efforts are concentrated on creating quality relationship via interpersonal relationship with customers. This research is suggesting two ways of building good interpersonal relationship with customers, which are rapport and respect. This preliminary study draws on empirical result from clients of dental clinics in Malaysia. The result from Pearson Correlation and Multiple Regression analysis support the need for both constructs in building quality relationship with customers. The authors conclude with a discussion on the results and implications.*

**Keywords:** Rapport, Respect, Service, Relationship quality, Dental clinics, Malaysia.

### Introduction

As competition in service industries increases, a new age of service commoditization is being reflected. Managers are looking for new ways to differentiate their service products from competitors. Besides looking for new ways, they are also looking for cost effective customer retention strategies. One of the most effective ways is through building quality relationship with customers (Ndubisi 2007). Thus, it has become a very important issue to manage, develop and evaluate the relationship between a retailer and customers (Berry, 1995; Clark *et.al.*, 1995; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995). Firms are recognizing the value of establishing close relationships with their customers as a means of retaining existing customers. In the current business environment, relationship marketing has become an important aspect of doing business. This is especially true for a service business where a high amount of customer-employee relationships can influence the consumption of services offered. Keeping a good relationship with customers is crucial for the success of the business because it has the potential to increase customer retention rates.

Customer retention has many benefits, for example, it can be ten times more expensive to win a customer than to retain a customer – and the cost of bringing new customer to the level of profitability as the lost one is up to 16 times more (Lindgreen *et.al.*, 2000). Consequently, the relationship paradigm should grow towards emphasizing on how business should enhance the quality of relationships with customers in order to gain mutual benefits of involved parties (Ndubisi, 2007). As mentioned by Ndubisi (2003), the only real sustainable business growth strategy is through mutual symbiotic relationship with customers. In any situation involving people, one aspect that needs to be given proper attention is interpersonal relationship. Based on the inseparability characteristic of service, naturally service itself may have significant impact on people (Carmel *et al.*, 2009). The inseparability characteristic of service reflects the production and consumption of the service which often takes place simultaneously (Edgett & Parkinson, 1993; Sierra & McQuitty, 2005), suggesting an interdependence role between service providers and customers (Solomon *et.al.*, 1985). In fact, there have been frequent discussions in the marketing literature suggesting that personal relationships can influence the influence of goods and services (Beatty *et.al.*, 1996; Bitner *et al.*, 1990; Jain *et al.*, 1987).

Customers need to feel being valued and connected in ways that allow them to overcome the uncertainty involved in the interactions with the organization. When a service is difficult to evaluate, consumers often look to other cues, such as aspects of interaction or interpersonal method in assessing service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985). The idea is that providing a personal relationship may give service customer a reason to return and retaining customers is beneficial to the organisation. Reichheld (1996) claimed that small improvements in customer retention can as much double company profits. This is because it costs less to serve long-term customers and furthermore, loyal customers will pay a price premium (Reichheld, 1996). This paper is proposing two interpersonal mechanism, those are respect and rapport as antecedents to customer perceived overall relationship quality. Interestingly, the word respect and rapport are not new to us. The words are used very extensively in our everyday lives.

In fact when the word ‘respect’ and ‘rapport’ are mentioned, the terms are used colloquially, as if everyone understands. The fact is that, not many researches have been conducted in these two areas, especially in the business field. The dimensions and consequences of respect and rapport remain unclear. The aim of this paper is to investigate the extent to which respect and rapport affect relationship quality in the context of dental care services in Malaysia.

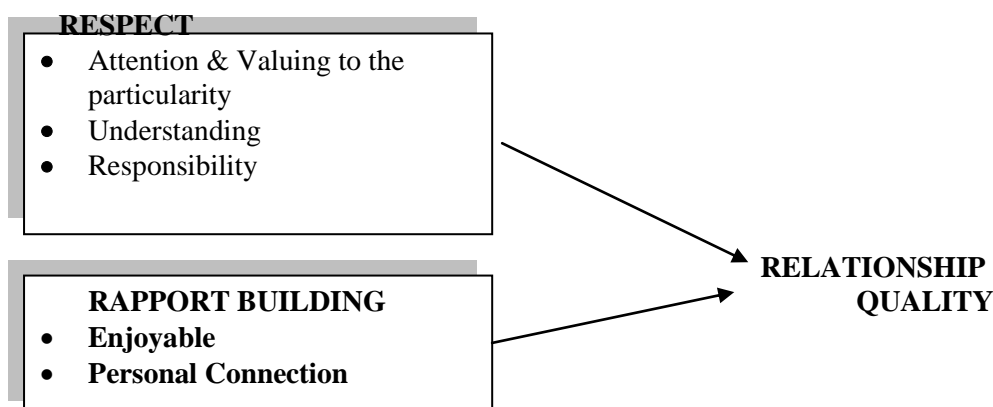
### **Related Literature**

The concept of relationship quality arises from theory and research in the field of relationship marketing (eg. Crosby et al., 1990; Dwyer et al., 1987) in which the ultimate goal is to strengthen the already strong relationships and to convert indifferent customers into loyal ones (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). Ndubisi (2007) observes that one of the goals of relationship marketing is to improve relationship quality for mutual benefits of involved parties. From the perspective of customers, relationship quality is achieved through the ability of the service provider to reduce customer’ perceived risks. In-fact, high-relationship quality is sign that customers can rely on the integrity of the sellers (Kim & Cha, 2002). Customers will also have increased confidence of service provider future performance due to satisfactory past performance. The satisfaction emerges from customers’ perception and evaluations of individual employees’ communication and behaviour, such as respect, courtesy, warmth, empathy and helpfulness (Kim & Cha, 2002; Jarvelin & Lehtinen, 1996).

### **Relationship Quality**

Relationship quality has been originally termed as a bundle of intangible value that augments products or services and result in an expected interchange between buyers and sellers (Levitt, 1986). Relationship quality is a higher order construct depicting the value customers attach to their relationship with the service provider (Dorsch et al., 1998). It refers to customer perceptions and evaluations of individual service employee’s communication and behaviour which involves inducing feeling and emotional states (Crosby et al., 1990; Dwyer et al., 1987). Previous studies have indicated relationship quality as a multidimensional construct that captures many different facets of an exchange relationship (Crosby et al., 1990; De Wulf et al., 2001; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Components or dimensions of relationship quality proposed in the past research include cooperative norms (Baker et al, 1999), opportunism (Dorsch et al., 1998), customer orientation (Dorsch et al., 1998; Palmer & Bejou, 1994), and conflict, willingness to invest and expectation to continue (Kumar et al., 1995). De Wulf et al.(2001) regard relationship quality as a construct that consist of relationship satisfaction, trust and relationship commitment.

For Athnasopoulou (2008), relationship quality should be related to three major dimensions that include the behaviour of the providers and customers and the interactions between both of them. The relationship between service provider and customer should be cemented by quality interactions between them. This includes having direct, honest, polite and friendly manner relationship (Athnasopoulou, 2008), which supports earlier perception of relationship quality as a customer’s perception of how well the relationship fulfils the expectations, predictions, goals and desires of the customers (Ndubisi 2007; Ndubisi forthcoming). As a result, relationship quality itself should convey the customers’ impression of the whole relationship (Wong & Sohal, 2002), and it is expected to be influenced by interpersonal dimensions such as respect and rapport as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Research Framework

### **Respect**

The word ‘respect’ is not uncommon in our everyday usage. As mentioned earlier, the word is very commonly used and each time when ‘respect’ is mentioned, it is as if everyone understands.

On the other hand, in the actual academic world, to understand 'respect' is very complex. Even though the term *respect* is widely used in the society, its dimensions and operationalisation are unclear. To our knowledge, no large scale empirical research has been conducted on the phenomenon of feeling respected – not respected. The concept of respect by many researchers is usually based on the work by Kant. In fact, Kant was the first Western philosopher to place respect for persons as central to moral theory. Kant's work focuses on the strong believe of the importance of treating others never simply as a means but always at the same time as an end (Kant, 1964). In other words, "it is morally obligatory to respect every person as a rational agent" (Davis, 1993). Dillon (1992) offers respect as "most generally, a relation between a subject and an object, in which the subject responds to the object from a certain perspective in some appropriate way".

Even though, respect can be considered as an 'old' concept judging from the extensive usage of the word itself, respectful behaviours actually varies by definition and making it a deceiving complex concept after all (Sung, 2004). In the psychology literature, respect has been used under 4 different themes (Langdon, 2004). Those themes include: (a) social power, (b) social rules, (c) caring and (d) equality and accepting differences. Respect as caring involves the feeling of care and loving towards others (Frei & Shaver, 2002). Although this theme is qualitatively different from other themes, it serves as a very important basis in conceptualizing the concept of respect towards customers (Langdon, 2007; Parse, 2006; Noddings, 1984, Dillon, 1992). Care respect is thought to be the best basis in conceptualizing respecting customers due to it unique blend of morality, compassionate, responsive and caring for other individual (Dillon, 1992). The whole idea of care respect is what is known as "meeting the others morally" (Noddings, 1984). Dillon (1992) proposes a concept with three dimensions; namely attention and valuing of the particularity, understanding and responsibility. Dillon believes the combination of the three dimensions will produce a kind of respect that we (as individuals) owe to all, and not just our loved ones (1992). The dimensions of respect in this study include: 1) attention and valuing, 2) understanding and 3) responsibility (see Dillon's 1992 typologies).

The first dimension is attending to a particularity which means appreciating and cherishing each person as an unrepeatable individual (Dillon, 1992). It involves an acceptance of the differences of others that goes beyond toleration. Attention here also carries the need to be sympathetic, cherishing and concern to be involved in engagement with participation of others. All in all, this dimension urges the need to value differences in others and not viewing it as a barrier to be overcome. The second dimension, understanding is about trying to understand a person in his own terms. Understanding is not just simply a precondition to care respect but also trying to understand a person's own consciousness, his activities and his purposes (Dillon, 1992). In this dimension, one should avoid making assumptions about another person. To understand other persons, it demands a great effort which is curbed by our limited abilities to understand others (Dillon, 1992). It eschews mindless stereotyping and promotes mindfulness (Ndubisi forthcoming).

Last but not least is responsibility. Care respect here highlights our individual responsibility as a care respecer in a community. This dimension involves caring for a person in the sense of helping them to pursue their end, acting to promote their goods and assisting them to satisfy their needs and wants (Dillon, 1992). It is expected that a positive relationship exists between respect and relationship quality.

*H1: There is a significant relationship between respect and relationship quality.*

*H1a: Attention and valuing particularity is significantly associated with relationship quality.*

*H1b: Understanding is significantly associated with relationship quality.*

*H1c: Responsibility is significantly associated with relationship quality.*

## **Rapport**

Similar to respect, rapport is such a familiar concept that almost everyone can identify with. Literature on the concept of rapport has been developed in a number of different disciplines studying human interaction including marketing, psychology and education. Most studies on rapport were done on education (eg Faranda & Clarke, 2004; Smart et al., 2003). In the marketing literature, rapport has been studied from the perspective of sales or service relationship (Brooks, 1989; Nickels et al., 1983; Weitz et al., 2007) However, a precise definition of rapport is not clearly delineated (Tickle-Degnen & Rosenthal, 1987). Most of the definition suggests rapport as good relationship experience (eg Weitz et al., 2007). By referring to psychotherapist-client interactions, Gfeller et al. (1987) describe rapport as the quality of a relationship. Carey et al. (1986) define it as a quality of relationship characterized by satisfactory communication and mutual understanding. In this paper we model rapport as an antecedent to relationship quality rather than a dimension to demonstrate (in line with logic) that increases in the former can lead to increases in the later. Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal (1990) suggest that people experience rapport when "they click" with one another or feel the good interaction due to chemistry. The term has been defined as a quality in the relationship or connection between interactants, especially relations marked by harmony, conformity, accord and affinity (Bernieri et.al., 1996).

LaBahn (1996) in an examination of ad agency-client relationships defines rapport as “the client’s perception that the personal relationships have the right ‘chemistry’ and are enjoyable”. Considering all definitions, one common theme between all is characterized by an enjoyable interaction in which participants connect on some level (Gremler & Gwinner, 2000). Gwinner and Gremler (2008) have also come out with various dimensions of rapport. However those variables are basically customers’ point of view on rapport. Combining all, customers’ opinion, they have coined five dimensions of rapport building. Those five dimensions include: 1) attentive behaviour, 2) courteous behaviour, 3) common grounding behaviour, 4) connecting behaviour and 5) information sharing behaviour. However, these are only customers’ point of view of rapport and are not backed up with empirical research. In fact, the research reveals that with those dimensions, rapport is not enhanced (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008). The definition by Gremler and Gwinner (2000) is much more relevant to marketing. They define rapport as the character of the interaction between employees and customers (Gremler & Gwinner, 2000). Among others, they suggest that rapport consists of two important dimensions; namely enjoyable interaction and personal connection.

Both are perceived by customers and employees as important in the development of relationships in service contexts. Enjoyable interaction refers to “an affect laden, cognitive evaluation of one’s exchange with employee.” It is characterized by a personal connection between the two interactants (Gremler & Gwinner, 2000). Perhaps this enjoyable interaction component of rapport is comparable to what Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal (1990) term as ‘positivity’ describing a feeling of care and friendliness. Personal connection is a reflection of the customer’s perception of a bond between them and the service provider. It is present when there is a strong affiliation with the other based on some tie (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000). This line of thought is supported by Macintosh (2009) which suggests building customer rapport is an important intermediate step in the relationship building.

This leads to the next hypotheses:

*H2: There is a significant relationship between rapport and customer loyalty.*

*H2a: Attention and valuing particularity is significantly associated with customer loyalty.*

*H2b: Understanding is significantly associated with customer loyalty.*

### **Methodology**

The population of this study is customers of dental clinics in Kuala Terengganu (east coast of Malaysia) and Kuala Lumpur (central and capital city of Malaysia). Altogether, 16 dental clinics were approached to participate in the survey. Out of 16, ten clinics (five in Kuala Terengganu and another five in Kuala Lumpur) accepted the invitation and participated in the study. Participation by the customers of these clinics was purely voluntary. Structured questionnaire was used as a mean for data collection. Therefore the need for data collector was obvious. University students were recruited and trained to serve as data collectors. They were chosen on the basis of some background experience in research and data collection. This technique has proven to be successfully used in a variety of service marketing researches (eg Bitner et al., 1990; Gwinner et al. 1998). Data was collected using a structured questionnaire with questions in prearranged order. The questionnaire items were adapted from different sources to suit the study. Items for respect and rapport building were adapted from Dillon (1992), Dickert and Kass (2009), Gremler and Gwinner (2008). Modelling rapport together with respect gives a holistic picture than studying the two constructs separately. In this sense, the study adds value to the present knowledge in the area.

Items for relationship quality were adapted from Hennig-Thurau (2002) and Ndubisi (2007). All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 indicating “strongly disagree” to 7 indicates “strongly agree”. The exercise was conducted over a period of three weeks, five-days-a-week between 10.00 am until 4.00 pm, and continued from 8.00 until 10.00pm. The time was designed to suit the time the clinics open and close to customers. A total of 1200 questionnaires were distributed and 583 (49 percent) were returned. However, 20 were voided because of incomplete data, resulting in 563 usable responses. Factor analysis was performed on all questionnaire items to establish their suitability for performing the subsequent multivariate analysis. The results presented are based on parsimonious sets of variables, guided by conceptual and practical considerations with loadings of 0.50 and above (Hair et al., 1998), and cross loadings below 0.20. The varimax factor rotation was employed for the analysis. High communality values were recorded for all the variables, indicating that the total amount of variance an original variable shares with all other variables included in the analysis is high. Overall, the results show that the construct measures are valid. The summarised results of factor analysis are shown in Table II.

### **Results**

The summary of the demographic compositions of the respondents is as shown in Table I. The participants in this study were predominantly females (57.5 percent), majority (68.7 percent) of the respondents were Malay.

Ages of between 18 - 28 years old (49.9 percent) were in majority. Most possessed a bachelor degree (37.5 percent) and work in the private sector (30.4 percent). Full details are shown in Table I.

No	Profile	Description	Responses	Percentage
1	Location	Kuala Terengganu	336	59.7
		Kuala Lumpur	227	40.3
2	Gender	Male	239	42.5
		Female	324	57.5
3.	Age	18 – 28 years	281	49.9
		29 – 42 years	180	32.0
		43 – 60 years	89	15.8
		Above 60	13	2.3
4.	Ethnicity	Malay	387	68.7
		Chinese	101	17.9
		Indian	54	9.6
		Others	21	3.7
5	Education level	High School	155	27.5
		HSC/ Diploma	158	28.1
		Degree / Professional	211	37.5
		Post Graduate	39	6.9
6.	Employment Status	Employed	416	73.9
		Unemployed	147	26.1
7.	Employer	Private	171	30.4
		Government Servant	138	24.5
		Self-employed	88	15.6
		Unemployed	166	29.5

**Table I:** Respondent's demographic Profile

### **Factor and Reliability Analysis**

We started off with 33 items loading on five factors – attention, understanding, responsibility, rapport building and relationship quality. Two items (*Service provider shows warm regards to customers*; and *The service provider finds ways to understand customers different terms*) were dropped from the 2<sup>nd</sup> round due to high cross loadings. In the third round of FA, another item (*In thinking about my relationship with the service provider, I enjoy interacting with the service provider*) was dropped for the same reason. Another item (*the service provider is committed to attending to the individual needs of the customers*) was also dropped from the 4<sup>th</sup> round. Finally, the remaining 28 items (shown in Table 1) loaded well on five dimensions with scores over 0.50 (Hair et al., 1998). Thus, the validity of measures was being established, confirming that the individual items are measuring the same construct and thus are highly inter-correlated (Nunnally, 1978).

Table II shows the key dimensions, items, loadings and communality statistics. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy gives a high total of 0.954 and Bartlett's Test of sphericity value is significant ( $p = 0.000$ ) Five items loaded on the attention and valuing to the particularity dimension with variance of 61.97 percent, understanding with four items contributes a variance of 10.12 percent, responsibility accounts for 10.293 percent with five items, rapport explains 12.75 percent variance with nine items and relationship quality with five items contributes 4.87 percent variance. The first underlying dimension (F1) of the factor analysis is attention which comprises of items such as the service provider acknowledges that people are different, the service provider sees customers as they really are, the service provider values customers, customers are being treated well regardless of their background and the service provider makes an effort to identify customers by name.

**Table 2:** Factor Loading and Communalities

Key Dimensions and Items	Loadings	Communalities
<b>RESPECT</b>		
<b>F1 – Attention and Valuing to the particularity</b>		
1. The service provider acknowledges that people are different.	0.780	0.649
2. The service provider sees customers as they really are.	0.767	0.685
3. The service provider values customers.	0.668	0.637
4. The service treat customers well regardless of their background.	0.652	0.628
5. The service provider makes an effort to identify customers by name.	0.609	0.559
<b>F2- Responsibility</b>		
1. The service provider responds to me as part of his / her responsibilities	0.740	0.698
2. The service provider regards customers as important	0.707	0.699
3. The service provider wants to hear my comment and opinion.	0.599	0.595
4. The service provider is happy to have me as customer	0.641	0.660
5. I just trust the service provider.	0.559	0.513
<b>F3 – Understand</b>		
1. The service provider does not make any assumption towards the customers.	0.627	0.568
2. The service provider is sympathetic to the customers	0.717	0.666
3. The service provider is interested to relate his / her experience to the customers.	0.734	0.672
4. The service provider understands my needs	0.530	0.544
<b>RAPPORT</b>		
<b>F4 – Enjoyable</b>		
1. The service provider creates a feeling of ‘warmth’ in our relationship	0.595	0.545
2. The service provider relates to me well.	0.692	0.661
3. Thinking about my relationships, I have a harmonious relationship with the service provider.	0.746	0.690
4. The service provider has a good sense of humour	0.752	0.679
5. I am comfortable interacting with the service provider	0.762	0.677
<b>F6 – Personal Connection</b>		
6. I feel like there is a “bond” between the service provider and me.	0.778	0.673
7. I look forward to going to the same service provider	0.640	0.608
8. The service provider likes me as a person.	0.576	0.599
9. I have a close relationship with the service provider.	0.581	0.624
<b>F5 – Relationship Quality</b>		
10. My relationship with the service provider is what I really want.	0.708	0.640
11. I have a very close relationship with this service provider.	0.728	0.628
12. My relationship with the service provider meets my goals	0.675	0.573
13. My relationships with the service provider fulfils my expectations.	0.583	0.544
14. Overall, I have a good relationship with the service provider.	0.500	0.437

The second dimension (F2) consists of items that relate to understanding a person in his own terms. The items in this dimension fulfil the demand to understand others with our great effort and limited capabilities (Dillon, 1992). The items in this dimension include: the service provider does not make assumptions towards the customers, sympathetic to consumers, interested to relate his/her own experience to the customers and understand the customer's needs. The third dimension is the last dimension for respect. It (F3) consists of items that relate to individual responsibility in a wider community. Items in this dimension includes how the service provider responds to customer as part of his / her responsibilities, regards customers as important, wants to hears comments and opinions from customers, happy to receive customers and develop a sense of trust in the customers. The fourth and fifth dimension (F4 & F5) consist of elements that relates to rapport building. The items used are referred to as customers' perception of being connected to and having enjoyable interactions with one or more service providers (Gremler & Gwinner, 2000).

Some of the items include the service provider relates to me well, customers have harmonious relationship, the service provider has a good sense of humour and customers feel comfortable interacting with the service provider. The sixth dimension (F6) consists of items describing overall relationship quality. Following Ndubisi (2007) this research takes relationship quality as an overall impression expressed by consumers. The items of relationship quality include: the close relationship that the customer has with the service provider, the relationship itself meets the customer's goals, fulfils his expectations and the customer has a good relationship with the service provider, overall. The internal consistency of the instrument was tested via reliability analysis. Reliability estimates (Cronbach's Alpha) for the construct's dimension are as follows: attention and valuing to the particularity (0.800), understanding (0.801), responsibility (0.865), rapport building (0.918) and relationship quality (0.790), suggesting a high degree of reliability. The results exceed 0.60, the lower limit of acceptability recommended by Hair et al. (1998).

### Correlation among Variables

Pearson correlation was used to test for association. The result of Pearson correlation (shown in Table 3) supports the notion that there are significant positive correlations between relationship quality and the two variables, respect and rapport building.

**Table 3:** Correlations among Variables

	(Att)	(Und)	(Res)	(Enjoy)	(Interact)	(RelQ)
Attention and Valuing to the particularity (Att)	1.00					
Understanding (Und)	0.554**	1.00				
Responsibility (Res)	0.668**	0.582**	1.00			
Enjoyable (Enjoy)	0.456**	0.451**	0.532**	1.00		
Personal Interaction (Interact)	0.420**	0.460**	0.517**	0.780**	1.00	
Relationship Quality	0.424**	0.430**	0.512**	0.552**	0.520**	1.00

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01level (2 tailed)

All the dimensions of respect (attention and valuing to the particularity, understanding and responsibility) and rapport building (enjoyable and personal connection) demonstrated a significant correlation with relationship quality ( $r = 0.424, 0.430, 0.512, 0.552$  and  $0.520$  respectively).

### Regression Analysis

Further investigation using multiple regression analysis (as shown in Table 4) was conducted. The results show that respect (with three dimensions namely attention and valuing to the particularity, understanding and responsibility) and rapport building (with two dimensions – enjoyable and personal connection) contribute significantly ( $F=139.049$ ;  $p=0.000$ ) predict 38 percent of the variations in relationship quality. Therefore, those dimensions predict a significant change in relationship quality.

The results further show that there is a marginal relationship between understanding ( $t = 3.092, p = 0.002$ ) and relationship quality. Besides that there are significant relationship between responsibility ( $t= 4.514$ ;  $p= 0.000$ ), enjoyable ( $t=7.032$ ;  $p=0.000$ ) and personal connection ( $t=3.900$ ;  $p= 0.000$ ) with relationship quality at 5 percent significant level. The result shows no significance relationship between attention and valuing to the particularity ( $p= 1.284$ ) and relationship quality. Of all the four dimensions, enjoyable (rapport building) possesses the strongest value, followed by responsibility and understanding respectively.

**Table 4** : Summary of Regression Analysis

SUMMARY		ANOVA		DIMENSIONS				COLLINEARITY STATISTICS	
R	R Square	F	Sig		Beta	t	P	Tolerance	VIF
0.740 <sup>a</sup>	0.383	139.049	0.000	1. Attention & Valuing to the particularity	0.046	1.284	0.199	0.431	2.322
				2. Understanding	.110	3.092	0.002	0.436	2.292
				3. Responsibility	0.170	4.514	0.000	0.390	2.567
				4. Enjoyable	0.274	7.032	0.000	0.364	2.748
				5. Personal Connection	0.150	3.900	0.000	0.375	2.688

- a. Predictors (constant) enjoyable, personal connection, attention, understanding, responsibility  
b. Dependent variable: RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

### ***Discussions and conclusions***

It is true after all that as competition in service industries increases, reflecting a new age of service commoditization (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), managers are looking for new ways to differentiate their service products. Among such new ways are perhaps respecting and build rapport with customers. The whole research proved that rapport and respecting customers are indeed two examples of cost-effective customer retention strategies. The idea is that a personal relationship whether in the form of friendship or simple camaraderie, creates in service customers a perception of high overall relationship quality with service providers. From the results it is clear that respect and rapport building explain a significant amount of variance in relationship quality in service business. Therefore, respecting customers and build rapport do matter in the relationship between service provider and customers. Comparing between the two dimensions, rapport shows a stronger impact on relationship quality.

Thus establishing rapport between dentists, nurses and customers is critical in creating quality relationship, which ultimately results to repeat patronage. The finding supports the similar notion by Yu (2009) who mentions that establishing rapport is the very first step in the development of an effective nurse-patient relationship; it occurs at the first point of contact with patients (Yu, 2009). The most influential dimension of respect is responsibility. The finding supports the definition by Gallagher (2007) which takes respect as a relationship between subject and object. Service providers need not only recognize but to be responsive to the customers (Gallagher, 2007). Understanding is another important driver of respect in building up relationship quality with customers. Evidence from the customer – service provider relationship (from dental clinics) in two different locations in Malaysia – Metropolitan Kuala Lumpur and traditional Islamic Terengganu supports the notion of respect as an important driver of relationship quality. This means that irrespective of the nature of service and the level of development of the society, respect also serves as an important factor shaping customers perceptions of relationship quality.

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