



ผลกระทบของความสัมพันธ์ที่มีต่อความไว้วางใจระหว่างพนักงานขายและผู้บริโภค ต่อความตั้งใจซื้อสินค้า

The Effect of Trust-based Relationship between Salesperson and Customer on Intention to Purchase

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บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อให้เข้าใจถึงความเชื่อมั่นของผู้บริโภคที่มีต่อพนักงานขายซึ่งเป็นหัวใจสำคัญในการสร้างความตั้งใจซื้อของลูกค้าในการซื้อผลิตภัณฑ์จากร้านค้า ถึงแม้ว่าลูกค้ามีความต้องการที่จะซื้อผลิตภัณฑ์นั้นๆ แต่การได้รับคำแนะนำในเรื่องผลิตภัณฑ์จากพนักงานขายที่ลูกค้ามีความเชื่อมั่นและไว้วางใจมีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจที่จะซื้อผลิตภัณฑ์ดังกล่าวมากขึ้น บทความนี้ได้กล่าวถึงระดับของความไว้วางใจในพนักงานขายที่สามารถสร้างความเชื่อมั่นของลูกค้าต่อพนักงานขายและอธิบายเพิ่มเติมในประเด็นความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างพนักงานขายกับลูกค้าที่เป็นผลมาจากการที่ผู้บริโภคมีความไว้วางใจในพนักงานขาย จะช่วยลดความรู้สึกต่อการถูกเอาเปรียบจากพนักงานขายได้ ความไว้วางใจและความเต็มใจที่จะช่วยเหลือกันนอกจากนี้ผู้บริโภคที่ไว้วางใจพนักงานขายจะสามารถช่วยลดความรู้สึกต่อการถูกเอาเปรียบจากพนักงานขายได้

คำสำคัญ: ความไว้วางใจในพนักงานขาย ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างพนักงานขายและผู้บริโภค ความตั้งใจซื้อ

Abstract

This article aimed to provide better understanding on how consumers' perceived trust in salesperson is a key to earn customers' intention toward purchasing products from a store. Despite the desire of customer on a particular product, the positive perception of trust towards the salesperson is able to influence customer to patronage recommended goods from the salesperson in this study. The degrees of trust in salesperson were discussed in this article to illustrate varies of each degree can generate customers' perceived trust on customers. The article then further clarified that relationship between salesperson and customer is fostered base on the foundation of trust and willingness to rely on another party. Besides, consumers' perceived trust in salesperson helps to eliminate the perception of being taken advantages of.

Keywords: Trust in Salesperson, Salesperson-customer Relationship, Intention to Purchase.

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**Introduction**

Increasingly, many businesses focus on building and maintaining long-term relationship with customers. This maybe because an ongoing relationship is considered as a very important factor in such today's competitive marketing war. The market competition is very intense, where companies are striving to get their best market shares and to win over customers at the same time. In this business environment, salespeople, sales managers and other marketers need to know how to win customers' trust and the outcomes of trust. According to CSO Insight, (2016), only 56% of the salespeople achieved or exceeded sales quotas in the year of 2015. The data in this report shows that sales organization needed help. In this relation, CSO Insight focused on the data collected directly from the sales executives from over a thousand of companies worldwide. These data represented current sales performance, challenges that sales teams have experienced, reasons why problems have existed, and in what way that the companies can improve their sale performance. In addition, CSO Insight information analysis claimed that the percentage of the salespeople seemed to lack expected achievement. This reason can make salespeople tensed up in order for them to achieve their targets. They may attempt to use hard selling approaches, which may undermine a company's abilities to build a long-lasting relationship with its customers' bases on trust (Guenzi, De Luca, Spiro, Johnston, & Johnston, 2016).

An essential ingredient in successfully achieving this long-term relationship is the establishment and maintenance of trust (Kennedy, Ferrell, & LeClair, 2001). Base on this statement, it can be pointed out that trust between buyers and sellers helps to facilitate this relationship. In addition, salesperson plays a key role in the formation of long-term buyer-seller relationship (Weitz & Bradford, 1999), in which, a salesperson is the one who influences customers' decision to purchase. Therefore, this is particularly important for high involvement products like household goods, cosmetic products, and the products that need close interaction between the salesperson and customers.

It is known that the role of the salesperson in a sale is to persuade and convince customers that they need the supplier's product (Weitz & Bradford, 1999). In order to successfully convince customers, a salesperson needs to have in-depth knowledge about products. Martin (2008) claimed that salespeople are sorely tempted to take advantage of information asymmetries. This means that many salespeople exploit the knowledge that they have to make sales or maximize commissions. In connection with this, customers may have questions in their minds whether to trust what the salesperson has presented to them or not. Some information and knowledge given by them might be over-exaggerated in order to attract customers' interests and easily convince them to make a decision to purchase either products or services.



Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to the possibility for consumers' willingness to consider buying a product at the present time and coming future and even attempt to buy a product or to visit a service provider store (Lin & Lu, 2010). It also represents what the consumers think that they will buy and their intentions to purchase products or to patronize services (Lin & Chen, 2009). Likewise, it can be stated that because of their positive attitude toward product or services and perception of that particular product, the customers desire to buy them. In other words, it can be assumed that the relationship between consumers' perception and the willingness to buy maybe positive.

Moreover, Madahi and Sukati (2012) suggested that purchase intention means consumers will repurchase a product again once they evaluate a product and find that the product worth buying. In this case, the customers' decision to repurchase products from the company will be revealed. Hence, it can be concluded that the consumers' purchase intention can be an effective tool to forecast future sales.

However, there are many factors that influence the intention to purchase of consumer. To illustrate this, trust in the salesperson is one of the most influential factors founded. Guenzi and Georges (2010) highlighted that customers' trust in the salesperson has a positive effect on the customers' interaction with the salesperson, repurchase intentions, and even the willingness to recommend a particular salesperson to other buyers like family members or friends.

Salesperson-Customer Relationship

The relationship between salesperson and customer is the crucial relationship for an organization (Chebat & Oumlil, 2015) especially in retailer contexts, direct selling contexts and service firms where interaction between sellers and buyers highly occur. The nature of this kind of relationship may have a direct impact on customers' intention to engage in deciding to purchase products introduced by the salesperson who also represent and carry out the company's image in the customers' eyes, which can also be a significant influencer for the customers.

Besides, Ellis and Beatty (1995) stated that customers in a retail setting come with the expectation that salesperson can help them to sort out products, and customers want ongoing relationship with the salesperson. Chebat and Oumlil (2015) indicated that the ability of the salesperson perform his or her job might be the key to maneuvering the relationship with the customers. Moreover, customers' trust in salesperson is impulsive for them to commit to the relationship with the salesperson.

Interpersonal Trust

Trust is defined as a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence (Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992). Lewis and Weigert (1985) indicated that interpersonal trust has two foundations, which are cognitive-based and affective-based. As far as the cognitive-based trust



is concerned, it is accumulated by information and knowledge as such, customers' confidence or willingness to rely on a salesperson's competence, credibility, and reliability. Meanwhile, the affective-based one refers to an emotional type of bond between individuals with care and concern for the welfare of partners (Akrouf, Diallo, Akrouf, & Chandon, 2016), which is mostly recalled as sincerity, honesty, and benevolence.

Affective-Based Trust in Salesperson

Benevolence of Salesperson

Benevolence focuses is on an individual's (retail buyer's) trust of the other individual (vendor's representative) Ganesan (1994), in which customers who trust in the salesperson's benevolence will feel confident that they are not being taken advantage in the relationship. As a result, the customers feel more comfortable to share personal problems and information with the salesperson. This is because the belief in benevolence embodies assurance that the salesperson will not abuse the information (McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002). It can be said that the higher the levels of the customers' benevolence trust in a salesperson, the more likelihood that a customer will commit to the interpersonal relationship with a salesperson. Bateman and Valentine (2015) addressed that interpersonal customer orientations have an impact on sales outcomes and purchase intention.

Honesty of Salesperson

Honesty is one of the key facilitators to reduce the fear of exploitation and the feeling of uncertainty (Geyskens, Steenkamp, Scheer, & Kumar, 1996), in which customers will take action to commit to relationship with the salesperson at ease. In this sense, honesty enables the salesperson to foster a long-term relationship with the customers. This relationship requires honest customers' trust in the salesperson, as trust in a partner's honesty helps to eliminate the fear of risk and uncertainty which lead to mutual understanding between the two parties.

On the other hand, customers become frustrated with a salesperson who behaves dishonesty. When customers feel that the salesperson is dishonest, reputation and the perceived trustworthiness of the salesperson suffer and such situation impacts the ability of the salesperson to build the long-term relationship with the customers. Moreover, this may have a negative impact on customers' confidence about their purchase decisions.

Cognitive-Based Trust in Salesperson

Competence of Salesperson

Expertise is considered as salesperson's competency. It reflects the salesperson's knowledge, technical competence (Guenzi & Georges, 2010), and relevant competencies associated with particular goods and services that the salesperson is in charge of (Johnson & Grayson, 2005). Presently, information



about everything that customers want to know is hugely available on the internet that can easily be accessible for everyone. With regard to this, the salesperson is required to deal with knowledgeable customers who study products themselves, and they may not need assistance from the salesperson. However, Kennedy et al. (2001) argued that the customers may view that such help and assistance from the salesperson could persuade them to make an easier decision to buy the products. Thus, the salesperson is required to have thorough understanding of both products and their applications. As mentioned earlier, most customers have already had knowledge and information about products that they want to buy beforehand. Accordingly, being an expert is very important for the salesperson to provide answers to specific questions with adequate sources of information. As a matter of fact, the salesperson should be able to suggest the best fit product to the customers. Additionally, customers' perceived level of expertise not only enhances the source of credibility and trustworthiness in the salesperson (Johnson & Grayson, 2005), but high-expert salesperson is also effective in generating customers' trust and is able to meet customers' needs than less knowledgeable salesperson (Parsons, 2002).

Reliability of Salesperson

Reliability is dispositional attribution that is made to a partner, such that he or she is regarded as reliable and concerned with providing expected information (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). It can be reflected that the knowledge and information given are dependable. Besides, the salesperson statements and proof sources provide an evidence and verify the claim of dependable knowledge and information (Swan, Trawick, & Silva, 1985). Consequently, customers are likely to be interested in the information given by the salesperson with a high level of reliability (Homburg & Stock, 2005). Another perception of reliability is the expectations held by the customers that the salesperson is dependable and can be relied on to fulfill the promises that have been made (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). The perception of the salesperson's dependability is increased when the customers experiences that a number of expected occasions are confirmed. In order to gain customer's trust, it is essential that the customer believe and feel that they can rely on what the salesperson says and promises. For example, if the salesperson says that the out-of-stock products will be restocked by next week and if something prevents that from happening. The salesperson will have to inform the customers together with letting the customers know the most possible date of delivering the products.

The Commitment-trust Theory

Morgan and Hunt (1994) introduced one of the most cited theories in relationship marketing, which is the commitment-trust theory. They theorized that the presence of relationship commitment and trust lead to successful relationship marketing. Moreover, the commitment and trust are keys to encouraging marketers to cooperate with exchange partners and overcoming short-term relationship in favor of the long-term one that provides benefit for both parties. Therefore, commitment and trust directly lead to cooperative behaviors which



are the critical instrument that can be used to achieve successful relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Commitment refers to the fact that a party is willing to put maximum effort to maintain an ongoing relationship with another party as it viewed as an importance key of the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Similarly, Moorman et al. (1992) defined commitment to the relationship as an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship. In this sense, commitment is enduring and does not change often over the time of being in a relationship. People are not typically to be committed to something they do not value (Moorman et al., 1992). In other words, customers would not desire to have relationship commitment with the salesperson if they do not have faith or trust in them. In retailing, when the customers value the relationship with the salesperson, the likelihood of this relationship is that the customers' commit themselves to the salesperson and a store (Wong & Sohal, 2002). Consequently, it can be noted that this committed relationship reflects a positive association between the customers and the salesperson.

The perceived level of trust between exchange partners like a salesperson and a customer is an important criterion for understanding the strength to forester the relationship. Trust is a fundamental relationship model building block that includes in most relationship models (Wong & Sohal, 2002). However, trust alone cannot guarantee the continuance of the relationship, but it also requires a commitment from both parties (Twing-Kwong, Gerald Albaum, & Fullgrabe, 2013)

According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), trust is a major determinant of relationship commitment. In order for a party to commit to a relationship, the party will seek only for trustworthy partners. When the relationship is characterized by trust, it would be viewed as a high value that creates a desire for the party to commit oneself to such the relationship. Moreover, the result from Morgan and Hunt (1994) study suggested that commitment and trust are the key to cooperative relationships that are the necessity for relationship marketing success.

Furthermore, the establishment of customer trust and commitment in salesperson does not only benefit to the salesperson part, but it also goes further to a store (Wong & Sohal, 2002). As a result, this establishment helps to enhance customers' loyalty toward the store. Therefore, it is important for the salesperson to understand how to properly build the relationship with the customers. When the strong relationship between customer and salesperson is built, both parties will have benefit. Therefore, apart from the fact that customers' perceptions of perceived risk and anxiety will be reduced, the levels of trust and confidence will be higher (Wong & Sohal, 2002). In the same vein, the store and the salesperson will benefit from customers' positive word-of-mouth communications and earn customer's intention to purchase (Rutherford, 2012).



Conclusion

The interaction between salespersons and customers are most likely to happen when discussing about products, especially in a high-involvement product where the consumers may need the salespersons who can guide and introduce them the products. Furthermore, perceived trust in both affective-based and cognitive-base in salesperson are an essential key for the salespersons to earn customers' final decision-making to purchase desired products. In relation to this, the affective-based trust fosters confidence that the customers place in salespersons based on feelings and emotions. Meanwhile, the cognitive-based trust is knowledge-based driven that earn trust from customers by being able to provide reliable sources of information.

Besides, customers' trust and commitment in salesperson does not only benefit the salesperson, but also bring about trust and loyalty to the store. As a result, the trust and commitment relationship helps customers to have positive intention to purchase goods from retailers and even lead to be a part of success marketing tool.

Suggestion

As far as this study concerned, it only focuses on the term of trust in salespersons that influence consumers' intention to purchase. However, there are other aspects that have an impact on the consumers' purchase intention. Hence, it will be more interesting if future research identify other factors that this study has neglected. Firms or researchers who want to learn more about customers' intention to purchase should look into other factors that might have effect on customer's decision. Each factor may differently affect the customer; future sales can be conveniently estimated by covered potential factors.

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