

Relational Marketing and Customer Relations Management (CRM) Implementations on Automotive Sector: The Case of Turkey

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Abstract

In this study relational marketing implementations of dealers of a leading automotive company operating throughout Turkey are assessed in terms of customer relations and some suggestions are offered regarding the implementation. The universe of the study is composed of all dealers of the said automotive company in Turkey. In-depth interview method is used within the scope of the study and one-to-one interviews are made with executives. In accordance with the findings of research almost all dealers use relational marketing strategies and they develop effective relational marketing approaches and create customer loyalty.

Keywords: Marketing, Relational Marketing, Customer Relations Management, Automotive Sector

INTRODUCTION

Marketing assumes the role of a bridge between the needs of a community and the responses given or to be given by the said community to these needs. Automotive companies try to adapt their presentations to ever-changing requests and needs of customers via marketing function in order to achieve their objectives and targets. In this regard, automotive companies are obliged to grab the evolution.

Marketing came face to face with a new paradigm today. This new approach emerges in the form of relational marketing. Relational marketing had transpired in response to change of borders between industries and markets, increasing market divisions day by day, gradually shortening product life curves, rapid change in purchasing style of customers and new assertions of an environment containing well-informed and sophisticated customers. Establishments have always implemented various marketing tactics to provide sustainability and ultimately create profitability they aim from the first days of trade up until today. While these tactics are generally affected by market conditions, demand status and numerous environmental factors, sometimes they focused on the products produced, sometimes price of the product/service constituted the foundation of marketing approaches. Furthermore gradually globalized market areas due to the improvements in information technologies, changes in characteristics of consumers, increasing competition as a

result of diversification of producers and products/services due to industrialization made the establishments rapidly turn towards consumers. Many establishments constituted departments such as marketing and human relations within themselves to finger on the pulse of customers and “method of customer relations” became more of an issue.

In this study relational marketing implementations of dealers of a leading automotive company operating throughout Turkey are assessed in terms of customer relations management within the scope of relational marketing approach and some suggestions are offered regarding the implementation.

LITERATURE

Relational Marketing Approach

Relational marketing is a strategic tendency especially implemented in service and industry establishments to increase, maintain and improve customer loyalty and satisfaction, retain existing customers and develop relations with them and do more business and receive more orders (İnal and Demirer, 2001). Relational marketing is a notion to willingly change their behaviours and practices with respect to what the individual customer told the company and what employees of company should know about the customer (Odabaşı, 2000). Relational marketing includes all activities in respect to “attracting customers’ attention on products/services produced/performed by the related company, developing good relations with customers and maintain these relations” (Şahin, 2004). Relational marketing requires the companies establish strong relations with company’s customers and other groups (suppliers, members of distribution channel) they are in relation with and maintain and improve these relations (Kotler, 1999). Relational marketing is a concept which focuses on retaining existing customers and improving relations with them more than finding new customers (Öztürk, 2003). Gummesson (1997) states that the term “Relational Marketing” was used in Barbara Bund Jackson’s project related to industrial marketing late in 1970’s against the concept of “Transition Marketing” and later she explained the concept in her book published in 1985 and in her article published in Harvard Business Review (Gummesson, 1997: 11).

The most important focus of relational marketing is retaining and enhancing existing customers and developing relations with them. Feedback from customers is the most important criterion measuring performance of relational marketing. Task embedded in relational marketing is always establishing profitable relations or create loyal customers (Selvi, 2007). Relational marketing is the marketing philosophy of information age. Competition in the market is one of the important factors which makes relational marketing to become prominent. One of the implementation methods of relational marketing is customer relations management. What's important is becoming different from competitors and how customers perceive and position the company. Customer oriented approaches should be implemented to establish customer loyalty (Şendur, 2009: 14). Actually marketing is based on repetitive shopping behaviours but not on differing sales processes. Relational marketing is an approach resulting from the need of fully comprehending requests and needs of customers and developing one-to-one relations with them (Petrof, 1998).

Customer Relations Management in Relational Marketing Approach (CRM)

The major problem encountered by establishments all around the world today is cheaper goods and service offered to customers due to the increased competition and consequently, decrease seen in customer loyalty. CRM is a solution raised because of these problems faced by establishments and therefore there are numerous descriptions (Oflluğlu, 2005: 20). CRM "is an information technology containing all methodologies, software and usually internet based solutions to enable establishments to manage its relations with customers by structural methods" (Dereli, 2005). CRM is "restructuring of establishment basing on customer needs to increase competitive capacity of establishment" (Akça, 2003).

It is seen that CRM and relational marketing are being used interchangeably in marketing literature from time to time. Concept of CRM is one of the focal points in the implementation of relational marketing understanding. In other words, relational marketing is a strategy adopted by establishment and CRM is a tactic used to implement this strategy. Generally speaking relational marketing is a strategic tendency which concentrates on retaining existing customers and developing relations with them more than finding new customers. Customer management is comprehension of customer concept by establishment and implementation of tailor-made marketing activities. Customer relations, on the other hand, is a process established between the establishment and other establishments which includes all pre-sales and post-sales actions with intention of providing mutual benefits and fulfilment of needs (Soyaslan, 2006: 21-22). In sectors which comprehended the importance of retaining customers establishments especially focus on establishing and improving customer loyalty and implement customer relation

management by adopting relational marketing approach in line with the objective of making customers their partners. In order to fully establish customer loyalty, establishments should leave conventional marketing methods and implement relation-oriented new marketing strategies. Because customer loyalty is the most important factor to provide establishment's profitability in the long run (Ersoy, 2002: 6).

Concept of Customer Loyalty in Relational Marketing Approach

Establishing long term relations with customers and customer loyalty is the most important aspect of relational marketing approach. Customer loyalty is obtained by properly managing marketing resources aimed at providing the greatest values to customers (Yüksel, 1997). Customer loyalty I defined as "the feeling of loyalty towards a brand or establishment" (Odabaşı and Oyman, 2002). In reference to another definition customer loyalty is "to what extent customer resist to competitive effects and how decisive they are to use an establishment's goods and services" (Baytekin, 2005). Numerous factors like customer satisfaction, service quality, market share, customer value and cost of replacement determine the formation of customer loyalty. Customer loyalty is a more important factor determining marketing performance of an establishment in comparison with factors like customer satisfaction and customer value (Spiteri and Dion, 2004).

There are some common points in relational marketing understanding and customer loyalty oriented marketing understanding in terms of components such as usage of information technologies, information about customers and direct customer communication. Therefore customer loyalty is considered as customer loyalty programmes and relational marketing implementations (Hart vd., 1999) in marketing literature (Palmer, 1995 and Grönroos, 1997) due to the recognition of similarity between these two approaches.

Relational Marketing Approach in Automotive Sector

Automotive sector is one of the biggest sectors in the world today. Developing greatly in the world and in Turkey from 1769 up until today, this sector has expansive markets in developing and developed countries. Automotive sector is a sector in which there is intensive competition and rapidly increasing technological improvements (blog.reklam.com.tr). Automotive sector is one of the leading sectors in national economies due to the added value it provides, employment opportunities it created and its interaction with other industries. Turkish automotive industry is also the locomotive industry for Turkish economy in a lot of ways. The sector has an important share in state budget due to its positive contributions on balance of payments resulting from the added value it provides, its direct or indirect contribution to

employment and foreign exchange savings by limiting imports; tax revenues obtained from the manufacturing and supplying establishments in the sector.

Suppliers are chosen by customers, there are numerous supplier alternatives, brand selection is a common case and face-to-face communication is considered as a powerful way of communication in automotive sector, so the necessity to adopt relational marketing strategies in terms of market conditions is indisputable (Gilbert vd., 1999). One of the important objectives of relational marketing is retaining existing customer portfolio more than having new customers. This objective also gains importance in automotive sector. In automotive sector where competition is increasing and becoming though each and every day establishments try to attract customers and create customer loyalty by way of different services and opportunities. It is necessary for establishment in automotive sector to keep their service quality high, implement customer loyalty campaigns and personalize their relations with customers as much as possible in order to make a difference in the eyes of customers.

It is stated that the relational transactions between car companies and customers increase the perceived value of customers in two ways: First of all the relation to be established between the company and customer creates the opportunity to share more information. Establishment is enabled to develop services to meet the needs and expectations of customers by using this information. With regard to customers, on the other hand, having information about characteristics and capability of company makes it possible to have more realistic expectations from establishments (Keith vd., 2004). Relational marketing is being adopted by car companies as a method providing positive returns for customers and marketers and developing customer loyalty. Company loyalty and award campaigns implemented by car companies for their loyal customers offer many advantages to customers and strengthen the relation between companies and customers due to privileged services.

As for establishments in other sectors, offering quality products remains incapable to have a superior competitive advantage also for car companies and importance of developing long term relations with customers becomes prominent (Varinli, 2006: 99). In other words, establishing close relations with customers and offering quality products are important in terms of competitiveness in automotive sector as it is in others. Close relations established with customers result in customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in consequence. Only car companies managing to establish long term relations with customers are able to survive in today's competitive environment (Karakaş, Bircan and Gök, 2007:8).

METHODOLOGY

It is intended in this research to explore the functionality of relational marketing, one of the modern marketing

approaches, and the incorporated subject of customer relations in terms of a leading automotive company active in Turkey. In order to prevent any misunderstanding with regard to the results of the research, the name of the automotive company explored in this study is not mentioned. Dealers participated the research are named as "Dealer 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14". Relational marketing approaches of dealers of the said company are determined with this study. It is intended to contribute the literature by this means.

Universe of Research

Universe of research is composed of "all dealers of the said automotive company in business in Turkey". 23 dealers in 10 provinces were determined in November, in Turkey. Only 14 of these dealers participating the research accepted to have face-to-face interviews. Remaining 8 dealers rejected requests of interview due to their very busy schedules.

As the main mass of research had a small volume, *in-depth interview* method which is one of the qualitative research methods is used instead of surveys. The reasons to adopt in-depth interview are; its functionality to obtain more detailed and more information as a result of group discussions; obtaining more detailed information from senior staff who are difficult to bring together at the same time and creating opportunity to obtain more complex information and discuss technical matters.

Data Collection Technique

First of all overall information regarding 14 dealers involved in research is collected. Questions asked during interviews with executives of dealers were intended to reveal opinions with respect to general marketing strategies of dealers, their views of relational marketing concept and their relevant practices, importance of customer loyalty for companies and establishing customer loyalty via relational marketing understanding and summarize and support this research. Questions are formed as mutual questions and answers to provide obtaining findings in accordance with the objective of this study. Questions are prepared in light of theoretical information with respect to creating customer loyalty via relational marketing and in the manner so that they will be clear-cut and not leading questions as much as possible. These questions are below:

1. How important is customer royalty for your company? What kind of studies you perform in terms of customer loyalty? To what matters you pay attention to gain loyal customers?

2. Do you consider requests and needs of your customers when determining your products or services? If expectations and needs of your customers are important for your company,

what do you do to understand these expectations, what kind of strategy you implement?

3. Do you have a storage area that you use to store your activation with customers? (Customer complaints or positive opinions of customers, recommendations, expectations, customer information etc.)

4. Do you think that your establishment have sufficient customer services? Do you instantly solve your customers' problems? Do you continue to provide services to your customers after sale?

5. What kind of privileges you offer to your loyal customers?

6. How do you define relational marketing? Which elements should be included in this definition? Which channels you use to conduct your customer relations? (Sales personnel, phone, e mail, customer relations department...etc.)

7. Do all your employees adopt relational marketing understanding? How do you train your personnel with respect to this matter? Which method you follow especially in terms of communication between your sales personnel and customers?

8. How your company handles customer complaints? What is your attitude towards customers who are not happy with your service or product?

9. What do you do to re-gain customers you lost? What do you do to solve the problems with respect to customers who are not satisfied with your services or products? What kind of a communication strategy you determine?

10. Do you investigate your competitors' attitudes towards customers? What methods you implement not to lose your customers to your competitors offering similar services and products?

11. Do you make a research exploring attitude changes of your customers towards your company?

12. Do you establish your service policy and marketing plans to retain your existing customers or to gain new customers?

Data Collection

Within the scope of research 45 minutes interviews were conducted with Customer Relations Managers (CRM) of the said dealers between 04.11.2016 and 30.11.2016 so that they could answer the questions in the in-depth interview form prepared in advance. The main reason to conduct in-depth interviews only with CRMs is because the relational marketing strategies are managed and approved by them. As the results will not be explained by using any statistical method, they are only interpreted.

FINDINGS OF RESEARCH

Sub-titles are constituted as a result of interviews conducted with participating dealers and attitudes of dealers towards customers are determined via these sub-titles. These sub-titles are respectively; importance of customer loyalty and steps required to gain loyal customers, customer orientation, customer data bank, customer services and after-sale services, privileges offered to loyal customers, definition and elements of relational marketing, personnel training, attitude towards customer complaints and loss of customers, investigations about competitors, investigations about customers and relational marketing strategy.

Importance of Customer Relations and Steps Required to Gain Loyal Customers

Findings regarding the importance of customer loyalty and implementations of participating dealers to gain loyal customers are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Practices of Participating Dealers to Gain Loyal Customers

DEALER	PRACTICES TO GAIN LOYAL CUSTOMERS
Dealer 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discounts for regular customers ,offering promotional products • Making customers feel that they are important • Paying attention to customer requests and complaints
Dealer 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calling every customer being serviced and querying their satisfaction • Sincerely trying to pre-eminently help every customer being serviced
Dealer 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly calling customers who received service to query their satisfaction, reporting the results and conveying to relevant people • Trying to-re-gain trust of unsatisfied customers • Making improvements in terms of satisfaction by making regular meetings
Dealer 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying to know the customer, making market researches

Dealer 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making call-backs (SFU) to apprehend lacking aspects and take necessary action • Being more caring to loyal and regular customers and offering discounts • Supporting customers for spare parts after expiry of guarantee who visit to authorized services during guarantee
Dealer 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special discounts, gifts and priority in processes for loyal customers
Dealer 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To gain new customers and loyalty of existing customers paying attention to customer relations and satisfaction
Dealer 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer feedbacks, surveys, making campaigns and offering opportunities towards customer needs
Dealer 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making calls to measure loyal customer potential
Dealer 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly calling customers who don't visit us during a certain period of time • One maintenance free in return 2 maintenances campaigns for truck group vehicles after expiry of their guarantee period • Free-of-charge check-up for light commercial vehicles, discount campaigns depending on total kilometres and age • Obtaining campaigns and actions with regard to visits by loyal customers
Dealer 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying to deal with customers in terms of their needs and requests to establish long term relations
Dealer 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calling customers after making a sale and querying whether they have a problem or not
Dealer 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping all communication channels open before, during and after the sale of product or service • Adopting honesty in every circumstance to build customer trust
Dealer 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having short meetings with regard to conversations during SFU calls and making improvements if necessary

All interviewed executives of dealers emphasized the importance of customer loyalty for companies. Furthermore they stated that customer loyalty is important for them and continue to work in this matter.

Customer Orientation

Findings regarding customer orientation practices of participating dealers to gain loyal customers are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Practices Regarding Customer Orientation of Participating Dealers

DEALER	CUSTOMER ORIENTATION
Dealer 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calling customers after sale and service and learn their expectations, reviewing the information collected via calls and considering demands with higher percentages
Dealer 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When customers call us back asking some mini survey questions regarding innovations, campaigns and their expectations to exchange information
Dealer 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making status analysis in accordance with customer calls and reports of survey results and determining the areas needed to be improved
Dealer 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining customer expectations, providing services in line with expectations
Dealer 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noting down all requests at dealer and take action to meet customer requests
Dealer 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysing interview notes taken during customer visits or calls, looking for solutions to make customers happy and making action plans accordingly
Dealer 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employing one customer specialist for each product group to support services before and after sale, • Calling customers after sale or service and query their satisfaction and reporting to administration
Dealer 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysing customer needs when determining products and services. • Calling every customer who received service and query their satisfaction, taking actions in line with

	<i>customer needs and requests</i>
Dealer 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hearing out customers one-by-one and sharing customers' expectations in every respect with administration</i>
Dealer 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Regularly calling customers with regard to their expectations and fields of interests, organizing campaigns and actions in line with these requests, then assessing the accuracy of the action by checking the incoming vehicles</i>
Dealer 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Taking customer oriented studies into consideration</i>
Dealer 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Regularly calling customers and keeping in touch</i>
Dealer 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Constituting vehicle orders and packages in line with customer requests and needs</i>
Dealer 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Making service loyalty calls apart from SFU calls and hearing out requests of customers</i>

Customer oriented service is very important for all interviewed dealers. All dealers taking customer requests and needs into consideration when they determine products or services and conduct various studies to apprehend customers' expectations.

Customer Data Bank

All participating dealers use customer data bank. There is a program named MI4biz commonly used in the companies. Complaints and satisfaction notes sent to headquarters are conveyed to dealers afterwards by customer relations department. Via customer call-back feature of program customer complaints or positive opinions of customers, their recommendations, expectations, customer information etc. are stored.

Customer Services and After-Sale Services

All dealers except Dealer 3 and Dealer 4 believe that their customer services are sufficient. Dealer 3 and Dealer 4, on the other hand, state that saying "I am sufficient" shall restrain improvement and actually there are so many other things to do in order to satisfy customers more. The common view of dealers in this respect is communication with customers to attain quality in services and taking a close interest in all of their needs and finding instant solutions to the problems of customers are imperative.

Privileges Offered to Loyal Customers

Findings regarding privileges offered to loyal customers by participating dealers are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Privileges Offered by Participating Dealers to Loyal Customers

DEALER	PRIVILEGES TO LOYAL CUSTOMERS
Dealer 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Even if guarantee period of regular customers is expired free-of-charge part replacements in malfunctions originating from products or by applying special discounts or 50% of the priced payable by customer in line with customer satisfaction; special discounts for loyal customers</i>
Dealer 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Discount in specified ratios for loyal customers in service, spare parts and workmanship, support in parts, maintenance, workmanship etc.</i> • <i>Mobilo service for loyalties lasting for more than 4 years</i>
Dealer 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Supporting customers who receive service from authorized services during the guarantee period in spare part prices even after the expiry of guarantee.</i>
Dealer 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Various services for loyal customers; priority for their vehicles, credit contracts, discount ratios, service on spot and getting their cars from their parking lots and returning there.</i>
Dealer 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Special test drives and customer activities for loyal customers</i> • <i>Providing some advantages to loyal customers that they had during guarantee period after the expiry of guarantee</i> • <i>Loyalty Card practices – special discounts, free-of-charge tow truck, free-of-charge magazine subscription...</i>
Dealer 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Privileged Loyalty Card services for loyal customers who still receive service from dealer after the expiration of their guarantees</i>

Dealer 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Signing service contract with loyal customers to provide continuity and offer price and term advantages</i>
Dealer 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Additional discount for loyal customers, ease at payment term, assisting them when they buy a new vehicle or when they interchange their vehicles</i> • <i>Giving specially prepared promotions in special days like their birthdays or once a year</i>
Dealer 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Making customers feel that they are special</i>
Dealer 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sending gifts to loyal customers at certain times</i>
Dealer 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Giving 1% loyal customer discount to customers who buy their second car in two years and 3% loyalty discount to the ones who buy their third car within the same period.</i>
Dealer 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Additional discounts, giveaways, gift, visits and service on spot</i>

Dealer 2 stated that loyal customers are different than new customers but didn't give any information regarding the privileges offered. Dealer 4 said they don't have any special practices for their loyal customers. Practices for loyal customers by other dealers are as follows;

Definition and Elements of Relational Marketing

Almost all of the interviewed dealers defined relational marketing as "being preferable by establishing close relations with customers". They intend to gain loyal customers and create continuity via this marketing understanding. Almost all dealers conduct their customer relations through customer relations department. Elements of relational marketing for participating dealers are strong relations, trust, customer satisfaction, profit and loyalty.

Personnel Training

All interviewed dealers aims the relational marketing strategy to be adopted by all employees. All employees are informed both in routine personnel meetings of dealers and in regular trainings given by the main company to all dealers and their employees. Especially certification trainings can be measured via exams and interviews.

Attitude towards Customer Complaints and Loss of Customers

All interviewed dealers expressed that they are willing to provide instant solutions to problems by hearing out all requests and complaints of customers. In order not to lose customers, complaints to dealers are solved by consulting with top management and support is received from the customer relations department of main company when needed.

Investigations about Competitors

All interviewed dealers emphasized that they keep following the activities of their competitors and that it is important. Dealers try to apprehend the attitudes of their competitors towards customers via customer feedbacks and market researches. Some executives of dealers stated that customers might prefer products of competitors in line with the changing market conditions from time to time. They try to loyalty of customers to dealers by applying different methods from telling the quality of the work done to how trained and professional their employees are. Sometimes they also offer promotional products and organize campaigns to do so.

Investigations about Customers

Findings regarding investigations of dealers about customers by participating dealers are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Investigations of Participating Dealers about Customers

DEALER	CUSTOMER INVESTIGATIONS
Dealer 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Checking request-complaint boxes placed in waiting rooms of each product once a week.</i> • <i>Assessing customer attitudes via assessment report cards used by the company</i>
Dealer 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>None</i>
Dealer 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Two dimensional customer satisfaction investigations in terms of sales and services.</i>
Dealer 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Customer satisfaction surveys</i>

Dealer 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Calling customers 3 days after the sale of vehicle or completion of the service works and querying their satisfaction</i>
Dealer 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Recording all customer calls under certain titles.</i>
Dealer 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Continuously checking customers via calls by customer relations and reports obtainable from the system</i>
Dealer 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reporting customers who don't visit the service for some time and calling them</i>
Dealer 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Calling customers</i>
Dealer 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>None</i>
Dealer 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Phone contact</i>
Dealer 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Continuous customer calls and determining unsatisfied customers</i>
Dealer 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>None</i>
Dealer 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Calling customers via an independent call company and assessing the results</i>

Relational Marketing Strategy

All interviewed dealers expressed that they aim to establish closer relations with their existing customers and gain new customers through their loyal customers. Common view of most of the dealers is retaining existing customers is cheaper than trying to gain new customers. Nevertheless all dealers perform studies to increase their customer potential and consider this important.

RESULT AND SUGGESTIONS

Classic marketing approach had been established to retain existing customers and gain new customers and make more sales instead of creating customer loyalty. Only sales was important and aftersales service and customer satisfaction were disregarded. Quite the contrary, relational marketing aims to create customer relations to provide long term customer satisfaction and establish customer loyalty. Instead of gaining new customers, it is important to retain existing customers. Customer loyalty is the sincere loyalty they feel towards a certain establishment, seller or product or service or their non-random tendency, wish and act to shop in an environment where there are other options.

Concept of relational marketing draws attention in recent years when the importance of customer loyalty is gradually increasing. Contemporary marketing understanding of present day revealed the importance of one-to-one marketing to regain customer loyalty instead of social marketing. This is to say that a marketing approach came in sight which perceives customers as consumer masses containing hundreds of individuals but as sole individuals, tries to know them with their personal characteristics, determines their needs, requests and expectations individually and deliver individual solutions.

Information obtained in literature section of research reveals that implementation and adoption of relational marketing approaches which provide various advantages to establishments and customers requires some time. Even though adoption of relational marketing approach by the establishment as a whole is costly and time-consuming

process, it has a strategic importance and it is not merely a perspective of establishing loyalty via making a difference in today's competitive market and establishing good relations with customers. .

It is clearly seen in this study that commercial relations can be converted into close relations and consequently the loyalty of customer to company would increase via relational marketing. It is possible to say that quality of relations and services, customer information and shared values contribute positively to relational marketing process in automotive sector. Concept of trust also affects the relation process in relational marketing approaches implemented in automotive sector and assumes an important role to establish loyalty. It is understood that meeting the requests and need of customers and offering necessary service after the sale are mandatory to create customer loyalty. In addition car companies are obliged to make their customers feel that they are very special for them. Car companies are able to increase the life-long value of their customers by creating a customer value based or relational marketing approach. Customers perceive the close relations between them and car companies positively and becomes a value which makes the customers loyal to the company. Thus loyalty to company continues. In order to establish this reputation and loyalty, corporate culture which affects every department in company should be customer oriented and all employees of company should internalise relational marketing approach.

The importance of relational marketing approach to create customer loyalty is explored in this study and it revealed that relational marketing approach is a marketing tactic used to constitute customer loyalty as a result of in-depth interviews conducted with 14 car dealers. Participating car dealers;

- Determine special strategies for their customers to gain loyal customers,
- Conduct investigations about their competitors and customers,
- Consider that relational marketing positively contributes to customer loyalty,
- Offer some privileges to their loyal customers.

This study conducted with dealers of a leading automotive company serving throughout Turkey clearly reveals that almost all dealers of the brand use relational marketing strategies in line with the corporate structure of the said company. Said dealers are developing effective relational marketing strategies and offering different implementations to establish customer loyalty. As seen from the obtained findings, relational marketing has an important place and impact to establish customer loyalty. In order for relational marketing approach implemented reliably, all personnel of car companies from lowest level to top level should internalise relational marketing approach. Relational marketing which constituted the lowest level of commerce from past till today is conceptualized as a marketing strategy today and regarded as very important to establish customer loyalty.

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