

NICHE BASED RELATIONAL CAPABILITY TO INCREASE SALESPEOPLE PERFORMANCE IN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

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Received 21 June 2020; accepted 24 January 2021

Abstract. The role of salespeople is increasingly important in relation to improving sales performance. Sales may increase if it is supported by reliable, smart and hardworking salesperson. To create a professional salesperson, enterprises need to provide a guidance, for example, in the form of practical training that can support their works. The ability to adapt when interacting with the customers plays a critical role in relation to improving salesperson performance. However, there are inconsistencies in research findings between adaptive sales and salesperson performance.

This research was conducted on salesperson in small and medium enterprises. Our sample consists of 300 respondents who lived in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. To obtain proper data, we carried out screening and trimming. The tests include: bias non-response test, logical connection test, and confirmatory factor analysis. This study uses structural equation model. A Sobel test was conducted to test the role of moderating variable.

The findings of the research indicate that niche based relational capability was influenced by customers trust orientation, salesperson's expertise and adaptability when interacting with their customers. The higher customers trust and the more intelligence of salesperson are, it will increase the niche based relational capability. In addition, salesperson's performance may increase if it is supported by extensive customers relation based on market gaps, trust and salesperson's intelligence. This research also discusses managerial implication, limitation and the directions for future research.

Keywords: adaptive selling behavioral, customers' trust orientation, niche based relational capability, salesperson expertise, salesperson's performance.

JEL Classification: D4, K2, M31.

Introduction

Salesperson has played, plays and will continue to play a critical role in improving sales performance (Babakus et al., 1994; Bartkus et al., 1989; Basir et al., 2010; Bolander et al., 2015; Miao & Evans, 2013). A reliable and professional workforce is extremely influential on the performance of sales force. The more professional and reliable a salesperson is, the higher his performance will be. Additionally, intelligence and hard work equally determine the success of a salesperson (Klerk, 2014). A smart salesperson is capable to understand properly the needs and wants of customers. Meeting customer's needs and wants will surely make them satisfied, and their satisfaction may increase the number of purchases thus affecting the performance of the salesperson.

Purchases may increase as a result of a skillful salesperson (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Sekaran, 1984). Skills may be acquired from a relatively long experience. A salesperson must continuously strive for self-improvement.

Self-improvement is achievable by learning from mistakes, sharing experiences with seniors, and participating in sales training. Special awards for salespersons is also a type of reward that is beneficial for them to increase their motivation in working. A salesperson who meets or even exceeds the target set by the company should receive special reward. The types of reward can be either tangible e.g. increasing salary or intangibles e.g. giving holidays abroad, or improving the salesperson's competence through mastering a modern sales technology, e.g. optimizing of internet marketing.

An increasingly dynamic environment and industrial revolution characterized by digitized systems (online and robotic) have forced salesperson to adapt. Failing to do so, it may cause salesperson unable to work optimally (Wu & Ho, 2014; Xiabing et al., 2015).

Quality products are the products acceptable by consumers (Schmitz et al., 2014). Thus, the performance of salesperson is likely to improve. In addition, salesperson

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must be able to adapt when interacting with the customers. If salesperson can adapt to customers, sales performance is likely to improve. However, there is still controversy over research findings among researchers. Some findings suggest that adaptive sales can improve sales performance of a salesperson (Basir et al., 2010; Bolander et al., 2015; Miao & Evans, 2013). On the other hand, the other study found that adaptive sales do not have an influence on the sales performance of a salesperson (Ahearne et al., 2008; Pettijohn et al., 2014; Piercy et al., 2012).

With regards to the contradiction, this study aims to overcome the contradiction of research findings, i.e. adaptive sales and salesperson's performance with a new variable, namely niche based relational capability as an intervening variable. With the addition of this new concept that functions as an independent variable, it has the potential to improve the performance of a salesperson. In addition, the performance of a salesperson may be improved by empowering the person through improving skills or competencies (Glickman et al., 2012). Types of skills or competencies include: having the ability to identify potential customers, having the ability to interact with customers' especially profitable customers, being able to retain customers, and having the ability to convince the customers. If those skills and competencies can be well executed, the performance of the salesperson will improve.

A niche base relational capability is the development of relationship marketing theory by providing empirical evidence for the relationship between adaptive selling and salesperson performance (Wang et al., 2016). It can enhance the role of a niche-based relational capability in improving salespeople's performance. This research aims to find out that the salespeople, especially in the field of small and medium enterprises should always develop a special relationship as much as possible. With the breadth of specific relations, it is easier to improve sales performance for self-development processes in terms of expanding relationships with customers. Established relationships should pay attention to complaints and give solutions to the customer's problems.

1. Literature review

1.1. Niche based relational capability

Niche base relational capability is the ability of salespeople to develop relationships in particular, by advancing customers who have the same view, so that a mutually beneficial relationship merits consideration. A niche-based relational capability is the development of relationship marketing theory (Rodriguez & Honeycutt, 2011; Vatani et al., 2014). The interaction between a salesperson and customers greatly determines the effectiveness of relations between the two parties (Chang et al., 2012; Huang et al., 2014). A salesperson who can maintains and develops good relationship with customers determines the success of the salesperson's performance. Problems faced by customers are also the problem of the salesperson.

Consequently, a salesperson must be able to provide a solution to their problem. Such problem may include on the right instruction to use a product purchased by customers, special appreciation for the customers with a significant increase in purchase. Customers will feel more comfortable and will not regret his buying decision. Discussion can be a way to find and determine better values and strategies that can improve the performance of salesperson.

A long-term and sustainable relationship can be maintained if a salesperson can help customers with their problem (Boorom et al., 1998; Homburg et al., 2011; Rehmat et al., 2005). The form of support may be an integrated and complete service. This integrated service can provide high convenience and effectiveness for the customers. The ability of a salesperson to predict customer's needs and wants is important and it determines the success of sales performance. A salesperson who can accurately predict customers' satisfaction may fulfill their satisfaction and when they are satisfied, they will make repeating purchases. In addition, a salesperson must be able to help whenever the customers have difficulties. This type of attention is greatly meaningful to the customers, because they would feel that they are well taken cared.

1.2. Salesperson performance

The workforce competence is critical in relation to improving performance. A convincing salesperson in interacting with customers creates a significant positive influence on his sales performance (Amyx et al., 2014; Bolander et al., 2015; Pettijohn et al., 2014). A salesperson who can convince his customers inclines to maintain and develop customer networking. Customer networking plays a significant positive influence on sales performance (Miao & Evans, 2013). The higher competence of a salesperson to develop networking is, the higher the salesperson's performance will be. An extensive networking may strengthen the relationship between the salesperson with his customers. A good relationship between them can create a salesperson easily understand the customers wants and needs.

Sales success can be measured by several indicators, such as: the ability to expand a market, increased sales volume, increased company profit, increased customer networking, smooth payments and low customers compliant (Miao & Evans, 2013; Shoemaker & Pelham, 2013). Sales performance may be improved if it is followed by an empowerment towards a salesperson systemically and measurably. The form of empowerment may vary according to the current needs. For example, optimizing internet usage in sales tasks is very urgent since the internet business transaction increases every year. The consumers' awareness in using internet transaction is high, because they feel it is more convenient and practical.

1.3. The expertise of salesperson

Understanding the offered products is important to a salesperson (Oua et al., 2012). If customers can understand the

product offered, it reflects an understanding or knowledge of the product offered. Typically, customers can become understand the products bought faster if they receive sufficient information on the products offered. Sufficient (abundant) information may help customers take more informed decisions on their perceived needs. Thus the accuracy and professional service greatly determine the success of a salesperson. The ability to provide advice and extensive knowledge of the product offered is very helpful to convince the customers (Tsai et al., 2010).

The intelligence of a salesperson can lead to customers' trust. In order to maintain customers' trust, it is needed that a salesperson must be honest. Honesty is shown in the form of providing correct and accurate information about the product offered, showing the product composition, and product expiration time. Customers' trust in providing the best service for customers is crucial. It is a process that requires a relatively long time. If one gains the trust from his customers, one should maintain it. Customers' trust may lead to a positive attitude toward the salesperson.

1.4. Adaptive selling competence

The ability of a salesperson to adapt when interacting with his customers is greatly necessary (Chen & Jaramillo, 2014; Locander et al., 2014; Roman & Iacobucci, 2010). The salesperson must understand what his customer's needs and wants. Customers' needs for products are always changing. Customers always want something new from a product. Thus innovation and new designs must always be created. A salesperson can provide information about a product and explain its advantages compared to other available products. In addition, products variations should always been improved. It is related to the customer's changing preferences/taste and inquisitiveness to find something new.

Product variation is achievable by creating different prices from a product (Lee et al., 2011). It is needed to be done considering that consumers have a range of capability and purchasing ability. If customers are provided with information on price variation, the customers would have the flexibility in making choices according to their financial needs and capability. Surely we cannot ignore competitors' pricing. A similar price for a product for all regions is important. In addition to the similar price, a product price must also be vary according to the quality offered. It is important to avoid confusion in the market in which retailer acts as a distributor.

2. Hypotheses development

2.1. Adaptive selling and niche based relational capability

The ability of a salesperson to adapt when interacting with his customers greatly determines the success of the salesperson (Chen & Jaramillo, 2014; Singh & Das, 2013). A salesperson is required to be able to carry out various

approaches in order to reach and retain customers. Different approaches for different customers are important because every customer has unique characteristic and differences from each other (Eng & Sorooshian, 2013; Salam et al., 2013). It is necessary for a salesperson to have the ability to understand customers. A salesperson who can understand the needs and wants of his customers well, can help the customers in making purchasing decision appropriately and accurately (Moslehpour et al., 2015; Zhu & Chang, 2015). It takes a long time and a process to be able to understand customers' needs and wants. Thus, patience, thoroughness and caution are needed by a salesperson to be able to satisfy customers.

Customers' satisfaction is a great step and has the potential for creating good and sustainable relationships (Cheng & Rashid, 2013; Choi & Kim, 2013). For this reason, the intelligence of a salesperson to overcome any difficulties faced by customers and to provide solutions to these difficulties become the main points and determine his success (Ahmad & Kim, 2015). If customers feel that they receive the helped over the difficulty, the customers will get satisfied. Satisfied customers with the services they receives from a salesperson, will inform their relatives willingly (Chow & Shi, 2015; Kim & Min, 2015). If this can develop properly, the relationship with the customers can grow and become even more developed. As such, customer's satisfaction is very closely related to good relations and sustainability.

A good and sustainable relationship with customers need to be nurtured and maintained by a salesperson (Vatani et al., 2014). If this is done professionally, not only giving benefit to the company, but also to the salesperson. For this reason, the ability of salesperson to classify his potential customers may lead to an establishment of good relations with customers. Good relations can be established closely if a salesperson has the ability to provide convenience to customers (Kantur, 2016; Vij & Farooq, 2015). Therefore, a wholehearted service is important to support the success of a salesperson. Customers who receive good service given with a sincerity by the salesperson can reassure them (Tawinunt et al., 2015). The settled customers has the potential to maintain good and sustainable relationship with the salesperson. Based on those description, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: The higher ability of a salesperson to adapt during interaction with customers, the more improved the niche based relational capability.

2.2. Adaptive selling and salesperson performance

The ability to act fairly to every customer is not an easy one (Kim & Kim, 2016; Mandal, 2016; Tawinunt et al., 2015). Fair means that customers do not have to get the same service from one another. Customers with high potential purchase should receive an exceptional service. The same applies in treating customers who make purchases in a certain (high) amount should receive an attractive bonus

from the store. Customers who feel they are treated fairly by the salesperson will repeat their purchases and they will also invite other people to make purchases (Toyese, 2014; Xiabing et al., 2015). As such, it would be easier for the salesperson to meet the sales targets set by the company.

One performance indicator of a salesperson is the ability to meet the target set by the company (Bolander et al., 2015; Pettijohn et al., 2014). A salesperson who has adequate competencies and skills in approaching customers can easily achieve the targets set by the company. The skills required from a salesperson is communicating with the customers. The way a salesperson communicate determines whether or not he is successful in convincing his customers. If the customers receive comprehensive information about the product they bought, they will get satisfied. The customers' satisfaction will spread the positive vibes amongst their close relatives. The behavior is said to be one of the important aspects in improving sales performance. Customers are willingly persuade their friends to buy products they already bought. Thus the market share will become even more extensive.

Potential market share serves as one indicator of a salesperson's success (Pettijohn et al., 2014; Piercy et al., 2012). A salesperson who can continuously extent his market share from time to time stands as an excellent achievements. Extensive market share may potentially improve salesperson's performance. The wider market share of a salesperson is, the greater the potential for increased sales performance will be. Extensive market share may help increase the number of new customers (Fink et al., 2008; Pelham & Kravitz, 2008; Voss & Voss, 2008). New customer is one of the important factors and determines the relationship with salesperson's performance so that the company's profits will also increase. Based on the previous description, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: When the competence of a salesperson to adapt in interacting with customers increases, the performance of the salesperson will improve.

2.3. Customers' trust and niche based relationship capability

Trust is a concept attached to other parties which subsequently impacts on a long-term relationship (Çerri & Xhuvani, 2012). This shows that trust is closely linked with relationships as shown in a number of social capital studies. An empirical study conducted by Schwepker and Good (2012) and a study conducted by Singh and Koshy (2012) explained that customers' trust had an impact on better relationships with them. These empirical studies support (Tsai et al., 2010) in a meta-analysis study in that customers' trust have an influence on relationship.

Customers' trust need to be built for their satisfaction (Fang et al., 2014; Tjahjono et al., 2019). Customers who get satisfaction can increase customers' trust. Customers will be satisfied with quality and consistent services. In addition, the company's reputation can affect customers'

trust. In order to always be able to maintain customers' trust, companies need to keep their promises and commitments to customers. Another important thing is that companies must always keep their promises to maintain good and sustainable relationships with customers. The company's intention to always provide the best for customers should be developed. Intention can influence behavior to always act the best for the customers in order to maintain customers' trust in the company. Customers who believe in companies tend to provide information that is shared with others. Thus the network of companies is increasing.

H3: When the customers' trust increases, the competence of a salesperson to build a nice based relational capability will improve.

2.4. The relationship between an expert salesperson on niche based relational capability

Study of Rodriguez and Honeycutt (2011) explains that a salesperson requires special attention from the organizations in developing his competence through training program. The competency training program may be achieved by describing the training programs carried out by the organization through understanding of product information, sales technique, market information, company information and other factors (Pettijohn et al., 2010). Describing a program to improve the competence of a salesperson consisting of personal skills, sales skills, product knowledge, environmental knowledge, attitudes and other general competencies that can improve the competences.

Study of Wilson and Hunt (2011) propose a transfer process in increasing sales force expertise to improve sales performance (Wilson & Hunt, 2011). The result of the study recommends a training program to improve the competence of marketing personnel who has yet been disclosed in their research. Roman and Iacobucci (2010) outlines the factors that influence sales training. The results, there is a relationship between sales training and relationship building competence (Roman & Luis Munuera, 2005).

A study by Agnihotri and Krush (2015) examined the determinants of sales force performance through the behaviors of activities carried out by a salesperson. These dimensions of performance were shown as the behavioral performance and performance results. Sales force performance was evaluated using factors that could be controlled by the sales force based on the behavior and the targets achieved by the sales force. Shkeer and Awang (2019) tested the performance of salesperson as measured by the ability to reach great market shares targeted by companies, increase the amount of turnover from product sales, and expertise of salesperson in selling their products. The results of the study by Schwepker (2015) found that sales force performance can be measured through indicators such as the ability of salesperson to contribute to the company in achieving market share, selling company's new products quickly and the ability to achieve sales targets.

The salesperson is also a major part in improving relationship building with the customers. Efforts are needed to be carried out by business organizations through long-term relationships between buyers and sales. It can be valuable business assets (Matsuo et al., 2013). While Zhu and Chang (2015) stated that successful salespersons are those who can use an adaptive customer approach and able to interact with their customers.

H4: Increasing intelligence of salespersons increases the ability of them to build niche based relational capability.

2.5. Customers' trust and salesperson performance

The influence of customer trust on salesperson performance is supported in empirical studies (Kim, 2017). Study of Sarwar et al. (2012) and study of Marakanon and Panjakajornsak (2017) actually also explain the impact of customers' trust on salesperson performance, because customer loyalty is a proxy for measuring a salesperson's performance. Likewise, an empirical study conducted by Chu et al. (2012) shows that customers' trust have an impact on proxies' performance with the want to repurchase. This is supported by the study of meta-analysis of Shafiee and Bazargan (2018) that customers trust have an impact on increasing customers.

Customer satisfaction must always be maintained and improved. Many ways can be done, among others, by always paying attention to the needs and desires of customers (Fang et al., 2014; Tjahjono et al., 2019). In addition, service quality must be improved by providing the best products and services. Customers who need something, they feel satisfied. Satisfaction for customers is an advantage for the companies, because the satisfied customers can cause trust (Chow & Shi, 2015). This trust is an advantage for the companies. Thus quality communication is needed to maintain customers' satisfaction that can lead to customers' trust. Customers who believe in companies tend to repurchase. This repurchase for companies can improve sales performance.

H5: When customer trust increases, the performance of salesperson will also increases.

2.6. Niche based relational capability and salesperson performance

The ability of a salesperson to build relationship with customers is considered as fundamental in relation to improving sales performance (Vij & Farooq, 2015). The relation can be built by a salesperson with adequate interpersonal mentality. A salesperson must be able to be polite and to act professionally to every customer as well as to any prospective customers. The salesperson must be able to easily start conversation on current issues with prospective customers at the first occasion, wherever and under any conditions. The salesperson should not have any difficulties in understanding the customer's condition, and has a specific strategy to approach customers, which basically each customer has their own uniqueness.

Willing to share sales experiences with friends (colleagues) which include both pleasant and unpleasant experiences is an effective way to improve salesperson's performance (Hajli & Lin, 2016). With the expectation that everyone can learn a lesson and has not the same mistakes done by their friends. There is a willingness to always improve the quality of oneself that can be done through learning from colleagues who are successful and willing to express sincerely the shortcomings faced in carrying out sales tasks (Dulger et al., 2016). In addition, a salesperson must be able to create an atmosphere that can attract the interest of prospective customers, so that the prospective customers are willing to discuss and express their complaints about any products purchased or to be consumed.

H6: When the competence of a salesperson increases in building nice based relational capability, the performance of salesperson also increases.

2.7. The relationship between salesperson' expertise on salesperson performance

Companies need asymmetric information from their customers through their salesperson. Information obtained by the salesperson plays an important role that needs to be delivered by salesperson that interact directly with the buyers (Hajli & Lin, 2016). Salesperson also play a strategic role in influencing customer decisions buying the products, therefore the role has a direct impact on the performance of salesperson (Amyx & Jarrell, 2016; Keneseia & Kolos, 2018).

A study conducted by Agnihotri et al. (2016) suggests that the performance of salesperson had a positive influence on achieving a certain sales. Other findings in the study also suggests that the effectiveness of product sales was also influenced by factors outside the control of the salesperson, for example: competition, market potential and market changes. The present of a sales force may serve as an evaluation of salespersons' contribution in achieving the organizational goal. A study of Verhoef (2003) explains the sales force performance is measured by how well its ability to reach a certain market share for the company, to increase the number of product sold, and the ability to sell products with high profit margin.

In his research, Agnihotri and Krush (2015) measured the performance of salesperson conceptually which functions to test the performance related to the behavior or activities carried out by the salesperson, and the results can be contributed to their efforts. A research conducted by Locander et al. (2018) found that sales force training program had a positive influence on customers orientation and on salesperson performance.

H7: The higher the salesperson's expertise is, the higher the salesperson's performance will be.

Based on the literature regarding interrelationship between variables in the study, we propose a research model

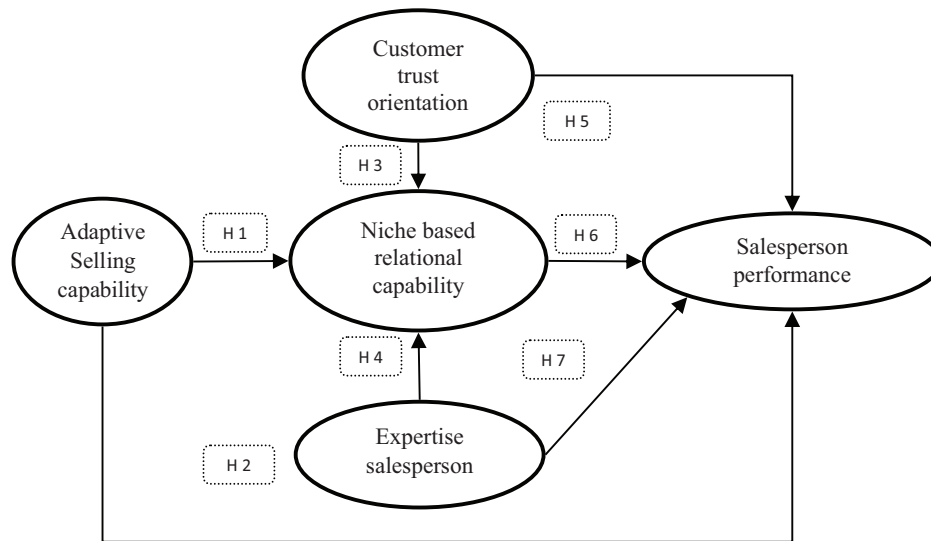


Figure 1. Research framework

3. Research method

3.1. Sampling frame

This research was conducted in small and medium enterprises (SME), due to these SMEs play an important and decisive role in advancing the prerequisite of a country. Indeed, the amount or volume of sales is relatively insignificant, but the number of SMEs is relatively great so that in the total sales is quite significant, thus control the economy nationally. It is appropriate for SMEs to receive serious attention from all parties including stakeholders. The number of sample in the study is 300 respondents. The unit of analysis is salesperson who did the profession as salesperson in small and medium micro businesses located in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This research deals with micro small and medium enterprises, whose base data is mainly concerned with The Cooperative and Small and Medium Enterprises offices. Research sample is marketing people in SMEs. Random sampling is a way of taking samples.

The primary data was collected using a questionnaire that has been tested for its validity and reliability. The measurement scale is 1 for strongly disagree, 10 for strongly agree. The answer leaning to 10 shows that the respondent is as much amenable to the question of the questionnaire in this study. There were 12 students mobilized as enumerators. After passing a selection as enumerators, the student were given sufficient debrief related to the research data collection techniques before they worked in the field. They were also supported with motivation so that the process of data collection on the field run smoothly.

3.2. Measurement

It is small sample of pre-test research data. The research data were tested to obtain valid and reliable research data. The number of sample used was 30 respondents. In

addition, the data were also tested with a non-response bias testing to convince the researchers that the data obtained were good ones, in the sense that there was no difference in the quality of data between the questionnaires received on time and the questionnaire received later. The third data test was a logical connection test. The purpose of this test was to ensure that all variable indicators used in the study were positively correlated with other variable indicators. If there was an indicator of a variable that correlates negatively with other variable indicators, the indicator would automatically be discarded. In addition, the data must be convergent validity, construct reliability and variance extracted, therefore a confirmatory factor analysis test was required.

4. Results

4.1. Non-response testing can be done to determine the characteristics of respondents between men and women

Non-response bias tests was carried out with independent sample t-test by observing the difference in average respondent's answer between men and women. A significant difference in the population variance in the two samples can be seen in the value of Levene's test for equality of variance to see the difference in the F-value and the probability value of the t-test results. In this study, the probability value is above 0.05. Thus it can be said that there is no significant difference in responses among of those men and women. The logical connection test is the relationship between variable indicators. The correlation test results between variable indicators show a positive correlation. This may indicate that the correlation between variable indicators statistically is logical.

Validity and reliability testing is conducted to get accurate data. The results of confirmatory factor analysis in this study indicate that the indicators used are able to

explain the latent variables created. This can be seen from the convergent values of validity, reliability index and extracted variance which are above the specified value limit as shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Scale item with loading factor and reliabilities

Construct	Standardized loadings
<i>Adaptive selling capability</i> (Maroofi et al., 2011) AVE = .541; Composite Reliability = .834	
When I feel my approach is not working, I can easily change to another approach	.602
Each customer requires a different approach.	.798
I can easily overcome customer’s difficulties.	.807
It is always easy for me to adapt to certain customers.	.774
<i>Niche based relational capability</i> (Huang et al., 2014) AVE = .531 Composite Reliability = .841	
I am always skillful at categorizing potential customers	.939
I am skillful at interacting to achieve profitable customers	.958
I am always skillful at interacting to retain customers	.930
I am able to provide significant benefits to customers.	.928
<i>Salesperson performance</i> (Li et al., 2018) AVE = .522; Composite Reliability = .852	
I always produce a higher level of sales, compared to my colleagues	.735
I always exceed the sales target set by the company.	.674
I can increase the company’s market share	.663
The growth of new customers is increasing.	.813
<i>Customers’ trust orientation</i> (Paschal & Eid, 2011), AVE= .533; Composite Reliability = .761	
Customers believe that I have an integrity	.957
Customers think that the company where I work can be trusted	.952
Based on the customer’s review, I have done the best for them.	.927
Based on customer’s review, I have done the best for the success of their business.	.929
<i>Expertise salesperson</i> (Hassan et al., 2013) AVE= .551; Composite Reliability = .831	
I was able to explain the brand of the product that I was selling	.952
I have the competence in explaining the quality of the products I offer.	.941
I feel that I have a good image in building the image or image of the product I sell	.901
I feel I have a more personal personality in building my work environment.	.907

Table 1 shows that the loading factor value is above .5, this indicates that the questionnaire items are valid. Composite Reliability above .7 is sufficient to justify a research result. The extracted variance value is above the predetermined value limit. Thus it can be said that the items in the questionnaire used as the observed variable are able to explain the latent variable.

4.2. Evaluation of Goodness of fit model

Evaluation of model suitability is conducted to ascertain regarding to what extent the model hypothesized is in accordance with the sample data. Evaluation of model suitability refers to the selected criteria as follows: Chi-square = 225.062; probability = .01; TLI = .977; CFI = .981 GFI = .897; AGFI = .865; CMIN / DF = 1.407; RMSEA = .048, NFI = .937. With these results, the model can be accepted. The results of the processed full model analysis data are presented in Figure 2.

Results of analysis indicates that the feasibility value of a model has met the determined cut of value. Thus the model is feasible to test the hypothesis.

4.3. Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis testing is based on the processing data using the Structural Equation Model, and the regression value is shown in Figure 2. The analysis results show that adaptive selling does not significantly influence niche based relational capability but it has a significant positive influence on salesperson’s performance. To improve the performance of a salesperson, it is critically important for a salesperson to have the ability to adjust when interacting with the customers. This is because every customer has his/her own specificity or uniqueness. A different approach for different customers is needed to serve the customer’ uniqueness. Another finding in this research is that customers’ trust and the expertise of the salesperson have a significant positive influence on niche based relational capability. On the other hand, the salesperson’s performance was influenced by customers’ trust, a niche based relational capability, and the salesperson’s expertise.

Hypothesis 1: a significant relationship between adaptive selling and a niche based relational capability (H1: $\beta = .286, p = .002$); However, adaptive selling has a non-significant positive influence on the salesperson’s performance (H2: $\beta = -.164, p = .172$); customers’ trust orientation have a significant positive influence on niche based relational capability (H3: $\beta = .360, p = .000$); the salesperson’s expertise has influence on niche based relational capability (H4: $\beta = .557, p = .000$); Customers’ trust orientation have a non-significant influence on the salesperson’s performance (H5: $\beta = -.207, p = .030$); Niche based relational capability has a significant positive influence on the salesperson’s performance (H6: $\beta = .264, p = .019$); Expertise of the salesperson has a non-significant influence on the salesperson’s performance (H7: $\beta = .142, p = .197$). In Table 2, we present the hypothesis tested, i.e. the whole standardize regression coefficient.

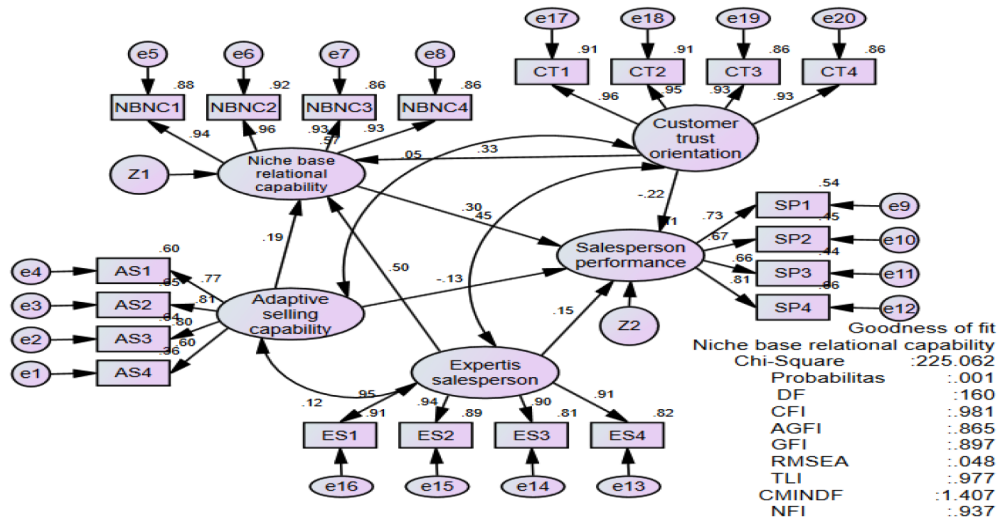


Figure 2. Full analysis model

Table 2. Results of hypothesis testing

Path			β	Sig	Comment	
H1	Niche based relational capability	←	Adaptive selling	.286	**	Accepted
H2	Salesperson's performance	←	Adaptive selling	-.164	ns	Rejected
H3	Niche based relational capability	←	Customer trust orientation	.360	***	Accepted
H4	Niche based relational capability	←	Expertise of the salesperson	.557	***	Accepted
H5	Salesperson's performance	←	Customer trust orientation	-.207	ns	Rejected
H6	Salesperson's performance	←	Niche based relational capability	.264	**	Accepted
H7	Salesperson's performance	←	Expertise of the salesperson	.142	ns	Rejected

Note: N = 160; *p < .05, ** p < .01, ***p < .001.

4.4. Testing of mediating role: niche based relational capability

Testing the important role of niche based relational capability variable was conducted to fill in the research gap between adaptive selling and salesperson performance. Testing the important role of this mediating variable was conducted using the Sobel Test calculation (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Sobel test is used to assess the significance of indirect influence in structural equation model. The results of statistical test of the mediating role between adaptive selling and the salesperson's performance from the sobel test is = 2.66, with probability (two tail) is = .008. Thus it can be concluded that the variable niche based relational capability plays a very important role in bridging the gap between adaptive selling and the salesperson's performance. Thus the ability of salesperson to categorize potential customers is very important. Categorizing has the potential role to improve the performance of salesperson.

5. Discussion

The salesperson's performance may increase if the niche based relational capability and customers' trust increase. Customers' trust orientation characterized by high

integrity, high level of customers' trust in the company, continuously providing the best for customers, continuously paying attention to customer satisfaction, friendly and available to customers may reduce the risk to the least possible. The results of the total influence calculation on the influence of customer's trust orientation on the performance of salesperson through a niche base relational capability is .124. The result indicates that there is a significant influence of customers' trust orientation on the salesperson's performance through a niche base networking capability. This can be interpreted that a new concept, namely a niche base of relational capability is important in increasing the salesperson's performance.

Trust and the quality of a relationship have a significant positive influence on the performance of a salesperson (Ferdinand & Wahyuningsih, 2018; Drollinger & Comer, 2013). The ability of a salesperson to listen and to talk to customers, to be able see from customer's views regarding the difficulties faced by the customers play an important role in increasing customers' trust in which ultimately can improve the performance of the salesperson. In addition, a salesperson should be happy to accommodate ideas suggested by the customers and be able to sincerely listen to customers complaints. This way, the quality of

customers' relationship with the salesperson can be even improved. As the result, the customers would voluntarily recommend their positive experience to other customers or relatives.

The expertise of a salesperson has a significant positive influence on the salesperson's performance through a niche based relational capability. The expertise of a salesperson characterized by understanding thoroughly the product offered (product knowledge), having an adequate competence in explaining the product offered, having a good image in building trust with the customers, having a competence in establishing good relations with customers, and achieving beyond the targets. The result of total influence of salesperson's expertise on his performance through a niche base relational capability is .134. This shows that the role of a new concept i.e. a niche base of relational capability is critical as a moderating variable between salesperson's expertise and performance. The essentials of salesperson's intelligence influence the customers to willingly establish good relations with the salesperson.

Otherwise, a research conducted by Tsai et al. (2010) shows that salesperson's expertise has a significant positive influence on salesperson's performance. This means that the more intelligent a salesperson is, the more sales performance of the salesperson can be achieved. The relationship is the expert salesperson usually has high competence, but the salespeople who has high intelligence, not necessarily has the skill. The skilled salesperson does not directly affect the performance of the salesperson. Thus, intelligent salespeople influence the performance of salespeople through a niche-based relational capability. Form of intelligence may include: agile and thorough in carrying out duties, mastering the product knowledge, able to provide detailed description of the products offered, and able to provide professional advice to customers for the problems they have. All forms of intelligence of a salesperson have an influence on customers' becoming loyal and voluntarily establishing good relationships with salesperson in the long term. In addition, customers who are satisfied may provide positive information about the company, which in turn is very useful information for the salesperson to improve his sales performance.

Adaptive selling has a significant positive influence on the salesperson's performance through a niche based relational capability. Adaptive selling is characterized by, among others: able to simply change an approach if it is not working; use different approach for different customers, able to immediately resolve customers' problem, able to always adapt to customers' needs, able to easily understand customer's behavior, and able to treat customers as fairly as possible. The total influence of adaptive selling on the salesperson's performance through a niche based relational capability is 14. The result indicates that there is a significant positive influence of adaptive selling on the salesperson's performance through a niche based relational capability. The role of niche based relational capability is crucial to improve the performance of salesperson.

On the contrary, the results of research conducted by Singh and Das (2013), adaptive selling was shown to have a significant positive influence on the performance of the salesperson. A salesperson with long working experience and is customer-oriented tends to be more able to provide good service and able to make the customers contented which can ultimately lead to an increase in sales performance. On the contrary, a salesperson who has limited work experience and is less customer-oriented tends not to make customers satisfied. Customers who do not receive good service will not make a repeat purchase. The influence would be that the salesperson's performance declines. Thus, less experienced salesperson should learn more from mistakes, and try follow the methods or steps of successful salesperson.

A salesperson can improve his competence through the expansion of market-based relations that generally unattainable by competitors. Gap-based relationships can be effective if supported by a salesperson who has adaptability to interact with the customers. It is very important for a salesperson to understand what customers want and needs quickly. The ability to understand customer's needs may create the trust from them. This trust can expand to market-based marketing relationships. In addition, it is very important for a salesperson to improve his competence, so he can improve the knowledge and master product knowledge well. Customers' trust is a strategy to improve marketing relationship so that his performance increases.

A niche-based relational capability has a significantly positive impact on the performance of salespeople, but the adaptive sales, customers' trust orientation, and expertise salesperson influence indirectly against the performance of the salespeople. Thus, the role of a niche variable-based relational capability is essential for a new variable, which is from the development of relationship marketing theory, able to be a variable intervening relationship between adaptive sales and sales force performance. The expert salesperson (expertise) and accompanied by strong trust of the customers, and supported by a strong base relation (hip niche), can increase the performance of the salesperson.

Niche-based relational capability concept is a specific competence owned by the salespeople who can carry out the vital tasks of sales (Udayana et al., 2019). As for the form of such underlying principle, among others: the ability to classify potential customers, skillfully interact with customers to achieve maximum profit, leverage to retain customers, and the ability to provide maximum benefit to customers.

Salespeople on small and medium enterprises require special needs in carrying out the sales task. If it is done in a better way, the activity will not impact sales performance. Therefore, it is necessary to support the ability, whereas this support seeks to accelerate the effectiveness of the concept of niche-based relational capability. These support abilities include adaptability when interacting with plans; the ability to increase customer's confidence; solutions to customer-facing problems.

Conclusions, implications and limitation

Conclusions

Niche-based relational capability has direct impact on the performance of salespeople, otherwise adaptive selling, and customers' trust and expertise salesperson affects indirectly to the performance of the salespeople. Thus it is a crucial role variable intervening, which is a new variable that is a niche-based relational capability to increase the salesperson performance, which is the development of relationship marketing theory. Salespeople are required to be able to categorize potential customers, have the skills of interacting with the customer, able to retain customers, and can fulfill the needs of customers.

As a new concept in this study, niche based relational capability is able to overcome the problem in this study i.e. the gap between selling adaptive and salesperson's performance using the sobelt-test. Thus a salesperson must have the ability to categorize customers. Customers can be categorized if a salesperson has the ability to interact well with the customers so that they get profits, both profits for customers and profits for salesperson. In addition, it requires the ability of salesperson to be able to retain existing customers and be able to provide services wholeheartedly. Complete customer data may help provide an optimum service to customers.

Niche based relational capability may be improved if it is supported by the ability of a salesperson who has adaptability in interacting with customers, smart salesperson, customers' trust the salesperson and product purchased. The ability of a salesperson to explain the product offered greatly influences the customer's decision in purchasing. Customers who get satisfied with information of the product they buy, they will repurchase and may even help salesperson expand the customer network. In addition, the ability of salesperson in building a good image of the product may develop the customers' trust. Customers' trust may lead to customers' satisfaction. Customers who feel satisfied may influence their relatives to do the same for what they have done, so the customer network become more extensive.

Sales performance is a measure of the success of a salesperson. The higher the salesperson's performance is, the more successful the salesperson will be. A lot of factors can influence the performance. These factors include the ability of a salesperson to build market-based gap. Thus the ability of a salesperson to categorize potential markets will greatly help in adding new customers. More customers mean that the salesperson can improve the sales performance. Salesperson's performance can also be influenced by the integrity factor of a salesperson. As high as the integrity of the salesperson, the higher the performance of the salesperson will be. High integrity can be realized in the form of continuously performed the best for the customers, always open and attentive to customers' satisfaction. If the customer are satisfied, the performance of the salesperson increases, which in turn will improve the company's performance.

Implications

This research was started with a gap research between adaptive selling and salesperson's performance. To overcome this gap, researchers propose a new concept, namely niche based relational capability. Adaptive selling has a significant positive influence on salesperson's performance through a niche based relational capability. In line with the research conducted by Miao and Evans (2013) the study shows that adaptive selling has a significant positive influence on salesperson's performance. The customers' trust orientation has a significant positive influence on the performance of salesperson through niche based relations capability. This finding supports the research conducted by Ashforth et al. (2007). Furthermore, his findings stated that when customer trust increases, the salesperson performance also increases. Expertise of a salesperson has a significant positive influence on the performance of a salesperson through a niche based relational capability. This result supports the research of Tsai et al. (2010) which shows that the more intelligence of salesperson is, the relationship become more extensive and it will increase the salesperson's performance.

Limitation and direction for future research

The scope of this research needs to be expanded, so it should cover not only in the Special Region of Yogyakarta but over a more extensive area. The wider the area of research, more population would be represented. By conducting the extensiveness of research, there will be more information obtained, more varied and accurate. The quality of information and data largely determine the quality of research. So, the better quality of data and information are obtained, the better quality of research will improve. From the perspective of research method, this research should also be conducted not only cross section but also in longitudinal. If it is conducted based on cross section method, the information and data obtained are incomplete. A complete information also determines the quality of a study. When conducted as a long-term research, the respondents' answer (salesperson) can be confronted with the sales manager's answer. The best solution will be obtained if the method applied.

The subject of this study should be expanded so that it is not only limited to salesperson in small and medium enterprises but also salesperson in the industry with high levels of complexity, such as salesperson in electronic products and the automotive industry. If this can be done, the information and data obtained will be more complete and comprehensive. Complete and comprehensive information is critically important on the quality of research. Mastery of product knowledge is very important for a salesperson. Therefore it is necessary to improve the quality of a salesperson, so that he can communicate and assure that the customers using or buying the products are satisfied.

We should include more research variables. A lot of factors influence the performance of a salesperson. Sales

profession is a job that requires both hard and smart work. Two variables can be used as supporting variables to improve the performance of salesperson. However, the salesperson's profession really needs strong physical energy such as approaching potential customers and be able to convince customers. In addition, a salesperson must be smart. He must be able to understand customer's situation, including being able to understand their needs and wants. If the salesperson can understand them, the salesperson will be able to provide the right solution for all of them.

Future research may include expanding research area, research variables, and increasing the number of respondents and unit of analysis. The research area may cover not only Yogyakarta but also throughout Java or at least five provinces in Java so the population and sample are met. The research variables are hard work and smart work. Consequently, a salesperson must be smart and agile. Agile means to never give up and willing to learn from experience, both a pleasant and an unpleasant experiences. Smart means that one should be able to predict exactly what his customers' needs and wants.

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