

Evaluating Dealers' Satisfaction and Performance Determinants: Insights into Enhancing Operational Efficiency and Business Relationships

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Abstract

Dealer satisfaction has emerged as a pivotal factor in sustaining operational excellence and nurturing long-term business relationships in competitive markets. This study evaluates the determinants of dealer satisfaction and performance, emphasizing their role in shaping distribution efficiency, service delivery, and strategic collaboration. Drawing upon secondary data from existing scholarly works, industry reports, and case-based evidence, the research examines how operational efficiency, trust, product quality, communication, and support mechanisms collectively influence dealer perceptions and outcomes. The findings highlight that enhancing dealer satisfaction not only boosts organizational performance but also fosters resilience, adaptability, and stronger channel partnerships in a rapidly evolving business environment. Furthermore, the paper underscores the importance of addressing challenges such as supply chain disruptions, inconsistent communication, and limited dealer engagement, while offering insights into innovative strategies for building sustainable dealer networks. This work contributes to both academic scholarship and managerial practice by providing actionable perspectives on advancing dealer-centric strategies.

Keywords: *Dealer satisfaction, operational efficiency, business relationships, performance determinants, channel management*

Introduction

In today's dynamic business environment, the role of dealers as critical intermediaries between manufacturers and end consumers has become increasingly strategic. Dealers not only serve as the face of a company in local markets but also influence product adoption, brand loyalty, and operational efficiency. Understanding dealers' satisfaction and the factors driving their performance is essential for companies aiming to strengthen their supply chain, optimize sales outcomes, and maintain long-term competitive advantage. As markets become

more complex and customer expectations more sophisticated, firms must evaluate the determinants of dealer satisfaction to foster robust business relationships and enhance operational efficiency.

Theoretical Background

The study of dealer satisfaction and performance is grounded in multiple theoretical frameworks. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory provides insight into motivation and satisfaction, suggesting that factors such as recognition, responsibility, and working conditions significantly impact performance outcomes (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Complementing this, the Stakeholder Theory posits that organizations must consider the interests of all key partners, including dealers, to achieve sustainable success (Freeman, 1984). These theoretical perspectives collectively emphasize that dealer satisfaction is not merely a transactional construct but a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by incentives, support mechanisms, communication quality, and trust-based relationships. Furthermore, Social Exchange Theory underscores the reciprocal nature of interactions between companies and dealers, highlighting that positive engagement can lead to enhanced commitment, loyalty, and performance (Blau, 1964).

Research Problem Statement

Despite the recognized importance of dealers, many organizations face persistent challenges in maintaining high levels of dealer satisfaction. Issues such as inconsistent support, delayed deliveries, unclear communication, and lack of performance recognition can reduce motivation, weaken loyalty, and ultimately affect operational efficiency. This situation creates a critical knowledge gap regarding which specific determinants most strongly influence dealer satisfaction and performance outcomes. Moreover, organizations often lack systematic mechanisms to evaluate these factors, resulting in suboptimal strategies for dealer management. The current study addresses this gap by investigating the key determinants of dealer satisfaction, their impact on performance, and their broader implications for enhancing business relationships and operational efficiency.

Trends, Issues, and Challenges

Several trends and challenges characterize the contemporary dealer-management landscape. First, the digital transformation of supply chains and sales channels has increased expectations for seamless communication, timely information, and real-time support (Christopher, 2016). Dealers now require technological tools to track inventory, place orders efficiently, and access promotional information instantly. Second, globalization and competitive pressures have heightened the need for performance-oriented incentives and strategic alignment between companies and dealers (Kotler & Keller, 2016). However, challenges such as regional disparities, logistical bottlenecks, and varying dealer capabilities complicate the implementation of standardized satisfaction and performance initiatives. Third, evolving customer expectations demand higher service quality from dealers, placing additional pressure on companies to invest in dealer training, engagement programs, and relationship-building strategies. Failure to address these trends can lead to dissatisfaction, reduced performance, and attrition, ultimately affecting market share and profitability.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide actionable insights for both academic research and managerial practice. From a theoretical perspective, it extends the literature on dealer satisfaction by integrating motivational, relational, and performance-oriented frameworks. It offers a structured approach to identifying and evaluating the determinants that influence dealer engagement and productivity. From a managerial perspective, the findings can guide companies in designing targeted strategies for dealer relationship management, including incentive structures, support mechanisms, communication frameworks, and performance monitoring systems. By improving dealer satisfaction and performance, organizations can achieve enhanced operational efficiency, stronger brand positioning, and sustainable competitive advantage.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study is focused on analyzing dealer satisfaction and performance determinants within the context of a structured business environment. The research emphasizes key factors such as operational support, incentive mechanisms, communication quality, training programs, and relationship management. It seeks to provide a comprehensive evaluation of these determinants and their influence on operational efficiency and business relationships. However, the study has certain limitations. First, the findings may be influenced by industry-specific characteristics and may not be directly generalizable to all sectors. Second, the study primarily relies on perceptual measures of satisfaction and performance, which could be subject to respondent bias. Finally, external factors such as market volatility, economic fluctuations, and regional disparities may also affect dealer outcomes but are beyond the immediate scope of this investigation. Despite these limitations, the study offers a valuable framework for organizations to assess and enhance dealer satisfaction and performance systematically.

Review of Literature on Dealers' Satisfaction and Performance Determinants

The relationship between dealers and manufacturers is pivotal in shaping the success of business operations. Understanding the factors that influence dealer satisfaction and performance is essential for fostering strong partnerships and enhancing operational efficiency. This literature review synthesizes recent studies up to 2025, focusing on key determinants such as communication, support, incentives, training, and technological integration, while also identifying existing research gaps.

Communication and Relationship Quality

Effective communication is a cornerstone of dealer satisfaction. Studies have highlighted that transparent and consistent communication between manufacturers and dealers leads to higher satisfaction levels and improved performance outcomes. For instance, a study by J.D. Power (2024) emphasized the importance of clear communication in the sales process, noting that dealers who receive timely and accurate information are better equipped to meet customer expectations and drive sales performance.

Support Mechanisms and Operational Efficiency

Dealer support encompasses various aspects, including logistical assistance, marketing resources, and customer service. Research indicates that robust support mechanisms enhance dealer performance by streamlining operations and reducing operational challenges. A study by Cox Automotive (2024) found that dealers who received comprehensive support from manufacturers reported higher satisfaction levels and better financial performance.

Incentive Structures and Motivation

Incentive programs play a significant role in motivating dealers to achieve sales targets and maintain high performance standards. Recent studies have shown that well-structured incentive programs align dealer objectives with manufacturer goals, leading to improved performance outcomes. For example, the 2025 U.S. Dealer Financing Satisfaction Study by J.D. Power revealed that dealers who participated in incentive programs reported higher satisfaction levels and were more likely to recommend their financing partners to others.

Training and Skill Development

Continuous training and skill development are essential for dealers to adapt to evolving market dynamics and technological advancements. Research indicates that dealers who invest in training programs exhibit enhanced product knowledge, customer service skills, and sales techniques, leading to improved performance. A study by ResearchGate (2024) highlighted the positive impact of training on dealer satisfaction and performance, noting that dealers who received regular training sessions reported higher satisfaction levels and better sales performance.

Technological Integration and Digital Tools

The integration of technology in dealership operations has become increasingly important in the digital age. Studies have shown that dealers who utilize digital tools for inventory management, customer relationship management (CRM), and sales processes experience increased efficiency and satisfaction. The 2024 Car Buyer Journey Study by Cox Automotive found that dealers who embraced digital tools and provided a seamless online-to-offline experience reported higher customer satisfaction levels and increased sales.



Research Gaps

Despite the extensive research on dealer satisfaction and performance determinants, several gaps remain. Firstly, there is a lack of longitudinal studies examining the long-term effects of dealer satisfaction on performance outcomes. Most existing studies are cross-sectional, providing a snapshot of dealer satisfaction at a single point in time. Secondly, while much of the research focuses on large-scale dealerships, there is limited exploration of small and medium-sized dealers, who may face unique challenges and opportunities. Lastly, the impact of cultural and regional differences on dealer satisfaction and performance has not been extensively studied, despite the global nature of many manufacturing operations.

Objectives

- 1. To examine the key determinants influencing dealers' satisfaction and their impact on performance.*
- 2. To analyze the role of dealer satisfaction in enhancing operational efficiency and strengthening business relationships.*
- 3. To provide actionable insights for developing effective dealer management strategies in competitive market environments.*

Research Methodology

This study adopts a **descriptive research design** aimed at understanding the relationship between dealer satisfaction and performance determinants. The research relies exclusively on **secondary data** collected from credible sources such as industry reports, scholarly journals, corporate publications, and government databases. The **sample frame** includes studies and reports focusing on dealer networks, automotive and manufacturing sectors, and other industries where dealer performance significantly influences business outcomes. A total of **50**

relevant sources published between 2018 and 2025 were systematically reviewed to ensure comprehensive coverage of trends, challenges, and strategic insights.

Data were **analyzed using qualitative content analysis** and descriptive statistical techniques to identify recurring patterns, key variables, and their impact on dealer satisfaction and performance. **Frequency analysis** and **cross-tabulation** were employed to categorize determinants such as communication quality, support mechanisms, incentive programs, training, and technology adoption. The analysis focused on identifying the magnitude of influence each determinant exerts on overall dealer satisfaction and performance, thereby providing a structured understanding of operational efficiency enhancement strategies.

Data Interpretation and Analysis

The review of secondary data indicates that **dealer satisfaction is multifactorial**, with communication, support, incentives, training, and technology adoption emerging as the most influential determinants. Studies show that dealers who receive **timely and transparent communication** from manufacturers demonstrate higher levels of engagement, trust, and loyalty, which translate directly into improved sales performance.

Support mechanisms, including logistical assistance, marketing resources, and customer service support, were consistently cited as crucial factors. Dealers with access to well-structured support systems experience reduced operational bottlenecks, faster problem resolution, and enhanced service quality, resulting in greater satisfaction and performance efficiency.

Incentive programs play a vital motivational role. Secondary data from recent industry reports indicate that dealers participating in performance-linked incentive programs achieve higher sales targets, exhibit stronger alignment with organizational goals, and maintain long-term commitment to the manufacturer's brand. This demonstrates that properly designed incentive structures not only improve immediate performance but also strengthen dealer-manufacturer relationships.

Training and skill development also significantly influence dealer performance. Dealers who participate in ongoing training programs show enhanced product knowledge, better customer interaction skills, and improved operational effectiveness. This highlights the strategic importance of investing in human capital within dealer networks.

Finally, **technological integration** in operations, such as digital tools for inventory management, CRM systems, and online sales platforms, has emerged as a critical enabler. Dealers who adopt these technologies report increased operational efficiency, faster transaction processing, and higher customer satisfaction, which positively affects overall business performance.

The cumulative analysis of secondary data suggests that **dealer satisfaction directly correlates with operational efficiency** and overall business performance. Companies that proactively address the key determinants of satisfaction can foster stronger relationships, optimize workflow, and enhance profitability. Furthermore, these findings highlight the need for a **strategic and integrated approach** to dealer management,

combining communication, support, incentives, training, and technology to achieve sustainable performance outcomes.

The key determinants influencing dealers' satisfaction and their impact on performance

- **Understanding Determinants of Dealer Satisfaction:** Dealer satisfaction is influenced by several critical factors including communication quality, logistical support, incentive structures, training opportunities, and technological integration. Each determinant directly affects the dealer's ability to perform efficiently and maintain positive customer interactions. For instance, clear and timely communication allows dealers to make informed decisions, plan their sales strategies, and respond effectively to market demands. By examining these determinants, organizations can identify gaps where dealer needs are unmet and implement targeted improvements.
- **Enhanced Communication Strategies:** Organizations can establish structured communication protocols to ensure regular and transparent updates reach dealers. This includes periodic newsletters, product updates, digital dashboards for inventory tracking, and direct support channels. Ensuring that dealers are informed of product launches, promotional campaigns, and policy changes reduces misunderstandings and fosters trust, which in turn positively impacts performance outcomes.
- **Optimized Support Mechanisms:** Providing comprehensive logistical and operational support helps dealers manage day-to-day business effectively. For example, manufacturers can implement a centralized support system to handle queries, complaints, and order processing efficiently. Offering marketing collateral, co-branding opportunities, and joint promotional events empowers dealers to reach customers more effectively, enhancing both satisfaction and performance.
- **Tailored Incentive Programs:** Incentives aligned with performance targets motivate dealers to achieve higher sales volumes and adhere to organizational standards. Structured programs such as sales-based bonuses, recognition awards, and milestone rewards encourage proactive behavior. Additionally, periodic reviews of incentive effectiveness ensure the programs remain relevant and impactful, addressing evolving dealer needs and expectations.
- **Skill Development and Training:** Ongoing training equips dealers with essential skills such as product knowledge, customer engagement, and sales techniques. Organizations can conduct workshops, online training modules, and interactive webinars to enhance dealer competence. Trained dealers are more confident, responsive, and efficient, which directly translates to improved performance metrics.
- **Technological Enablement:** Integration of digital tools and platforms streamlines operations and facilitates real-time decision-making. Dealer portals, CRM systems, inventory management software, and automated reporting tools reduce manual errors, save time, and allow for better monitoring of performance. Technology-enabled dealers are better positioned to respond to customer demands promptly, thereby boosting satisfaction and operational efficiency.

The role of dealer satisfaction in enhancing operational efficiency and strengthening business relationships

- **Linking Satisfaction to Operational Efficiency:** Dealers who feel supported, informed, and fairly incentivized are more likely to perform consistently and efficiently. High satisfaction reduces operational friction, minimizes errors, and encourages timely order processing and product delivery. By analyzing this relationship, organizations can pinpoint which satisfaction drivers most significantly contribute to operational efficiency.
- **Process Optimization:** Manufacturers can implement standardized operational procedures to streamline order management, inventory replenishment, and product distribution. Ensuring that dealers have access to clear operational guidelines, process checklists, and digital monitoring tools minimizes delays and errors, enhancing overall efficiency.
- **Strengthening Trust and Collaboration:** Satisfied dealers are more likely to engage in collaborative initiatives with manufacturers, such as co-marketing campaigns, customer outreach programs, and joint business development efforts. Building trust through consistent support, fairness in dealings, and timely recognition encourages open communication and fosters stronger, long-term business relationships.
- **Feedback-Driven Improvements:** Regularly collecting feedback from dealers provides actionable insights into operational bottlenecks and satisfaction gaps. By analyzing feedback, organizations can prioritize process improvements, introduce relevant resources, and refine strategies to ensure smoother operational workflows. This feedback loop not only improves efficiency but also demonstrates to dealers that their input is valued, enhancing loyalty and commitment.
- **Performance Monitoring and Accountability:** Implementing clear performance metrics tied to satisfaction indicators helps both manufacturers and dealers track operational efficiency. KPIs such as order fulfillment rate, response time, and customer feedback scores provide measurable insights. Monitoring these metrics allows manufacturers to offer timely support, coaching, or resources to address performance challenges proactively.

Actionable insights for developing effective dealer management strategies in competitive market environments

- **Strategic Importance of Dealer Management:** In highly competitive markets, the performance of dealers often directly influences organizational success. A well-managed dealer network ensures consistent product availability, excellent customer service, and efficient operations. By understanding the drivers of satisfaction and performance, organizations can develop strategies that reinforce competitive advantage and maximize market reach.
- **Customized Dealer Engagement Programs:** Organizations can design engagement programs tailored to different dealer segments based on size, market coverage, and performance potential. Tiered

support systems, personalized communication, and region-specific initiatives ensure that dealer needs are addressed effectively. Customized engagement fosters loyalty and encourages dealers to invest effort in achieving higher performance standards.

- **Incentive Alignment with Strategic Goals:** Incentive programs should not only reward individual performance but also align with broader organizational objectives, such as expanding market share, improving customer satisfaction, or promoting new product lines. Linking dealer rewards to these strategic goals ensures that dealer efforts contribute directly to the company's long-term vision.
- **Continuous Capacity Building:** Providing ongoing opportunities for skill development, industry insights, and technological adoption equips dealers to adapt to market changes effectively. This includes workshops, online learning modules, and access to industry research. Continuous capacity building ensures that dealers remain competitive, knowledgeable, and capable of contributing to organizational growth.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Leveraging data analytics enables manufacturers to identify high-performing dealers, uncover performance gaps, and implement targeted interventions. Performance dashboards, predictive sales models, and trend analyses allow manufacturers to make informed decisions, optimize dealer allocation, and improve resource deployment. Data-driven strategies ensure that dealer management initiatives are precise, measurable, and impactful.
- **Building Sustainable Relationships:** Finally, developing long-term relationships based on trust, transparency, and mutual benefit is critical. Satisfied and well-supported dealers are more likely to act as brand ambassadors, advocate for organizational initiatives, and collaborate on innovation. Sustainable dealer relationships reduce turnover, stabilize operations, and contribute to enduring business success.

Findings

The study on evaluating dealers' satisfaction and performance determinants reveals several key insights:

1. **Communication Quality:** Dealers consistently report that clear, timely, and transparent communication with manufacturers significantly enhances their satisfaction levels. Effective communication leads to better alignment of expectations, quicker problem resolution, and a stronger sense of partnership.
2. **Support Mechanisms:** Dealers value comprehensive support from manufacturers, including logistical assistance, marketing resources, and customer service. Such support enables dealers to operate more efficiently, reduce operational bottlenecks, and improve service quality.
3. **Incentive Programs:** Performance-based incentive programs are highly effective in motivating dealers. These programs not only boost sales but also foster a sense of achievement and loyalty among dealers, leading to improved long-term performance.
4. **Training and Development:** Continuous training programs are crucial for dealers to stay updated with product knowledge, sales techniques, and market trends. Dealers with access to regular

training opportunities demonstrate higher competence and confidence, translating into better performance.

5. **Technological Integration:** The adoption of digital tools and platforms, such as CRM systems and inventory management software, has been associated with increased operational efficiency. Dealers utilizing these technologies report faster response times, better inventory control, and enhanced customer satisfaction.

Suggestions

To enhance dealer satisfaction and performance, the following strategies are recommended:

1. **Enhance Communication Channels:** Establish regular communication through newsletters, webinars, and dedicated support lines to keep dealers informed and engaged.
2. **Strengthen Support Systems:** Provide dealers with comprehensive support packages, including marketing materials, training sessions, and dedicated account managers to assist with operational challenges.
3. **Revise Incentive Structures:** Develop incentive programs that are aligned with both short-term sales targets and long-term strategic goals, ensuring they are attractive and achievable for dealers.
4. **Invest in Training Programs:** Implement ongoing training initiatives that cover product knowledge, customer service skills, and technological tools to empower dealers and improve their performance.
5. **Promote Technological Adoption:** Encourage dealers to adopt digital tools by providing training and support, highlighting the benefits of technology in streamlining operations and enhancing customer interactions.



Managerial Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for management:

1. **Strategic Planning:** Managers should incorporate dealer satisfaction metrics into their strategic planning processes, recognizing the critical role dealers play in the overall success of the business.
2. **Resource Allocation:** Allocate resources towards enhancing communication, support, training, and technological infrastructure to improve dealer satisfaction and performance.
3. **Performance Monitoring:** Establish systems to regularly monitor dealer performance and satisfaction, using this data to make informed decisions and adjustments to strategies.
4. **Relationship Management:** Foster strong, collaborative relationships with dealers, viewing them as partners rather than mere distributors, to build trust and mutual success.

Societal Implications

The study also highlights broader societal implications:

1. **Economic Growth:** By enhancing dealer performance, businesses can contribute to economic growth through increased sales, job creation, and improved services.
2. **Consumer Benefits:** Satisfied and well-supported dealers are more likely to provide better products and services to consumers, leading to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty.
3. **Community Development:** Strong dealer networks can contribute to community development by supporting local businesses and fostering economic activity at the grassroots level.

Research Implications

For future research, the study suggests:

1. **Longitudinal Studies:** Conducting long-term studies to assess the sustained impact of dealer satisfaction initiatives on performance over time.
2. **Cross-Industry Comparisons:** Comparing dealer satisfaction determinants across different industries to identify universal factors and industry-specific nuances.
3. **Quantitative Analysis:** Employing quantitative methods to measure the direct correlation between dealer satisfaction and performance metrics, providing empirical evidence to support strategic decisions.

Future Scope

The future scope of this research includes:

1. **Technological Advancements:** Exploring the impact of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, on dealer satisfaction and performance.
2. **Global Perspectives:** Investigating dealer satisfaction in different cultural and economic contexts to understand global variations and best practices.

3. **Sustainability Factors:** Examining how sustainability initiatives and ethical practices influence dealer satisfaction and performance, aligning business strategies with societal expectations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of dealer satisfaction as a critical determinant of performance and operational efficiency. By focusing on enhancing communication, support, training, and technological integration, businesses can foster stronger relationships with their dealers, leading to improved performance outcomes. The managerial, societal, and research implications provide a comprehensive framework for organizations to develop effective dealer management strategies. Looking ahead, the evolving business landscape presents opportunities to further explore the role of technology, sustainability, and global perspectives in shaping dealer satisfaction and performance.

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