REVIEW:
Hypothesizing the impact of internal alignment and perceived risks to key account management performance

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Abstract

Key account management is a relationship marketing approach initiated by the supplier company, targeted at the most important customers to solve their complex requirements with special treatment. It eventually ensures both parties' financial and nonfinancial objectives, and thus has been regarded as a strategic weapon of many companies' sales efforts. Based on the social exchange theory, the researchers have theorized and hypothesized the conditions under which operational factors including internal alignment and perceived risks influence the performance of key account management and its impact on repeat order. We have also theorized the moderating role of the length of relationship on the relation between key account management performance and repeat order. Several theoretical and practical implications are provided and there are also suggestions on how to develop a platform for future research.

Keywords: Key account management, length of relationship, operational variable, repeat order, social exchange theory.

Introduction

According to the Pareto principle 80 percent of revenue comes from 20 percent of marketer's customers (Bunkley 2008). This notion is the basis for the key account management (KAM) approach as the best way of ensuring repeat purchase, additional purchases and referral to other good customers. Napolitano (1997) mentions that key account customers are characterized by a centralized, coordinated purchasing organization with multi-located purchasing influences, a complex, diffuse buying process, very large purchases and a need for special services; serving these customers requires focused effort and dedicated resources.

Efficient customer management with endless efforts helps strengthen the marketer's position in the marketplace, make its position impregnable and ensure a sustained competitive advantage. The situation is more critical when the customers have strategic importance for the organization. In this regard, Workman, Homburg and Jensen (2003) suggest the execution of added functions and/or designation of special executives aimed at the organization's most significant customers. Zupancic (2008) calls key account management as systematic choice, examination and management of the most important present and future customers of the company with the needed set up and maintenance of infrastructure. Brehmer and Rehme (2009) define key account management as the organization that provides for the management and building of relationships in a more or less formal arrangement.

Among academics, definitions of key account management differ significantly. In the present study we define KAM as a supplier company initiated approach targeted at the most important customers to solve their complex requirements with special treatment that eventually ensures both parties' financial and nonfinancial objectives (Ahmmed and Noor 2012).

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Performance relates to the assurance of efficiency and effectiveness in completion of a particular task which results in the expected level of outcomes. In the field of marketing, usually sales volume, profit margin and return on investment by a marketer determine performance (Ofek and Sarvary 2003). In addition, choice of customers among brands (Meyvis and Janiszewski 2004), attitude towards brand and repeat sales, and in case of nonprofit marketing, donations and promotions in non-profits are also used to measure performance. Sherman et al. (2003) mention that key account management performance is the undertaking of firm-wide initiatives by which firms systematically and proactively deliver strategic solutions to multiple contacts at targeted accounts with the purpose of capturing a dominant share over time.

Napolitano (1997) explains the significance of selecting an account manager with conceptual and analytical abilities including high-level selling skills along with superior relationship skills to understand the profit and productivity goals of key account customers and to provide solutions based on their company's ability and creativity. Workman, Homburg and Jensen (2003) found that building *esprit de corps* among those involved in key account management, initiating proactive activities in intensive ways, assurance of key account manager's access to key resources of marketing, and sales and top management involvement are the key determinants of key account management performance.

From the above discussions, it is evident that various factors have a significant impact on key account management performance. But to the best of our knowledge, studies are scant that integrate operational factors and theorize their relationship with key account management performance, thus supporting our first study objective. Jackson (1985) and Levitt (1981) mention that in business-to-business relationships, anticipated levels of performance are likely to have an important effect on the stay-or-leave decision. Hence buyers' likelihood of future repeat order can be predicted by the performance of key account management strategy. Shi et al. (2010) opine that the success of suppliers in coordinating the activities and marketing approach with their global account customers can lead to a greater sales volume to the customers and their satisfaction with the GAM relationship.

So far, the primary emphasis of research studies has been on the impact of key account management performance; these studies have reported several positive outcomes including a higher revenue, improving the present market image, customer referrals, expectation of continuity, transfer of market knowledge, improving internal supplier operations, competitive advantage, shareholder value creation and joint action (Gosselin and Bauwen 2006; Selnes and Sallis 1999; Workman, Homburg and Jensen 2003). Although it is apparent that KAM performance influences the customer satisfaction levels in the form of repeat orders, existing literatures ignore this vital aspect. Thus, our second objective is on theorizing the impact of key account management performance on repeat order.

Social psychology literatures report that individuals in early stages of a relationship may have less confidence in their evaluation of their partners than in later stages of that relationship (Swann and Gill 1997). This is because the effect of such evaluations on behavior is enhanced in later stages of the relationship (Verhoef, Franses and Hoekstral 2001). Bolton (1998) and Rust et al. (1999) argue that the same process might also hold for customers' confidence in their satisfaction judgments as an outcome of KAM performance. Wagner (2011) mentions that the nature of the buyer-seller relationship is dynamic where the relationship life-cycle might moderate the relationship between supplier development and firm performance in the buyer-seller relationship dyad. Workman, Homburg and Jensen (2003) suggest that future studies should take into account the influence of moderators between key account management performance and its outcomes.

Surprisingly, to our knowledge, no research has examined the length of relationship as a variable that may moderate the relationship between key account management performance and repeat order. Eventually, we endeavor to study the moderating role of length of relationship on the relation between key account management performance and repeat order.

Therefore, to theorize our research objects, the following research questions are addressed:

1. Does key account management performance influence the repeat order outcome?
2. What are the operational factors that influence the key account management performance?
3. To what extent does the length of relationship moderate the relationship between key account management performance and repeat order?

Methodology

This study is mainly based on a detailed review of literature, plus an analysis of a number of hypotheses that result from the primary discussions. In a previous article (Noor and Ahmmed 2013), we proposed a research framework without an in-depth discussion on variables; however, here we examine the relationships among variables with extensive literature support and an in-depth discussion of individual variables. We isolate and discuss several dimensions of individual variables that can be used to measure the impact of those variables on dependent variable, and also develop several propositions that open the research work for further exploration.

The current study introduces repeat order as the outcome of key account management performance. Two operational variables namely internal alignment and perceived risks are taken as independent variables of key account management performance. In addition, the length of relationship is introduced as a moderating variable that may moderate the relationship between account management performance and repeat order. On the basis of literature review on key account management, the following framework (Figure 1) has been developed to incorporate the influence of key account management performance on the repeat order behavior and the influence of two operational factors such as internal alignment and perceived risks on key account management performance.

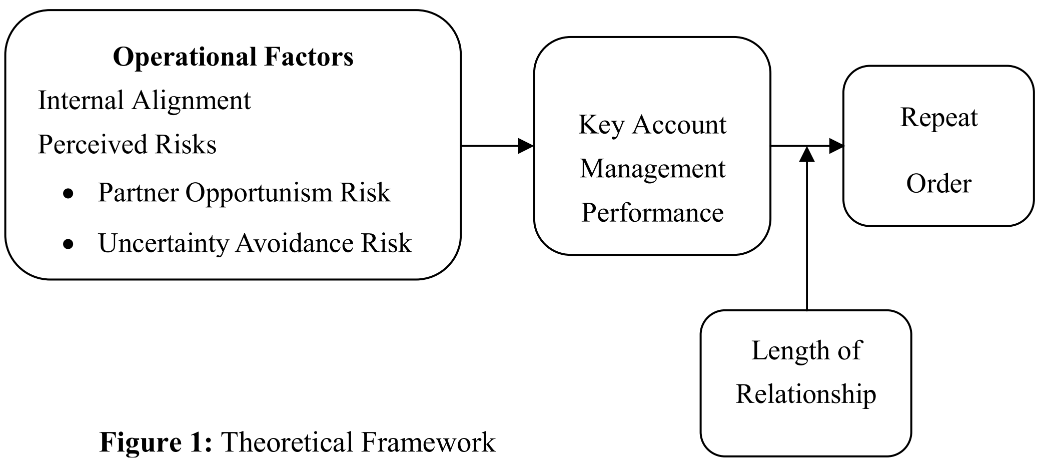

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

In addition, the length of relationship is taken as a moderating variable on the relationship between key account management performance and repeat order. The basic idea of the proposed framework is that KAM performance has a considerable positive impact on the key account's repeat order behavior, while KAM performance is influenced by operational factors. Also the relationship between KAM performance and repeat order is moderated (enhanced) by the length of relationship. Boles, Barksdale and Julie (1997) explain that when a seller keeps a customer it makes it easy to ensure more business from buyers and it also lets the seller to serve a buyer better and, possibly, boost sales to that key account. Usually key customers who want to realize these benefits from the suppliers are expected to maintain the relationship for a long time as benefits are supposed to increase in the longer relationship.

The conceptual foundation of the present study is derived from the social exchange theory (SET) that views the relationship between key account customers and supplying companies as "actions contingent on rewarding reactions from other" (Blau 1964). The major proposition behind the social exchange theory is that persons behave in such a way which adds value to the outcomes that impact positively, and refrain from behaviors that impact negatively, on the relationship (Rodríguez and Wilson 2002). The risk of opportunism is apparent in the exchange relationship, but it can be avoided with the parties' openness and integrity (Lee, Mohamad and Ramayah 2010). Because the social exchange theory explains and predicts relationship maintenance through relational governance (Trenholm and Jensen 2003), to reduce uncertainty attempts should be made on part of organization to foster mutual cooperation and control through enhancing the parties' commitment to the relationship (Moore and Cunningham III 1999).

Findings: variables of the model and their theoretical relationships

Repeat Order: Repeat order refers to the continuation of purchasing goods and services from an organization (Molinari, Abratt and Dion 2008) by key account customers. By the key account management approach, suppliers become more aware of the customers' requirements and are better able to meet those requirements with a customized attention that eventually ensures the repeat order. Boles, Barksdale and Julie (1997) examine how retaining a customer by a supplier makes it easier to ensure more business from buyers and allows the supplier to serve the customer better and thus increase sales to that account. Noordewier, John and Nevin (1990) explain that as transactions become more relational, in a long-term relationship there is a greater expectation of repeat business with the exchange partner.

The theory of reasoned action suggests that if a buyer receives superior service, increased salesperson attention to their needs and best prices, positive intentions toward continuing business with this salesperson and firm will increase (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). This implies that key account management performance influences customer satisfaction levels expressed in the form of repeat purchase from the suppliers and thus makes the relationship last. The anticipated level of performance is likely to have a big influence on the stay-or-leave decision (Jackson 1985; Levitt 1981). Similarly, Kellerman (1987) has identified "anticipation of future interaction" (repeat order) as an outcome goal of dyadic encounters. The buyers' likelihood of future repeat order behavior can be predicted by the performance of key account management strategy. From the perspective of a salesperson, (Crosby, Evans and Cowles, 1990) the best predictor of a customer's likelihood of seeking future contact is the quality of the relationship to date.

Key account selling is one type of relational selling activity, and successful "relationship selling" is correlated with increased trust, enhanced loyalty, enhanced purchase intentions and greater likelihood that the buyer will recommend the supplier to other firms (Foster and Cadogan, 2000). Capon and Senn (2010) explored the increased chances of firm's business success from the relationship. Homburg, Giering and Menon (2003) argue that in general if a customer's expectations for the required attributes are met by the seller, the customer will be less likely to search for a replacement alternative, thus ensuring a repeat purchase.

In their study, Brehmer and Rehme (2009) mention key account management as a way for companies to develop existing relationships and increase sales. Colletti and Tubridy (1987) report on retaining large customers, increased sales to current customers and enhanced working relationships with customers as the result of successful major account sales management. In sum, it appears that a supplier company may adopt key account management approach to serve their most important and strategic customers and thus realize fruitful outcomes in the form of repeat orders.

Key account management performance: Performance in the strategy of key account management refers to the attainment of goals for both key buyers and the seller over a long period of time in the key account relationship. In the field of marketing, this performance is measured with the sales volume, profit margin and return on investment (Ofek and Sarvary 2003). Proper customer orientation helps the suppliers to know key customers properly and to serve key customer needs well which in turn ensures the performance of key account management and organizational outcome. In the business arena, the perception of customers over the key account management approach affects its performance; a positive perception influences them to be receptive, as long as the relationship does not create any disadvantage for them, and develops commitment toward the program (Pardo 1997).

Al-Husan and Brennan (2009) realized that the most important factors to facilitate an efficient and successful management of accounts were swift access to top management, authority to communicate with any level in the organization, authority to make decisions, as well as teamwork and training. Similarly, Workman, Homburg and Jensen (2003) found that building esprit de corps among those involved in the key account management program, initiating proactive activities and performing them in an intensive way, assurance of key account manager's access to key resources of marketing and sales, and top management involvement are the key determinants of the key account management program.

As the performance of key account management depends on account managers, Napolitano (1997) explains the need to account managers with conceptual and analytical abilities for key account success; they should have strong salesmanship skills and relationship skills, understand the account's key profit and productivity goals, and provide solutions on the basis of their ability and creativity.

Operational factors in key account management: In the key account management program, management faces a variety of operational factors which impact on the performance of key account management strategy. Operational factors include those linked to the systems, measures, routines of the institutions and knowledge of risks and uncertainties which may facilitate operations. More specifically, operational factors facilitate the flow of functions and processes between the firms and aid in the flow of products or information. Leugers (1997) argues that information is an operational factor that has an impact on performance. He mentions that with complete assimilation of data and information, the leader is empowered with a clear perception of the situation and has the essential knowledge to support an appropriate and timely use of the proper mix and quantity of resources.

In the field of business-to-business relationships these factors help with the task of ensuring that business operations are efficient in terms of using the minimum resources needed for effectively meeting customer demands. At the organizational level application of the appropriate technical and strategic skills and experience is ensured by these factors. McDonanls, Millman and Rogers (1997) explain that the field of key account management is broadening and becoming more compound, and thus professional skills at strategic and operational arenas require to be continuously modernized and developed.

Apart from the factors discussed earlier, this study focuses on other operational factors namely internal alignment and perceived risks in serving the key account as potential antecedents of key account management performance. Justifications for the incorporation of these variables are explained in detail in the following sub-sections.

Internal Alignment: Internal alignment is necessary among the people participating in the key account management program (Workman, Homburg and Jensen 2003) and can influence the performance of key account management strategy (Guesalaga and Johnston 2010). Sisco and Wong (2008) define internal alignment as "the set of commitments, policies, strategies, procedures, behaviors and systems that support integrated customer decision making based on suppliers' commercial and ethical commitment and performance".

Internal alignment focuses on the similarities and differences among jobs within an organization and the relative contribution of jobs to company objectives and tries to make a strategic fit among various layers (Kathuria, Joshi and Porth 2007). According to Boyer and McDermott (1999) strategic consensus or alignment is an agreement of employees of various levels on the organization's most important goals. They define strategic consensus or alignment in relation to the relative significance of quality, delivery, flexibility and cost to the organization's operational goals. Jaworski and Kohli (1993) relate it with interdepartmental connectedness that ensures a level of prescribed and casual direct contact among personnel across different divisions and in turn ensures more exchange of market intelligence and response to it in a concerted fashion.

Sisco and Wong (2008) mention that executive commitment and support, integrated policies, strategy and structure, steady in-house communication, important information, metrics and reporting, and motivations and accountability for expected behavior are the key components to ensure internal alignment. Literature distinguishes between two categories of alignment in the organization which are vertical alignment and horizontal alignment. In the organization, vertical alignment shows the lines of reporting and accountability from the chief executive officer (CEO) level to the factory floor whereas horizontal alignment refers to coordination across organizational boundaries (Sisco and Wong 2008).

Storbacka and Harald (2007) and Sullivan (2006) suggest that development of skills and capabilities and availability of management processes and systems as well as organizational matrix ensure the achievement of internal alignment. O'Regan and Ghobadian (2004) conclude that an organizational performance will be at higher level when alignment is ensured between generic capabilities of the organization and its strategic planning and Ojasalo (2001) mentions that operational and strategic capabilities are essential elements for key account management performance. Thus, people feel an obligation to common goals and to each other in the key account management team (Workman, Homburg and Jensen 2003). When sound internal alignment is present, having multiple relationships and a suitable alignment with the firm's strategy and market environment (Jones et al., 2005) may contribute to internal alignment in key account management and can influence the level of key account management performance (Guesalaga and Johnston 2010).

Generally, it can be concluded that internal alignment influences organization to be more customer focused and sensitive and responsive to key customer needs and requirements.

Perceived Risks: The other individual variable which is the focus of this study is perceived risks in serving a key account. Perceived risks in serving a key account can be defined as the risk of getting and/or not getting the predicted business or earnings from the key accounts and the risk of unanticipated events in current business that would result in unexpected expenses incurred on the seller (Woodburn, Holt and McDonald 2004). The study of Workman, Homburg and Jensen (2003) shows that serving the key accounts effectively can be a critical as well as a risky task.

In describing the hidden risks in strategic account management, Piercy and Lane (2006) highlight organizational strategic weakness, uncertainty in long-term profit from key accounts, misunderstanding about customer relationship requirements, misreading customer loyalty and challenging competition regulations. Woodburn, Holt and McDonald (2004) divide the customer risks into two categories: probability of customer forecast and risk of the customer. They mention the risk of achieving or not achieving forecasted business or revenues. On the other hand the risks of the customer include unanticipated events in current business that would result in unexpected expenses being incurred by the seller (Woodburn, Holt and McDonald 2004). In the organizational context, McDonanls, Millman and Rogers (1997) refer to global/local organizational issues, assurance of process excellence, and difficulties in designing, adequate training and the development of a program for key account managers.

Ryals (2006) cited financial risk as the most common form of risk in the key account relationship context. In addition, misunderstandings of customer requirements, project overruns, and changes in customer requirements are critical and may impact on the key account management approach (Ryals 2006). McDonald (2000) suggests that both internal short-term crisis and long-term uncertainties and external risks may happen. Cardozo Shipp and Roering (1987) discuss the risk of opportunity loss related to key account management, meaning the risk of concentrating limited resources on a few key buyers which may be vulnerable to competition and a prospective new customer may be ignored leading to lower expansion of customer base (Al-Husan and Brennan 2009). As suppliers invest in the relational assets, opportunism from the buyer's side may become an issue (Lambe and Spekman 1997; Piercy and Lane 2006). In the buyer-supplier relationship, buyers' opportunistic behavior refers to their self-interest seeking behavior. In the key account relationship, opportunism is very harmful in the form of dishonesty and deceitful behavior as well as more subtle forms of deceit, like uncovering less information than necessary or breaking provisions of an agreement (Rindfleisch and Heide 1997).

McDonald (2000) states the vital opportunities for profit improvement in buyer and seller market information sharing, greater flexibility in response and leveraging market influence for a collaborative relationship that in turn can reduce the external risks. In serving the key customers it is beneficial for the supplier to know the risks associated with the key account management approach because it will help the supplier to take contingent decisions. Supplier should know the consequences of dissolution of the relationship because it is beneficial for the organization to terminate the relationship to avoid risks under certain circumstances (Purinton, Rosen and Curran 2007).

Moderating the role of length of relationship: The Length of relationship refers to the duration that a relationship exists between a buyer and a supplier (Palmatier et al. 2006) as well as how the parties regard each other as they pass through various phases (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987). The present study uses the length of relationship as a moderator related to key account management performance and key customer repeat order behavior. Wotruba and Castleberry (1993) refer to the impact of the length of time an account management program is in existence with older programs showing higher performance.

A longer relationship develops confidence between buyers and sellers (Bolton 1998; Buvik and Haugland 2005; Rust et al. 1999; Weiss and Kurland 1997). Social psychology research shows that individuals in early periods of a relationship rely less on their evaluation of their partners than in later stages of the relationship (Swann and Gill 1997). This is because at the subsequent stages of relationships the impact of such assessment on behavior increases (Verhoef, Franses and Hoekstral 2001). In this regard Bolton (1998) and Rust et al. (1999) argue that a similar principle might also hold for customers' reliance on their assessment of satisfaction as an outcome of key account management performance. Bolton (1998) shows how the level of satisfaction becomes stronger in lengthy relationships.

Gill, Swann and Silvera (1998) noted that parties in lengthy relationships have higher reliance on their appraisals. Even though buyers with long-lasting relationships may have incorrect assessments of the seller, they rely more on these estimations, while in the introductory phases of a relationship buyers have minimum reliance on their assessment of the seller (Verhoef, Franses and Hoekstra 2002). Therefore, in lengthy relationships the customer knowledge gained from exchanges with seller acts as a more powerful driver (Jap 1999).

Verhoef, Franses and Hoekstra (2002) consider the duration of a relationship to be an interesting area of study in the field of relationship marketing. Wagner (2011) mentions that the nature of buyer-seller relationship is a dynamic one. The present study theorizes the impact of the length of relationship as a moderating variable on the link between key account management performance and repeat order.

Discussion: propositions of the study

The theory of reasoned action proposes that when a buyer gets better services, more attention from salesperson to meet its requirements and better price dealings, it is natural that that buyer will show positive behavior to continue doing business with that seller (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). Hence buyers' likelihood of future repeat order behavior is predicted by the performance of key account management strategy. Crosby, Evans and Cowles (1990) have mentioned that the best driver of a customer's probability of looking for future business is the excellence of the relationship to date. This means that key account management approach leads to higher key account's satisfaction which in turn ensures business continuation in the form of repeat order. Therefore, the present study proposes that:

Proposition 1*: Key account management performance is positively related to repeat order.*

Internal alignment influences the organization to be more customer-focused and sensitive and responsive to key customer needs and requirements. Alignment among the operational and strategic capabilities is essential and is positively associated with the performance and thus meets the interest of the key account and helps sustain the relationship (Ojasalo 2001). Jaworski and Kohli (1993) relate internal alignment with interdepartmental connectedness that refers to the level of prescribed and casual direct contact among personnel across different divisions.

To serve the key account customers' purposes effectively organizational excellence is required; Peters and Waterman (1982) suggest that it depends on the congruence among organizational strategy, systems, style, structure, shared values, staff and skills. Therefore, internal alignment among various units and layers within the organization is likely to increase organization knowledge about customers which in turn will help the supplier to realize the customers' needs and serve them properly, resulting in key account management performance. Thus, we propose that:

Proposition 2: *Internal alignment is positively related to key account management performance.*

Serving the key account successfully is critical as well as a risky task for the organization because it demands the performance of additional activities (Workman, Homburg and Jensen 2003) the lack of which make the program a fruitless one. McDonald (2000) states that key account management can offer vital chances for expanding profit levels for both buyers and suppliers if the program is run with utmost integrity and care both at the strategic and operational level. He further suggests that market information sharing, greater flexibility in responses and leveraging market influence are necessary for a collaborative relationship that can reduce the external risks. In serving the key customers it is beneficial for the supplier to know the risks associated with the KAM approach because it will help the supplier to take contingent decision. That means knowledge of serving the key account helps the marketer in operating its key account management activities smoothly.

Cardozo, Shipp and Roering (1987) discuss the risk of opportunity loss related to key account management, by engaging limited assets on a small number of key accounts; broadening the customer base may be hindered which may lead to minimum expansion of customer number (Al-Husan and Brennan 2009). As suppliers invest in relational assets, the issue of opportunism may affect the key account relationship (Lambe and Spekman 1997; Piercy and Lane 2006). In the key account relationship, key customers may pursue their self-interest by providing wrong information, breaking promises, and exaggerating their needs (Wuyts and Geyskens 2005). Thus, this study proposes that:

Proposition 3a: *The risk of partner opportunism in serving the key account is negatively related to key account management performance.*

Proposition 3b: *Uncertainty risk aversion in serving the key account is negatively related to key account management performance.*

The length of relationship is defined as the extent of the relationship between a buyer and a seller where they pass through various phases and how the parties regard each other (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987). Several studies reveal that a longer duration of relationship results in greater buyer profitability (Reinartz and Kumar 2003), maintenance (Bolton 1998), quantity of services bought (Verhoef, Franses and Hoekstra 2002), continuous museum patronization (Bhattacharya 1998; Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn 1995) as well as intention to repeat order and loyalty (Seiders et al. 2005). Bolton (1998) shows how the level of satisfaction increases in lengthy relationships.

Verhoef, Franses and Hoekstra (2002) explain that the buyer-seller relationship passes through different stages. Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987) explain that at different phases of a buyer-seller relationship both parties treat each other differently and various factors play a key role to influence the relationship. As the relationship is established in the key account management dyad, both supplier and customer invest in relational resources making them mutually dependent on each other (Buvik and Haugland 2005; Heide and John 1988; Sharma 2006; Weiss and Kurland 1997; Williamson 1985) and when the parties are interdependent, a lengthy relationship results in more clear and better interactions, higher trust, superior elasticity and better commitment (Anderson and Weitz 1989; MacNeil 1978; Ouchi 1979). Thus, in the long-run the supplier's experiences from recurrent interactions with the customer exert a powerful influence on outcomes (Jap 1999). Wagner (2011) mentions that the nature of buyer-seller relationship is dynamic where the relationship life-cycle might moderate the relationship itself.

Thus, the effect of key account management performance on organizational outcome performance is enhanced by the length of relationship between key account customers and suppliers (Baron and Kenny 1986). Therefore, we propose that:

Proposition 4: *Length of relationship moderates (enhances) the positive relationship between key account management performance and repeat order outcome.*

Conclusion and implications of the study

From this proposed theoretical model several implications can be suggested. First and foremost is the assembling of operational factors that influence the key account management performance. Secondly, the theoretical framework incorporates the repeat order as the outcome of key account management performance and the moderating effect of length of relationship on the key account management performance-repeat order relationship. Knowledge about the individual influence of these categories on key account management performance, its resulting impact on repeat order as well as the moderating effect of length of relationship helps us to uplift our understanding of this emerging field of relational selling. Thirdly, the theoretical framework that is provided creates a platform for future empirical studies. This study sheds light to the application of social exchange theory (SET) in the context of key account management approach where 'relationship' acts as a governing mechanism between key accounts and the supplier.

In addition, several managerial implications may be concluded from this study. In applying the key account management approach at the organizational level, management should have the knowledge about which factors influence this approach. However, the factors mentioned in this paper are not all inclusive, and management should be vigilant in applying all concerned variables. Cooperative and coordinated actions can be promoted to avoid from uncertainty in the key account management relationship. Management should emphasize on long-term orientation as the length of relationship has a positive impact on the outcome of key account management performance.

Several limitations in our study may be identified. Although we suggested factors that may influence the key account management performance, we don't know which variable exerts more influence as compared with others. Thus future empirical research can look into this question and search for evidence about the level of influence of each variable which may be critical for decision making. Also, we examined 'repeat order' as the consequence of key account management performance. Future research can introduce other dyadic outcomes and also negative consequences of key account management like dissolution or customer switching behavior. Finally, empirical research can provide evidence on whether the length of relationship moderates the link between key account management and repeat order in various industrial settings.

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