



Developing Salesperson Performance: The Role of Customer Encountering Competence Portfolio, Relational Capital and Service Excellent Customer Heterogeneity

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship of customer encountering competence portfolio, relational capital and service excellent customer heterogeneity to enhancing Indonesian pharmaceutical salesperson performance. The context is taken from pharmaceutical in Indonesia. The research setting was in a developing country, Indonesia, which has a promising pharmaceutical market in the global market. As a developing country that provides a large and growing market and is very potential in the global market, theories and measurements which have been conducted in the other countries need also to be done in Indonesia, as part of an effort to manage and enable the sales force to perform better in this global era. The sample of this study was tested with survey data from the detailers of the already go public pharmaceutical companies in Indonesia. The structural model analysis was employed to examine all the hypotheses. There were interesting finding in this study between customer encountering competence portfolio, relational capital and service excellent customer heterogeneity on salesperson performance. The rejected hypothesis from the model, still leave a question over whether the customer encountering competence portfolio will enable salesperson performance. Therefore, there are many possible entry of intervening variables that could be considered to test the ability in customer encountering competence portfolio to enhancing the salesperson performance as recommendations for further research.

Keywords: Customer Encountering Competence Portfolio, Relational Capital, Service Excellent Customer Heterogeneity, Salespersons Performance

JEL Classification: M31

1. INTRODUCTION

In facing the increasingly repetitive competition, salesperson's role requires a self excellence in establishing relationship with customers towards long-term and good-value relations for the both sides. As a vanguard who directly interacts and serve customers, no doubt that the salesperson's performance becomes very important and gives a real contribution to the creation of the company's performance. It is an appropriate word to say without exaggerated customers. The various characteristics and uniqueness of each customer gives certain challenges for a salesperson to win customers' heart. One of the important roles of the salesperson is making an effort to fully understand the customers' needs for giving the goods they are really wanted. The properness and

accuracy of the responses can be taken from the proper attitude of the salesperson towards the customers to win customers' choice is a complicated matter (Homburg et al., 2011; Mallalieu and Nakamoto, 2008).

As a front liner who directly interacts with the customers, the role of salesperson becomes a critical factor which gives influence in the relationship between the companies with the customers. Therefore, the role of salesperson in direct facing sales with the customers, namely, understanding of sales marketing interface (SMI) becomes very important. The effectiveness of SMI will be depends on the aims and rational approach of the involvement of salesperson in creating strategies. The marketing and selling integration will be achieved affectively if some determinant factors

move together. It can be seen from the achievement of value integration, talent exchange function and joint rewards (Hughes et al., 2012). It is not easy to make the company be close to its customers. The wise way to do especially for salesperson is the ability to 'listen' customers' wants and it become the important ability that every salesperson should have (Bergeron and Laroche, 2009). This is a challenge for salesperson to understand customers' wants correctly and give the best service that other competitors. This will be a main factor for the company to have a better place in customers' heart and their choice (Heijden et al., 2013; Lynch and Chernatony, 2007).

The competition of salesperson in understanding and facing the customers cannot be ignored. Various characteristics of salesperson make the dynamic portfolio with the customers. Customers have to be able to be described in portfolio description for the company with reviewing the recent value and the next value which is produced by the customers for the company (Arndt and Karande, 2012; Flint et al., 2011). The contribution value from the customers for the companies is as the starting point to know the customers' uniqueness which is related to the companies.

In the previous research about the role of salesperson competencies towards salesperson's performance in facing customers, there was significant positive result on both of those things Yim et al., (2008) and there is also a similar result on empirical research from Lin and Hsieh (2011). However, there was a contrast from the result of both researches. There was a different result in examining the same thing (Arndt et al., 2012; Verbeke et al., 2004). The insignificant result is the time needed to fully understand customers' wants will decrease the sales performance if the situation of sales is structured. The different view also stated by Plouffe et al., (2008) that the behavior of salesperson is separated from the activities and the complicated understanding in interactive approach with customers. This view is also on the contrary with the view from Tuli et al. (2007) which stated that the main problem in understanding the dynamics in their business environment is the inability in giving a solution needed for customers individually.

Form the base of the research location, most researches on salesperson competencies were done in developed countries (The USA and other western countries), while in the developing countries which provide promising markets for the global market, research findings on this particular issue are not many. Researches in developing countries are needed because there are real differences with the westerns such as in the fields of economy, politic, and culture. As a developing country that provides a large and growing market and is very potential in the global market, theories and measurements which have been conducted in the other countries need also to be done in Indonesia, as part of an effort to manage and enable the sales force to perform better in this global era.

The purposes of this study were:

- Identify the salesperson's antecedents that are able to increase the effectiveness of salesperson performance;

- Investigate researches which have been done in the western countries to do the same testing in a developing country, Indonesia, which has a promising pharmaceutical market in the global market.

It is expected that the results of this study could be beneficial in providing theoretical contributions and implications for sales force management in developing countries in particular and the development of literature in sales force management in general.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1. The Relationship between Customer Encountering Competence Portfolio on Salesperson Performance

In various research in sales management, it has been widely recognized that having the ability customer oriented service for salesperson will greatly affect salesperson performance (Jonesa et al., 2003; Malshe, 2011; Singh and Koshy, 2011; 2012). Homburg et al. (2011) states that customers oriented in direct interaction requires salesperson's ability to identify customers' needs and customers' attention in various different levels on face-to-face sales (sales encounter). There are five main different stages in interaction with customers which require in-depth attention; they are the stages of problems identification and customers' needs, presentation, overcoming the objections, negotiating, and closing. It is required adequate competence portfolios from salesperson in facing various stages of encountered situations. In line with statement, the salesperson should be able to provide the optimum service offering in each interaction stage which will enable to keep the customers to be always loyal to the company. This requires a whole understanding of the services to reach a prime service transfers (Heijden et al., 2013).

Based on previous studies we propose the following:

H₁: Customer encountering competence portfolio has positive effect on salesperson performance.

2.2. The Relationship between Relational Capital on Salesperson Performance

Relational capital is a form of social capital which inherent in a relationship between the company and the customers, and it includes dimension of trust, open interaction, and the ability to share beneficial things between the company and the customers (Kohtamäki et al., 2013). Either salesperson nor employees who have a number of the autonomy level in working is expected to be able to response effectively and quickly about the changing of customers' needs which eventually could be go through the quality of relationships in keeping the customers (Heijden et al., 2013).

The other study by (Dorrego et al., 2013) explain that relational capital are based on the attention that the company and the employees are not an isolated system. On the contrary, company's resources are required to be active in following the changes that occurred related to the changes outside (external entities).

Valued relationship with the customers' needs strong competencies as the asset of relational capital. The knowledge of marketing

channel and relationships with the customers becomes the main strength to the results of relational capital (Dorrego et al., 2013). In terms of increasing relational capital possessed by the salesperson, it should be realized by sales organization that the company and employees is not an isolated system. On the contrary, the company's resources are required to be active in following the changes that occurred related to changes outside (external entities) (Dorrego et al., 2013).

Competences of salesperson that will support the establishment of ability in relational capital also based on the needs that are required in the dynamics of duty in environmental changes to get the given achievement towards the performance. Social competences which are owned by the salesperson will enable to interact effectively with the customers in social communication skills to achieve the performance results which have been decided (Yang and Wu, 2014).

Based on previous studies we propose the following:

H₂: Relational capital has positive effect on salesperson performance.

2.3. The Relationship between Services Excellent Customer Heterogeneity on Salesperson Performance

The power of salesperson in creating an extra point in the relationship with the customers becomes the power of the sales organization which will lead the company to be the main choice of the customers (Turley and Geiger, 2006). Salesperson who is able to learn from the experiences in dealing with the customers will be able to keep the customers in long-term relationships. The dynamic of changes in salesperson environment which is able to keep the customers to be a client will be more successful than those who just do the sales activity as merely transactional activity (Zhang et al., 2013). Further it is said that salesperson that are able and want to update customers' wants continuously and apply it in their sales organization will make the customers as a loyalty.

Excellent service to see the characteristics of inherent in a variety of the diversity of users into power for sales force to give the overall value created prime customers (Mascio, 2010). Competence of salesperson who fully understand the desire of diverse customers will be visible in effective action within the first, the provision of efficient services and fun, both of the fulfillment of the target sales of established and the latter is the ability to give form relationships of mutual customers by between the company through the provision of the solution for customers.

The duty of salesperson as the company representative which interact directly with the customers, in the empirical study conducted by Mascio (2010) showed that the inherent characteristics of customers' heterogeneity become a power for salesperson to give an offering which measure overall superfine customers' value. The competencies of salesperson which are fully understand with various customers' wants will be seen in effective action in first, the efficient and pleasant services given by the salesperson, second, the achievement of fixed sales target and the last is the ability to give the model of a beneficial relationship between customers with the company through the

solutions given by the salesperson. Another important thing to support their ability is to analyze various customers characteristics with improving salesperson performance in social construction individually by doing the interpretation and explain the instructions which are constructed in the environment and it is called sense making (Shannahan et al., 2013). This will support salesperson to strengthen their performance achievement.

Based on previous studies we propose the following:

H₃: Excellent service customer heterogeneity has positive effect on salesperson performance.

Based on the developed hypotheses, with the support from reviewing the related theories and the research results above, it can be formulated an empirical model of this research as seen in Figure 1 as follows.

Figure 1 explain the model of this empirical research above, there are three exogenous variables; they are customer encountering competence portfolio, relational capital, and excellent service towards customer heterogeneity. These three exogenous variables will be examined towards their influence to salesperson performance. These three exogenous variables will be expected to have positive influence towards the endogenous variable (salesperson performance).

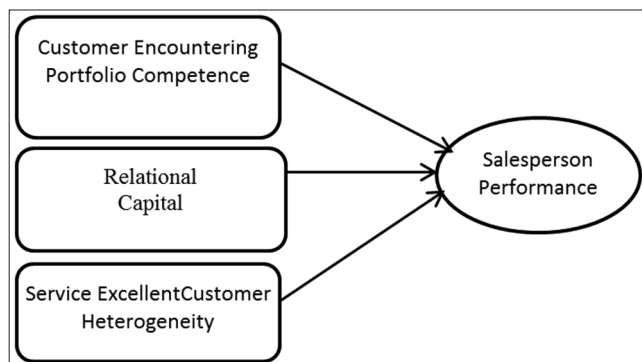
3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

The sample in this study were taken from the sales force of pharmaceutical industry in Indonesia, a developing country with a promising prospect of pharmaceutical industry both in Asia and global. The data were collected from the go public pharmaceutical companies in Indonesia. Reasons for selecting the go public companies are due to the researcher's belief that these companies are more transparent and have good corporate governance. The salespersons referred in this study were the companies' ambassadors/detailers who are believed to represent the companies in promoting their products in professional way, credible, and with integrity to doctors that the doctors are confident that then prescribe the companies' products to the patients.

The sampling technique used in this research was purposive sampling and convenience sampling which is a nonprobability

Figure 1: Empirical research model with proposed hypotheses



sampling technique. The sampling technique employed certain criteria, i.e., the respondents were pharmaceutical sales representatives who have worked at the latest company for 2 or more years when the data were collected with the assumption that those people have done pretty much sales and interaction activities with customers.

Stages of screening and trimming data need to be done as an effort in ensuring the data reliability at the next testing phase. The data screening was done by testing the consistency of respondents' answers, by looking at the extreme standard deviation. The trimming data was done by looking at the consistency between closed answers and open answers filled by the respondents. The results at this stage on the overall answers from 350 respondents and questionnaires, 295 (response rate 84%) returned, 16 data (cases) were unqualified due to under 1 year experience, and 27 data (cases) of questionnaires were incomplete and inconsistency, that those data should be discarded. There were 252 respondents data left and of those, 47 data (cases) were classified as outliers. Thus, the final questionnaires data left that were eligible for the subsequent testing were 205.

3.2. Definition Operational and Scale Measurement

The summary of operational variables definition on this research is summarized on the Table 1. Each variable is completed by the explanation of indicators which will be measured.

There are four variables and fourteen indicators in total as an instrument to measure those construct variables. All indicators

above will be used to examine all proposed hypotheses in this research.

3.3. Measure

In measuring all the variables, this study employed a self-reported measuring instrument that has been validated in the previous studies, and has become standard in various studies in the marketing management literature either for customer orientation, salesperson autonomy, relational capital, salesperson performance, as well as the salesperson energizing relationship (Anderson et al., 2010; Cross et al., 2007; Hughes et al., 2012; Kang et al., 2013; Kilic and Dursun, 2008). All of the variables were measured in a 10 point range scale (a 10-point range scale) on a score of 1: Strongly disagree to score 10: Strongly agree with a given statement.

4. RESEARCH FINDING

4.1. Descriptive Statistic

The descriptive statistic analysis was used to describe the characteristics of respondents, samples, and research variables. To describe the demographic of the respondents such as age, education, how long they have been working, and others. This research also discussed respondents' comments towards the indicators from researched constructs in this research. Thus, this research used structural equation modeling (SEM) in examining the hypotheses from research models which was developed for this research.

Table 1: Operational definition and research indicators

Variable	Operational definition	Indicators
Customer encountering competence portfolio	The competency and ability from salesperson in facing varied conditions of the customers	The ability to identify proposed conditions from the customers The ability to consider what the customers concerns are Have enough information to close the selling Awareness of relationship with the customers is based on respecting each other
Relational capital	Relational capital is a form of social capital which sticks to business world and have a trust, open interaction, and sharing values between the company and the customers	Awareness of relationship with the customers is based on trust each other Awareness of relationship with the customers is based on mutual needs Have enough understanding which can answer each questions from customers Have convincing self confidence in helping customers Have an ability to keep a promise to customers Give individual caring for every single customer Total sales target achievement compared with other top performing salespersons in the same group
Service excellent customer heterogeneity	The ability to give varied excellent customer service to every customer	Total sales target achievement compared to the overall quota target of salesperson over the past year Contribution of sales target in supporting the team sales target The increase in the number of customers (doctors, pharmacies, hospitals)
Salesperson performance	To maximize the work of salesperson, it can be seen from varied success measurement which are decided by the company	

Source: Developed for this research (2016)

The descriptions for those 205 respondents were as follows: Male and female salespersons were balanced, i.e., 59% and 41% respectively, the age range of 25-50 years old, most were married (82%), most work experiences were ranged at 10-15 years of work (26%), and the following order on a working period was between 3 and 5 years (21%). The number of associates working in a team, the biggest number was 2-5 people (70%).

4.2. Analysis of Structural Model

Before analysis hypothesis testing was conducted with SEM-AMOS software in structural model, validity measurement through confirmatory factor analysis as shown in Table 2. Fit statistics was provided by indicator's weight from full structural model with lambda value - factor loading ≥ 0.50 with critical ratio ≥ 2.0 indicated good construct-validity.

After examining the analysis confirmatory factor, Figure 2 shows the whole model which meets the requirements to be examined for the next stage including the results on tabulation of structural analysis with AMOS as follows.

The result of χ^2 : 68,722, $P = 0.055$, GFI: 0.972, AGFI: 0.954, CFI: 1000, and TLI: 1000, CMIN/DF: 0.958 and RMSEA: 0.008. Those points met the requirements of the terms of examining structural fit model. Thus, model analysis can be done to examine the proposed hypotheses. The following Table 3 shows the results of regression weights.

5. RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study is to examine the antecedents and links towards salesperson's performance. Analysis of whole structural model which was done by AMOS program, it gives the explanation towards the proposed hypotheses. Here are the explanation for each examined hypothesis in this research. The estimated parameter to measure the effects of customer encountering competence portfolio to salesperson performance (H_1) shows insignificant result. The result states that the better customer encountering competence portfolio, it cannot support salesperson performance directly. This matter makes the novelty is needed as proposed in this research. The result supports the previous of empirical result, the insignificant result is the time needed to fully understand customers' wants will decrease the sales performance if the situation of sales is structured (Arndt et al., 2012; Verbeke et al., 2004). The different view also stated by Plouffe et al. (2008) that the behavior of salesperson is separated from the activities and the complicated understanding in interactive approach with customers. This view is also on the contrary with the view from Tuli et al. (2007) which stated that the main problem in understanding the dynamics in their business environment is the inability in giving a solution needed for customers individually.

The estimated parameter to measure the effects of relational capital towards performance (H_2) shows significant result. The result shows that the higher relational capital could support salesperson performance directly. Competences of salesperson

Table 2: Scale and measurement - construct validity

Indicator variables	Standard estimates	CR	P
Customer encountering competence portfolio			
The ability to identify proposed conditions from the customers	0.75	7.092	***
The ability to consider what the customers concerns are	0.74	5.437	***
Have enough information to close the selling	0.81	5.894	***
Relational capital			
Awareness of relationship with the customers is based on respecting each other	0.78	8.320	***
Awareness of relationship with the customers is based on trust each other	0.83	8.217	***
Awareness of relationship with the customers is based on mutual needs	0.76	6.879	***
Service excellent customer heterogeneity			
Have enough understanding which can answer each questions from customers	0.70	9.155	***
Have convincing self confidence in helping customers	0.73	8.992	***
Have an ability to keep a promise to customers	0.83	8.929	***
Give excellent caring to customers	0.71	5.532	***
Salesperson performance			
Total sales target achievement compared with other top performing salespersons in the same group	0.84	8.012	***
Total sales target achievement compared to the overall quota target of salesperson over the past year	0.85	7.093	***
Contribution of sales target in supporting the team sales target	0.80	8.352	***
The increase in the number of customers (doctors, pharmacies, hospitals)	0.70	5.431	***

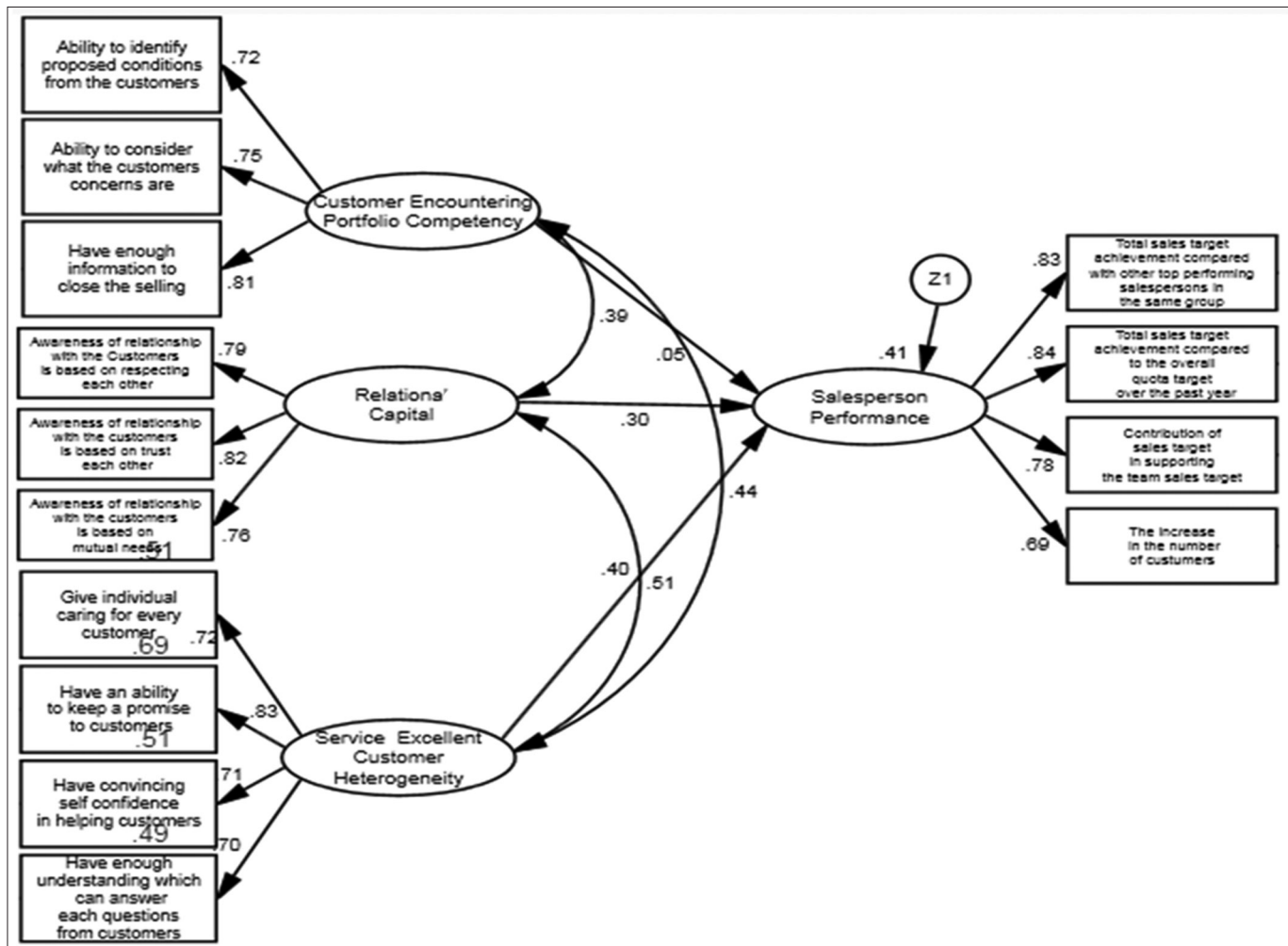
Source: Developed for this research (2016). CR: Composite reliability

Table 3: The results of regression weights

Hypothesis	Standardized path coefficients	t	P	Result
H_1 Customer encountering competence portfolio \rightarrow salesforce performance	0.060	0.595	0.552	Not significant
H_2 Relational capital \rightarrow salesforce performance	0.353	3.300	0.000	Significant
H_3 Service excellent customer heterogeneity \rightarrow salesforce performance	0.602	4.012	0.000	Significant

*Significant at $P \leq 0.05$; ** $P \leq 0.01$

Figure 2: Fit model



that will support the establishment of ability in relational capital also based on the needs that are required in the dynamics of duty in environmental changes to get the given achievement towards the performance. Social competences which are owned by the salesperson will enable to interact effectively with the customers in social communication skills to achieve the performance results which have been decided (Yang and Wu, 2014).

The estimated parameter to measure the effects of service excellent customer heterogeneity towards performance (H_3) shows significant result. The result shows that the higher service excellent customer heterogeneity can support salesperson performance directly. Excellent service to see the characteristics of inherent in a variety of the diversity of users into power for salesperson to give the overall value created prime customers (Mascio, 2010). Competence of salesperson who fully understand the desire of diverse customers will be visible in effective action within the first, the provision of efficient services and fun, both of the fulfillment of the target sales of established and the latter is the ability to give form relationships of mutual customers by between the company through the provision of the solution for customers.

This research shows that some hypotheses that have been accepted are H_2 and H_3 whereas rejected hypothesis was H_1 . In hypothesis 1, the result shows that the higher customer encountering competence

portfolio, the higher salesperson performance in this empirical research is insignificant. This result supports the founding in some previous research (Arndt et al., 2012; Verbeke et al., 2004) that there is insignificant relationship between customer encountering competence portfolio and the performance of salesperson. This result has to be bridged by the novelty variable which was examined in future research to strengthen salesperson performance.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The rejected hypothesis from the model (H_1), still leave a question over whether the customer encountering competence portfolio will enable salesperson performance. Therefore, there are many possible entry of intervening variables that could be considered to test the ability in customer encountering competence portfolio in improving the sales-person performance. The other antecedents of salesperson performance are service excellent customer heterogeneity towards performance and relational capital shows positive as the main support to their salesperson performance. It is can be seen from the increasing number of total sales target achievement compared with other top performing salespersons in the same group, total sales target achievement compared to the

overall quota target of salesperson over the past year, contribution of sales target in supporting the team sales target, and the increase in the number of new customers.

This empirical study gives the contribution not only in academy research writing, but also gives the contribution to people who work in pharmaceutical industry to take benefits from this research. This research adds the literatures regarding antecedents and link to salesperson performance study in Indonesia. As expected by the previous researchers who suggested doing a research regarding the role of salesperson in pharmaceutical industry in a country which are developing service business except other countries that have been researched. The results of hypothesis examination either related or not with the previous researches is expected to enrich the literatures and further academic research development in the ability of salesperson in giving the the strengthen salesperson performance.

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