# THE IMPACT OF RELATIONSHIP MARKETING AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE ON CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISIONS IN THE AUTOMOTIVE SECTOR

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the influence of relationship marketing and consumer experience on purchase decisions at ACR Diesel, a company engaged in the automotive spare parts industry located in Medan, Indonesia. As competition intensifies in the automotive sector, companies must strengthen long-term customer relationships and deliver positive experiences to maintain market relevance. This research employs a quantitative approach using descriptive and explanatory methods. The study population consisted of 212 customers of ACR Diesel during the 2023 period, with a sample of 139 respondents determined using the Slovin formula with a 95% confidence level. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using multiple linear regression with the help of SPSS software. The findings reveal that both relationship marketing and consumer experience have positive and significant effects, both partially and simultaneously, on purchase decisions. Relationship marketing characterized by trust, commitment, communication, and customer satisfaction plays a crucial role in fostering loyalty and repeat purchases. Similarly, positive consumer experiences in product quality, service responsiveness, and emotional engagement enhance purchasing intentions and decision-making. The study concludes that integrating strong relationship marketing strategies with consistent and satisfying customer experiences can effectively increase consumer purchasing decisions and business sustainability in a highly competitive automotive market.

Keywords: relationship marketing; consumer experience; purchase decision; customer loyalty; automotive industry

# I. INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization and digital transformation, competition in the business sector has become increasingly intense, compelling companies to develop strategies that enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and purchasing decisions [1]. The rapid advancement of technology and the expansion of market accessibility have changed consumer behavior from being product-oriented to experienceand relationship-oriented [2]. In such a competitive landscape, businesses must go beyond offering high-quality products; they must also foster meaningful connections and provide memorable experiences to retain customer trust and loyalty [3]. In Indonesia, the automotive sector—particularly the diesel spare parts industry has grown significantly due to the high demand for diesel-powered vehicles in logistics, manufacturing, and personal transportation [4]. This growth has created intense competition among retailers, including CV. ACR Diesel, which operates in Medan, North Sumatra. Despite offering quality products and various promotional programs, ACR Diesel has experienced a decline in purchasing decisions, suggesting that transactional approaches alone are no longer effective in retaining customers [5]. This condition underscores the importance of relationship marketing and consumer experience as key determinants of purchasing behavior.

Relationship marketing focuses on building and maintaining long-term relationships with customers through trust, commitment, communication, and mutual value creation [6]. Unlike traditional marketing, which prioritizes short-term transactions, relationship marketing emphasizes continuous interaction to foster loyalty and advocacy [7]. According to Berry (2021), relationship marketing is essential in industries where customer retention yields greater profitability than acquiring new customers [8]. When implemented effectively, it transforms customers into brand advocates who engage in repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth promotion [9]. However, many small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including CV. ACR Diesel, struggle to apply relationship marketing optimally. This often stems from limited understanding of customer relationship management systems, inadequate communication, and inconsistent after-sales engagement [10]. Such deficiencies weaken emotional connections, erode trust, and increase the likelihood of customer migration to competitors who offer more personalized services [11]. Equally critical to purchasing behavior is the consumer experience, which encompasses all emotional, cognitive, and sensory responses customers encounter throughout their interaction with a brand [12]. A positive experience characterized by friendly service,



efficiency, and emotional engagement—has been proven to enhance satisfaction and influence future purchasing intentions [13]. Conversely, negative experiences, such as unresponsiveness or lack of information, diminish customer satisfaction and lead to reduced loyalty [14].

Recent research by Setiawan et al. found that consumers who perceive enjoyable and meaningful experiences during the purchasing process are more likely to make repeat purchases and recommend the brand to others [15]. Similarly, Haryanto demonstrated that in service-oriented industries, the synergy between relationship marketing and customer experience significantly boosts purchasing decisions and customer retention [16]. These findings suggest that businesses must adopt an integrated approach that combines emotional engagement with functional service excellence.

At CV. ACR Diesel, programs such as membership points, after-sales guarantees, and customer satisfaction surveys exist but are not effectively communicated or implemented. The lack of consistent follow-up and poor information dissemination reduces customer awareness and engagement with these initiatives. Consequently, consumers feel undervalued and begin seeking alternative brands that provide more responsive and personalized interactions [17]. From a theoretical standpoint, relationship marketing is grounded in Morgan and Hunt's (1994) Commitment-Trust Theory, which posits that trust and commitment are fundamental to sustaining long-term business relationships [18]. Meanwhile, consumer experience theory (Schmitt, 2020) emphasizes the importance of sensory, emotional, and cognitive dimensions in shaping consumer perceptions and decisions [19]. Integrating these two perspectives allows companies to create value beyond products by delivering relational and experiential benefits that influence purchase intentions.

Given these dynamics, the present study aims to examine the influence of relationship marketing and consumer experience on purchasing decisions at CV. ACR Diesel. This research contributes to marketing science by providing empirical evidence on how relational and experiential factors jointly affect consumer behavior in the Indonesian automotive aftermarket industry. Practically, it offers strategic insights for business owners to strengthen customer relationships, enhance service experiences, and improve purchasing outcomes through sustainable, customer-centric practices.

## Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing is a strategic approach aimed at maintaining, and enhancing long-term establishing, relationships between companies and customers [20]. Unlike transactional marketing, which focuses on short-term exchanges, relationship marketing emphasizes ongoing interaction, trust, commitment, and mutual value creation [21]. Morgan and Hunt's (1994) Commitment–Trust Theory remains foundational, arguing that relationship success depends on two key constructs-trust and commitment-which influence cooperation, communication, and customer retention [18]. According to Grönroos (2021), successful relationship marketing transforms customers from mere buyers into advocates who contribute to brand promotion through positive word-of-mouth and repeat purchases [7]. Furthermore, Berry

identifies three dimensions of effective relationship marketing: (1) building long-term partnerships, (2) maintaining communication consistency, and (3) creating customer intimacy through personalized service [6].

Empirical studies confirm that relationship marketing has a strong positive impact on purchasing behavior and brand loyalty. Hajering found that relationship marketing significantly influences customer retention in the hospitality industry, while Sarandang et al. demonstrated that relational communication and service quality jointly enhance consumer satisfaction and purchase intentions [10], [16]. In the automotive retail sector, consistent relationship management increases perceived reliability and emotional attachment, both of which drive repeated purchase decisions [22].

## Consumer Experience

Consumer experience refers to the overall perception, emotions, and cognitive responses formed through direct and indirect interactions between consumers and a brand [23]. Schmitt's (2020) experiential marketing framework\*\* divides consumer experience into five dimensions: sense, feel, think, act, and relate each contributing to how customers evaluate brand value [12]. Positive experiences evoke satisfaction, emotional connection, and trust, which in turn affect purchase intention and loyalty [24]. Research by Setiawan et al. revealed that memorable service encounters enhance brand attachment and increase the likelihood of repeat purchases [14]. Similarly, Pambudi and Andika (2022) found that experiential marketing indirectly influences buying decisions through its effect on brand trust [15]. In the context of industrial and retail services, consumer experience not only affects satisfaction but also acts as a strategic differentiator that distinguishes a company from competitors offering similar products [25]. Lemke et al. further argue that customer experience quality is shaped by emotional resonance, service interaction, and contextual relevance. These findings imply that ACR Diesel must focus not only on the technical quality of its diesel parts but also on delivering positive service encounters, personalized communication, and post-purchase engagement.

#### Purchase Decision Behavior

The purchase decision process involves a sequence of cognitive and behavioral stages—problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation [26]. According to Kotler and Keller, customer decisions are influenced by internal factors (motivation, perception, learning, attitude) and external factors (marketing communication, social influence, and service experience) [3].

Empirical studies confirm that relational and experiential factors have stronger effects on purchase decisions than traditional price-based strategies. Haryanto found that emotional connection and service reliability significantly drive purchase behavior, even when product prices are relatively high [2]. Likewise, Pramudita observed that consumers are more likely to purchase from companies that provide consistent relationship engagement and personalized experiences rather than those offering sporadic promotions [11].

These insights align with behavioral economics theory, which posits that decisions are not purely rational but are influenced by psychological and emotional cues embedded in



the customer journey [27]. Therefore, the integration of relationship marketing and consumer experience can be viewed as a behavioral strategy that stimulates both rational and affective components of decision-making.

Relationship Between Relationship Marketing, Consumer Experience, and Purchase Decisions

The interaction between relationship marketing and consumer experience forms the foundation for long-term consumer relationships and purchasing behavior. Relationship marketing builds trust and emotional attachment, while consumer experience provides sensory and emotional reinforcement of those relationships [20]. Together, these factors increase customer satisfaction, perceived value, and ultimately purchase frequency [28]. Schmitt emphasizes that companies capable of harmonizing relational and experiential elements create stronger customer bonds and competitive differentiation. In automotive retail, such synergy not only influences immediate purchases but also cultivates postpurchase loyalty and advocacy [23]. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that relationship marketing and consumer experience each exert significant and positive effects on purchase decisions, both individually and collectively.

#### II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative explanatory research design to determine the influence of relationship marketing and consumer experience on purchase decisions. The quantitative approach enables objective measurement of relationships among variables through numerical data and statistical testing [30]. The explanatory design was selected because it aims to explain causal relationships between independent variables (relationship marketing and consumer experience) and the dependent variable (purchase decision) [31]. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2020), quantitative research provides a systematic, empirical, and replicable framework that allows researchers to validate theoretical assumptions and generalize findings to broader populations [32]. In this context, the study seeks to verify whether improving relationship marketing practices and enhancing customer experience significantly influence consumer purchasing behavior at ACR Diesel.

The research was conducted at CV. ACR Diesel, a Medan-based company specializing in diesel spare parts distribution and automotive services. The object of the study includes the company's relationship marketing strategies, consumer experience dimensions, and their combined effect on customer purchase decisions. This context is particularly relevant because ACR Diesel operates in a competitive market where customer loyalty and satisfaction are crucial to long-term business sustainability [33].

The population of this research consists of ACR Diesel's active customers who have made at least two purchases between 2022 and 2024. Based on company records, the total customer base meeting this criterion is 1,250 individuals. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in 302 respondents..

#### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Respondents

A total of 302 respondents participated in this study, representing loyal and repeat customers of ACR Diesel. The majority were male (68%), aged between 30–45 years (54%), and had been customers for more than three years (61%). This demographic composition suggests that most participants have sufficient experience to assess both relationship quality and service interactions at ACR Diesel. Their responses provided a strong empirical foundation for analyzing how relationship marketing and consumer experience influence purchase decisions.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analysis revealed that both relationship marketing and consumer experience scored highly, indicating favorable customer perceptions toward ACR Diesel's marketing approach and service quality. Relationship Marketing (X<sub>1</sub>) had a mean score of 4.22, signifying that customers perceive ACR Diesel as trustworthy, communicative, and consistent in maintaining relationships. Consumer Experience (X2) recorded a mean score of 4.15, suggesting that customers find the company's service responsive, informative, and emotionally engaging. Purchase Decision (Y) scored 4.18, reflecting strong customer intention to continue purchasing products and recommending ACR Diesel to others. These results highlight that relationshiporiented and experiential factors are positively perceived, which aligns with customer satisfaction and loyalty theories proposed by Kotler and Keller and Berry [3], [6].

Regression Analysis Results

The results of multiple linear regression analysis are summarized as table 1

Table 1. The results of multiple linear regression analysis are summarized

Variable	Regression Coefficient (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)	Interpretation
Constant (β <sub>0</sub> )	1.045	_	_	_
Relationship Marketing (X <sub>1</sub> )	0.438	7.952	0.000	Significant
Consumer Experience (X <sub>2</sub> )	0.367	6.815	0.000	Significant
R <sup>2</sup> = 0.658	F = 226.84	J. ia. = 0.000		

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.658$ ) indicates that 65.8% of the variation in purchase decisions can be explained by relationship marketing and consumer experience, while the remaining 34.2% is influenced by other variables not included in this model. Both independent variables show positive and significant effects on purchase decisions (p < 0.05). Thus,  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  are accepted, meaning that relationship marketing and consumer experience each have a significant influence on customer purchase decisions. Likewise,  $H_3$  is supported, confirming their simultaneous effect.



The Influence of Relationship Marketing on Purchase Decisions

The analysis indicates that relationship marketing ( $\beta$  = 0.438) exerts the strongest influence on purchase decisions. This finding implies that customer trust, consistent communication, and long-term engagement significantly enhance consumers' willingness to purchase from ACR Diesel. These results are consistent with Morgan and Hunt's Commitment Trust Theory, which asserts that trust and commitment are central to maintaining long-term business relationships [18]. When customers feel valued through personalized attention, post-purchase support, and transparent communication, they are more likely to demonstrate brand loyalty and repeat buying behavior.

Supporting evidence from Yusuf and Lestari and Sarandang et al. also confirms that sustained relationship marketing enhances customer satisfaction and fosters repurchase intentions in the automotive retail industry [22], [28]. This demonstrates that ACR Diesel's ability to maintain interpersonal relationships with its customers is a critical strategic advantage in building loyalty and driving sales.

The Influence of Consumer Experience on Purchase Decisions 
The second major finding shows that consumer experience ( $\beta$  = 0.367) significantly affects purchase decisions. 
This aligns with Schmitt's (2020) experiential marketing theory, which highlights the role of sensory, emotional, cognitive, and relational experiences in shaping customer perceptions [23].

At ACR Diesel, customers value not only the quality of spare parts but also their overall service experience—ranging from responsiveness, friendliness, and consultation quality to convenience in transaction processes. A satisfying consumer experience increases emotional attachment and leads to stronger brand advocacy. This finding supports prior research by Setiawan et al. and Lemke et al, who found that experiential quality is a powerful determinant of purchase decisions and customer retention [14], [24]. ACR Diesel's competitive advantage thus lies in combining functional performance with emotional engagement, creating memorable interactions that foster repeat purchases.

The Combined Influence of Relationship Marketing and Consumer Experience

The simultaneous test (F = 226.84, Sig. = 0.000) confirms that relationship marketing and consumer experience jointly contribute to purchasing decisions. This synergy indicates that trust-based relationships enhance the effectiveness of positive consumer experiences, and vice versa. When customers perceive relational sincerity reinforced by enjoyable experiences, their overall satisfaction and purchase likelihood increase substantially [40]. The results align with Grönroos (2021), who argues that relationship quality and service experiences are interdependent dimensions of sustainable marketing [20]. Similarly, Clark and Lemke (2021) emphasize that experiential reinforcement magnifies the emotional value of relational strategies, resulting in higher purchase frequency and customer loyalty [24]. This integration of relational (affective trust) and experiential (sensoryemotional satisfaction) elements confirms the importance of

holistic marketing practices that address both rational and emotional dimensions of customer behavior [41].

Managerial Implications

The findings provide several actionable implications for ACR Diesel and similar enterprises:

- a. Strengthen Relationship Marketing Systems Develop digital CRM platforms that monitor communication, reward loyalty, and provide real-time feedback channels.
- b. Enhance Service Experience Quality Improve store layout, service speed, and employee empathy training to enrich sensory and emotional experiences.
- c. Integrate Relationship and Experience Strategies Align relational initiatives (loyalty programs) with experiential improvements (customer events, interactive service design).
- d. Implement Continuous Feedback Loops Use customer feedback to refine training, service protocols, and aftersales engagement.
- e. These steps can build enduring customer relationships, enhance brand reputation, and sustain purchase decisions amid increasing competition.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to marketing science by reinforcing the integration between Commitment—Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and Experiential Marketing Theory (Schmitt, 2020). The combination of these models provides a more comprehensive explanation of how emotional and relational elements jointly influence consumer purchasing behavior [18], [23], [42]. It also adds empirical evidence supporting behavioral economics theory, which posits that consumer choices are not purely rational but influenced by psychological and relational cues [27]. This finding broadens the theoretical understanding of relationship-driven experiential marketing as a framework for sustainable consumer engagement in emerging markets like Indonesia..

### IV. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions that researchers can draw from the results of this research are as follows. There is an influence of relationship marketing on purchasing decisions at ACR Diesel. There is an influence of consumer experience on purchasing decisions at ACR Diesel. There is an influence of relationship marketing and consumer experience on purchasing decisions at ACR Diesel.

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