

# 行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計畫成果報告

## 關係行銷之特徵與權變 探討其內外部條件之結構關聯

### The Characteristic and Contingency of Relationship

### Marketing : In Pursuit of a Structural Explanation

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#### 中文摘要

交換是一種社會與經濟的手段，人類藉由交換手段來掌握與保障他/她的生活。行銷是促成交換的商業努力，可視為一門在市場的網絡中管理交換關係的科學。本研究是首創以網絡中交換的高抽象概念為模式啟發點，而將之理論化為中抽象的假設，最後驗證於電腦消費的關係現象。這一篇研究增進了我們對於關係行銷全面有序結構的瞭解，其中包括了內部特質與外部權變系統性的互動關聯。

#### Abstract

*Exchange is a social as well as economic mean that consumer utilizes it to secure or manage his/her surroundings. Facilitating exchange is matter of managing relations among market of network. This study is a first attempt to pursuing a structural explanation of relationship marketing through a conceptualization grounded on higher level metaphor, theorized from derived abstraction and tested on empirical definition. The research findings advance our understanding of the internal characteristics and the external contingency of relationship marketing.*

#### INTRODUCTION

*The ideas of networks and relationships will be trend-setting realities in the new context of today's business (Kotler 1999).*

*Relationship Marketing is a challenge to established marketing management theory and practice. Although relationship marketing has had an international breakthrough during the 1990s, the perceptions of it go far apart (Gummesson 1999).*

Marketing experts postulate that the current interest in relationship marketing represents a

"fundamental reshaping of the field" (Webster 1992), "a paradigm shift" (Kotler 1991), "a life realities toward post-modernism" (Brown 1995), and deserves new theory and language (Achrol 1991; Anderson, Hakansson, and Johnason 1994; Nevin 1995). Sheth and Parvatiyar (1993) believe relationship marketing theory offers the potential for a new "general theory of marketing". Researchers are theorizing the central issues of relationship marketing being trust and commitment among distribution channel members (Morgan and Hunt 1994).

Different streams of research are exploring the benefits of relationship marketing among retailers and consumers (Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995), service marketers and their customers (Berry 1995), and business-to-business (Stanly and Dickinson 1998).

Other researchers find relationship marketing to be a subset of, or not substantially different from, prior marketing practices and theories (Frazier and Autina 1995; McGarry 1951; Peterson 1995). Despite that marketing scholars and practitioners are interested in learning more about long-term relationship, much of efforts central on trust and commitment (Gummesson 1999). Trust and commitment are necessary conditions for a successful long-term relationship but not sufficient (Chien 1998). Literature of relationship marketing is often developed in a patched-up manner, without adequately being grounded in a higher level of theoretical origin, and hence few has judiciously developed coherent conceptual models. Such path of theoretical development could contribute to "our inability to climb the theoretical ladder in any significant way" (Venkatesh 1985), diminishing weights of problem-solving adequacy in our discipline (Achrol 1991; Day 1996), and marketing "mid-life crisis" (Kotler, 1994). Siew(1985) postulated that a noteworthy

conceptualization is often characterized by its features of unifying idea and consistency between up-stream, middle-range and working hypothesis. If relationship marketing will position itself as a forefront of paradigm shift to provide a unique worldview, a conceptualization grounded on higher level metaphor, theorized from derived abstraction and tested on empirical definition is needed.

This research draws from exchange theory (Bagozzi 1979), contract norm (Macneil 1981), and value theory (Perry 1954) and synthesizes several thoughts of relationship research to form a theoretical framework of relationship marketing included internal characteristics and external contingent factors. A quest of internal characteristics of relationship marketing is to address the research question what is relationship marketing? Besides, the stability of a market relationship would be contingent on its external factors. Different context could impact internal characteristics differently.

This study further address (1) will relationship marketing be impacted by external contingent factors? (2) how does it do? Specific supporting objectives entail the following research facets:

1. To establish a scientific conceptualization for explaining the alternative view of network and relationship.
2. To delineate a middle range framework which is as much wishful thinking as reality, supporting the metaphor of relationship exchange.
3. To develop a conceptual model at the first level of abstraction and operationalise the model at the ground level of abstraction by (i) exploring the exogenous contingent factors influencing relationship marketing; (ii) categorizing exogenous contingent factors; (iii) developing the conceptual model to portray the effect of exogenous contingent factors on indigenous characteristics of relationship marketing; (iv) operationalizing the hypothesized model; (v) substantiating the empirical causal link between exogenous contingent factors and indigenous characteristics of relationship marketing; (vi) providing system explanations of relationship marketing

## CONCEPTUALIZATION

Much of the infrastructure necessary in determining the basic propositions of marketing science has been presented by Hunt (1983). He views marketing as the behavioral science seeking to explain exchange relationships between buyers and sellers. Exchange is the general theory of marketing discipline (Alderson 1965; Bagozzi 1979; Hunt 1983; Kotler 1984).

Marketing is an applied science to manage satisfactory exchange through either (1) instrumental metaphor (McCarthy 1960), (2) organism metaphor (Alderson 1957), or (3) competitiveness metaphor (Porter 1980). Nevertheless, an inquiry of "why humans engage in exchange, in the first place?" is suffering a dearth of search. Such up-stream inquiry could add fruitful explanation of relationship behavior as alternative worldview to existing paradigm. This study postulates that (i) human beings basically are need-fulfilling actors; (ii) every need is a problem in his/her daily life; (iii) exchange is a social as well as economic means to secure/ manage human's surroundings; (iv) paths of securing/ managing behavior is network structure. In fact, why we spend money is because we have endless motivation to manage our living to be more secure and comfortable. When we are loyal to shop in Seven-Eleven because of convenient benefit, we build a behavior-net to Seven-Eleven convenient store. The more satisfactory behavior-net has been built the more comfortable his/ her life is.

Based on the notions of Alderson (1965), Blalock and Wilken (1979), Hunt (1983), and Kotler (1984), this study re-identifies the conditions necessary for there to be the potential for exchange.

1. Human beings basically are need-fulfilling actors.
2. There are at least two human parties.
3. Humans engage in behavior directed at managing daily life through consummating exchange.
4. Humans are able to create innovative behaviors directed at securing sustainable surroundings through facilitating exchange.
5. Each party is free to accept or reject the exchange.
6. Institutional frameworks exist which are directed at consummating and/ or facilitating exchange.

7. The potency of each party is increase on the consequence of exchange.

These basic propositions of marketing help us to view a market behavior through the lens of network and relationship. Market display itself as a structure of network not of segment (Thorelli 1986). Among a network, trust and commitment are necessary passwords or linkages to channel through node to node (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Opportunity of exchange derives from an immerging need to be fulfilled. Need is a function of living problems. To secure/ manage living is a matter of controlling his/her value of space through out a time span. Value of space could refer to physical and psychic measurement, but particularly relevant in psychic dimension. Relationship prospect of marketing is seen as helping customer's behavior-net to secure his/her utility of potency and psychic domain through out a time span.

## **A CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

Time and contract-norm are the two basic dimensions of relational exchange. At the beginning of time continuance, economic calculation or utilitarian comparison is the focal point of exchange. On the other end of time continuance, expectation for future or projection of benefits is important. Relational behavior is a social process. Although human being is an opportunistic creature, he or she would inevitably be limited by social norms. On one side of the contract-norm continuance, internal contracts regulate exchange parties' behaviors, such as promissory and nonpromissory. On the other side, external social norms govern two parties' interrelationship, such as reputation and recognition. Drawing on the works of Macneil (1979); Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987); Oliver (1990); Wilson (1995); Bagozzi (1995); Nevin (1995); Morgan and Hunt (1994); Doney and Cannon (1997), this study names utility and projectability as the characteristics anchoring on two side of time continuance. Further this paper proposes reciprocity and legitimacy as the characteristics landing on two side of contract-norm continuance.

### **Utility and Projectability**

The starting point for a need to exchange with others is utilitarian benefit of living. The human

desires to maximize selfish benefits and to create and maintain social solidarity with other participants are the underlying utilitarian behaviors (Bagozzi 1995). It is the fundamental nature of choice-induced exchange and all participants' exchange only when an exchange-surplus is possible (Macneil 1980). The characteristics of measurement and specificity in relational exchange reveal significant attention to measuring, specifying, and quantifying all aspects of performance, including psychic and future benefits (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987; Wilson 1995). Utility feature is the necessary condition for a further reciprocal relationship of which trust and commitment are the central building blocks and a long-term relationship can be established (Berry and Thompson 1982).

Utilitarian benefit of living will not be maximized without projecting this benefit into the future. Projectability is the characteristic that does occur in relations, must occur if relations are to continue, and hence ought to occur so long as their continuance is valued (Macneil 1979). Projectability can be defined as expectations respecting the future in the exchange linking. Projectability in relationship consists the notions of (1) planning (Macneil 1979), (2) adaptation (Wilson 1995), (3) preservation of the relation (Macneil 1979), (4) expectations for relations (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987), and (5) timing of exchange (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987; Macneil 1979). The more the company is able to achieve a closer bond with its customers, the more likely the projecting efforts will grow as an essential mean of relationship-building in the market place for marketers (Kotler 1991). Projecting strategies have been found a significant impact on business performance (Chien and Moutinho 1997).

### **Reciprocity and Legitimacy**

Exchange, as a social mean, is a great revolutionary discovery by our ancestors. It is built on an infrastructure of promissory. Reciprocity is dyad matter of norms. Whereas, legitimacy is triad contract in our public. Norms of contract become a major part of our mental space.

Relationships occur for the purpose of pursuing common or mutually beneficial goals or interests. Morgan and Hunt (1994) postulate that commitment and trust are key mediating

variables for successful reciprocity relationship. It is helpful to treat the constructs of commitment and trust as intermediate level of abstractions to explain reciprocity as the higher level concept, and to capture lower level of abstraction such as role integrity (Macneil 1979), interpersonal emotion (Bagozzi 1995), social bond (Wilson 1995), and mutual goal (Wilson 1995). Crosby and Stephens (1987) found a significant path coefficient (.358) from satisfaction with contact person to overall satisfaction. In view of alternative, the benefits of trust-building are seen in client's acquiescence, expectations for relations, and preservation of the relation retention. On the basis of reciprocal relationships, various projecting efforts can be facilitated.

Institutional theory (Fennel and Alexander 1978; Hirsch 1975; Meyer and Scott 1983) suggests that institutional environments impose pressures on social actors to justify their activities or outputs. These pressures motivate social actors to increase their legitimacy in order to appear in agreement with the prevailing norms, standards of proper conduct, rules, beliefs, or expectations of external constituents. The establishment of relationships for purposes of increasing legitimacy can originate from an social actor's motives to demonstrate or improve its reputation, image, prestige, or congruence with prevailing norms in its social environment (Oliver 1990). Bharadwaj, Varadarajan and Fahy (1993) suggest that the greater the intangibility of a service, the greater the importance of legitimate image as a source of information for consumer to assess his/her purchasing risk. Wilson (1995) postulated the reputation variable is in the first phase of relationship development process.

## **Involvement**

Consumers are more likely to be involved in a product decision when the product: (1) is important to the consumer because of its functional significance or because of its symbolic significance; (2) entails significant risks (e.g., the financial risk, the technological risk, the social risk; (3) has emotional appeal; (4) is identified with the norms of a group. (Assael 1987)

High involvement purchases are purchases that are important to the consumer. Such purchases are closely tied to the consumer's ego and self-image. They involve some risk to the

consumer. In such cases, it is worth the consumer's time and energies to consider product alternatives more carefully. The high involvement hierarchy—beliefs/evaluation/behavior—represents the model of complex decision making. (Petty and Cacioppo 1981)

On the other hand, A low involvement purchase is one where the consumer does not consider the product sufficiently important to his or her belief system and does not strongly identify with the product. In such cases, it may not be worth the consumer's time and effort to search for information about brands and to consider a wide range of alternatives. Therefore, a low involvement purchase generally entails a limited process of decision making. (Petty and Cacioppo 1981). In a low involvement hierarchy, brand beliefs are formed first by passive learning and a purchase decision is then made. The brand may or may not be evaluated afterwards. (Assael 1987)

In this vein, involvement status of a consumer could affect his /her belief of corporate legitimacy, and evaluation of utility, reciprocity and future projectability.

## **Culture Context**

According to Hall (1976), a high-context (HC) society, communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the overt coded and explicit part of the message. Whereas a low-context (LC) communication is the reverse - most of the information must be in the transmitted message in order to make up for what is missing in the context.

There are excellent examples of high-low context such as restricted, yet simplistic, intimate conversation in the home (HC) and a highly specific, elaborated code of law (LC) (Bernstein 1964; Hall 1976). High-context actions are by definition rooted in the past and the forms that are used are important. Further, in the high context culture, the bonds that tie people together are strong, and hence word-of mouth, social formality are highly valued (Hall 1976).

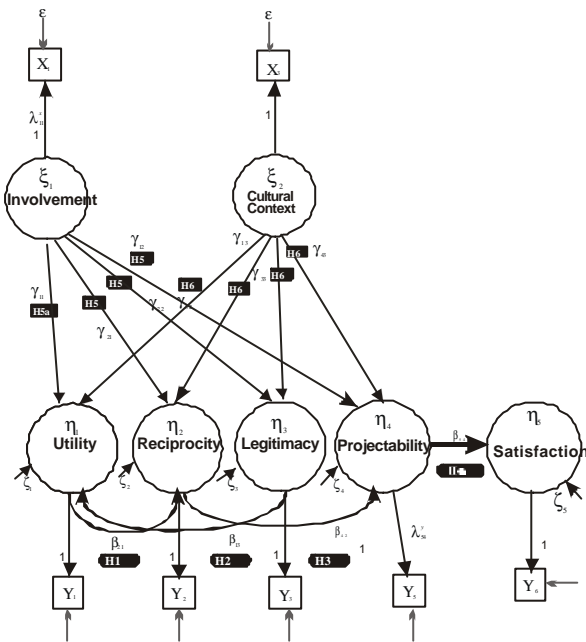
Chinese language reflecting a oriental norms is on the high-context end of the scale. In Taiwan, the overall approach to life, institutions and government is high-context. People raised in

high-context systems are more relationship oriented in exchange activities.

## MODEL OPERATIONALIZATION

Proposed model following the above discussed hypotheses among the constructs are illustrated in Figure 1.

### PPM Model



*H1: the better the utilitarian value perceived by customer, the better reciprocal trust that can be established between customer and company.*

*H2: the better the reciprocal trust to be established, the more perceived value of the projecting that can be obtained.*

*H3: the better legitimate image perceived by a customer, the greater chance for customer to try utilitarian value.*

*H4: there is a positive association between projecting and overall satisfaction.*

*H5: there are positive association between involvement of buying behavior and*  
*(a) reciprocity,*  
*(b) legitimacy,*  
*(c) utility*  
*(d) projectability*

*H6: there are positive association between culture*

*context of buying behavior and*

*(a) reciprocity*

*(b) legitimacy*

*(c) utility*

*(d) projectability*

## METHOD AND PROCEDURE

### Sampling and Response

This research selects personal computer purchasing behavior among college students as the context of this study. Because it would enable the narrowing of focus to the appropriate relationship settings and frame questions that would have a common meaning among the respondents. In order to substantiate a conceptual foundation for investigating domains and the causal linkages of the hypothesized model, exploratory in-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen participants and five owners of computer stores. A two-stage pretest was launched to purify the scale items. In the first stage, the draft questionnaire was administrated to fifteen participants on the campus of a university located in the central Taiwan with a subsequent follow up for their feedback on the appropriateness and answerability of the questions. In the second stage, input from 5 academic experts was obtained. Departments and classes of four universities situated in central Taiwan was used as sampling frame for this study. Random sampling was used to pick the target classes for survey. The final questionnaires were distributed by interviewers to sample (N=500) of ten departments with twelve classes during spring of 1999. The total 240 complete data cases, including 15 pretest responses, represent a 48% response rate.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The unidimensionality of each construct is assessed simultaneously with confirmatory factor analysis (Gerbing and Anderson 1988). Once unidimensionality was achieved, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The results support unidimensional concepts for utility (ten items), reciprocity (eight items), legitimacy (nine items), projectability (seven items), involvement (three items), context culture (four items), and satisfaction (five items). The proposed model, then, were evaluated using

LISREL 8 (Joreskog and Sorbom 1988) with sample covariance matrix as the input matrix.

The overall assessment of CPM model fit was found adequate (Table 1). The chi-square value was statistically nonsignificant ( $\chi^2_{(12)} = 19.35$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), which indicated the differences between the model-implied covariance matrix  $\Sigma$  and data-observed  $S$  were nonsignificant. The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) was 0.959, and the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) was only 0.903. These high indices, GFI and AGFI, indicate a high construct validity of the CPM model, in which 90.3% of the variances and covariances in the observed data ( $S$ ) were predicted by the estimated model. In the summary statistics for standardized residuals, the largest standardized residual was 2.64 and the smallest standardized residual was -1.11. The values of standardized residuals were on an acceptable range (+ 2 to - 2) of criteria (Joreskog and Sorbom 1989).

With regard to the proposed model, the hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H4 were accepted. These interactions describe moderate levels of impact between the direction of legitimate image to utilitarian value ( $\beta_{13} = 0.915$ ,  $t$ -value = 6.398), utilitarian value to reciprocal trust ( $\beta_{21} = 0.985$ ,  $t$ -value = 4.294), and reciprocal trust to projecting efforts ( $\beta_{42} = 0.626$ ,  $t$ -value = 7.065). Finally, projectability to satisfaction ( $\beta_{54} = 0.968$ ,  $t$ -value = 10.928). The construct "legitimate image" seems to initiate the total relationship quality development process which subsequently impacts on the provision of a total utility and then goes on to have an effect on the policy of reciprocity management, followed by a consolidation effect on projecting activities. Satisfaction of a purchasing experience could be enhanced by projecting benefits into the future.

The hypothesis H5 comprised four hypothesised associations. Upon inspection of Table1, it was found that the result of  $\gamma_{21} = -0.454$  and  $t$ -value = -1.867 does not support for this hypothesis  $H_{5a}$ . This finding can be interpreted as one standard deviation increase in the degree of involvement is expected to lead to a decrease of 0.454 standard deviation in core service, with all other variables left untouched at their original values.

This implied that the higher involvement behavior of purchasing personal computer the less the consumer will depend on personal trust of store owner as a decision criteria.

The second component of Hypothesis Five delineated the association between involvement and legitimacy. The result ( $\gamma_{31} = 0.811$ ,  $t$ -value = 8.298) provides support for hypothesis  $H_{5b}$  that the higher involvement of pc purchasing behavior, the more relying on legitimate information.

The third component of hypothesis  $H_{5c}$  concerned the effect of involvement on utility. The result shown in Table 1 revealed a non-significant path from involvement to utility ( $\gamma_{41} = 0.091$ ,  $t$ -value = 0.95) which offered no support for  $H_{5c}$ . This suggests that involvement factor fails to distinguish a good or bad experience of purchasing personal computer.

The fourth component of Hypothesis Five ( $H_{5d}$ ) stated that the higher the involved efforts on purchasing personal computer, the more likely consumer will project their relationship into future. The result indicates that a significant positive loading ( $\gamma_{41} = 0.380$ ,  $t$ -value = 4.255) was found to support this hypothesis  $H_{5d}$ .

There are four hypothesized associations within H6. Upon inspection of Table1, it was only found that  $H_{6a}$  was supported with the result of  $\gamma_{22} = 0.381$  and  $t$ -value = 2.613 and rest of the hypotheses ( $H_{6b}$ ,  $H_{6c}$ ,  $H_{6d}$ ) was not significantly supported. The evidence shows that the higher context perceived by consumer the more likely he/she would emphasis on reciprocal relations to secure exchange benefits. This finding is parallel to the assertion of Hall (1976).

TABLE 1  
Results of the LISREL Analysis for PPM Model

Path	Estimate	T-Value	Path	Estimate	T-Value
$\beta_{13}$	.915	6.398	$\epsilon_{22}$	.054	—
$\beta_{21}$	.985	4.294	$\epsilon_{33}$	.361	—
$\beta_{42}$	.626	7.065	$\epsilon_{44}$	.312	—
$\beta_{54}$	.968	10.928	$\epsilon_{54}$	.246	—
$\gamma_{11}$	.091	.950	$d_{11}$	.165	—

$\gamma_{21}$	-.454	-1.867	$d_{22}$	.257	–
$\gamma_{31}$	.811	8.289	$\zeta_1$	.163	1.532
$\gamma_{41}$	.380	4.255	$\zeta_2$	.051	.437
$\gamma_{22}$	.381	2.613	$\zeta_3$	.342	3.037
$\lambda_{y11}$	.664	–	$\zeta_4$	.166	2.815
$\lambda_{y22}$	.973	–	$\zeta_5$	.063	.853
$\lambda_{y33}$	.799	–			
$\lambda_{y44}$	.830	–			
$\lambda_{y55}$	.868	–			
$\varepsilon_{11}$	.559	–			

# All the  $\lambda_x$  and  $\lambda_y$  are fixed parameters at '1' value.

PPM :  $\chi^2_{(12)} = 19.35$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , GFI was 0.959, AGFI

[adjusted goodness-of-fit index] was 0.903

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

McKenna (1992) suggests that a superior marketing strategy in today's times is to find a way to sustain an existing relationship and increase its scope over time. More and more firms are adopting this strategy and moving toward building closer relationships with customers. This study is a first attempt to pursuing a structural explanation of relationship marketing through a conceptualization grounded on higher level metaphor, theorized from derived abstraction and tested on empirical definition. The research findings advance our understanding of (1) the internal characteristics and the external contingency of relationship exchange (2) inter-supported natures of relationship variables; (3) causal associations between relationship marketing and satisfactions. Exchange is a social as well as economic means that consumer utilizes it to secure or manage his/her surroundings. Exchange behavior which is consisted of market activities, is a network formation. Facilitating exchange is matter of managing relations among market of network. The fundamental dimensions of relational exchange are about time and contract norms. This study names utility and projectability as the characteristics anchoring on two side of time continuance; and proposes reciprocity and legitimacy as the characteristics landing on two side of contract-norm continuance. Legitimate image is important as a proxy for quality and assurance. Without a positive awareness of legitimate image as a foundation of pre-relationship, there is little chance for company to overcome threshold for prospects to

enter an exchange relation. Customers who do not acknowledge the other values of legitimacy, reciprocity and projectability, will act as opportunists. Such opportunist relationships may be short-lived and eventually costly. Therefore, it is suggested that company should be alert when approaching a potential client with utilitarian value features without any pre-establishment of legitimacy. Features and outcomes of utilitarian value are decisive factors in relationship building. A satisfactory experience of utilitarian value will reinforce a customer's perception of legitimate image and lead to the trust-building stage of relationship. Without the pre-conditions of positive awareness of legitimate image and satisfactory utility, efforts of reciprocal trust seem discourteous and burdensome.

Findings also suggest utilitarian value does not automatically render itself to overall satisfaction, and intermediary activities, such as reciprocal trust and projecting efforts, are necessary in capitalizing utilitarian values, and thus lead to sustainable satisfaction.

Exogenous variables such as involvement and context culture are found to have impact on overall satisfaction, but indirectly. The higher involvement of purchasing behavior, the more relying on legitimate information as buying criteria and consequently lead to satisfaction. The higher context perceived by consumer the more likely he/she would emphasis on reciprocal relations to secure exchange benefits. External contingent factors are certainly not limited to involvement and culture context only. Demographic as well as psychographic variables could also be seen as exogenous influence on satisfaction, but have to channel through utility, reciprocity, legitimacy and projectability. These propositions consist of future research direction.

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