

Conceptualization of Relationship Quality and its Antecedents

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Abstract: *This paper is conceptualizing theoretical understanding about the relationship quality. Today when businesses are facing high competition; it has become important for the firm to focus on long term relationship with their customers. This paper tries to explain the role of quality of relationship in building long term relationship between buyer and seller. It further discusses about various possible antecedents that can be maintained by company for having long term relationship with their customers.*

Keywords: Commitment, Relationship Marketing, Relationship Quality, Satisfaction, Trust

Introduction

Today, market structure is very complex to understand the exchange of buyer and seller as most of the time there are more than two parties involved in one transaction. For example, if a customer is buying a Samsung TV from Croma showroom on EMI, we can see that in this one single transaction there are mainly four parties involved namely: the customer, the seller at the Croma showroom, the Samsung Company and the bank. Let us take another example, the customer is purchasing a Smartphone from an online platform (e.g. Flipkart, Amazon) and pays through Google Pay, even in this following example more than two parties are involved unlike the discrete transactions where only two parties are involved.

From both of the examples given above, it can be seen that transactions could be long run and thus involves more than two parties. Organizations have to focus on customer needs and thus should analyze the level of customer satisfaction from transactions. In the current marketing scenario, Discrete Transaction models are not successful for long term sustainability of businesses. The reason being, today most of the buyers and the sellers prefer to make the exchanges as a long-term relationship.

In the long run, relationship exchange between the two parties (buyer and seller) is only possible if the exchange profits to both of them. For example: A buyer can get a satisfactory service, with less risk of uncertainty in performance, and reduce their searching cost in market. A seller on the other hand gains a loyal customer which will help the company in increasing their profitability.

The word 'relationship' in context of buyer and seller transaction is poorly defined (Baggozi et al. 1995), but fundamentally, in an operational context, the relationship is created through series of episodes which require at least two meetings (Storbacka et al. 1994; Liljander and Strandvik, 1995). Relationship existence was further developed by Barnes in 1997, he suggested that mutual perception and special status from both the sides are required if the relationship is said to exist.

Specific relationship marketing strategies are very important for creating a relationship exchange. For instance, a relationship manager should focus on the expectation of customer when that transaction is actually conducted. Customer perception is an important dimension in case of relationship exchange and for a manager to understand the actual expectation of customers on consuming products or taking services from company.

Relationship marketing mainly concerns with developing and maintaining relationships with customers at a profit of both the parties so that both of them are able to fulfill their objectives (Storbacka et al. (1994)). Relationship marketing strategy is continuous and situation-specific process which should be analyzed from scenario to scenario. There are two important dimensions of relationship marketing which mainly help to understand and maintain the relationship with the customer. First is service quality and the second is relationship quality. Service Quality dimension is majorly concerned with the core service and satisfaction of the customer at that point of time. Many researchers consider service quality as an antecedent of relationship quality (Storbacka, Strandvik and Gronroos 1994; Anderson and Fornell 1994; Bitner and Hubbert, 1994). On the other hand, Relationship Quality is majorly concerned on the overall relationship exchange with the

customer and indicates the strength of the relationship (Lagace, Dahlstrom and Gassenheimer 1991). Relationship Quality is a higher-order construct that mainly has three dimensions; trust, satisfaction, and commitments, for showing the nature of relationship (Anderson and Weitz, 1989; Anderson and Narus, 1990; Crosby et al., 1990; Ganesan, 1994; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Kumar et al. 1995).

Literature Review

Relationship quality is an intangible aspect that exists between buyer-seller interactions in the market. Relationship Quality is considered to be an indicator of how well relationship is established by firms with their customers. Levitt (1986) considered relationship quality as a bundle of intangible values which was provided to customers for augmenting product or service and resulted in expected exchange in the near future.

In a conceptual way, relationship quality described the strength and depth of relationships that build through relationship marketing strategies (Huntley, 2006; Johnson, 2004). Ideally, relationship quality scale is the indicator of long term success and sustainable competitive advantage of the firm. It is an intangible aspect and thus makes it difficult to be duplicated by the competitors (Roberts, Varki, and Brodie, 2003).

Jarveline and Lehtinen (1996) referred relationship quality as a customer's perception regarding the performance of relationship exchange with the sellers. It is an important concept to measure as Gwinner et al. (1998) suggested in his research. He hypothesized that if a firm is providing them important benefits then they might remain in a relationship even if they perceived core service less than the superior.

In literature, relationship quality is viewed as higher order construct which is commonly composed of three interdependent dimensions, namely being satisfaction, trust and commitments (Anderson and Weitz, (1989); Anderson and Narus, (1990); Crosby et al. (1990); Moorman et al. (1992); Ganesan, (1994); Morgan and Hunt et al. (1994); Kumar et al. (1995); Wong and Sohal 2002; Roberts, Varki, and Brodie 2003). These dimensions, driven by multiple key antecedents, are considered as determinants of relationship quality. Few examples of the multiple key components are customer orientation, ethics of sales personal, domain expertise of sales personal, communication, bonds, mutual goals, relationship norms, dependence on each other, similarities, benefits of customer, special treatments etc. (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2000, Shamdasani and Balakrishna et al. 2000; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner and Gremler et al. 2002; Parsons et al. 2002; Roberts, Varki, and Brodie, 2003; Bejou, Wray and Ingram et al. 1996).

Even in the past, number of researchers effectively showed the importance of relationship quality and suggested that it was played as a mediation role between marketing strategies for building long term relationship and outcomes of relationship marketing. But the relationship between different dimensions of relationship quality is still unclear. Even after so many researches in this area, there are still no common drivers or determinants that affect dimensions of relationship quality. Storbacka (et al. 1994) said that structure of the relationship quality was a higher-order construct depending upon the nature of organization and from situation to situation.

Dimensions of Relationship Quality

This section analyzes the most common components or indicators of relationship quality construct which are trust, satisfaction, and commitment. It will also be specifying different attributes of the customer that will show the quality of relationship build with them, providing complete insight and nature of core relationship elements that customer expects from relationship exchange.

Interrelationship between these dimensions in the literature section has already been discussed, now we will understand the relevance of each dimension and how they indicate relationship strength.

Trust: Trust generally is defined as the customers' belief regarding his needs being fulfilled in the future by the firms (Anderson and Weitz, 1989). The trust of customers indicates the integrity and reliability of the customers in the seller's performance (Anderson and Weitz, 1989; Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande, 1992; Ganesan, 1994; Grayson and Ambler, 1999). While measuring the strength of relationship quality, the perceived level of trust between both buyer and seller is an important dimension (Wong and Sohal, 2002). Naudé and Buttle, (2000) concluded from their research that level of mutual integration and trust was the most common attribute that affected the relationship quality construct.

Geyskens and Steenkamp suggested two important elements of trust; 1) trust in partner's honesty (or credibility) and 2) trust in partner's benevolence (Ganesan, 1994; Kumar et al. 1995; Geyskens and Steenkamp, 1995). Customer's trust on partner's credibility and honesty showed the extent to which the customer would believe that his needs being fulfilled by the work of seller at a reasonable price and their trust on the effective performance of the firms (Anderson and Weitz, (1989); Ganesan, 1994; Grayson and Ambler, 1999). On the other hand trust was the benevolence of the other party showed the perception of the customer about the firm regarding their thoughts about the welfare of the customer in an uncertain situation or while making any decision (Grayson and Ambler, 1999).

Henning- Thurau and his colleagues (2002) empirically investigated the direct impact of trust and confidence benefit (from relationship benefit approach) together on the overall satisfaction of the relationship. The author emphasized that the firm should focus on the behavioral ways to help the customer alongside helping them to build trust on partners that effectively had an influence on the customer's satisfaction (Andaleeb, 1996; Berry, 1995; Garbarina and Johnson, 1999; Henning- Thurau, P. Gwinner and D. Gremler, 2002).

Trust is not built on one transaction but is a result after a consistent satisfactory performance by the sellers (Henning- Thurau, Klee and Langer, 1999). Key drivers or specific marketing strategies that help in building trust are also complicated to understand. Dorsch and his colleagues (1998) suggested that trust was majorly dependent on the salesperson's experience, his level of customer orientation, and selling orientation (Dorsch, Swanson and Kelley, 1998). The author concludes that salesperson's ethical behaviour didn't had a significant effect on the customer's trust which contradicted previous researches like Lagace et al. (1991), Moorman et al. (1992), Wray et al. (1994), Bejou et al. (1996). They did an empirical study in different areas and concluded that ethical behavior of salesperson had a significant effect on the perceived trust of the customer.

Satisfaction: Satisfaction is defined as a state where the customer is assured regarding future performance of firm, given that past consistent satisfactory performance. Relationship satisfaction builds over a period of time of the satisfactory transaction between parties which means providing quality of service/ product that can fit in the customer's budget or his preferences (Storbacka, Strandvik and Gronroos, 1994).

Customer satisfaction is a very important dimension for increasing relationship quality but it does not directly leads to retention behaviour (Reichheld and Aspinall, 1993). Retention behaviour of the customer may result from the low level of satisfaction. The reason for this behavior could be the limited budget of customer or the service/ product fitting in customer preference. In the same way, there may be a situation in which customer is satisfied from service/ product but will not retain with the firm (Dick and Basu, 1994; Storbacka, Strandvik and Gronroos, 1994).

For understanding the role of satisfaction in relationship building, Bitner (1990), argued the assessment of satisfaction was effected by service quality and linked it with loyalty in the future. . After measuring overall satisfaction, subsequent retention and repurchasing behavior, the author recognized a positive link between satisfactions in general from a transaction and satisfaction from the relationship (Bitner, 1990; Storbacka, Strandvik and Gronroos, 1994).

Relationship satisfaction was considered as a multi-dimension construct by Bejou and his colleagues (1998), which had been conceptualized as a prerequisite for relationship quality. They defined three dimensions of measuring satisfaction. In the first dimension, satisfaction was measured while interacting with the salesperson (Crosby and Stevens, 1987). In the second dimension, satisfaction was measured with core service/ product and to what extend customer's need was satisfied. In the third dimension, satisfaction of the customer from the organization was analyzed (Bejou, Ennew and Palmer et al. 1998; Crosby and Stevens, 1987).

For understanding the relationship between these two different constructs (relationship quality and satisfaction), Hennig-Thurau and Klee, (1997) proposed and explained three different theories in one of their papers. In the first theory, relationship quality was considered as an antecedent of satisfaction. In this theory, relationship quality was equated with an overall evaluation of the customer's experience throughout the transaction, for analyzing his overall satisfaction with service/ product (Gotlieb et al. 1994). The two major problems faced by this theory were: first of which was that quality construct didn't include expectation aspect even though measurement of satisfaction is majorly based on confirmation or disconfirmation of

expectation of the customer; and the second problem aroused as this theory ignored different affective and cognitive structure of the satisfaction (Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997)

In the second theory, both the construct were considered to be the same and had no theoretical difference between satisfaction and quality. In this approach, higher stability aspect of quality and unstable emotional aspect of satisfaction were ignored while considering this ‘no theoretical difference’ between them (Crosby et al., 1990; Naude and Buttle, 2000; and Parsons, 2002).

In the third theory Customer satisfaction was considered as an antecedent of relationship quality. In the following, relationship quality was considered as a higher-order construct that built an overall evaluation of the previous experience of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Customer satisfaction was taken as short term emotional state of mind of customers which would not directly lead to retention. Henning-thurau et al. (1998) considered this theory for framing the process of how satisfaction leads to retention by using relationship quality as mediating variable. In the framework, the dimensions of relationship quality were trust, commitment, and overall perception of the customer about the service.

Commitment: Commitment is an important key component for successful relationship exchange to ensure both parties’ intentions are to maintain the relationship for a longer time (Gundlach et al. 1995). Storbacka and his colleagues (1994) said “Commitment is defined as the parties’ intentions to act and their attitude towards interacting with each other; high relationship value will affect commitment positively”, (Storbacka, Strandvik, and Gronroos, 1994). Degree of commitment in a relationship is a direct indicator that relationship is valued by both the parties and has the consistent motivation to maintain the relationship (Dwyer et al. 1987; Moorman et al. (1992); Morgan and Hunt, (1994); Gundlach et al. (1995)).

Huntley (2006) argued that for industrial marketing, commitment and relationship quality were different construct. This was because relationship quality between both the parties was specified by the level of coordination and collaboration they had. Hence it meant that relationship quality construct was more attitude related and commitment was more related with sustainable investment over a period of time (Huntley et al., 2006).

Gundlach (1995) conceptualized commitment as a construct in three different components. The first component was input component which referred to an action taken by the customer that clearly showed his intention for future transaction, action being more than just a promise (Gundlach, 1995; Scanzani et al. 1979). For example, when the customer is consistently satisfied with the last few transactions, he may like to give a reward to the seller and he may reward him by increasing Business transactions with him in the future. Berry and Parsuraman (1991) supported this notion and said that when the customer perceives that he was getting value from service provider, he would continue with the same service provider for future transaction.

The second component was attitude component of commitment. It explained the intention part that involved commitment. This component exhibited behavioral aspect of the relationship and displayed that exchange parties will be committed with each other in future only if they have strong intention to develop and maintain the relationship (Anderson and Weitz, 1992; Moorman et al. 1992; Gundlach et al. 1995; Dorsch, Swanson, and Kelley, 1998).

The third component was the temporal component and was at the heart of commitment to believe that relationships will continue in the future (Gundlach et al. 1995; Scanzani et al., 1979). Presence of this component in a relationship only comes with time or it indicates the duration of the relationship. Duration of relationship remain high only when customers consider the value of relationship to increase the resources exchange with parties (Kumar et al. 1995; Gundlach et al. 1995; Dorsch, Swanson and Kelley, 1998).

In literature, Meyer (1995), suggested organizational commitment from the employees’ point of view that can be with affective commitment (Attachment with the organization), normative commitment (obligation to stay with the organization) or continuance commitment (perceived cost of leaving the organization). Each type of commitment had a different psychological impact on the relationship of the employees with the firm (Meyer et al., 1995).

Roberts and his colleagues further explained these commitments in a buyer-seller relationship and said that only affective commitment explained the relationship which the customer actually wants to maintain. On the other hand, they continued that normative commitment indicated the dependence base relationship which had

to be maintained by them. Furthermore, they showed that the continuance commitment explained the behavioural intention to maintain the relationship (Roberts, Varki and Brodie, 2003).

Hennig-Thurau and Klee (1997) used only two aspects to explain commitment as a construct. First was an emotional aspect which indicated affective component of the commitment. The second was the net benefit from the relationship which indicated the cognitive aspect of commitment. Authors ignored the behavioural aspect in the construct and said that Commitment will be high in a relationship when both rational (net benefit) and affective (emotional) bond were present (Hennig- Thurau and Klee, 1997).

Storbacka (1994) explained that the strength of the relationship is defined by the bond made by the firm with the customer, consistent satisfaction and commitment which both parties have made with each other (Storbacka, Strandvik and Grönroos, 1994).

Determinants of Relationship Quality

In this section, we will discuss ‘what exactly determines relationship quality’. Many construct have been considered as a determinant of relationship quality in past empirical researches in this area, but there are no common strategies explaining a clear path or the key drivers that affects dimensions of relationship quality. Morgan and Hunt (1994) discussed five key determinants of the marketing strategies that effects the outcomes of relationship marketing by using commitment- trust theory. The five key determinants were: 1) termination costs involve in transaction, 2) benefit from the relationship, 3) the value that both parties were sharing, 4) communication, and 5) opportunistic behaviour.

Similarly, the commonly used determinants as key factors in the service industry were: sales person’s expertise, ethical behaviour, frequency of contact, duration of the relationship, salesperson’s behaviour exhibit customer orientation and sales orientation, etc. (Crosby, Evans and Cowley, 1990; Lagace, 1991; Wray, Palmer, and Bejou, 1994. Kumar et al., (1995) used empirical study for showing the positive impact of information symmetry and interdependence between partners on their relationship.

Parsons (2002) divided all these strategies into two broad headings. The first heading was interpersonal variables that indicated seller’s characteristics (Handing risk, Relationship behaviour, mutual disclosure, Communication, customer orientation, Domain expertise, Similarities/ share value). The second heading was an aspect of relationship variables which indicated variables to motivate the customer to be in the relationship like mutual goal, benefit.

The most common dimensions mentioned in the literature are categorized into these two heading as mentioned below:

Interpersonal Variable

Sales personnel’s ethical behaviour: Ethical behaviour exhibits the behaviour of a salesperson where he will provide all relevant information about the product to customers so that customers can make better decisions. Lagace and his colleagues (1991) explained that for a seller to be considered as ethical, he must provide all the information regarding the product, its features and its availability. He must also not provide with any false information about the competitor in order to be considered behaving ethically. (Lagace, Dahlstrom, and Gassenheimer 1991). The author showed the relevancy of ethical behavior in the pharmaceutical industry. He suggested that ethical behaviour of salesperson had a significant impact on the trust of the party. It was also showed that this behaviour impacted towards the satisfaction if that medicine performs well on patients. This result again was supported by Wray et al., (1994) in his research in the financial service industry.

Later a significant impact of ethical behaviour on relationship quality was questioned by many researchers. Their research showed that ethical behaviour didn’t had a significant effect on satisfaction but had an effect on the trust (Bejou, Wray, and Ingram, 1996; Bejou, Ennew, and Palmer, 1998; Vieira, Winklhofer and Ennew, 2008).

Sales personnel’s customer satisfaction:When the market practice of sales personnel is more empathized with customer requirements and his satisfaction then increasing sales, is the situation considered as sales personnel’s customer orientation (Sullivan and Peterson, 1982; Wray, Patner and Bejou, 1994).

Saxe and Weitze (1982) had specified two factors for analyzing customer orientation. First being 'relationship' and second being 'ability to help'. The first factor, relationship, was referred as developing and maintaining long term relationship during an exchange with help of co-operation, trust and conflict resolution. The second factor, the ability to help, was referred as the quality of sales personnel to resolve the conflict that arises during transaction and help the customer (Saxe and Weitze, 1982).

On contract to customer orientation, sales personnel's selling orientation was referred as the situation when the first concern of sales personnel was selling the product instead of satisfying customers.

Wray and his colleagues (1994) suggested in his research that the relationship satisfaction was negatively related with the selling orientation and was positively related with customer orientation of sales personnel (Saxe and Weitze, 1982; Wray, Patner and Bejou 1994; and Bejou, Ennew and Palmer, 1998). It was contradicted by the result of Bejou et al. (1996), who suggested that sales personnel's selling orientation and customer satisfaction had a significant impact on relationship quality by using artificial neural network analysis (Bejou, Wray and Ingram, (1996)).

Domain expertise of sales personnel: Significant effect of domain expertise of sales personnel on relationship satisfaction and trust-building has been analyzed by a number of researchers (Woodside and Davenport, 1974; Swan et al. 1985; Crosby et al. (1991); Wray, Patner and Bejou, 1994; Bejou, Ennew and Palmer, 1998; Vieira, Winklhofer and Ennew, 2008).

The expertise of sales personnel was identified by a number of factors, like their technical knowledge, ability to demonstrate to the customer and formal qualification for providing particular core service (Swan, Trawick, I.F., and Silva, 1985; Bejou, Ennew and Palmer, 1998).

Perceived sales personnel's domain expertise of customer had a significant effect on the customer purchase intention (Lagace, Dahlstrom and Gassenheimer, 1991), building trust on relationship (Bejou, Wray and Ingram, 1996) and satisfaction from a relationship (Bejou, Ennew and Palmer, 1998).

Similarity between buyer and seller: Similarities refer to the extent to which parties shared the same personal attributes and characteristics. The also shared a common value, goal and the same level of trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Doney and Cannon 1997; Smith, 1998). According to Wilson et al. (1977), similarities between the parties played an important role in the initial stage of the relationship for creating conversation and establishing common ground for communication (Busch and Wilson (1976); Shamdasani and Balakrishna, (2000).

Smith (1998) specified that similarities directly helped in customer relationship management and indirectly affected the relationship quality. Similarities between parties, closely linked with sales personnel's credibility and building trust, later had an effect on sales effectiveness (Busch and Wilson, 1976). Morgan and Hunt (1994) said that sharing value and common goal between parties significantly affected both commitment and trust.

Knowledge of customer: Knowledge of customer was the extent to which sales personnel gave efforts towards understanding the nature of the customer and their requirements (Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, 1985; Shamdasani and Balakrishna, 2000). Parasuraman et al. (1985) specified the importance of knowing your customer for improving service quality and later was linked with relationship quality by Shamdasani and Balakrishna.

Shamdasani and Balakrishna suggested in their research that perceived knowledge of customers by sales personnel acted as a very important variable in the antecedent of satisfaction from the relationship than other variables (Shamdasani and Balakrishna, 2000).

Relational Variables

Customer's relationship benefits: Relationship benefit approach assumed that the relationship was benefiting both the parties. It was one of the most important key drivers for sustaining in same relationship for long period of time in global competition (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Gwinner, Gremler, and Bitner, 1998; Reynolds and Beatty, 1999; Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler, 2002).

From seller's point of view, these benefits could include loyalty from the customer's side, a positive word of mouth or customer retention; whereas, from customer point of view, benefits could be in core service or in relationship itself. From literature, relationship benefits could be of three types; the first type is confidential benefit; the second type is social benefit; and the third and last type is special treatment benefit (Bendapudi, Neeli and Berry, 1997; Berry, 1983).

Confidential benefit was linked to the reduction of uncertainty for future performance and customer's expectation from core service. On the other hand, social benefit played an emotional part in relationship which resulted into friendliness between parties. The last type, that is special treatment, was linked to the benefits that customer got above or beyond the core service in form of special price of service, faster service, providing convenient service and providing additional service.

Confidential benefit in relationship had a direct significant effect on customer's satisfaction and had an indirect effect on commitment (through effecting satisfaction) (Henning- Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler, 2002). This contradicted the results of some researchers who showed the significant contribution of relationship benefit for building commitment in relationship (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, and Evans, 2006).

There are empirical researches that showed the direct effect of social benefit in loyalty and commitment as a social benefit that helped in initiating the relationship (Goodwin, 1997; Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler, 2002). Whereas these researches shows that special treatment as a relationship benefit had no direct significant benefit on loyalty, they did had an indirect effect on word of mouth through commitment.

Dependence on seller: Customer dependence on relationship came after evaluations of perceived value from transaction, by comparing alternatives which were available in market (Kumar, Scheer and Steenkamp et al. 1995; Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, and Evans, 2006). Customer dependence on the relationship increased as the customer invested his time and money towards the relationship or legally bounded in the relationship because it created the switching cost for customer (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, and Evans, 2006).

Wilson et al. (1995), suggested that dependency between two parties' was effected by the degree to which they share goal. It can only be achieved by joint action and maintaining relation. The author considered mutual goals as an important antecedent that effected the dependency between parties (Wilson, 1995).

Customer dependence on relationship was increased with the increase in trust on seller and the customer's satisfaction from past few transactions. This further had a significant contribution on building commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Kumar, Scheer and Steenkamp, 1995; Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, and Evans, 2006).

Bond between buyer and seller: Bond, specified by the kind of relationship which was shared between both the parties, functioned as a switching barrier for the customer (Naudé and Buttle, 2000). Liljander and Strandvik (1995) mentioned ten different bonds that existed in consumer market for creating the barriers to exit the relationship. The authors suggested these ten barriers that the customer may have: technological, economical, legal, geographical, time, cultural, social, knowledge, ideological and psychological bond.

Liljander and Strandvik (1995) further classified these ten bonds into two factors. The first was contextual factor (customer have less control) and the second was the perceptual factor (Directly connect with customers' value and preference). First five bonds (technological, economical, legal, geographical, and time) were included in contextual factors and other last five (cultural, social, knowledge, ideological, and psychological) were included in perceptual factor.

Wilson and Jantrania, (1996) also commented on importance of social and structural bond for developing relationship. The social bond included the emotional aspect of the customer towards the relationship and indicated his perceived value of relationship. The structural bond referred the mutual investment in the relationship in the form of time and money. This made the dissolution of relationship costly and difficult both the parties.

Presence of high level of bond between parties indicated the high level of commitment in the relationship and the strength of the relationship quality (Storbacka, Strandvik and Gronroos, 1994; Naude and Buttle, 2000; Robert, Varik, and Brodie, 2003).

Communication: Communication is the most basic and important variable for exchanging the information during relationship exchange (Williams et al., 1990). Communication between buyer-seller can be formal or informal (Morgan and Hunt et al. 1994); or it can be technical or social (Henning-Thurau et al. 2000). Technical communication includes the information regarding two major aspects; fully utilizing the product and the satisfaction of the customer from core product. Social communication, on the other hand, indicated the informal way of exchanging information which helped in proper interaction between buyer-seller.

Effective communications helped in improving trust on the relationship due to which they were considered as the antecedents of relationship quality in past researches (Morgan and Hunt et al. 1994; Henning-Thurau et al. 2000; Boles, Johnson and Barksdale, 2000; Pearson et al. 2002; Vieria, Winklhofer and Ennew, 2008).

Duration of relationship: Duration of relationship indicated the journey that the buyer-seller spend on the exchange. This time factor indicated the quality of relationship between them. Lagace and his colleagues suggested that duration of past transaction was an indicator of positive relationship and satisfactory performance by seller in pharmaceutical industry (Lagace, Dahlstrom, and Gassenheimer, 1991). On the contrary to that Bejou and his colleagues did not find any significant relation between duration of relationship and satisfaction from relationship (Bejou, Ennew and Palmer, 1998).

Development of trust in relation is a matter of time. Swan and Nolan identified three stages for developing trust in relationship. The first stage was the exploration stage where the buyer had no clue about the kind of service/product that he might receive. It was purely based on reference, check and compare number of alternatives. There is minimum trust in this stage. The second stage was the performance stage, where the actual delivery of product/ service took place. In this stage the buyer had the opportunity to judge the service quality. In the third and final stage, buyer matched the performance with expectation and develops satisfaction or dissatisfaction from that transaction, hence develop trust (Swan and Nolan, (1985)).

Central to the whole discussion in this study is the belief that no single dimension, determinant or relationship construct can fully define the 'overall depth or climate' or relationship quality of an exchange relationship (Johnson et al. 1999).

Conclusion

From the discussion till now, it can be concluded that successful relationship exchanges are driven by focusing on different components of relationship quality. If a manager wants to maintain a long term relationship with his customers, then he should focus on building trust and giving them satisfaction from their transactions.

Choice of key determinants for targeting loyalty or long term relationship is situation specific. Managers should explore, 'what actually affects the preferences and the loyalty of their customers'. Further researches could explore different determinants for understanding behavioural aspect of customers in today's modern marketing era. They could also explore the role of relationship quality in building customer relationship behavior (Xie et al., 2017).

Most of the researches relating relationship quality have been analyzing customer's behaviour in offline transaction. Effects of dimension and determinants on offline transaction are possibly different from online transaction. Future research could explore the possible dimensions that effect customer behaviour at online platform (Brun et al., 2016).

Limitation of the study

This study has certain limitation as it is limited to the theoretical conceptualization of relationship quality and this concept can be further test with empirical study. This study has not use any scale and in future this concept can be explored in particular one industry like banking, tourism, insurance industry etc. This concept needs explore in Indian market.

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