

2 Relationship quality in business to business customer-supplier relationships

This chapter introduces the concept of relationship quality and presents the relevant conclusions of state-of-the-art customer relationship research and customer relationship marketing. A particular focus is on customer relationship marketing, as looking into this field of study provides an improved understanding of the various types, dimensions, and determinants of buyer-seller relationships. Furthermore, this chapter introduces the crucial factors that will allow for a comparison with the family business sector.

2.1 Introduction to relationship marketing and customer relationships

Today, customers are considered one of the most important stakeholder groups for any corporation.²⁸ In addition to relationship marketing, the focus on customer relationship management as a practice has accordingly increased in recent years.²⁹ The focus of this dissertation is on customer-supplier relationships and the way these relationships are influenced by the unique characteristics of family businesses when they are a party in the relationship. Customer-supplier relationships are of great relevance and a large body of research is available. This work focuses on the relationship itself and gives a short introduction to relationship marketing and customer relationship management. These introductions are provided to facilitate the understanding of the relationship, its antecedents, and consequences.

Marketing scholars today focus largely on a company's long-term relationships with clients, wholesalers, retailers, and suppliers. The aim of relationship marketing is the development of a company-specific network comprising the relevant stakeholder groups. Competition is no longer seen as happening between individual companies,

²⁸ Hillman and Keim (2001); Collins, Steg, and Koning, Martine A. S. (2007)

²⁹ Grönroos (2000)

but between networks of companies. Consequently, those with the best networks have the highest success probabilities, and business-to-business relationships offer opportunities to create competitive advantages and achieve superior results.³⁰ Long-term relationships with customers can be considered the essence of business-to-business marketing.³¹ Long-term competitive advantage, resulting from the investment in the collaboration process, was made clear by Jap (1999), who used a dyadic longitudinal study to investigate the collaboration process between buyers and suppliers, pointing out that the process itself is worthwhile. Within this work the ultimate focus is on supplier relationships of family firms. Nevertheless the customer relationships are very closely related to supplier relationships as it is mostly a matter of the researcher's perspective and allows for an adequate examination. This work partly builds upon relationship marketing literature and therefore a thorough introduction into the field is provided.

The term "relationship marketing" dates back to the late 1980s and early 1990s. The first appearance of the term occurs in Berry (1983). Dwyer & Oh (1987) commented that marketing research neglected the relationship aspects of buyer-seller behavior and tended to study transactions as discrete events. Grönroos (1994) called for a paradigm shift in marketing, away from the paradigm of the four Ps and marketing mix management and towards a focus on customer retention, market- and customer relationship economies. They provide a solid overview of the change from the old marketing paradigm, which lasted for decades, and towards the approach of relationship marketing. Today's focus has generally shifted from a transactional approach to a relationship marketing approach. Despite this development, a solid theoretical foundation for relationship marketing is still lacking. There is a theory-reality gap between marketing textbooks and the related fundamental theories of marketing, especially in the area of relationship marketing.³²

A relationship between two parties, a buyer and a seller, is characterized by interdependence; it is the result of a joint effort by both parties. Relationships exist

³⁰ c.f. Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders, and Wong (2010, p. 36); Jap (1999); Ulaga (2003)

³¹ Hutt and Speh (1992)

³² Gummeson (2002)

between all customers and suppliers in business markets. "Relationship marketing is marketing seen as relationships, networks and interaction. Relationships require at least two parties who are in contact with each other. The basic relationship of marketing is that between a supplier and a customer."³³ Relationship marketing involves the initiation, preservation, and improvement of stable relationships with customers and other stakeholder groups. Relationship marketing has a clear long-term focus; the aim is to provide long-term value for the buyer.³⁴ The added value for the buyer is not the sole outcome of relationship marketing. Value-creation for the seller side exists as well. It is important to note that many of the advantages (e.g. reduced uncertainty and transaction cost) apply to both sides. This dissertation relies on Bruhn's definition of relationship marketing as including "all actions for the analysis, planning, realization, and control measures that initiate, stabilize, intensify, and reactivate business relationships with the corporation's stakeholders - mainly customers - and to the creation of mutual value."³⁵ To best understand relationship marketing, the practices associated with it, and its potential drivers, it is necessary to draw a distinction between relationship marketing and transaction marketing. This comparison is helpful and furthermore important for a deeper understanding of either one. Transaction marketing is marketing focused on single transactions, especially when the fact that a customer has bought a product (or made a repeated purchase) does not influence the likelihood of any future interactions. In contrast, the influence of one purchase on the likelihood of making a second one is very important in relationship marketing. It is primarily this factor that differentiates relationship marketing from transaction marketing.³⁶ More precisely, transaction marketing, as the opposite of relationship marketing, is characterized by a short-term time horizon. Customers in transaction-related settings tend to be more price sensitive, and price sensitivity plays a major role in the context. The dominant quality dimension is the quality of the output, not the quality of the interactions as would be the case in relationship marketing. The relevant dimension has a rather technical quality dimension in spite of the more functional quality

³³ Bruhn (2004-2005, p. 120)

³⁴ Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders, and Wong (2010, p. 555)

³⁵ Bruhn (2004-2005, p. 120)

³⁶ Bruhn (2004-2005)

dimensions of the relationship-oriented approach. Of special importance is the distinction in terms of the customer satisfaction measurement. The transaction-based paradigm uses monitoring of market share as the relevant, but indirect, dimension of customer satisfaction, whereas within the relationship approach a direct measurement of the customer base is applied. Another clear and important difference is found in the internal role of marketing. This is of very limited importance to success in the transaction-oriented case, but the role is of substantial strategic importance when a relationship marketing approach is followed.³⁷ In the remainder of this dissertation, I focus solely on cases of repeated purchase, not on spot market interactions with no or extremely short customer lifecycles. Repeated purchase relationships reflect long-term relationships and are thereby in line with the core purpose of this work; they especially reflect the basic model assumptions from previous research that I build upon.³⁸ Further, this is in line with the family business-related assumptions of this work, as discussed in chapter 0 of this work.

Based on the above definition of relationship marketing, various dimensions of relationship marketing orientation can be identified. Most relevant to the focus of this work is the underlying concept of stakeholder orientation in relationship marketing. Stakeholder orientation in the context of marketing underlines marketing's aspiration to create value for all related stakeholders not only customers. Furthermore, this underlines this work's approach of analyzing the customer-supplier relationship. Others would be, for example, decision, time-horizon, or value orientation. Nevertheless, stakeholder orientation provides the most appropriate perspective for this analysis.³⁹ Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of all related stakeholder groups.

Relationship marketing is about the establishment, maintenance, and enhancement of relationships for the creation of mutual benefits. Relationship marketing and customer relationship management are two closely related concepts that need to be discussed

³⁷ Grönroos (1994)

³⁸ Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990/07); Boles, Johnson, and Barksdale (2000/4); Dwyer and Oh (1987)

³⁹ Bruhn (2004-2005)

jointly in order to clearly understand how they relate and how they differ.⁴⁰ Furthermore, when discussing only one in isolation there is a high potential for creating confusion, in part because some researchers use them interchangeably.⁴¹ According to Ryals & Payne (2001), the two terms are best distinguished by associating relationship marketing with the strategic dimension, and customer relationship management with the tactical dimension. The latter includes the implementation of relationship marketing, with an especially strong focus on information technology. Customer relationship management focuses on building and establishing relationships with profitable customers.⁴² Relationship marketing, on the other hand, and especially important in the context of this work, focuses on building relationships with an entire set of stakeholders, including those beyond the customer-supplier dyad.⁴³ A third and last major distinction pertains to the fact that relationship marketing is focused on emotional and behavioral practices, e.g. trust and reciprocity⁴⁴, while customer relationship management is focused on management practices.

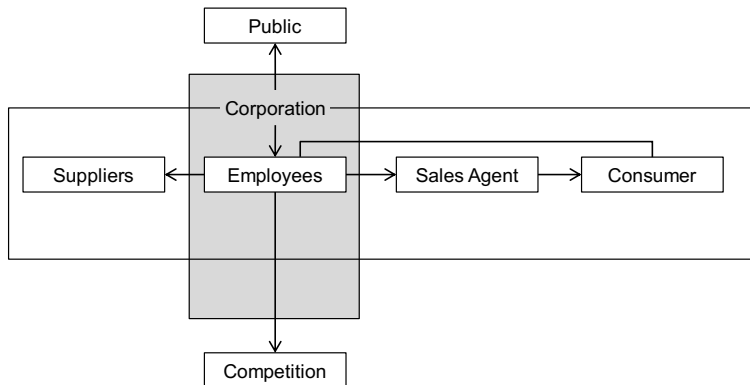


Figure 1: Marketing's stakeholders⁴⁵

⁴⁰ c.f. Das (2009)

⁴¹ see Sin, Tse, and Yim (2005)

⁴² Ryals and Payne (2001); Sin, Tse, and Yim (2005)

⁴³ c.f. Gummesson (1994); Mitussis, O'Malley, and Patterson (2006); Hunt, Arnett, and Madhavaram (2006)

⁴⁴ Sin, Tse, and Yim (2005)

⁴⁵ Bruhn (2004-2005); Meffert (2000)

2.2 Conceptualization and definition of relationship quality

For the purpose of this work, relationship quality plays a fundamental role as a relevant success measure. Relationship quality is a higher order construct with independent, yet interlinked dimensions.⁴⁶ It can be regarded as a meta construct but has no universally accepted definition. Generally, it reflects the overall nature of relationships between a buyer and a seller.⁴⁷ The relationship quality approach is the most promising approach in relationship marketing.⁴⁸ Also noteworthy is the relational benefits approach.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, this work focuses on the relationship quality approach and lays out its dimensions in chapter 2.3. The core variables most often used are satisfaction, commitment, and trust. Further dimensions of relationship quality are trust, commitment and reciprocity⁵⁰, mutual value for all members of the relationship⁵¹, level of involvement⁵², communication quality⁵³, power or dependence of the relationship partners⁵⁴, longevity of the relationship⁵⁵ and shared technology⁵⁶.

The research direction's starting point can be seen in the work by Dwyer & Oh (1987). The topic was firmly established by the landmark study of Crosby, Evans, & Cowles (1990/07), and virtually all relationship quality studies published since then refer to it. Following this study a stream of research within the relationship marketing field can be identified. This stream increased slowly at first, but after 1995 a vast number of different approaches to the topic of relationship quality were developed. Few definitions of relationship quality exist. Hennig-Thurau & Hansen (2000) point out that researchers

⁴⁶ c.f. Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990/07); Dwyer and Oh (1987); Kumar, Scheer, and Steenkamp (1995)

⁴⁷ c.f. Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler (2002)

⁴⁸ see Crosby et al. 1990, Dorsch et al. 1998, Smith 1998a

⁴⁹ see Bendapudi and Berry (1997); Gwinner, Gremler, and Bitner (1998); Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler (2002)

⁵⁰ Morgan and Hunt (1994); Berry (1995a); Palmer, Barrett, and Ponsonby (2000)

⁵¹ Payne and Holt (2001)

⁵² Gummeson (2002)

⁵³ Menon, Bharadwaj, and Howell (1996/Fall96); Menon, Bharadwaj, Adidam, and Edison (1999); Roberts, Varki, and Brodie (2003)

⁵⁴ Wilson (1995)

⁵⁵ Lagace, Dahlstrom, and Gassenheimer (1991); Ganesan (1994); Gummeson (2002)

⁵⁶ Wilson (1995)

tend to assume that everyone has some kind of intuitive understanding of what relationship quality involves and that, as a consequence, sophisticated discussion of this issue is rare. In this chapter information regarding characteristics of relationship quality is provided and determinants are introduced to provide a comprehensive picture. As a logical result, the cited attributes are not mutually exclusive, especially when compared across different models, which follow different approaches.

For this dissertation, relationship quality is considered a higher order construct made up of several distinct, but related dimensions. This is in line with past research.⁵⁷ Dwyer & Oh (1987) suggest that high levels of satisfaction, trust and minimal opportunism reflect a quality relationship. Satisfaction therefore is the overall satisfaction with the relationship being focused on. Minimal opportunism is related to low tendencies to shirk obligations and distort information. And thirdly, satisfaction is conceptualized as expectations that the other desires coordination and will meet the relevant obligations. Crosby, Evans, & Cowles (1990/07) conceptualize relationship quality in terms of trust and satisfaction. They provided one of the first definitions of relationship quality: "The customer is able to rely on the salesperson's integrity and has confidence in the salesperson's future performance because the level of past performance has been consistently satisfactory." Accordingly, trust, in a relational sales context, can be defined as "a confident belief that the salesperson can be relied upon to behave in such a manner that the long-term interest of the customer will be served." Satisfaction is described as "an emotional state that occurs in response to an evaluation of the interaction experience with the salesperson".⁵⁸ It is centered on the roles assumed and performed by the individual parties.⁵⁹ For Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp (1995) relationship quality consists of conflict, trust, commitment, willingness to invest and expectation of continuity. Conflict is seen as behavior that has hindering characteristics in terms of goal accomplishment of the firm or directly blocks these. Further on perceived conflict is an acknowledged or perceived degree of present conflict. Trust has a dual meaning, first regarding the honesty of the partner, expecting him to stand

⁵⁷ Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990/07); Dwyer and Oh (1987); Kumar, Scheer, and Steenkamp (1995)

⁵⁸ Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990/07); Westbrook (1981)

⁵⁹ Murstein (1977)

by its word, fulfill the role obligations and be sincere. The second dimension of trust within this piece of research is the trust in a partner's benevolence – the belief that the partner is interested in the firm's welfare and unexpected actions with negative effect are not anticipated. In summary, the trust is expected to be present when a firm believes in honesty and benevolence on the partner's side. Commitment is related to the willingness to invest. Affective commitment means the actual desire to continue the relationship. Willingness to invest is reflected by a desire to do more than just continue the relationship, investing and becoming more deeply involved by spending either effort or capital or increasing the identification with the relationship with which each is associated to a certain degree of risk taking. By comparison, Hennig-Thurau & Klee's definition of relationship quality is more focused on the customer (1997): "...the degree of appropriateness of the relationship to fulfill the needs of the customer associated with the relationship." Relationship quality there is a construct consisting of the product or service quality, the customer's trust and his or her commitment to the seller side. This work follows the definitions by Crosby, Evans, & Cowles (1990/07).

Many factors may contribute to the quality of a buyer-seller relationship. Different compositions of the relationship quality dimensions are advocated for in literature. In the context and the very special approach of this work, taking a strict focus on family firms, RQ is conceptualized as a high-order construct composed of two dimensions, relationship trust and relationship satisfaction. Therefore, I later hypothesize that both relationship trust and relationship satisfaction have a positive impact on relationship quality, which follows existing opinion. Trust is often cited as a critical ingredient for determining relationship success.⁶⁰ Trust is believed to alleviate risk and to increase cooperation in exchange relationships.⁶¹ Generally, trust is considered to be a catalyst for various business transactions.⁶²

Satisfaction refers to the degree to which interactions between the buyer and the seller meet expectations for performance; this can be based on evaluations of the tangible

⁶⁰ Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987); Morgan and Hunt (1994); Wilson (1995); Schurr and Ozanne (1985)

⁶¹ Schurr and Ozanne (1985); Swan and Nolan (1985)

⁶² Nooteboom (2002); Williamson (1993)

product or non-product related attributes such as delivery, service, or communication.⁶³ Relationship quality may depend on the nature of the organizations involved, the individuals in the organizations, and the nature of the situation.⁶⁴ A literature analysis delivers strong support for the chosen dimensions. Over 160 studies have analyzed the dimensions of trust and satisfaction. Among the constructs developed to define relationship marketing, more than 50 separate constructs exist; nevertheless, no other construct is cited half as often as the two named ones.⁶⁵

Table 1 Dimensions of Relationship Quality⁶⁶

Author (Year)	Dimension of Relationship Quality
Crosby, Evans, & Cowles (1990/07); Morgan & Hunt (1994); Berry (1995b); Palmer, Barrett, & Ponsonby (2000)	trust, commitment and reciprocity
Jamal & Getz (1995)	common vision, goals and objectives
Payne & Holt (2001)	mutual value for all members of the relationship
Gordon, McKeage, & Fox (1998); Gummesson (2008)	level of involvement in the relationship
Thunman (1992); Wilson (1995)	the existence and strength of bonds

⁶³ Wilson (1995)

⁶⁴ Parsons (2002)

⁶⁵ c.f. Agariya and Singh (2011)

⁶⁶ c.f. Athanasopoulou (2006)

Author (Year)	Dimension of Relationship Quality
Menon, Bharadwaj, & Howell (1996///Fall96); Roberts, Varki, & Brodie (2003); Menon, Bharadwaj, Adidam, & Edison (1999)	communication quality
Zineldin (1995)	the environment of the relationship (economic, legal/political, technical, and competitive)
Zineldin (1995); Wilson (1995)	power/dependence of relationship partners
Lagace, Dahlstrom, & Gassenheimer (1991); Ganesan, Brown, Mariadoss, & Ho (2010); Ganesan (1994); Gummesson (2008)	longevity of the relationship
Wilson (1995)	shared technology
Wilson (1995); Gummesson (2008)	adaptation
Crosby, Evans, & Cowles (1990/07); Anderson & Narus (1990/01)	satisfaction with the relationship

Gummesson (2008)

the degree of collaboration versus competition of partners, the importance of the relationship for each partner, risk and uncertainty, attraction, formality, informality and transparency, routinization, content, closeness and remoteness

2.3 Literature analysis on the dimensions and antecedents of relationship quality

The unit of analysis within this work is a specific customer-supplier relationship, in other words the relationship between a specific buyer and a specific seller. Within this dissertation, I developed a framework that identifies variables that influence the relationship quality between a buyer and a seller. This framework builds on existing studies regarding the relationship quality and takes those considerations into account.⁶⁷ Furthermore, it makes it possible to derive new findings about family business relationships and provides a starting point for further research on family business stakeholder relationships.

To develop a reliable and robust framework, a structured review of the existing literature was undertaken. The methodology of the analysis followed approved structures and a hands-on approach.⁶⁸

The goal was to find relevant literature that contributes theoretical or empirical results with regard to customer-supplier relationships and relationship quality in dyadic (no network studies) business-to-business customer-supplier relations, and further, existing and applicable customer relationship constructs. Additionally, any of the mentioned aspects or relevant foundations with regard to family businesses were of

⁶⁷ c.f. Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990/07); Boles, Johnson, and Barksdale (2000/4); Gummesson (1999)

⁶⁸ Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003); David and Han (2004)

great interest and were included in the focus of the literature search. To start the broad review I selected 21 journals⁶⁹ and 10 relevant keywords.⁷⁰ These decisions were based on existing literature reviews⁷¹ and on the author's prior research experience in the field. An early decision was made to include only journal articles and no book chapters or unpublished works; those articles went through a certain review process that should guarantee a level of methodological and conceptual rigor. The referred journals do show relevant requirements and minimum standards for publications. Furthermore, this allows for a consistent approach in terms of systematic search through completely available electronic abstracts; this as well is favorable in terms of output quality. It is important to notice that an availability bias at this point does not need to be considered. Consideration of published works only may lead to an overestimation of effects due to biases towards the publishing of only significant results. Nevertheless, the results of published and unpublished works can be considered "essentially identical" and therefore no problem with an availability bias is to be expected.⁷² Furthermore, Cooper, p. 58 (1989) argue that the general directions are, if several dozen and more research works are considered, fundamentally correct and only the magnitude of effects could be questioned if anything. It becomes clear when applied to the context of this dissertation here that the approach is adequate as the review is intended to provide basic direction and not precisely work out single effects. In view of the special positioning of this dissertation at the intersection of two fields of research, relevant journals in the family business domain were taken into account as well. Regarding the family business branch of the search, Family Business

⁶⁹ Academy of Management Review, Die Betriebswirtschaft DBW / Business Administration Review – BARev, Entrepreneurship: Theory & Practice, European Journal of Marketing, Family Business Review, Industrial Marketing Management, International Journal of Consumer Studies, International Journal of Market Research, Journal für Betriebswirtschaft, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Business to Business Marketing, Journal of Business Venturing, Journal of Family Business Strategy, Journal of Management Studies, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Relationship Marketing, Journal of Small Business Management, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Zeitschrift für Betriebswirtschaft, Zeitschrift für betriebswirtschaftliche Forschung, Zeitschrift für KMU und Entrepreneurship

⁷⁰ Relationship Quality, Relationship Marketing, Customer Relations, Relationship Duration, Supplier Relationship, Buyer-Supplier Relations, Customer Loyalty, Stakeholder Relationships, Family Firm, Family Business, Trust

⁷¹ Samiee and Walters (2003); Athanasopoulou (2009); Ngai (2005); Das (2009); Frank, Lueger, Nosé, and Suchy (2010)

⁷² Hunter and Schmidt (2004, pp. 507–509)

Review (FBR), Entrepreneurship, Theory & Practice (ET&P), Journal of Business Venturing (JBV) and Journal of Small Business Management (JSBM) have been included. These journals are regarded to be "the most appropriate outlets for family business studies"⁷³ and are recognized to account for a major portion of family business research.⁷⁴

After completing the preparation, venues and keywords were reviewed, discussed and confirmed with an experienced scholar in the field. The search itself was carried out by entering the combined search strings to the EBSCO host (Business Source Complete). Combined search strings are, for example, [AB ("Relationship Quality") AND SO (Academy of Management Review)]. The keywords were always searched for in title, keywords, and abstracts. A total of 210 search strings were performed. The combination of search strings in the various journals produced a combined 1151 hits in total; for example, the keyword "trust" produced 258 hits (22% of the total hits). Nevertheless, many of these are double hits as a journal article might appear within the results of distinct search terms. Double hits had to be eliminated while scanning, analyzing and categorizing the remaining works. First, by reading the title and selectively scanning the abstract, once more substantively irrelevant articles were excluded. The author excluded e.g. non-relevant business-to-consumer articles; generally speaking, there had to be a substantive relevance at this point, meaning that keywords were mentioned in a relevant context in the abstract and that the research context of the individual article had to be promising in light of the given context. Afterwards, the remaining results were consolidated and it was ensured that substantial relevance was given. After this first review, 260 individual articles were exported to a reference management program, including the related citation information and abstracts. Further on, this allowed for a precise review and inclusion or exclusion of the remaining articles. In a next step the works were individually categorized. This included selective reading of the article and ensured the relevance of the remaining articles. This categorization took into account several characteristics.

⁷³ Chrisman, Kellermanns, Chan, and Liano (2010, p. 10)

⁷⁴ Chrisman, Chua, Kellermanns, Matherne III, and Debicki (2008); Chrisman, Kellermanns, Chan, and Liano (2010)

Among these was the differentiation between family firm, and non-family firm context, categorization according to the theoretical base and categorization according to the methodological approach of each paper. Empirical works, as well as those which provided existing frameworks of relationship quality and its antecedents, were expected to be of the greatest importance for this dissertation.

A further qualitative analysis of the articles was done by the author, relating to the initial goal of the literature analysis, to find relevant literature that contributes theoretical or empirical results with regard to customer relationships and relationship quality in dyadic business-to-business customer relations. Irrelevant articles, which could not further contribute to the model development or creation of additional insight, were excluded and the relevant articles were further categorized according to the relevance and the applicability to this research's context. The literature review ultimately provided a strong foundation for the presentation and discussion of the framework of relationship quality. The procedure of the analysis ensures that the approach of this thesis is generally in line with the state of the art research and that the framework developed is based on solid fundamentals.

2.4 Conceptual Relationship Quality Framework

This chapter introduces a framework of relationship quality and the relevant related antecedents. The relationship quality framework has a fundamental role within this dissertation. Furthermore, it is in line with the conducted literature search and analysis and reflects the current state of existing literature as described in section 2.3.

Agreeing with and building upon existing literature, the analysis showed that relational selling behaviors are the most important antecedents to relationship quality and that they influence the relational success.⁷⁵ Therefore, the analysis of those relational selling behaviors on the seller side, in the context of this study, are the most suitable and most promising. The seller side is essentially the supplier in a customer-supplier

⁷⁵ Smith (1998); Woo and Cha (2002/12); Athanasopoulou (2009); Boles, Johnson, and Barksdale (2000/4)

relationship; however, the term seller is more intuitive in discussions of the relational selling behaviors and relationship marketing literature tends to use the terms seller- and buyer-side. That said, the dimensions and conceptualizations of relationship quality found in literature vary. The dimensions cited most often are trust, commitment, and satisfaction. In addition to these, dimensions such as cooperation, opportunism, power, and conflict are also found frequently.⁷⁶ In the study at hand they are expressed in the seller side's self-disclosure and cooperative intentions and in the interaction intensity. These and related constructs have frequently been used in past research.⁷⁷ Relational selling behaviors are the main influential factors with regard to perceived relationship quality and the increase in the relationship quality of the buyer.⁷⁸

The framework uses three sub constructs for the relational selling behaviors, each focused on the seller side; this is also in line with this study's research design. These are (a) *self-disclosure*, (b) *cooperative intentions*, and (c) *interaction intensity*. Generally speaking, the relational selling behaviors are intended to cultivate the buyer-seller relationship. Seller side's self-disclosure describes the degree to which a selling party opens up towards the buyer side and offers information about, for example, their own company or their personal career or views, or even private information. Cooperative intentions express the selling side's interest in a long-lasting relationship as perceived by the buyer. The buyer judges whether the relationship itself is more important than a single transaction to the seller and if the seller would be willing to help without a directly related personal benefit. The interaction intensity measures the frequency of interaction and the occasions used to interact with each other. For the mentioned sub constructs (a-c), there is no precise definition provided in literature. Besides the explanation, one best understands each sub construct when looking into the items it is measured with. These are provided in chapter 5, in Table 9, Table 10

⁷⁶ Athanasopoulou (2009)

⁷⁷ c.f. Smith (1998/03); Boles, Johnson, and Barksdale (2000/4); Doney and Cannon (1997/04); Zineldin (1995); Leuthesser (1997); Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990/07)

⁷⁸ Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990/07); Doney and Cannon (1997/04); Boles, Johnson, and Barksdale (2000/4)

and Table 11. Furthermore, the dependent variable's items are listed in Table 12 and Table 13. And they are part of the questionnaire provided in the appendix.

The impact is, among others, seen in a closer relationship leading to more personal and needs-related information sharing, and in the expression of cooperative intentions and long-term interest. Personal and needs-related information sharing can be seen in terms of frequency but more specifically in the type of information shared between the acting individuals. Private information and professional background information can be shared in varying degrees. Cooperative intentions relate to the buyer's perception of the long-term interest the seller side has. Reduced uncertainty applies from the buyer perspective and is favorable with regard to transaction costs. Uncertainty means the potential failure of products and services and other related negative outcomes.⁷⁹ Furthermore, time investment is perceived as something valuable and reciprocity plays an important role in relationships. Several theories, such as the trust-attraction theory and the social exchange theory provide explanations for the reciprocity of self-disclosure. Social exchange theory suggests that it is rewarding to receive a disclosure. When a person receives something of value, he feels obligated to return something of similar value in the form of a similar disclosure; it is similar with time spent.⁸⁰

The model developed here finds strong support in the fact that the initial business to consumer oriented study of Crosby, Evans, & Cowles (1990/07) was replicated in a business-to-business environment by Boles, Johnson, & Barksdale (2000/4). This suggests that the initial model has a good generalizability and the results of Boles, Johnson, & Barksdale (2000/4) indicate that relationship quality is even more important for business-to-business customers in rating a salesperson than it is for consumers. Furthermore, the study extends the relationship quality model by Crosby, Evans, & Cowles (1990/07). With a data set of approximately 1,000 customers in a business-to-business setting, they replicate and extend the original study. A major finding is that the study they replicated shows a good replicability (indicated by fit indices); the model

⁷⁹ Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990/07); Zeithaml (2000)

⁸⁰ Archer (1979); Shamdasani and Jung (2011)

suggested shows high degrees of generalizability to different sales settings. Six out of eight hypotheses within the work of Boles, Johnson, & Barksdale (2000/4) were closely related to the work of Crosby, Evans, & Cowles (1990/07) and were supported; the two other hypotheses were related as well, but did not find support in the related data. The study is extended by equity as an antecedent to relationship quality. Equity in this context is regarded as a measure of equality from the customers' perspective. The authors follow the suggestion that fairness is regarded as the dominant dimension of equity and that equity is a key component in the maintenance of customer relationships. Therefore, they build upon an existing three-item scale addressing whether the customer feels fairly treated.⁸¹

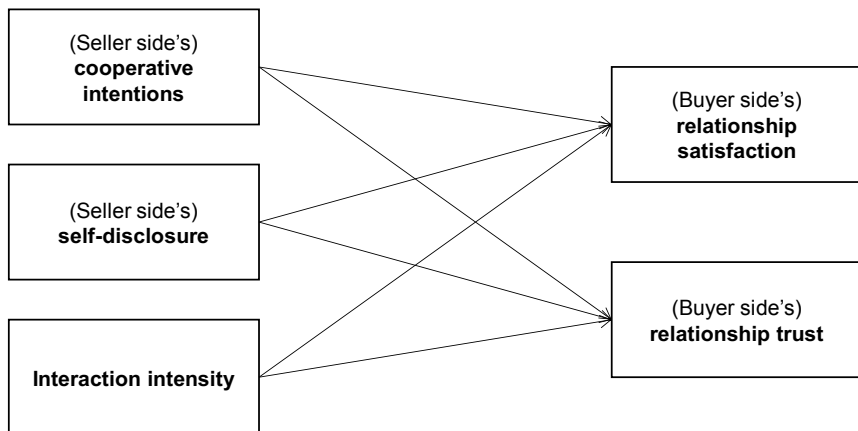


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

Other factors aside from the mentioned sub constructs of cooperative intentions, self-disclosure and interaction intensity were not included in this dissertation's conceptual framework. None of the potential additional dimensions indicated a relevant interaction with the unique characteristics of family firms based on the underlying theoretical

⁸¹ Oliver and Swan (1989)

expectations. At the same time, no other relevant dimensions that would have been interesting in terms of the family firm characteristic demonstrated the necessary methodological or conceptual rigor in the existing literature from the marketing field. Those relevant family firm characteristics and the underlying theories are discussed in the following chapter. This work focuses on the intersection between two research areas and in this consequence the chosen dimensions are expected to be of relevance. Other dimensions, such as conflict or communication within a relationship, based on their theoretical foundation, do not offer the expectation of relevant interaction.⁸²

⁸² Kumar, Scheer, and Steenkamp (1995); Myhal, Kang, and Murphy (2008)



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