



AENSI Journals

Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences

Journal home page: www.ajbasweb.com



## Relationship Quality as a Strategic Tool in Today's Turbulent Business World

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### ARTICLE INFO

**Article history:**

Received 22 October 2013

Received in revised form 14

January 2014

Accepted 20 January 2014

Available online 1 February 2014

**Keywords:**

Literature review, relationship quality

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Creating and maintaining long term relationships with customers is considered as a source of competitive advantage nowadays. Relationship quality is one of the important concepts in relationship marketing. Previous scholars have given numerous conceptualizations of relationship quality and there has been a healthy debate on its dimensions. Past research has stressed the importance of relationship quality and highlighted its role to build customer loyalty particularly in the service sector. **Objectives:** This paper aims to review the literature on relationship quality enriched with the findings and insights about the antecedents and consequences of relationship quality. **Conclusion:** Relationship quality has gained a significant position as a leading focus point in theory as well as practice. Successful organizations use relationship quality as a strategic tool to compete against their rivals in today's turbulent business environments. Therefore, future research should focus more on understanding this variable and examining the effect of this variable as a contemporary strategic tool.

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**To Cite This Article:** Haim Hilman, Noor Hasmini Abd Ghani, Jalal Hanaysha., Relationship Quality as a Strategic Tool in Today's Turbulent Business World. *Aust. J. Basic & Appl. Sci.*, 7(14): 478-487, 2013

## INTRODUCTION

The current business scenario is characterized by increasing competition, by which firms compete with each other aggressively in order to attract customers and sustain them. The highly changing environment requires firms to look for additional flexible and creative means to respond to such competition and maintain their customers. To do so, firms have become more conscious towards improving their relationship with existing as well as prospective customers. This necessitates business leaders to search for a possible means to sustain long-term relationships with their customers, which is called relationship marketing.

Relationship marketing refers to "all marketing activities directed towards establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges" (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p: 22). Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) illustrated that the main objective of relationship marketing is to improve marketing productivity through ensuring efficiency and effectiveness. Therefore, building, improving, maintaining, and developing successful relational exchanges with business customers requires firms to invest in further resources to attain their goal (Kim, Trail and Ko, 2011).

The idea of relationship marketing was originally begun in 1983 by Leonard Berry, and it has become in the recent years among the key important topics in business practice and marketing research. Relationship marketing issues have gained significant research attention from numerous scholars, particularly during the last two decades by indicating that marketing agendas are dominated by this topic (Berry, 1983; Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987; Crosby, Evans and Cowles, 1990; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Managing business relationships successfully is a critical issue that received a lot of debates between academics and practitioners. For example, Ali (2011) demonstrated that firms nowadays face severe competition, and one of the key success factors to survive in dynamic markets depends on creating and maintaining long-term relationships with customers.

A key concept in relationship marketing is relationship quality, which refers also to relationship strength or relationship closeness and plays an important role in influencing customer loyalty (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal and Evans, 2006; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002). In general, relationship quality refers to the overall evaluation of relationship strength (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999) and confines the core of relationship marketing (Ural, 2007). It is very important to understand relationship quality and its effect on the outcomes of customer behaviour, because it provides valuable insights for business managers to develop efficient strategies which may possibly permit them to acquire more customers and maintain them (Tang and Carlson, 2011).

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Relationship quality is a reflection of positive relationship outcomes which indicates the strength of a relationship that meets the need and expectation of particular parties. i.e firms and their customers (Smith, 1998). This relationship shapes the total impression that customers have, pertaining to the entire relationship that they enclose with those firms (Wong and Sohal, 2002). Indeed, the success of any firm depends on its ability to retain the added values by establishing long-term relationships according the experience and knowledge, hence consumers can be connected and interact with the firm (Taleghani, Largani and Mousavian, 2011). To elaborate more, long-term relationships with customers form the basis for the continued success of firms and improve their level of competitiveness (Taleghani *et al.*, 2011).

### Definitions of Relationship Quality

Relationship quality has gained significant interests from academic scholars in the recent years as a valuable strategy to enhance business performance through building enduring relationship with customers (Ivens, 2004; Tan *et al.*, 2011; Nammir, Marane and Ali (2012). As stated earlier, relationship quality is concerned more with developing long-term customer relationships than building short-term transactions with customers. Past literature declared that a high quality of relationship is crucial for business success, and it can lead to improved customer commitment (Lee, Chu and Chao, 2011). Such a relationship increases customers' confidence and facilitates the process of maintaining a good relationship with them (Lee *et al.*, 2011). Relationship quality is regarded "as a meta-construct reflecting the overall nature of relationships between companies and consumers" (Henning-Thurau, 2000, p: 235). Consequently, it constitutes the total impression that customers have with reference to the entire relationship including various transactions (Gronoos, 2002).

However, although relationship quality has received a great interest in the recent year, there still no consistent definition for this term (Doma, 2013). Crosby, Evans and Cowles (1990) are those who initially introduced the concept of relationship quality. They declared that relationship quality involves a general assessment of the strength of a relationship, and the degree to which the needs and expectations of the parties are met from that relationship. Besides, Jarvelin and Lehtinen, (1996) defined relationship quality as the perception of customers towards the ability of a firm to fulfill the expectations, predictions, goals, and desires of those customer and how well they evaluate the whole relationship.

Relationship quality has also been defined as a set of intangible attributes that result in a valuable long-term relationship among customers and firms (Fruchter and Sigue, 2005). Recently, relationship quality has been defined by Nammir *et al.* (2012) as the perception of customers towards the integrity and confidence in the supplier and his future performance as a result of satisfaction from the past performance. However, a summary of definitions for this construct are provided in Table 1 below. It can be noted from the table that most of the researchers agreed that relationship quality reflects the strength and overall evaluation of the relationship between a firm and its customers.

**Table 1:** Definitions of Relationship Quality.

Levitt (1986)	Relationship quality has been originally termed as a set of intangible values that enhances products or services, and results in an anticipated exchange between companies and their customers.
Crosby, Evans and Cowles (1990)	An overall assessment of relationship strength and the degree to which that relationship fulfills the needs and expectations of particular parties involved with regard to previous successful or unsuccessful events.
Kumar, Scheer, and Steenkamp (1995)	They define relationship quality as the total evaluation of the depth and strength of a relationship that offers insight into the relational exchange performance.
Jarvelin and Lehtinen (1996)	The perceptions of customers towards how well the overall relationship meets their goals, expectations, desires, and predictions that they form about the entire relationship.
Hennig-Thurau and Klee (1997, p: 751)	"The degree of appropriateness of a relationship to fulfill the needs of the customer associated with the relationship."
Fournier (1998)	Relationship quality reflects the extent to which a firm conveys an important concerns of its identity, themes, or tasks, thus suggesting an important facet of self image.
Smith (1998, p: 4)	"An overall assessment of the strength of a relationship and the extent to which it meets the needs and expectations of the parties based on a history of successful or unsuccessful encounters or events".
Johnson (1999, p: 6)	"The overall depth and climate of the interfirm relationship".
Henning-Thurau <i>et al.</i> (2002, p.235).	Relationship quality is regarded "as a meta-construct composed of several components reflecting the overall nature of relationships between companies and consumers".
Holmlund (2001, p: 15)	"Relationship quality is the cognitive evaluation of business interactions by key individuals in the dyad, comparatively with potential alternative interactions".
Griffith (2002)	Relationship quality is defined as the strength of the relationship and the potential for such relationship to continue and evolve.
Roberts <i>et al.</i> (2003, p: 191)	"A measure of the extent to which consumers want to maintain relationships with their service providers"
Algesheimer <i>et al.</i> (2005)	The extent to which customers consider a brand as satisfactory partner in a long-term relationship; it is the general evaluation of consumers toward the depth and strength of their relationship with that brand.
Trang <i>et al.</i> (2005)	It refers to the affiliation of relationship strength and the degree to which that relationship meets the needs and expectations of both companies and their customer in relation to past successful or unsuccessful dealings.

Fruchter and Sigue (2005)	Relationship quality has been defined as a set of intangible features that result from the expectation of long-term relationship between certain parties.
Palmatier <i>et al.</i> (2006, p: 138)	“Overall assessment of the strength of a relationship, conceptualized as a composite or multidimensional construct capturing the different but related facets of a relationship”.
Gyau and Spiller (2008)	The perception of companies towards how well their relationships with customers meet their needs, goals, expectations, and predictions.
(Sublaban and Aranha (2008)	Relationship equity reflects the view of customers to the quality or strength of a relationship between them and a particular brand.
Chen and Myagmarsuren (2011)	Relationship quality measures the experience of customers with regard to their satisfaction, trust, and commitment towards a brand.
Keating, Alpert, Kriz and Quazi, (2011, p: 6)	The “customers’ cognitive and affective evaluation based on the personal experience across all service episodes within the relationship.”
Nammir <i>et al.</i> (2012)	The perception of customers on the integrity of a salesperson and the degree to which they have confidence that the salespersons will perform well in the future as a result of their past experience.

### Dimensions of Relationship Quality:

Relationship quality has been measured in previous research through a set of dimensions. However, the mainly quoted dimensions for measuring or conceptualizing relationship quality in the literature are trust, commitment and satisfaction (Yang, Wu and Wang, 2010). For instance, Dwyer *et al.* (1987) examined the concept of relationship quality in a service context and used two dimensions to measure relationship quality. The dimensions included are: trust and satisfaction. On the other hand, Crosby *et al.* (1990) used trust and satisfaction in their study as dimensions of relationship quality. Morgan and Hunt (1994) established a model for measuring this variable and found that trust and commitment were the most appropriate dimensions for conceptualizing relationship quality.

Furthermore, Keating, Rugimbana and Quazi (2003) used seven dimensions to measure relationship quality. The dimensions include: liking, trust, effort, cooperation, value, understanding, and communication. Whereas, Roberts *et al.*, (2003) illustrated five dimensions for relationship quality, which are, trust in partner’s benevolence, affective conflict, affective commitment, trust in partner’s honesty, and satisfaction. Recently, Yang, Wu and Wang (2010) also used trust, commitment, and satisfaction as dimensions of relationship quality. However, a summary of relationship quality dimensions as discussed in previous researches is presented in table 2.

**Table 2:** Relationship Quality Dimensions.

Authors	Dimensions of Relationship Quality
Dorsch <i>et al.</i> (1998); Ivens (2004); Ulaga and Eggert (2006); Yang and Wu (2008); Yang, Wu, and Wang (2010); Lu, Fulford and Rafiq (2005); De Cannie’ re, Pelsmacker and Geuens (2010); Lee, Chu, and Chao (2011); Chen and Myagmarsuren (2011); Pi and Huang (2011); Liang, Ho, Li and Turban (2012); Valta (2013); Doma, (2013); Doaei, Rezaei and Khajei (2011); Bojei and Alwie (2010); Taleghani <i>et al.</i> , (2011)	Trust, commitment and satisfaction
Dwyer <i>et al.</i> (1987); Crosby <i>et al.</i> (1990); Lin and Ding (2004); Liu and Wu (2009); Ou, Shih, Chen and Wang (2011); Han and Hyun (2012); Castellanos-Verdugo and Beerapermal (2009); Hyun (2010); Boniface, Gyau and Stringer (2009)	Trust and satisfaction
Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner and Gremler (2002)	Satisfaction and commitment
Morgan and Hunt (1994); Hibbard, Kumar and Stern (2001); Keating, Alpert, Kriz and Quazi (2011); Lee and Kang (2012)	Trust and commitment
Kim <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Trust, Commitment, Intimacy, Identification, Reciprocity
Ndubisi (2007)	Trust, commitment, communication and conflict handling.
Hashim and Yasin (2012)	Commitment, passion and intimacy
Ural (2009)	Satisfaction, communication quality, information sharing, and long-term orientation
Cater and Zabkar (2009)	Trust, social bonds, satisfaction, and commitments
Ward and Dagger (2007)	Trust, benevolence, and commitment)
Gregoire, Tripp and Legoux (2009)	Trust, commitment and social benefits
Hunt, Brimble and Freudenberg (2011)	Trust, commitment, engagement, empowerment, level of client activity, and ownership
Kim and Han (2008)	Satisfaction, trust, and loyalty intentions
Tan, Mavondo and Worthington (2011)	trust, commitment and cooperation
Fourmier (1998)	Brand partner quality, Self connection, Intimacy, Nostalgia, Love and passion, Commitment, and Interdependence.
Gwin, (2013)	Brand partner-brand, brand partner-consumer, love and passion, intimacy, self-connection, and nostalgia
Keating, Rugimbana and Quazi (2003)	Trust, value, effort, communication, cooperation, liking and understanding
Roberts, Varki and Brodie (2003)	honesty, trust in partner’s benevolence, affective commitment, satisfaction and affective conflict

Based on the analysis of past studies which used relationship quality as one of the variables in their research frameworks, it is evident that most of the research agreed on using trust, commitment, and satisfaction as the dimensions for relationship quality. Many of those studies reported significant effect of these relationship quality dimensions on other variables. As trust, commitment, and satisfaction have been commonly used dimensions for relationship quality, therefore a brief comprehension of each of these dimensions is given below.

#### **Trust:**

Trust is one of the most important components of relationship quality (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Fournier, 1998). As defined by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001, p: 82), brand trust refers to "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function". Trust shows the honesty and benevolence of the brand, prioritizing the interest of both parties (a brand and its customers) in order to have trust, and demonstrates that it is necessary to believe their partners' transaction (Wang, 2009). Brand trust was also defined by Garbarino and Johnson (1999) as the confidence of customers towards the reliability and quality of a brand. They demonstrated that customers are likely to be committed to a relationship that is established on the basis of trust. Previous empirical and theoretical research confirmed that trust has significant influence on building relationship quality with the brand in a variety of different contexts.

The significance of trust in creating and sustaining long-term relationships between organizations and their customers has been frequently harassed in the existing literature (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987; Palmatier *et al.*, 2006; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). Sargeant and Lee (2004) affirmed that trust helps brands to minimize the costs of marketing, because it provides a strong basis for building enduring and valuable relationships between them and their customer. Morgan and Hunt (1994) regarded trust as the main factor of any long-term relationship. Seppänen, Blomqvist and Sundqvist (2007) in providing significant literature reviews on brand trust, indicated that scholars in inter organizational relationships have repeatedly suggested that relationship trust is a key factor for creating relationship quality.

Trust in today's competition is considered to be the main factor leading to loyalty. For instance McDonalds makes programs and corporate level policies to instill the element of trust for their customers through their common infrastructure and corporate culture across the world. McDonalds has focused on numerous principles to increase customers' trust such as providing food with high quality, clean and pleasurable environment, quick service attached with a smile, and all at reasonable price. Quality, cleanliness, value, and services have become the philosophy that guides business success for McDonalds. Toyota is another example that has been successful in building customer trust through its emphasis on quality. Toyota is very much concerned about producing the best quality vehicles for its customers. Quality, guarantee and quality assurance were the main basis of establishing relationship trust between Toyota and its customers. All over the world, there is a widespread positive feeling by the majority of Toyota's customers for its performance. A large number of customers feel that Toyota delivers top quality vehicles ensuring durability and good designs.

#### **Commitment:**

Commitment has extensively been underlined as an important construct that clarifies the nature of a relationship among companies and their consumers, and it plays a vital role in the consumption decision of particular customers (Funk and Pritchard, 2006; Funk and James, 2001). In any relationship marketing activity, commitment is regarded as an important element for sustaining long-term relationship (Wang, 2009; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). Commitment has been described previously as "an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it; that is, the committed party believes that relationship is worth working on to ensure that it endures indefinitely" (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p: 23). Brand commitment was also defined as "an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" with a brand (Moorman *et al.*, 1992).

Commitment is one of the most significant variables for understanding the strength of relationship marketing, and it is a valuable dimension for measuring customer loyalty and forecasting future purchase intentions (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Gundlach *et al.*, 1995; Dwyer *et al.*, 1987). Commitment was broadly studied in the dealings between brands and their potential customers (Beloucif, Donaldson and Kazani, 2004). Relationship commitment can be established when the exchange partner considers that an enduring relationship with another partner is very essential, and giving the best efforts to sustain it (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Bojei and Alwie, 2010). Gundlach *et al.* (1995) pointed out that relationship commitment is vital to the success of business relationship with customers, and strongly indicates the quality of relationships.

Lexus for example, is one of the top brands that has excelled well in the endeavor of providing customer service. In their concept of "make people feel at home, and "treat customers as guests in our own home". Lexus has altered the pattern of the conventional approach into servicing luxury customers by establishing trust with the community and sincere commitments to their customers. This has formed the basis for building long term relationships between Lexus and its customers, and driven the success of this brand to enhance its position on the global scale.

**Satisfaction:**

Satisfaction, which has a big importance in the literature of relationship marketing, is assumed as an key construct of relationship quality in that if customers are not totally satisfied with a certain brand, the quality of relationship cannot be sustained (Hyun, 2010). Oliver (1997, p: 13) defined satisfaction as “the consumer’s fulfillment response. It is a judgment to a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption- related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over-fulfillment”. In general, satisfaction has been defined in terms of whether the products or services provided by a brand meet the needs and expectations of particular consumers (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000).

Customer satisfaction towards the products and services delivered by the brand has been indicated and empirically verified that it influences customers’ decision to maintain the relationship (Fornell, 1992; Anderson *et al.*, 1994). Notably, satisfaction also has been found to have a significant influence on creating brand trust and maintaining the relationship (Bojei and Alwie, 2010). Satisfied customers put their trust and stay commitment to the brand; build up further positive intentions, and subsequently purchase more from that brand in the future (Anderson and Mittal 2000). Kim, Kim, Kim, Kim and Kang (2008) stated that satisfaction comes from the good experience of customers and the positive evaluation toward the brand. They further indicated that customers who have confidence in a brand will be highly committed to purchase its products or services that meet their satisfaction.

Nissan for example is dedicated to accurately bringing customer satisfaction to the extent that it would even restructure itself to build a department consisting of 36 staff devoted to develop customer satisfaction. This department also introduces warranty and supporting programs to customers at no cost. The program called “The Satisfaction Commitment” was mainly focusing on building a valuable relationship with its customers. Through this program, the relationship between Nissan and its customers has been improved and played a significant role in the success of this brand.

**Past Research in Relationship Quality:**

Relationship quality is a well-researched topic by which it has gained a significant interest from several scholars. They have been studying this variable in different contexts with respect to its components or dimensions. However, there is some disagreement on to what dimensions that constitute relationship quality (Yang, Wu and Qang, 2010). “There is no consensus on which dimensions make up relationship quality, they only exist in the various conceptualizations” (Yang *et al.*, 2010; Dorsch, *et al.*, 1998, p: 129). In the previous studies, it shows that the majority of scholars agree on trust, commitment, and satisfaction as the main components of relationship quality. Yang (2010) demonstrated that although several researches have focused on relationship quality, some fundamental questions concerning the relationship between the three dimensions have not been completely explored.

The investigation of relationship quality have mainly been conducted in the service contexts (Roberts, Varki and Brodie, 2003; Supatn, 2007; Ndubisi, 2007; Kim *et al.*, 2008; Bojei and Alwie, 2010; Ali, 2011; Lee *et al.*, 2011; Keating, Alpert, Kriz and Quazi, 2011; Chen and Myagmarsuren, 2011; Hashim and Yasin, 2012; Han and Hyun, 2012) and very few studies have focused on the manufacturing sectors (Boniface, Gyau and Stringer, 2009; Taleghani, 2011). For example, the study of Lee *et al.* (2011) was conducted in context of Taiwan for internet banking sector. The study revealed that relationship quality has significant positive effect on customer loyalty.

In another study on mobile communication service in the context of Malaysia, Hashim and Yassin (2012) revealed that service brand equity has a significant positive effect on brand relationship quality. Their study also showed that relationship quality has a significant positive effect on brand resonance. Similarly, Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2002) conducted a study in context of United States. The study reported that special treatment benefits, confidence benefits, and social benefits have significant positive effect on relationship quality dimensions (commitment and satisfaction). The findings also indicated that satisfaction and commitment positively and significantly influence customer loyalty and word of mouth communication.

As stated before, in manufacturing sector certain researches have studied this variable as well. For instance, Boniface *et al.* (2013) conducted a study to examine the role relationship quality in predicting long term relationship in context of Malaysian dairy industry. The study revealed that price satisfaction and mutuality had significant positive influence on farmers’ relationship quality. In addition, the relationship quality of the farmers has a positive impact on long term orientation of the relationship. In other study on palm oil in the context of Malaysia, Tan *et al.* (2011) reported that market orientation, innovativeness, and learning orientation have significant positive effect on relationship quality (trust, commitment, and cooperation). Also, their results indicated that relationship quality had a significant positive influence on business performance.

Similarly, Taleghani (2011) examined the effect of service quality and brand experience on purchase intention through the mediating effect of relationship quality (trust, commitment, and satisfaction). The study revealed that brand experience has significant effect on brand commitment and brand satisfaction. Their findings

also indicated that service quality has significant positive impact on all relationship quality dimensions, and relationship quality is related positively and significantly with purchase intention.

Hence, this review reveals that previous scholars have been studying relationship quality and its dimensions in variety of settings largely relating to service sectors and contributing towards the understanding of this variable in the field of research. The contribution in the manufacturing sector however is limited.

In addition, the contextual contribution regarding relationship quality is also found to be heterogeneous across continents. The majority of the studies on relationship quality have been undertaken in the Western countries (Ndubisi and Chan, 2005; Fengyi *et al.*, 2007). As stated by Noor Hasmini (2012), lesser studies on relationship quality are focused on Asian perspectives. Liu and Wang (1999) illustrated that managing relationships with business distributors is very important to the success in Asian contexts. Aulakh (2000) on the other hand, found that the level of performance in Japan depends on the ability of firms to manage their relationships with their distributors.

Furthermore, in reviewing the literature on relationship quality, it shows that most of the scholars have been investigating relationship quality as a predictor of customer loyalty (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002; Lu *et al.*, 2005; Kim *et al.*, 2008; Boniface, Gyau and Stringer, 2009; Bojei and Alwie, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2011; Hashim and Yasin, 2011; Keating *et al.*, 2011; Chen and Myagmarsuren, 2011; Doaei *et al.*, 2011; Pi and Huang, 2011; Liang *et al.*, 2012; Valta, 2013) and purchase intention (Reichheld, 1996; Supatn, 2007; de Cannière *et al.*, 2008; Mzoughi, Hadiji and Slimane, 2009; De Cannière *et al.*, 2010; Taleghani *et al.*, 2011; Feng and Zhong, 2012; ). However, in certain past studies, relationship quality has also been used as antecedent of performance (Tan *et al.*, 2011), continuance intention (Liang *et al.*, 2012), Switching intention (Han and Hyun, 2012), and brand equity (Akbar and Azhar, 2010). Hence, this review proves the significant role of relationship quality as an antecedent to a number of variables.

Tesco is a good example of strong retail stores that effectively manages its relationship with customers. Tesco has established its relationship with customers by introducing a Clubcard loyalty scheme with a reward scheme that entrench strong relationships among Tesco and its customers. In particular, the scheme introduces customers and other businesses to each other, through a brand or relationship web, and thus creates positive brand experiences and customer value. Customers can get points according to their involvement with Tesco and purchasing its products online. The value of Clubcard points is increased, if instead of being used in store, they can also be used to access Clubcard Deals. Premium customers get rewards according to their level of spending with Tesco with an improved return when they access Clubcard Deals. This has increased the performance of Tesco and enabled it to establish valuable relationships with the customers.

Furthermore, a significant amount of research has been done on the antecedents of relationship quality in different contexts. For instance, previous research has discussed several antecedents for relationship quality such as promotion (Pi and Huang, 2013), brand experience (Sahin, Zehir and Kitapç, 2011; Taleghani, Largani and Mousavian, 2011; Lee and Soo, 2012), Innovation (Abdullah, Tajuddin, Armia, Mat, Derani, Samsudin, Zain and Nair, 2012), brand equity (Chen and Myagmarsuren, 2011), and perceived value (He, Li and Harris, 2012). These studies have contributed to our understanding of a number of predictors for relationship quality.

A number of studies in the past have examined the effect of relationship quality as a mediator and reported results in favor of significant mediator effects for either relationship quality as a whole or its certain dimensions pointing towards its partial mediating effect (Supatn, 2007; Keating, 2011; Chen and Myagmarsuren, 2011; Tan *et al.*, 2011; Han and Hyun, 2012; Hashim and Yasin, 2012). For example, Chen and Myagmarsuren (2011) conducted a study in context of telecommunications services industry in Taiwan and used relationship as mediator between brand equity and customer loyalty and reported that relationship quality acted as a full mediator between both variables. Similarly, Tan *et al.* (2011) studies the mediating effect of relationship quality between organization capabilities and business performance in context of palm oil industry in Malaysia. Their result reported that relationship has a strong mediating role between organization capabilities and business performance. In addition, Keating (2011) examined the mediating effect of relationship quality between service quality and customer loyalty in context of Australian online services and revealed that relationship quality partially mediate the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty.

On the other hand, there are few researches concluding that relationship quality didn't have mediator effect (Doaei, Rezaei and Khajei, 2011). For example, Doaei *et al.* (2011) examined the mediating effect of relationship quality between relationship marketing tactics (interpersonal communication, tangible reward, direct mail, and preferential treatment) and customer loyalty in context of Iran. Their results reported that relationship quality hasn't any mediating effect on the relationship between relationship marketing tactics and customer loyalty. However, their research had inherent weaknesses such small sample size and limited generalizability. Hence, the review of literature in this stream of research reveals that a large body of research indicated that relationship quality acted as full/ partial mediator between various variable in a variety of research settings pertaining to different contexts.

### **Conclusion and Future Research:**

Relationship quality is one of most the important concepts in relationship marketing by which it has gained significant attention in the field of research. This paper concludes that a good quality of relationships between brands and their consumers is an important factor for the success of business, particularly in the highly dynamic environment which characterized by large competition. Establishing a good quality of relationships with business customers is also an important point in managerial decision making and therefore, it demands sizeable effort and investment to create and sustain strong consumer relationships (Ivens, 2004; Bojei and Alwie, 2010).

This paper has contributed to our understanding of the various issues relating with relationship quality as discussed by past studies. Although there has been much debate on the conceptualization as well as dimensions of relationship quality, but there has been less agreement about what dimensions exactly make up relationship quality. A number of researchers have favoured towards using trust, commitment and satisfaction as dimensions of relationship quality. Moreover, past research has examined in depth the antecedents and consequences of relationship quality. A number of researches came up with the findings that good relationship quality resulted into higher customer loyalty and greater purchase intention. Hence, in future new studies can look into examining the effects of relationship quality on other variables such as brand equity and firm's competitive advantage.

Moreover, the literature also indicates that majority of researches into relationship quality were conducted in western economies unlike developing countries, particularly in the Asian context. Therefore, it is recommended that future research can look into examining the antecedents and consequences of relationship quality with reference to emerging economies in Asia. In addition, in order to build more understanding on relationship quality and its consequences in particular, quantitative research can rely on improved methodologies and larger sample sizes. As well as, qualitative research can focus on producing case studies of successful or unsuccessful organizations with respect to relationship quality.

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