Interpersonal Relationship Marketing: Role of Customer Focal Antecedents in Relationship Building and Maintenance

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Abstract

This study evaluates the relationships between customer focal antecedents (CFA)-relationship benefits, seller dependence, trustworthiness, firm reputation, relational mediators (gratitude, trust, and intimacy), and relationship outcomes (commitment, reciprocity, and repurchase intentions). Conceptual model of the study is conceptualized on the basis of interpersonal relationship marketing model and theory of interpersonal attraction. Data is collected with survey methodology. The data is collected from four sectors i.e., Apparel, Food, Financial, and Telecommunication. Variance based SEM is applied to test hypotheses. Results provide substantial support for the proposed paths and validate interpersonal relationship marketing model. Results show that CFA - relationship benefits, trustworthiness, and firm reputation are found positively significant predictor of relational mediators. Gratitude, trust, and intimacy are found significantly mediating the relationship between CFA and relationship outcomes. Furthermore, relationships within relational mediators and relationship outcomes are found positively significant. There are number of managerial and theoretical implications. This research helps sellers to understand customer motivation and reinforcements of CFA in the relational ties. It also facilitates to improve customer value, experience, and to strengthen future customer commitments.

Keywords: *Customer focal antecedents, Relational mediators, Relationship outcomes, Variance based SEM*

1. Introduction

Businesses are in dire need to build and maintain relationship with customers to achieve competitive advantage. Relationship marketing practices are part of successful business philosophy (Storbacka & Lehtinen 2001). Customers' retention and sustainable relationships are key factors of success for any business (Grönroos, 2017). Relationship marketing has evolved as important mantra of business strategy for number of motivations e.g., reduction of cost, enhance customer base, increase sales, and growth of business (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006; Brito, 2011; Finch, O'Reilly, Hillenbrand, & Abeza, 2015; Buttle & Maklan, 2015; Debnath, Datta & Mukhopadhyay, 2016). Similar to business; the customers also have multiple benefits in close relational ties with sellers e.g., value (Buttle & Maklan, 2015), customization (Arli, Bauerb, & Palmatier, 2018) and time saving (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In Business to customer (B2C) relationship both parties (sellers and buyers) engaged in relationship (Ogilvied, Agnihotri, Rapp, & Trainorc, 2018) are benefited by reciprocal relationship. This research focuses customer focal antecedents (CFA). CFA are the antecedents when they share same perspective as relational mediators (Palmatier et al., 2006; Verma, Sharma, & Sheth, 2016). Customer focal antecedents are consistent with customer viewpoints. From theoretical perspectives relationship marketing needs new thoughts (Gummerus, von Koskull, & Kowalkowski, 2017; Grönroos, 2017; Sheth, 2017), integration and convergence of existing theories of relationship marketing (Grönroos, 2017; Sheth, 2017; Gummesson, 2017), and advances on emotive direction of relationship marketing (Sheth, 2017). Furthermore, more emphases should be imposed on interpersonal relationship perspectives (Palmatier, 2008) and to overcome limitations of interpersonal relationship marketing's research and theory (Palmatier, Jarvis, Bechkoff, & Kardes, 2009; Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, & Iacobucci, 2001; Hassan, Mortimer, Lings, & Neale, 2017; Arli, Bauerb, & Palmatier, 2018; Ali, Rasoolimanesh, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Ryu, 2018; Chou & Chen, 2018).

Comprehensive and critical review of literature leads to conceptual model (Payne & Frow, 2005). The conceptual model of this research is composed of relationship antecedents (customer focal antecedents), relational mediators (emotive plane), and relationship outcomes. Customer focal antecedents share the same perspectives as relational mediators (Palmatier et al., 2006). Perceived customer focal antecedents conceptualized for this research are; perceived relationship benefits, perceived relationship dependence, perceived seller trustworthiness, and perceived seller reputation. The perceived customer

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emotive plane consists of; perceived customer trust, perceived customer intimacy, perceived customer gratitude constructs. The relationship outcomes are analyzed with; reciprocity, customer purchase intentions, and commitment constructs.

Following objectives are framed to support the conceptualized model of this study (1). To examine the positive relationship between customer focal antecedents and emotive plane (relational mediators). 2. To examine the positive relationship between emotive plane and relationship outcomes. 3. To investigate the mediating role of emotive plane between customer focal antecedents and relationship outcomes. 4. To investigate the relationship within emotive plane (trust, gratitude, and intimacy) and relationship outcomes (commitment, reciprocity, and repurchase intentions).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Customer Focal Antecedents

In contemporary era, there is a shift of marketing functions towards customer-centric marketing. Each customer is served individually whether directly by the organization or through the third party (Sheth, Sisodia, & Sharma, 2000). To achieve above mentioned purpose different set of CRM tools are applied in B2C context (Reinartz & Berkmann, 2018). This customer focused agenda of B2C relationship benefits the both parties engaged in relationship (Ogilvied et al., 2018). In B2C context, customer focal antecedents shared the same perspectives of relational mediators (Palmatier et al., 2006; Verma, Sharma, & Sheth, 2016). In CFA customers play active role (Palmatier et al., 2006) when CFA’s are consistent with their viewpoint as a number of relationship characteristics are viewed as CFA (Sheth, Sisodia, & Sharma, 2000; Palmatier et al., 2006; Verma, Sharma, & Sheth, 2016; Hasan et al., 2017; Ryu & Lee, 2017; Reinartz & Berkmann, 2018; Ogilvie et al., 2018). However, in this research relationship benefits, Dependence on seller, Trustworthiness of seller, and Perceived reputation of seller are used to achieve the aforementioned objectives.

2.1.1 Relationship Benefits

Relationship benefits is the value created not only from the core product or service but also value obtained from relationship (Chou & Chen, 2018). Relationship benefits leads to customer value (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). In B2C relationship, benefits are created for both parties; however, most of the focus of research is on benefits obtained by the customers (Ulaga & Eggert, 2006; Ryu & Lee, 2017; Terblanche & Taljaard, 2018; Prentice, Wang & Lin, 2018). There are number benefits in a relationship, the research have not clearly stipulated benefits. The relationship benefits may be of physical benefits, service benefits, technical support (Monroe, 1990). The classification of relationship benefits may be of relationship related and product related (Lapierre, 2000). Similarly, the benefits may be identified as financial, emotional and expertise benefits (Terblanche & Taljaard, 2018), the benefits are may be of confidence benefits, sharing benefits, identity benefits, and symbiotic benefits (Yang, Yu, & Bruwer, 2018). This research conceptualized the relationship benefits as “Benefits received, including time saving, convenience, companionship, and improved decision making” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

2.1.2 Dependence on Seller

Extent to which one party requires to maintain relationship with second party in order to accomplish resources and goals is called dependency (Heide & John, 1988). Dependence may lead to; e.g., heightened commitment (from one side) (Barnes, Naude, & Michell, 2005), higher switching cost and exit barriers (Mishra, Sinha, & Koul, 2017). Customer dependence on seller is defined as “Customer's evaluation of the value of seller-provided resources for which few alternatives are available from other sellers” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In customer dependence on seller, seller may exploit the market power and customer is less likely to have competitive price and standard negotiation (Waheed & Gaur, 2012). Customer dependence research has demonstrated variety of relationship outcomes (Qiu, 2018) e.g., trust (Hewett & Bearden, 2001; Eggert & Ulaga, 2010) and commitment (Sahadev, 2008). This research focused on B2C relationship highlight the reversal of relationship outcome in the presence of dependence (Fatima & Mascio, 2018). It is also important to note that dependence may not lead to favorable relationship outcomes (Qiu, 2018).

2.1.3 Trustworthiness of Seller

The term “Trustworthiness” often confused with term “Trust”, however, these terms hold quite different psychological underpinnings. It is proffered across literature of number of disciplines that expectations and indications of trustworthiness are the foundations of trust (Hardin, 2002). Trust and trustworthiness are both cognition and affect based (Holste & Fields, 2010). In conclusive way, Trustworthiness of seller is defined as “a trait of seller in a relationship that inspires confidence in customers (Kharouf, Lund, & Sekhon, 2014). Therefore, sellers interested to cultivate trust among customers need to demonstrate attributes of being trustworthiness (Ostrom & Walker, 2003). Moreover, sellers can control the signals of customers’ trustworthiness but not the trust in isolation (Kharouf, Lund, & Sekhon, 2014). Additionally, Cultivation of trustworthiness signals among customers may improve the social bond between service providers (sellers) and customers (Grissemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). This research focuses trustworthiness (Perceived trustworthienss) as predecessor to the relational mediators (trust, gratitude and intimacy).

2.1.4 Perceived Reputation of Seller

Seller reputation is marked as powerful tool to build and maintain relational ties (Hackel & Zaki, 2018). It is based on notion that individual having reputation may have access to cooperative relationships and trust (Feinberg, Willer, & Schultz, 2014; Sylwester & Roberts, 2010). Seller reputation is defined as “customer believes that a seller is honest and concerns about its customer” (Doney & Cannon, 1997). The term is also defined as “firm’s appeal based on perception of past actions and future commitments compared to rivalry firms” (Anabela & Arnaldo, 2015). Customers’ decision making may be influenced by various factors. These factors work as clues to evoke complex and multi-dimensional customer decision making. Research has excavated such underpinnings (Hayne, Wang, & Wang, 2015). Seller reputation is important clue that influence the customer decision making (Shang, Deng, & Liu, 2018).

2.2 Emotive Plane

The research in relationship marketing theory and practice on emotive plane is scant (Sheth, 2017; Palmatier et al., 2009). In this research emotional core (relational mediators)-Emotive Plane are trust (affective), Gratitude and intimacy. Theorization of all constructs is based on affective (emotive) dimensions.

2.2.1 Gratitude

Disciplinary roots of gratitude are linked with Latin word “Gratia”, which means being thankful (Ma, Tunney, & Ferguson, 2017). Understanding of this concept is underpinned in number of disciplines e.g., religious teachings, philosophical connotations, and economic and political subjects (Ghosh & Deb, 2017). In scientific literature; gratitude is marked as emotional response, a mood, and a life trait (Ma, Tunney, & Ferguson, 2017). Moreover, gratitude is a fundamental component of human social interaction (Palmatier et al., 2009). It serves as force to maintain reciprocal obligations (Gouldner, 1960). Gratitude enables mutual giving loop that creates “web of feelings” (Komter, 2004). Trust and commitment are most widely studied relational mediators in relationship marketing theory; however, contemporary research advocates the gratitude as potential relational mediator (Palmatier, 2008; Palmatier et al., 2009; Hasan et al., 2017; Chou & Chen, 2018). Gratitude is marked as fundamental social component of human interaction. Gratitude helps to build the emotional foundation that leads to reciprocal behavior. Furthermore, reciprocal obligations are maintained with gratitude conceptualization. Gratitude is sort of intertie that helps to continue pro-social orientation of relationship (Palmatier, 2008).

2.2.2 Trust

Trust is most widely studied variable in relationship marketing context. Theoretical application of trust is unchallenged in majority of premier relationship marketing research (Chou & Chen, 2018). This relevance of trust in relationship marketing literature is continued with commencement of theory in the field. Furthermore, application of trust is evident across the forms (e.g., B2B and B2C) and context of relationship marketing literature (Palmatier, 2008). Additionally, trust has been studied in various forms of business e.g., manufacturing, services, and virtual communities. Among the most cited and referred relationship theory of Morgan and Hunt (1994) is also based on trust and commitment. Besides, the widespread application of trust in relationship marketing theory; there are also conceptual ambiguities related to theoretical underpinnings.

2.2.3 Intimacy

An interpersonal relationship is characterized as; intimate, feel for others, and inner thought for others (Balaji, Roy, & Wei, 2016). This intimate relationship helps to create sense of knowing between exchange partners beyond statue of social life roles and characteristics (Egan, 2011). Intimacy refers to the closeness and connectedness. This is an affective internal state. In relationship, it represents a customer's affective appeal towards organization (Bügel, Verhoef & Buunk, 2011). From interpersonal relationship point of view; intimacy play central role in relationship between partners (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998).

2.3 Relationship Outcomes

Relationship outcomes are means to analyze the continuation of relationship between buyer and seller. As the maintenance and continuance of relationship with buyers is key for organization in the present days and organizations are striving for customer retention (Grönroos, 2017). In this research the relationship outcomes are reciprocity, commitment, and repurchase intentions. These relationship outcomes are of behavioral in nature and provide support to the view that acquiring new customers is five times more costly than to maintain the existing customer base (Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1994).

2.3.1 Reciprocity

Reciprocity is marked as core of marketing (Bagozzi, 1995). Reciprocity has been conceptualized in number of ways; the exchange literature highlights three major types of reciprocity: (a) it is based interdependent exchanges of transactional patterns, (b) it is a folk belief, and (c) it is marked as moral norm (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In this research reciprocity refers to "Internalized patterns of behaviors and feelings that regulate the balance of obligations between two exchange partners" (Palmatier, 2008). Moreover, reciprocity is important for interpersonal relationships (Costello, 2018).

2.3.2 Commitment

Commitment refers to "An enduring desires to maintain a valued relationship" (Palmatier, 2008). Commitment indicates a psychological attachment (Liang & Chen, 2009), which ensures continuity of relationship over time (Chou & Chen, 2018). Both parties' buyer and seller are motivated to put their efforts to maintain relationship (Theron & Terblanche, 2010). Commitment has been extensively researched in relationship literature. Hence, commitment is marked as the key element of sustained relationship and support relationship building.

2.3.3 Repurchase Intentions

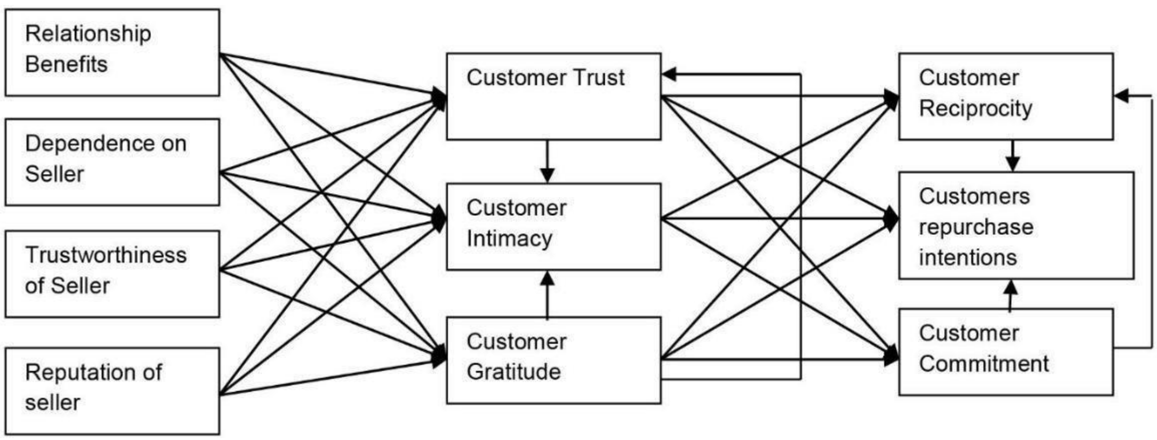
The most common outcome of relationship efforts is loyalty. However, loyalty has been operationalized in many different ways. Loyalty is conceptualized as, attitude and behavior in both ways (Palmatier et al., 2006). Loyalty may also apply to various concepts e.g., repurchase intentions and word of mouth and also hold the meanings of multidimensional construct (Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, & Iacobucci 2001). The past researches e.g., Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1991) have studied loyalty through repeat purchase. Conceptual model suggests that emotive plane (emotions generated with relational antecedents) influence the customer behavior. The literature recommends the impact of emotional ties on behavior. Customer loyalty is source of profit and competitive advantage (Rauyruen & Miller, 2007). Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) analyzed the emotions and predicted that the emotions foster brand loyalty and push customers to pay relatively higher price. Repurchase intentions refers to customer behavior to purchase from same seller over time (Chou & Chen, 2018). This research is based on premise that emotions lead to behavior and customer repurchase intentions is most desirable behavior.

2.4 Theoretical Foundation

Relationship is a complex phenomenon which cannot be explained with a single theory. It is recommended an integration of multiple theories to explain the nature and progression of the relationship between dyad. The amalgamation of theories to understand the phenomenon and advance in the subject is always encouraged. The similar effort is carried in this research, to study the relationship B2C with interpersonal relationship perspective.

Theoretical foundation of this research is based on interpersonal relationship marketing model (Palmatier, 2008) and interpersonal attraction (Perlman & Fehr, 1986). Interpersonal relationship marketing states there are various motivations for customers (Deshpandé, Farley & Webster, 1993) e.g., relationship benefits (Palmatier et al., 2009; Hasan et al., 2017) that stimulate the customers emotions e.g., customer intimacy (Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016) which create emotional debt and customer payoff the emotional debt in form of showing his/her commitment to organization (Palmatier, 2008). The most of literature is slant towards trust (Bugel, Verhoef, & Buunk, 2011), and ignored the customer gratitude (Palmatier et al., 2009) and intimacy (Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016). Therefore, this research incorporates customer gratitude and customer intimacy as relational mediators-emotive plane with customer trust.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



3. Materials and Methods

Data is collected from Food, Apparel, financial, and Telecommunication sectors to test the hypotheses. A self-administrated survey instrument (questionnaire) is used for data collection. Established scales with sound previous reliability and validity are used to collect the data. The sources of scales are; relationship benefits four items (Brun, Rajaobelina, & Ricard, 2016); dependence on seller three items (Mishra, Sinha, & Koul, 2017), trustworthiness of seller five items (Yu, Balaji, & Khong, 2015), reputation of seller six items (Walsh, Gianfranco, & Beatty, 2007), customer trust seven items (Hui, Zhao, Fan, & Au, 2004), customer gratitude three items (Palmatier et al., 2009), customer intimacy three items (Balaji, Roy, & Wei, 2016), customer commitment three items (Wulf, Odekerken-Schroder, & Iacobucci, 2001), customer reciprocity four items (Palmatier, 2008), and customer repurchase intentions three items (Dutta, Biswas, & Grewal, 2007). The responses are obtained on five (5) points likert scale. Part-A of questionnaire dealt with demographic information (Gender, Education, age and income of the customers); whereas, Part-B is used to record the customer responses on the abovementioned variables at five point likert scale.

Instead of focusing on the single sector, this research focuses on multiple sectors. This helps to have diverse dataset from multiple sectors (Lussier & Hartmann, 2017). Therefore, four sectors are selected (Apparel, Food, Financial Services (Banks and Insurance firms) and Telecommunication sector). A variety of relationship research applied the multiple sectors (e.g., Chou & Chen, 2018). Multi-method sampling technique is used to collect the data. At first stage the sectors are considered as stratum and second stage convenience sampling is used to collect data. Each sector is given equal weight in total sample. As there four sectors, so each sector is constitute 25% of the total sample. This is to give equal worth and representation to each sector. Sample size calculation is based on criteria (item to respondents); there would be minimum ten (10) respondents for each item (McQuity, 2004). The sample size is 440 which is above the aforementioned criterion.

This research has applied (PLS-SEM) Partial least square (PLS) approach for structure equation modeling (SEM). This PLS approach is variance-based SEM (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014). This type of modeling help to estimate complex cause-effect relationship models with latent variables. PLS-SEM analysis supports both formative and reflective models (Jarvis, MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2003; Hair et al., 2014; Balaji, Roy, & Wie, 2016).

4. Results

Table1. Sample Characteristics

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Age	Frequency	Percent
Male	280	63.64	20 and Below	52	11.82
Female	160	36.36	21-30 Years	213	48.41
Income			31-40 Years	106	24.09
Up to 50,000	103	23.41	Above 40 years	69	15.68
50,001-100,000	177	40.23	**Education**		
100,001-200,000	72	16.36	Up to Intermediate	89	20.22
200,001-400,000	46	10.45	Graduation	173	39.32
Above 400,000	42	09.54	Master	104	23.64
			Above Master	74	16.82

Sample is comprised of 280 (63.64%) males and 160 (36.36%) females. Moreover, the respondents belong to various age categories, education level, and income group. With respect to age, majority of respondents falls in age group between 21 and 30 years. The categories wise distribution show that; 52 (11.82%) respondents fall in age category up to 20 years, 213 (48.41%) are in age group between 21 and 30 years, 106 (23.64%) are in age category between 31and 40 years, and 69 (15.68%) are above 40 years. With
respect to qualification of respondents are 89 (20.22%), Graduation 173 (39.32%), Master 104 (23.64%), and above Master 74 (16.82%). Income of respondents is categorized in five categories i.e. up to 50,000 rupees per month to above 400,000 rupees. Most of the respondents fall in income group between 50,001 to 100,000 rupees per month. With respect to income the respondents, 103 (23.41%) are in income category up to 50,000 per month, 177 (40.23%) are in income category between 50,001 to 100,000 rupees per month, 72 (16.36%) are in income category earning between 100,001 to 200,000 rupees per month, 46 (10.45%) are in income group earning between 200,001 to 400,000 rupees per month, and 42 (09.54%) are in income group earning above 400,000 rupees per month.

Table2. Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Construct Name	Alpha Values (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Relationship Benefits	0.719	0.839	0.635
Dependence on Seller	0.861	0.914	0.780
Trustworthiness	0.727	0.878	0.782
Firm Reputation	0.819	0.880	0.648
Trust	0.874	0.902	0.569
Gratitude	0.765	0.864	0.680
Intimacy	0.811	0.888	0.726
Repurchase Intentions	0.772	0.868	0.687
Commitment	0.805	0.885	0.719
Reciprocity	0.830	0.887	0.664

Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability provides substantial support for reliability in PLS-SEM measurement model (Hair et al., 2014). The threshold value for Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability is above 0.7 (Ali et al., 2018). AVE is the measure of convergent validity; where, qualification criterion for AVE value should above 0.5 (Hair et al., 2014; Ali et al., 2018). Cronbach's Alpha (α) are in range of 0.719 to 0.861, Composite reliability (CR) values are in range of 0.839 to 0.914, and AVE values are in range of 0.635 to 0.782. The values of all constructs are above the minimum threshold values.

Table3. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	COM	DS	FR	GRA	INT	RB	REC	RINT	TRU	TW
COM	***0.848***									
DS	0.159	***0.883***								
FR	0.559	0.216	***0.805***							
GRA	0.609	0.152	0.579	***0.825***						
INT	0.638	0.193	0.577	0.765	***0.852***					
RB	0.342	0.099	0.265	0.428	0.419	***0.797***				
REC	0.767	0.178	0.420	0.652	0.658	0.280	***0.815***			
RINT	0.696	0.183	0.419	0.654	0.572	0.403	0.738	***0.829***		
TRU	0.645	0.167	0.619	0.716	0.730	0.397	0.679	0.581	***0.754***	
TW	0.325	0.034	0.155	0.346	0.262	0.091	0.358	0.197	0.286	***0.884***

COM=Commitment; DS=Dependence on Seller; FR=Firm Reputation; GRA=Gratitude; INT=Intimacy; RB=Relationship Benefits; REC=Reciprocity; RINT=Repurchase Intentions; TRU=Trust; TW=Trustworthiness

Tablep-3 dealt with Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and Fornell-Larcker Criterion of measurement. The HTMT ratio values should be below 0.85, such, conditionality suggested, is verified table-3, where, values are within the threshold range. The other criterion is Fornell-Larcker Criterion that applies that value of a variable should be higher than the corresponding relationship values. This criteria is also successfully achieve, as, the values of each variable are higher than the corresponding relationship values. Here, in table-3, the Fornell-Larcker Criterion values are given (Bold and Italic).

Figure 2. PLS-SEM Output

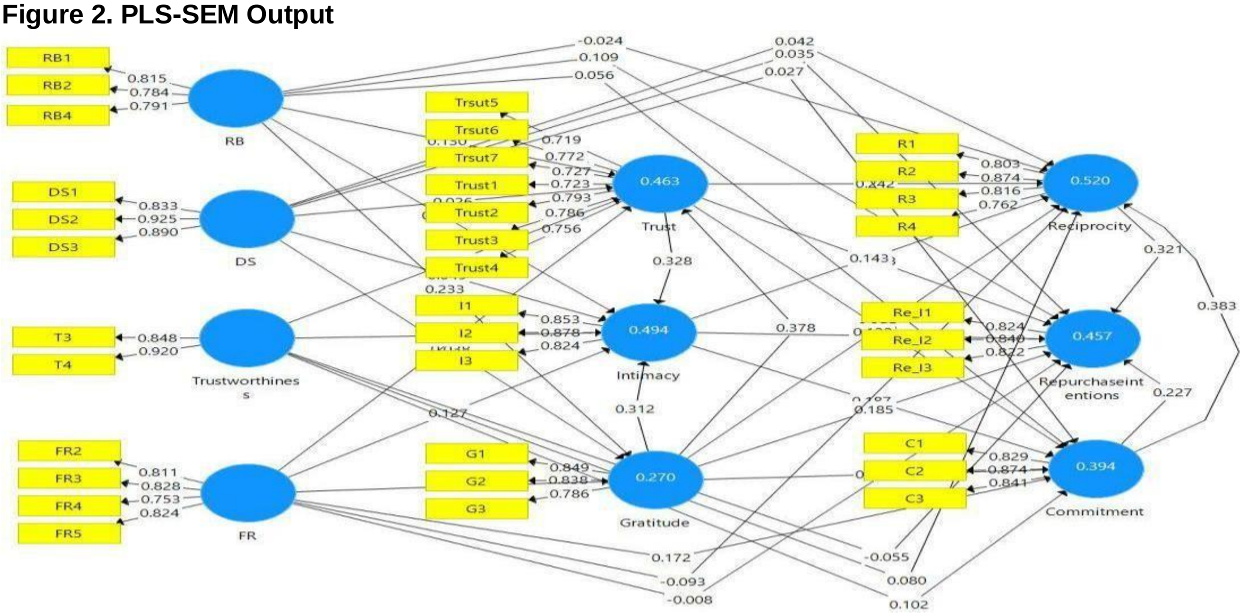


Table4. Effect Decomposition

Variable	Trust			Intimacy			Gratitude			Commitment			Reciprocity			Repurchase INT		
	D	IND	T	D	IND	T	D	IND	T	D	IND	T	D	IND	T	D	IND	T
1 . D S	0.026	0.014	0.040	0.049	0.025	0.074	0.038		0.038	0.027	0.027	0.054	0.041	0.046	0.087	0.035	0.049	0.084
2 . F R	0.316*	0.154*	0.470*	0.127*	0.281*	0.409*	0.408*		0.408*	0.172*	0.226*	0.398*	-0.093	0.286*	0.193*	-0.008	0.275*	0.267*
3 . R B	0.130*	0.088*	0.218*	0.084	0.144*	0.229*	0.233*		0.233*	0.056	0.117*	0.173*	-0.024	0.182*	0.158*	0.109*	0.141*	0.250*
4 . T W	0.095*	0.070*	0.165*	0.023	0.031*	0.054*	0.182*		0.182*	0.102*	0.032*	0.134*	0.080*	0.082*	0.162*	-0.055	0.086*	0.031*
5.TRU				0.328*		0.328*				0.225*	0.061*	0.287*	0.242*	0.157*	0.399*	0.038	0.193*	0.231*
6 . INT										0.187*		0.187*	0.143*	0.072*	0.214*	0.001	0.111*	0.111*
7.GRA	0.378*		0.378*	0.312*	0.124*	0.436*				0.106*	0.166*	0.273*	0.132*	0.258*	0.390*	0.185*	0.201*	0.386*
8.COM													0.383*		0.383*	0.227*	0.123*	0.350*
9 .REC																0.321*		0.321*

*P<0.05

D=Direct Effect, IND=Indirect Effect, T=Total Effect

DS=Dependence on Seller; FR=Firm Reputation GRA=Gratitude; INT=Intimacy; REC=Reciprocity; RINT=Repurchase Intentions; RB=Relationship Benefits; TW=Trustworthiness; TRU=Trust

In Structural model; Customer focal antecedents (Dependence on seller, Firm Reputation, Relationship Benefits, and Trustworthiness of Seller) are evaluated [(Customer focal antecedents - Emotive plane (Gratitude, Trust, and Intimacy) - and Relations outcomes (Commitment, Reciprocity, and Repurchase Intentions)]. The results of conceptual path's analysis are presented in table-4.9. Significant paths have p value (Probability value) less than 0.05. Significance value highlights that coefficient with 95 percent confidence interval.

Empirical results show that dependence on seller is found insignificant in all the direct, indirect, and total effects e.g., on trust (beta =.026), intimacy (beta=-.049), gratitude (beta=.038), commitment (beta=.027), reciprocity (beta=.041), and repurchase intentions (beta=.035) are found insignificant, as their p values are greater than 0.05. The indirect effect of dependence on trust (beta=.014), intimacy (beta=.025), commitment (beta=.027), reciprocity (beta=.046), and repurchase intentions (beta=.049) are also found insignificant, as their p values are greater than 0.05. The total effect of dependence on trust (beta=.040), intimacy (beta=.074), gratitude (beta=.038), commitment (beta=.054), reciprocity (beta=.087), and repurchase intentions (beta=.084) are also found insignificant, as their p values are greater than 0.05.

Firm reputation positively and significantly has direct impact on trust (beta=.316), Intimacy (beta=.127), Gratitude (beta=.408), and commitment (beta=.172), as their p values are less than 0.05; whereas, the firm reputation direct effect is found insignificant with reciprocity (beta=-.093) and repurchase intentions (beta=-.008) as their p values are greater than 0.05. With respect to indirect effect of firm reputation is positively significant on trust (beta=.154), intimacy (beta=.281), Commitment (beta=.226), reciprocity (beta=.379), and repurchase intentions (beta=.275), as their p values are less than 0.05. Firm reputation total effect is found positively significant on trust (beta=.470), intimacy (beta=.409), gratitude (beta=.408), commitment (beta=.398), reciprocity (beta=.193), and repurchase intentions (beta=.267), as their p values are less than 0.05.

Relationship benefits is the third customer focal antecedent. The empirical results with respect to relationship benefits show the mixed results. The direct effect on relationship benefits on trust (beta=.130), gratitude (beta=.233), and repurchase intentions (beta=.109) are found positively significant, as their p values are less than 0.05; whereas, the direct effect on intimacy (β = 0.084), commitment (beta=.056), and reciprocity (beta=-.024) are found insignificant, as their p values are greater than 0.05. The indirect effects are positively significant on trust (beta=.088), intimacy (beta=.144), commitment (beta=.117), reciprocity (beta=.182), and repurchase intentions (beta=.141), as their p values are less than 0.05. The total effects of relationships benefits are positively significant on trust (beta=.218), intimacy (beta=.229), gratitude (beta=.233), commitment (beta=.173), reciprocity (beta=.158), and repurchase intentions (beta=.250), as their p values are less than 0.05.

Trustworthiness of seller is the fourth customer focal antecedent. The empirical results show that trustworthiness has positive significant direct effect on trust (beta=.095), gratitude (beta=.182), commitment (beta=.102), and reciprocity (beta=.080), as their p values are less than 0.05; whereas, insignificant direct effect on intimacy (beta=.023), and repurchase intentions (beta=.055), as their p values are greater than 0.05. The indirect effect on trust (beta=.070), intimacy (beta=.031), commitment (beta=.032), reciprocity (beta=.082), and repurchase intentions (beta=.086) are found positively significant as their p values are less than 0.05. Total effect of trustworthiness found positively significant on trust (beta=.165), intimacy (beta=.054), gratitude (beta=.182), commitment (beta=.134), reciprocity (beta=.162), and repurchase intentions (beta=.031) as their p values are less than 0.05.

Direct effect of trust on intimacy is found positively significant with p values less than 0.05 and beta values are as .328. Furthermore, trust has direct positive significant effect on commitment (beta=.225) and reciprocity (beta=.242), whereas, insignificant direct effect on repurchase intentions (beta=.038) as the p value is greater than 0.05. Trust has indirect positively significant effect on commitment (beta=.061), reciprocity (beta=.157), and repurchase intentions (beta=.193), as their p values are less than 0.05. Total effect of trust on intimacy (beta=.328), commitment (beta=.287), reciprocity (beta=.399), and repurchase intentions (beta=.231) are found positively significant as their p values are less than 0.05.

Intimacy has direct positively significant effect on commitment (beta=.187) and reciprocity (beta=.143), as their p values are less than 0.05 whereas, insignificant direct effect on repurchase intentions (beta=.001) as their p value is greater than 0.05. Intimacy has indirect positively significant effect on reciprocity (beta=.072) and repurchases intentions (beta=.111). With respect to total effect, intimacy has positively significant effect on commitment (beta=.187), reciprocity (beta=.214), and repurchases intentions (beta=0.111), as their p values are less than 0.05.

Gratitude has positively significant direct effect on trust (beta=.378), intimacy (beta=.312), commitment (beta=.106,p<0.05), reciprocity (beta=.132), and repurchase intentions (beta=.185) as their p values are greater than 0.05. Gratitude has indirect positively significant effect (their p values are less than 0.05) on intimacy (beta=.124), commitment (beta=.166), reciprocity (beta=.258), and repurchase intentions (beta=.201). With respect to total effect, gratitude has positively significant effect on trust (beta=.378), Intimacy (beta=.436), commitment (beta=.273), reciprocity (beta=.390), and repurchase intentions (beta=.386) as their p values are less than 0.05.

Commitment has positively significant (p values are less than 0.05) direct effect on reciprocity (beta=.383) and repurchase intentions (beta=.227). Furthermore, commitment has positive significant indirect effect on repurchase intentions (beta=.123). Total effect of commitment on reciprocity (beta=.383) and repurchase intentions (beta=.350) are also found positively significant (p values are less than 0.05). Finally reciprocity has positively significant direct and total effect on repurchase intentions (beta=.321) and p value less than 0.05.

Table5. Model Fit Summary

Measure	Value	Standard	Reference
SRMR	0.062	SRMR<0.08	Hair et al (2014)
d_ULS	2.433	d_{ULS}<95% bootstrap	
d_G1	1.133		
d_G2	0.853	d_G<95% bootstrap	Dijkstra and Henseler (2015)
Chi-Square	2,198.396	(Complete Bootstrap)	
NFI	0.727	Near one or <0.9	Bentler and Bonett (1980)
GOF*	.546	values of 0.10 (small), 0.25 (medium), and 0.36 (large)	Tenenhaus, Vinzi, Chatelin, and Lauro (2005); Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015)

*= $\sqrt{\text{Average RSquare} * \text{Average communality (AVE)}}$

This research access the goodness-of-fit from both approaches (globally and locally) of model fitness in PLS path modeling. GOF is used as global scalar for global model assessment. Whereas, SRMR, d_ULS, d_G1, d_G2, Chi-square, and NFI are used locally assessment measures of PLS path modeling. The results confirm the model fitness both at global and local model level.

5. Discussion

This research is based on argument that antecedents' reinforcements-motivations of customers create emotional ties and generate relationship outcomes. Empirical results provide insight about factors (based on theoretical congruence established) that play critical role in long-term seller and buyer relationship. This research constructs a comprehensive model based on interpersonal relationship marketing by Palmatier (2008) and theory of interpersonal attraction by Perlman and Fehr (1986). The empirical support is available in most of the hypotheses; where customer focal antecedents (Benefits, Trustworthiness, and Reputation) are found significant predictor of relational mediators (Gratitude, Trust, and Intimacy). Furthermore, the relational mediators (Gratitude, Trust, and Intimacy) are found significant predictors of relationship outcomes (Commitment, Reciprocity, and Repurchase Intentions). Additionally, relationship within relationship mediators (Gratitude, Trust, and Intimacy) and relationship within relationship outcomes (Commitment, Reciprocity, and Repurchase Intentions) is found significant. Dependence is found non-significant; because, dependence is not for-granted in relationship marketing. It is reversed in B2C context (Fatima & Mascio, 2018).

6. Conclusion

The data of this research is based on multiple sectors I.e., food, apparel, financial, and telecommunication sectors. This research contributes to existing literature in following ways: (1) customer focal antecedents are studied with respect to Large, medium, and small organizations, however; previous research mainly focus on large and medium sized organizations (Herrero, Martín, & Collado, 2018). 2. Interpersonal relationship marketing model is extended by incorporating customer gratitude (Palmatier et al., 2009) and customer intimacy (Bugel, Verhoef, & Buunk 2011; Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016). 3. Interpersonal attraction- customers' motivations to stay in the relationship (Perlman & Fehr, 1986) studied in interpersonal relationship marketing model (Palmatier, 2008).4. Interpersonal relationship marketing model is tested with multiple sectors data.

Sellers with clarity of role of interpersonal relationship marketing to create relational ties, emotional bonds, and behavioral connectivity; enable them to implement interpersonal relationship marketing as their core marketing strategy; the seller can achieve and maintain relationship with most valuable customers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Egan, 2011; Buttle & Maklan, 2015; Chou & Chen, 2018). Furthermore, Increase experiential value of product and services that seller provide to customers (Bagozzi; 1995; Wulf, Odekerken- Schröder, Lacobucci, 2001; Egan, 2011; Buttle & Maklan, 2015). Finally, Sellers can cross-sell and up-sell to customers which are in relationship to seller (Palmatier, 2008).

Premier researches evoke thoughts and open new avenues of research. Along with significant contributions to existing theory of relationship marketing, this research also call attention for further research in the arena of interpersonal relationship marketing. This study call attention on following points that needs to be addressed. Future research may replicate this model to other contexts. The model may also be tested with data from other specific sector e.g., high contact/low contact services. Future research with longitudinal data may leads to different understanding about relationship formation, building, and maintenance.

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