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Analysis of Relationship Marketing Constructs in the Service Sector

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Abstract

Marketing is not just developing, selling and delivering products; it is creating a long-term relationship with customers, known as relationship marketing. However, some of the constructs are redundant and overlapping. Establishing relationship marketing in the service sector will bring many advantages and a competitive edge. Variables are identified and listed using a systematic literature review approach. To finish, the process of eliminating the redundant variables and categories of the finding. This research analysis highlighted the confusion and pitfalls in relationship marketing. It should bring new insights into the suitability of the constructs consistently used in relationship marketing.

Keywords: Relationship marketing; service sector; commitment; loyalty

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1.0 Introduction

Every firm competing in the service sectors has a competitive approach, apparent or implied. The service sector today is not just about marketing. One of the challenges is building and maintaining quality customer relationships (Crosby et al., 1990; Giovanis et al., 2015; Sajtos & Chong, 2018). The most critical role of marketing is the retention of the customer to the firms; however, the craving for development and marketing in the service sectors has given a primary problem for industries trying to employ strategies in making their services get to the customers and retains them. For example, the insurance sector unceasingly uses selling concepts which concentrate on the services rather than the prospects. Effective communication of the services and benefits offered is also a weak area of marketing management in the service sector. Service firms' success depends on how well they articulate their policy and strategy in the dynamic business environment (Epetimehin, 2011).

Relationship marketing is supposed to meet the objectives of everyone involved by identifying and establishing strategy, subsequently enhancing the relationship with customers and stakeholders at a profit. The idea is that the happier customers are with the relationship, the more likely they will retain the relationship with the servicing firm. For example, the service sector, like insurance firms, need to know and understand their customer completely so their insurance services can fit the customer and sell themselves. The insurance firm needs to go beyond just advertising their services to satisfy the customers, thus building long-term relationships. They must provide professional,

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quality service that guarantees customer satisfaction and devotion. Insurance is complex; customers usually understand the service less (Yu & Tung, 2014). In building a long relationship, it is obvious the firm needs to understand who they are servicing so that selling can become extra. The popularity of relationship marketing has risen because of several environmental factors. Research has shown that financial reason also influences the increase of relationship marketing fame, as the cost of enticing a new customer is five times the cost of keeping the existing one (Jackson, 1985). Although the importance of relationship marketing has been acknowledged and recommended to overcome the intangibility of service (Berry, 2014), this paper's objectives are to determine the constructs related to relationship marketing and remove the redundancy and overlapping constructs. Understanding the constructs or factors that contribute to successful relationship marketing can help the sectors overcome the intangibility of service and be more sensitive to the needs and wants of their existing and potential customers.

1.1 Towards a systematic review framework on relationship marketing construct in the service sectors

A systematic review investigates an articulated question that uses organised and distinct methods to identify, select and critically appraise relevant research and to collect and analyse data from studies included in the analysis. Thru a systematic review, the authors' claims of rigour research in the study are justified, permitting the identification of gaps and required directions for further investigation.

Despite abundant studies on relationship marketing, efforts to systematically review these studies in the service sector are still lacking. This article tries to fill the gap in understanding, identifying and characterising the relationship marketing pattern in the service sectors. Before this study, systematic review articles on relationship marketing practices in the service sectors is not substantial. It does not provide details on the review procedures usage (e.g., databases searches, reports excluded, search terms used), which is later challenging to be replicated, validate the interpretation, and examine the comprehensiveness. Additionally, this study is vital because the service sector will continue experiencing change. It calls for urgent relationship approaches to enhance resilience; therefore, details in the literature review have provided the opportunity to understand that emphasis and attention should be the focus.

The main research question guides the current article, how does the relationship marketing practice in the service sector? The main focus of the study was on relationship marketing practices in the service sector. A particular emphasis is given to the service sector as this group is most affected by the changing environment after the outbreak of Coronavirus diseases (COVID-19). This study attempts to analyse the existing literature on the service sector practices of relationship marketing. This section enlightens the purpose of performing a systematic review, while the second sections minutiae out the methodology section and the PRISMA statement (Preferred Reporting Items Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) method used. The third section systematically reviews and synthesises the scientific literature to identify, select and appraise relevant research on the service sector's practices, examine the relationship marketing construct, identify the key constructs and associate conceptual and operational definitions. At the same time, the paper's discussion is in section four. The last section specifies the future research primacies.

2.0 Methodology

This section discusses the method used to retrieve articles related to the relationship marketing services sector. The reviewers used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) technique. The resources (Scopus and WoS) used to run the systematic review, eligibility and exclusion criteria (see table 1), steps of the review process (identification, screening, eligibility) and data abstraction and analysis.

2.1 PRISMA

The PRISMA Statement guided the review offers three unique advantages, which are 1) defining straightforward research questions that permit systematic research, 2) identifying inclusion and exclusion criteria, and 3) it attempts to examine the extensive database of scientific literature in a defined time. PRISMA Statement allows for a rigorous search of terms related to relationship marketing and service sectors. The methodology can monitor service sectors in the relationship marketing approach.

2.2 Resources

This article has explored the WoS and Scopus databases, the largest and oldest indexing databases (Ramírez-Montoya et al., 2022). Many review articles use databases (Kroon et al., 2021; Rupp et al., 2021). In this search of both databases, we found 27 articles from the WoS database and 20 from the Scopus database. After, we eliminated duplicates (8 papers), which gave us 39 articles to be screened and accessed for eligibility. Later, we excluded 26 articles due to conference proceedings and non-financial services see Fig.1.

2.3 Eligibility and Exclusion Criteria

Some eligibility and exclusion criteria are resolute. First, select only article journals with empirical data for the literature type. Then exclude all review articles, conference proceedings, books, chapters in books and book series. Second, to avoid any confusion and difficulty in translating, the search excluded non-English language articles and focused on the English-language publication. Thirdly, the search timeline is five years (2018-2022), an adequate period to see the latest or current publications. As the review process focused on the relationship between marketing practices and the service sector, articles indexed in social science indexes are selected; thus, omit an

article published in a brutal science index (Science Citation Index Expanded). Lastly, in line with its objective, which focuses only on the service sector, the only article focused on the service sector are selected (see table 1).

2.4 Systematic Review Process

The systematic review process involved four stages. The first phase identified keywords used for the search process. Previous studies and thesaurus used similar keywords related to relationship marketing and service (see Table 2). The last stage of review resulted in a total of six articles that were used for that qualitative analysis (see Fig. 1)

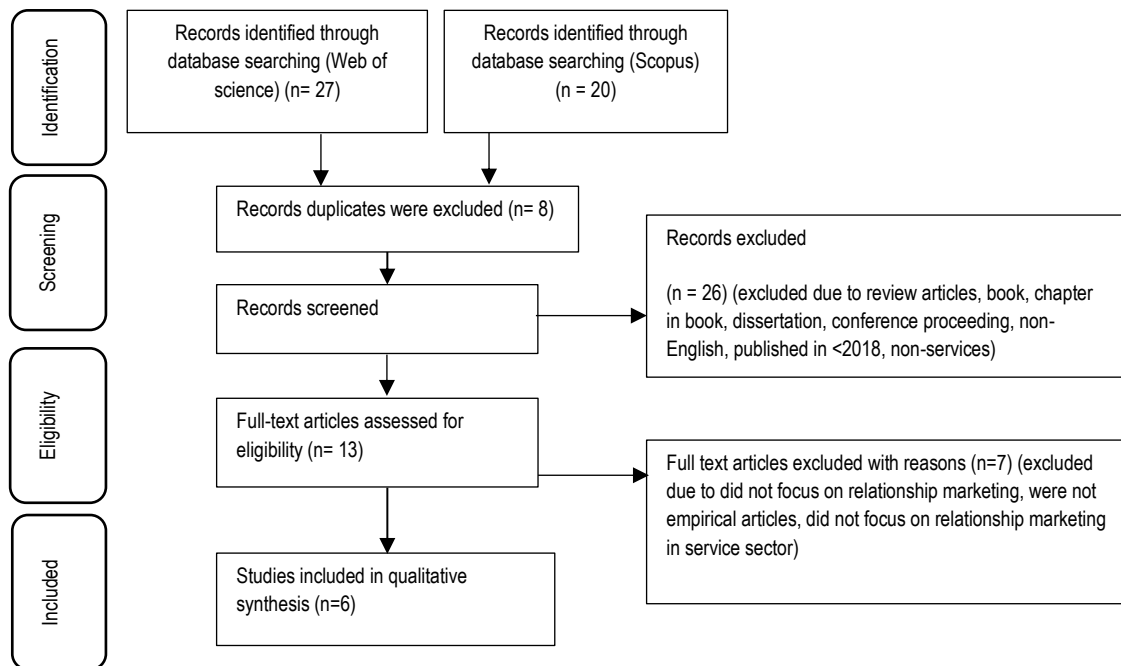


Fig. 1: The Flow Diagram of the Study
(Source: Adapted from Moher et al., (2010))

Table 1. The Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Eligibility	Exclusion
Literature type	Journal (research title)	Journals (systematic review), book series, book, chapter in a book, conference proceeding
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline	Between 2018-2022	< 2018
Indexes	Social Science Citation Index, Emerging Sources Citation Index, Art and Humanities Index (WoS)	Science Citation Index Expanded (WoS)
Sector	Services Only	Non-Services
Criterion	Eligibility	Exclusion

Table 2. The Search String Used for The Systematic Review Process

Databases	Keywords used
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("relationship marketing" OR "Long* term marketing relationship*" OR "Long* term relationship*" OR " Long* term transaction*" OR "Long*term orientation" OR "Long* term commitment*" OR "Customer* retention*" OR "Customer* relationship*" OR "Customer* engag*" OR "Close relationship*" AND ("service"))
Web of Science	TS= ("relationship marketing" OR "Long-term marketing relationship*" OR "Long-term relationship*" OR " Long-term transaction*" OR "Long-term orientation" OR "Long-term commitment*" OR "Customer* retention*" OR "Customer* relationship*" OR "Customer* engag*" OR "Close relationship*" AND ("service"))

2.5 Data Abstract and Analysis

The remaining articles were evaluated and scrutinised. The data were extracted by reading the abstracts first, then the full article (in depth) to identify the construct. The data were extricated initially by reading through the abstracts, then the full papers (in depth) to find the constructs—the qualitative analysis using content analysis to identify the redundancy related to relationship marketing practices.

3.0 Results

The review resulted in 10 constructs. The results provided a comprehensive analysis of the current practices of relationship marketing by the service sectors. Most of the research publications are from 2018. The services sectors and relationship marketing are the niche area to explore. In this literature search, we have found that Sharma (Gaur et al., 2019; Kingshott et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018) is the leading author in this area. Estelle van Tonder has written two articles (van Tonder & Beer, 2018; van Tonder & Petzer, 2018). While Kingshott authoring and co-authors two articles (Gaur, Kingshott, & Sharma, 2019; Kingshott, Sharma, & Chung, 2018) while other related authors have only one article each. Figure 3 shows the journals involved in this review, and from Fig. 3, all journals have only one publication score.

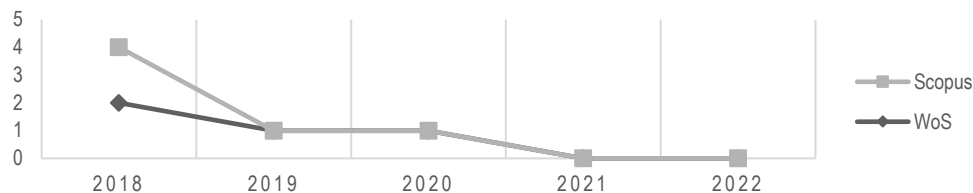


Fig. 2: Number of articles
(Source: Adapted Khan et al.,(2022))



Fig. 3: Name of Journals
(Source: Adapted Khan et al.,(2022))

Relationship marketing in the service sectors is an evolving area of research; therefore, there is inadequate research stating the practices of relationship marketing focusing on service sectors. After a fundamental search of Scopus and WoS databases, the results provided a comprehensive analysis of service firms' current relationship marketing practices. Two studies were conducted in South Africa; one in Gauteng focused on short-term insurance providers (van Tonder & Beer, 2018), while another focused on internet banking (van Tonder & Petzer, 2018). One study focused on China's banking sectors (Lee et al., 2018), one study concentrated on relationship marketing practices among local, national and foreign branded banks in New Zealand (Gaur et al., 2019) and one focused on Iranian banks in East Azerbaijan Province (Garepasha et al., 2020). Furthermore, all studies selected the applied quantitative approach (QN).

3.1 Relationship Marketing Constructs Used in The Service Sector

This section focuses on the primary relationship marketing constructs practised by service sectors such as customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, commitment, trust, social ties, service quality, e-quality, perceived value, relationship comfort, customer engagement and citizenship behaviour. Establishing and practising relationship marketing in the service sector will bring a step ahead for the servicing firms as the competitors cannot duplicate the enduring relationship with the customers. Redundancy or overlapping terms in the constructs need to be solved. Confusion in constructs can wrongly explain the relationship marketing, and strategies taken might not be helpful for the servicing firms.

Table 3. The Findings

Authors/Co untry	Main study design	Customer loyalty	Social ties	Relationship Quality			Service Quality/ e- quality	Perceived Value	Relationshi p comfort	Customer engagemen t	(interaction, attention, absorption and mind)	Citizenship behaviour
				Calculative trust/Trust	Affective attitude/ Commitment	Satisfaction/ online satisfaction						

		/customer satisfaction							
(Lee et al., 2018)	QN	√	√	√	√				
China									
(Kingshott et al., 2018)	QN	√			√	√		√	
New Zealand									
(Garepasha et al., 2020)	QN	√		√	√	√			
Iran									
(Gaur et al., 2019)	QN			√	√	√		√	
India									
(van Tonder & Petzer, 2018)	QN			√	√	√	√	√	√
South Africa									
(van Tonder & Beer, 2018)	QN				√	√			
South Africa									

3.1.1 Relationship quality- Affective Attitude/ Commitment

Relationship quality is a multi-dimensional construct connected to a customer's evaluation of a service provider in a time range based on the history of services their receive (Keating et al., 2011). All six studies focused on relationship quality emphasising affective attitude (commitment) (Lee et al., 2018) or commitment (Garepasha et al., 2020; Gaur et al., 2019; Kingshott et al., 2018; van Tonder & Beer, 2018; van Tonder & Petzer, 2018). The Affective attitudes (commitment) drive loyalty in China retail banking. In contrast, in New Zealand, commitment to loyalty toward e-banking is significantly more substantial for local and national banks than for foreign banks. While in Iranian banks in East Azerbaijan Province, online commitment's effect on customer loyalty decreases over time. Commitment is positively affected by relationship comfort in Indian retail banking and South Africa's short-term insurance company; customer value positively impacts affective commitment. Internet banking customer commitment only partially has a mediating effect on the relationship between customer satisfaction and the sub-dimension in the studies.

Commitment is well-defined "as an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" (Moorman et al., 1992), and it influences customer loyalty and retention, thus bringing long-term profitability. Customer commitment toward the service provider can grow with satisfaction in the experience of the service offered to the customer (Gremler et al., 2002) and other empirical literature showing the positive impact of customer satisfaction on their trust and commitment to the service provider as well as trust and loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The affective attitude or commitment construct refers to the customer's desire to commit to the service firms.

3.1.1 Relationship quality- Satisfaction/ Customer Satisfaction/ Online Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is "the summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectation coupled with the consumer's prior feelings about the consumption experience" (Oliver, 1997). In short, service has met his needs and expectations (Rajeswari & Kartheeswari, 2011). This construct positively impacts customer loyalty and thus is the utmost extensive search construct in marketing literature, which brings a competitive edge to the firms (Kandampully et al., 2015). Customer satisfaction comes from an evaluative process that judges prior expectations with perceptions of performance during or after the consumption experience (Parasuraman et al., 1985). In these studies, term satisfaction (Kingshott et al., 2018), customer satisfaction (Gaur et al., 2019; van Tonder & Beer, 2018; van Tonder & Petzer, 2018) and online satisfaction (Garepasha et al., 2020). Online satisfaction refers to the eminence of online systems and the information provided on the website when evaluating their online shopping involvements to reimburse for the absence of physical contact in traditional transactions. Consequently, in online purchases, consumer satisfaction is not about the actual product on sale but related to the website and its quality (Brun et al., 2014). Customer satisfaction or online satisfaction is ultimate in modern marketing; the success of the service firm depends on the recognition and satisfaction of the customer's needs and wants (Abtin & Pouramiri, 2016).

3.1.1 Relationship Quality- Trust/ Calculative Trust

Trust is a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence (Moorman et al., 1993). Trust-building characteristics are trusting behaviour and perceived trustworthiness (Shetty & Basri, 2017). Four studies used trust as a construct (Garepasha et al., 2020; Gaur et al., 2019; Kingshott et al., 2018; van Tonder & Petzer, 2018). The calculative trust construct means the party consider the opportunity of their corresponding person's attitude as opportunist towards them (Lee et al., 2018). For example, banks need to act so that the customer can rely on and trust them for their service, and the customer's long-term interests will be served (Kingshott et al., 2018). It suggests that calculative trust has the same indication as trust as it circles the trust in organizations and salespersons (Panda, 2013).

3.1.1 Customer Loyalty/ Loyalty

Loyalty is an intensely seized pledge to re-purchase or re-utilise a favoured product or service in the future despite other encouragement and marketing efforts to cause switching behaviour (Dos Santos Paulino, 2020). One of the basic expectations in relationship marketing

is that continuing loyal customers are money-making. This study used twice customer loyalty (Garepasha et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2018) and loyalty (Gaur et al., 2019; Kingshott et al., 2018).

4.0 Discussion

This study has attempted to systematically analyse the literature on the relationship between marketing practices in the service sectors. The Asian service sector is still mainly underdeveloped (Asian Development Bank, 2013); thus, local service firms need to be extra attentive in their relationship marketing efforts. Their ability to organise relationship marketing strategies to achieve present and upcoming customer needs and wants is a prerequisite in local service sectors. Typically, foreign firms understand the need and know how to engage and develop strong customer relationships in emerging Asian markets because they have become experts at organising their relational building competencies to engage with the customer. Eliminating several overlapping and redundant constructs suggested future researchers focus more selectively on upcoming research. The paper provides a classification of relationship marketing constructs as the basic theory in the service field. It should bring new insights into the suitability of the constructs consistently used in the relationship marketing literature.

5.0 Future Direction

As for future studies on a systematic review of relationship marketing in the service sector, review efforts should be widened and embrace new technologies as it is a crucial mechanism for interacting with the future customer. As the pandemic occurs in the year 2020, it is clear that businesses rely on technology to survive in today's highly competitive global marketplace.

6.0 Conclusion

This systematic review has highlighted the constructs used in relationship marketing practice in the service sector. In response to this, in the past five years, the service sector has identified customer loyalty, social ties, relationship quality, service quality, e-quality, perceived value, relationship comfort, customer engagement (interaction, attention, absorption and affection) and citizenship behaviour. The redundancy and overlapping construct can be found in the construct of customer engagement (van Tonder & Petzer, 2018) which consists of affection. Affection and the construct affective also are referred to as commitment. The review suggests recommendations for future studies. For example, more qualitative studies offer in-depth analysis and detailed explanations of relationship marketing constructs, along with service sectors' perspectives and decision-making about relationship marketing practices. The limitation of the paper is that the five-year timeline needs to be prolonged and to add more databases or more significant scale to non-services as the constructs found are limited in the service sector. It would be interesting to confirm the redundancy and overlapping of constructs used in relationship marketing and online relationship marketing practices and to determine the extent to which constructs may be relevant in the business environment to retain customers.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

Comprehending relationship marketing can provide valuable insights for developing strategies that allow the service provider to retain customers. It creates value for the customer by distinguishing its offering from other competitors. It also enhances the relationship marketing literature from the context of how the constructs influence the consumers of the service sector to have a long relationship with the service firms.

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