

The Influence of Relationship Efforts on Relationship Outcomes in a High Contact Service Environment

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While business is experiencing a period of great changes and clients' expectations and preferences are shifting, service organizations are induced to search for exceptional sources of value to clients' creation. Increasingly it is recognized that long term relationships with clients are becoming the source of unique value in today's highly competitive markets.

This article analyses relationship efforts made by an organization and a client, reveals their links with relationship outcomes. Having generalized the analysis of the concept of relationship, it is stated that long-term relationships develop through repeated interactions between a client and an organization, during which both parties make certain relationship efforts, resulting in the formation of a bundle of bonds that reflect the nature of relationship. Considering the imperatives of the latest marketing theories, recognizing that the focus in marketing has moved from an exchange of the tangible value to one that increasingly includes the intangible value (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), various forms of relationship efforts made by organization are grouped into tangible and intangible relationship effort categories. In the line with the new dominant logic of marketing stating that there should be a focus on clients as active participants' client relationship efforts as a separate construct is distinguished in this article. Acknowledging the importance of extended understanding of relationship outcomes, which take the form of various attitudinal concepts (trust, commitment, attachment), a distinction between positive and negative bonds, is made. It could be reasonably stated that the sector of sport and health clubs enables to reveal the mentioned aspects which are in the focus of this article.

This paper integrates theories of organizations' resources (Vargo & Lusch 2004) and clients' resources (Arnould et al., 2006) by exploring the emotional aspects of relationships (the aspects of client involvement, client-to-client interactions), and testing the links between relationship efforts and relationship outcomes.

The hypothesis tested in this article confirms that intangible relationship efforts as compared with tangible ones have a stronger impact on positive bonds, whereas tangible relationship efforts besides the impact on positive bonds have also a link with negative bonds. The ascertained relation between client relationship efforts and positive bonds proves the importance of active client role in developing meaningful long-term relationships.

However, we advance existing literature and extend previous research by demonstrating that, depending on the type of relationship efforts examined, the magnitude of the effects of relationship outcome structure differs.

Keywords: *relationship efforts, relationship outcomes, bonds, trust, commitment.*

Introduction

When reacting to constant changes in market, necessity to cooperate, establish long-term relationships with clients and seek exclusive sources of competitive advantage becomes an important strategic issue in service business. In the context of economic changes competitiveness is less and less dependent on the tangible goods and more and more dependent on intangible factors that have to do with long term relationships. Due to the increasing importance of intangible resources and due to the structure of new value-determining factors, high quality of the main service or, as Gronroos (1992) puts it, technical service quality becomes a *necessary* condition for every organization that wants to stay in business. It is acknowledged that assessment of value created for a client in the frame of the core service, measuring service quality and client satisfaction no longer satisfy the needs of a contemporary organization, because it does not enable determining, measuring, evaluating and properly managing specific additional factors that create value. Taking into consideration the importance of client retention, realizing the relevance of search for innovative unique value-creating marketing solutions (Dovaliene & Virvilaite, 2008), acknowledging the diminishing usefulness of the most of conceptions representing the principles of traditional marketing (Virvilaite, 2008), *long-term clients-organization relationships* are recognized to be the source of unique long-term competitive advantage (Ulaga & Chacour, 2001; Harker & Egan, 2006; Payne & Holt, 2001; Ulaga & Eggert, 2006; Jasiulioniene & Tamosiuniene, 2009) and considered to form the basis of long-term value-creating strategies (American Marketing Association, 2006).

In the light of the fact that the source of future competitive advantage is considered to be the ability to give emotional value to client experiences, the research studies carried out in recent years put emphasis on huge importance of intangible, emotional relationship aspects (Hennig-Thurau, 2006; Baxter, 2006; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Varey, 2002; Barnes, 2003; Liang & Wang, 2006; Rostamy, 2009). The changing role of a client requires to review the traditional, organization-oriented creation of value and to focus on value *co-creation with a client*. Organization-initiated efforts that develop long-term relations with clients and client's involvement into the

process of relationship development become an important perspective for research (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Prahalad, 2004; Kleine & Baker, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Though long-term client-organization relations receive considerable attention from researchers, the majority of the past conceptualizations have mainly focused on relationship efforts made by the organization as opposed to relationship efforts made by clients. It becomes important to find out how clients perceive relationship efforts made by the organization, as well as relationship efforts made by clients themselves. Despite a growing body of literature on client involvement into value co-creation processes client relationship efforts and its links with relationship outcomes has not been explored. Treating consumers as operant resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), and acknowledging them as *active*, rather than as passive “receivers“ of an offer consumer-to-consumer (C2C) relationships are often overlooked (Baron and Harris, 2006). It is not clear what impact tangible and intangible relationship efforts of an organization have on relationship outcomes, which, according to Arnould et al. (2006), would enable the organizations to predict clients’ preferences and help clients to get involved in the development of relationship with the organization.

The object of this article is relationship efforts, made by client and organization and they’re links with relationship outcomes.

Tasks of the article:

- To explore the forms of relationship efforts and relationship outcomes
- To estimate the impact of tangible and intangible relationship efforts of an organization on relationship outcomes
- To estimate the impact of client relationship efforts on relationship outcomes.

Research methodology used is systematic and comparative analysis of scientific literature, survey employing questionnaires.

Novelty. This article contributes to the growing research on long-term organization – client relationships by proffering the notion of intangible resources of an organization as well as the notion of client relationship efforts as a focal point for developing deep, committed relationships, based on positive bonds.

Conceptual framework and hypotheses

It is universally acknowledged that to be able to establish, maintain and strengthen relationships with clients organizations must put certain efforts that create and develop relationships. Therefore long-term client-organization relationships form during repeated *interactions* when both a client and an organization put in certain *relationship maintaining efforts*, which as a consequence manifests in the collection of attitudes and perceptions towards the organization in the form of certain bonds.

In scientific literature it is upheld that relationship efforts go beyond a particular individual episode and are oriented towards the multitude of episodes that are related to past and current interactions (Liang and Wang, 2006). In

line with De Wulf and Schroder (2000), we define relationship effort as any effort that is actively made by an organization and a client that is intended to contribute to the clients’ perceived value above and beyond the core service. It is argued that service efforts and relationship efforts represent two distinct and independent sources of value.

In line with De Wulf and Schroder (2000), we state that *organization’s relationship efforts* manifest through personalization, customization, differentiation, communication, rewards, and other relationship-maintaining actions. In marketing literature, most often financial, social and structural relationship efforts are distinguished (Liang and Wang, 2005). Taking into consideration that relationship efforts of structural character are directly related to the processes of service provision, create formal norms and structures of relationship administration, institutionalization (Liang & Wang, 2004) and, according to Liljander and Ross (2002), are more important when analyzing relations in the business-to-business market, in the present article relationship efforts of an organization are distinguished according to their tangibility (*tangible and intangible relationship efforts*). Financial incentives or incentives that are close to financial rewards (rewards for repeated visit, extra, customized services, providing additional information) are assigned to *tangible* type relationship efforts. It is recognized that clients estimating the value most often think about the price (Virvilaite et al., 2009) and other cost related issues. The category of *intangible* type efforts reflects relationship efforts aimed at satisfaction of needs for exclusiveness, personalized attention, caring, social status, self-esteem (Christy et al., 1996). Intangible relationship efforts are closely related to a customer and the contact person. As stated by Kazlauskaitė and Buciuniene (2008) these “soft” human resources may lead to the establishment and sustainability of a competitive advantage. Huang and Hsueh (2007) note, that in an attempt to meet the challenge of competitors, the role of intellectual or relational capital is a central issue creating profit, improving performance winning the loyalty and trust of customers, and building long-term friendly relationships. With regard to scientific discussions about efficiency of tangible and intangible marketing efforts, Jancic & Zabkar (2002) notice that for a long time business was delimited from social, emotional context, by claiming that business is only rational. In modern marketing theories it is acknowledged that with dissociation from social and emotional context *the human element*, which is the key factor in successful business decisions and long-term relationships with clients, is lost. Role of intangible relationship efforts based on intangible (operant) recurses in seeking true, meaningful relationships with clients is particularly emphasized in the recent marketing studies (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006; Barnes, 2003; Liljander & Roos, 2002; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Varey, 2002; Virvilaite et al., 2009). It is important to note that both tangible and intangible organizational efforts require possession of information about client, which in business practice is most often achieved by installing client data management bases. According to Urbanskiene et al. (2008), this is only one of the attitudes

towards client relationship management, where customer relationship management (CRM) is understood as the complex of software and technologies, automating and performing business processes. However, this technologies-based approach to relationship development is defined in scientific literature as rather superficial (Fournier, 1998; Harker & Egan, 2006; Barnes, 2003). Seeing the limitations of tangible marketing efforts, and in particular of those based on technological, automated solutions only, in seeking long-term customer loyalty, Bagdoniene & Jakstaite (2007) claim that most of the existing loyalty programs that are based on rational, tangible (economic) benefits, serve more the purpose of sales promotion than loyalty increase and are not understood by clients as providing emotional or social benefit.

Acknowledging that social, emotional context is particularly important in developing true, meaningful long-term relationship with clients (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006; Barnes, 2003; Liljander and Roos, 2002; Varey, 2002; Virvilaite et al., 2009), it is claimed that intangible relationship efforts of an organization are perceived by clients particularly positively, as they create client-organization closeness.

Client relationship efforts

In line with the efforts that an organization undertakes in order to maintain or enhance a relationship with a client, client relationship efforts refer to the efforts that a client makes in order to maintain or enhance a relationship with an organization. Relationship effort is considered to be an *active* tendency of a client. This corresponds with the notion of “an effort which is actively made” mentioned when describing organizations’ relationship efforts. In other words, relationship efforts of a client imply more than just a positive reaction to the marketing initiatives made by an organization (Patterson et al., 2006; De Wulf and Schroder, 2000). *Active* position of a client is reflected by various forms of efforts: involvement into organization’s activities, voicing of opinion, openness, initiatives to change organization’s behaviour, providing of personal information, discussions of problems that arise, submission of proposals, sharing of experience, adaptation of the process of buying, etc. It is recognized that the performance of the client is important because client’s decisions may affect expected outcomes and success (Alinaitwe, 2008). Client’s activeness, involvement can take the forms of a physical, cognitive and emotional character. It is stated that true activeness and involvement must encompass all dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and physical. For emotionally involved clients the processes they partake in are more important and more valuable. This should especially be emphasized in a high contact services sector, where clients participate in the process of service creation and delivery, and become the cooperating partners (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Bendapudi and Leone, 2003; Arnould et al., 2006).

Relationship outcomes

In scientific literature it is acknowledged that successful relationship efforts are leading to *bonds*. This implies that the client is tied to the organization in different ways. It is claimed that it is *bonds* or combination of certain bonds that is created during repeated interactions

defines the resulting position of relationship (Liljander and Strandvik, 1995; Liang and Wang, 2005). Bonds serve as perceptible motives to continue relationship, reflect degree and nature of interdependence among relationship participants and are considered to be the basis of client loyalty (Berry, 1995).

Accordingly to Liang and Wang (2005), Liljander and Roos (2002), a distinction between positive and negative bonds is made in this study, stating that some of the bonds are more likely to be perceived positively by clients, whereas others, such as economic, legal and structural bonds, could have a more negative lock-in effect. Negative bonds are defined as barriers to exit when the customer has an incentive to leave the relationship, while positive bonds are incentives to continue the relationship because of positive motivation. As Barnes (2003) points out, positive bonds (emotional attachment or connection) is a necessary condition for genuine relationship to exist, because clients understand the difference between repeat buying which is based on convenience, price or other non-emotive factors, and situations where they go back to the same organization because they feel something special towards the organization. Being in close, true relationships with organization clients adopt the possessive way of referring to them, develop high degree of comfort, trust, and emotional contact (Barnes, 2003). In the reference with Barnes (2003), Morgan and Hunt (1994), Liang and Wang (2005, 2008), Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006), Paul et al. (2006), Baron and Harris (2006) *trust*, *affective commitment* are treated as *positive bonds* in this study. Furthermore, acknowledging the importance of intangible resources the activation of client resources through client-to-client interactions (Pralhad and Ramaswamy, 2000; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Arnould et al., 2006; Baron and Harris, 2006), it is proposed that relationship outcomes also can have the form of *communal bonds*, i.e., the bonds that are formed during interactions with other clients (Arnould et al., 2006).

Affective commitment reveals sentiments of affection, emotional attachment, because of familiarity, friendship, self-identification with an organization built over time (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sharma, 2006). Acknowledging the role of clear positioning strategy existence (Ostaseviciute & Sliburyte, 2008), the need of clear positioning arrangements which lead to this affective state should be taken. *Trust* is treated as feeling of trustworthiness, confidence, and expectation that both sides can rely on the intentions and promises expressed by each of them (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Degree of trust that develops over certain period of time is often used to measure the strength of relationship (Berry, 1995). *Communal bonds* describes the ties that are formed in the process of client-to client interaction and refers to the degree certain ties of which link and hold a client and an organization together because of community spirit, other positive social, emotional bonds between clients. Pralhad and Ramaswamy (2000) explain that client involvement into value co-creation could be achieved through personalized interactions that are sensitive and meaningful to specific consumers (and not just relating to consumer-provider interactions). We assert that some of the strongest consumer-company relationships are based on client-to-client bonds.

To the group of concepts reflecting *negative bonds instrumental and normative commitment* are attributed. Negative bonds reflect the need to preserve the relationship motivated by 1) avoidance of losses or additional expenses (instrumental commitment) (Geyskens et al., 1996), 2) internal normative “pressure” that reflects the position of “I ought to” and “I should” and is related to a person’s normative values, standards, sense of duty (normative commitment) (Sharma, 2006). Though there is an agreement that both instrumental and normative commitment for a certain period of time maintain the client behaviour that is useful to the organization, the limitations of commitment of this type are emphasized. While affective commitment represents the extent partners are motivated to continue the relationship due to their liking of the relationship, locked-in commitment represents the need to maintain the relationship due to high penalties associated with leaving. Its focus is on the obstacles that hinder exploring and developing a new relationship rather than the positive reasons for keeping an existing one (Sharma, 2006). According to Meyer and Allen (1991), normative commitment usually lasts only until the “debt” is understood as repaid, settled. Marketing initiatives stimulating instrumental commitment can be understood by clients as forced retention techniques, bonds with negative emotional undertone, relationship break-off barriers (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Beatson et al., 2006) that can even presuppose clients’ dissatisfaction (Harker and Egan, 2006).

Hypothesis

By referring to that in scientific literature importance of efforts of emotional, social nature in formation of true, meaningful relationship is emphasized, it is stated that ***intangible relationship efforts of an organization are characterized by the higher degree of influence on the formation of true, meaningful relationships than tangible relationship efforts of an organization.*** To test this statement, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1 *There is a positive link between intangible organizational relationship efforts and affective commitment.*

H2 *There is a positive link between intangible organizational relationship efforts and communal bonds.*

H3 *There is a positive link between intangible organizational relationship efforts and trust.*

H4 *There is a positive link between tangible organizational relationship efforts and affective commitment.*

H5 *There is a positive link between tangible organizational relationship efforts and communal bonds.*

H6 *There is a positive link between tangible organizational relationship efforts and trust.*

Because relationship with an organization could also be based on negative bonds (desire not to lose the received economic benefits, anxiety, avoidance of losses or additional costs (Geyskens et al., 1996)), which are named by Liljander and Strandvik (1995) as forced relationships, it is stated that ***tangible organizational relationship efforts have an influence on the formation of negative bonds with the organization.*** To verify this statement, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H7 *There is a positive link between tangible organizational relationship efforts and instrumental commitment.*

H8 *There is a positive link between tangible organizational relationship efforts and normative commitment.*

Acknowledging the importance of active participation and involvement of clients in relationship-maintaining activities, it is claimed that ***clients’ relationship efforts have an influence on the formation of relationship with organization, which is characterized by positive bonds.*** To verify this statement, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H9 *There is a positive link between client relationship efforts and an affective commitment.*

H10 *There is a positive link between client relationship efforts and communal bonds.*

H11 *There is a positive link between client relationship efforts and trust.*

Research methodology

The research in the sector of Lithuanian sport and health clubs with a total sample of 1325 respondents was carried out. A self-completion questionnaire was developed and distributed through a direct client approach in the sport and health clubs and online (for more details see Damkuvienė, 2009). The constructs were measured using self-report measures of respondents’ perceptions of the situation in the sport and health clubs they have been visiting. Scale items used to measure the constructs were adapted from the previous studies, developing new items for this study as well (more detailed in Damkuvienė, 2009). Statistical analysis of survey data was carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences 11 for Windows) by *impact size coefficient squared eta* to measure the strength of the relationship between the variables. The measures were purified through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure validity and reliability of the measured constructs. Reliability was supported as a result of the fact that in all cases Cronbach Alpha values varied between 0.72 and 0.92, indicating quite high reliability level. A second-order factor analysis was carried out on the scores of the primary factors to ensure that: 1) trust, affective commitment and communal bonds indeed loaded on the higher order construct – positive bonds, 2) normative commitment, instrumental commitment belongs to the higher order construct of negative bonds; and 3) tangible relationship efforts, intangible relationship efforts of organization, client involvement, participation indeed loaded on the higher order construct of relationship efforts. Item and reliability analysis was done separately for each higher-order construct scale. Cronbach Alpha with the score of 0.82 - for relationship efforts, 0.78 - for positive bonds and 0.71 - for negative bonds indicated appropriate reliability level of the higher order construct scales. Causal path analysis (eta squared coefficient) was performed in order to investigate the impact of relationship efforts on dependent variables – relationship outcomes. Only statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$) were included. The path models derived are shown in Figures 1 - 3. The estimates of effect size were

interpreted using the Cohen (1988) rule (0.01 - 0.06 - small effect); >0.06 - 0.14 (medium effect); > 0.14 (large effect).

Results and interpretations

The results revealed a significant effect of intangible relationship efforts of an organization on all positive bonds (H1-H4) with a large size effect as the eta squared statistic larger than 0.14.

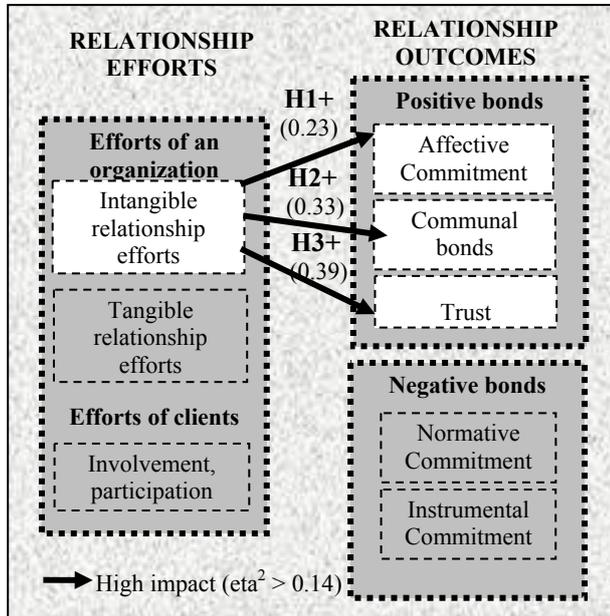


Figure 1. Relations of Intangible relationship efforts of an organization with relationship outcomes (H1-H3 hypotheses)

The Eta squared shows that there is strong association between intangible relationship efforts of an organization and trust, indicating that intangible relationship efforts can explain 39% of the variation of trust. For the communal bonds intangible relationship efforts of an organization can account for 33% of variation, for the affective commitment - 23 % of variation.

These results confirm the notion that intangible relationship efforts that are created at a more interpersonal client – service personnel level through individual recognition, open communication, social engagement, and personal friendship, develop higher level emotional bonds which have more positive connotations for the consumer and are more resistant to failures. At present most companies appear to have rather limited view of possible strategies for developing strong relationships with their clients, tending to focus on the lowest (functional, economic) levels of relationship efforts. As Barnes (2003) states, real meaning lies not in delivering the product faster, or increasing on-time performance, real meaning is created by occupying a special place in the lives of clients. These results of the research confirm the role of intangible bonding initiatives which goes beyond the economic content.

Rather strong relations of tangible relationship efforts with the concepts trust, communal bonds and affective commitment were determined. The relationship between tangible relationship efforts of an organization and affective commitment has the eta squared equal to 0.17.

This means that 17% of affective commitment can be accounted for by tangible relationship efforts. As for communal bonds and trust, the association is even stronger: the eta squared is 0.21 (communal bonds) and 0.28 (trust). Thus hypotheses H4-H6 were supported.

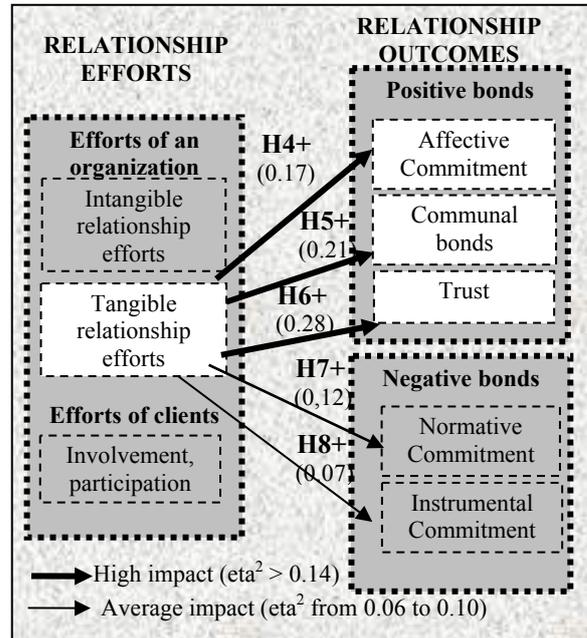


Figure 2. Relations of tangible relationship efforts of an organization with relationship outcomes (H4-H8 hypotheses)

Hypotheses H7 and H8 claiming that tangible relationship efforts of an organization have an impact on negative bonds, treated as exit barriers, were confirmed; however, the determined impact strength is much lower than with positive bonds. Eta squared value of 0.12 in the case of normative commitment, and the eta squared value of 0.07 in the case of instrumental commitment indicated a moderate effect size of tangible relationship efforts of an organization to negative bonds (see Figure 2). Even price is confirmed to be an important factor for clients (Jaafar et al., 2008) and this type of bond is treated as promoting continuity in a relationship (Liang and Wang, 2005), being one of consumer’s loyalty factors (Banyte and Salickaite, 2008; Tamosiuniene and Jasiulioniene, 2007) it is recognized to be easy imitable by competitors, so it cannot serve as the main source of sustainable competitive advantage.

These results support the notion that tangible relationship efforts of an organization (lower prices for the regular clients, other close-to monetary incentives) have an impact on locked-in commitment, which depends on dispassionate cognitive assessment - a rational evaluation of the costs of discontinuing the relationship. Like stated by Liljander and Roos (2002), they are more likely to be perceived in a negative sense, and are most effective when harmonized with other marketing mix elements (Virvilaite et al., 2009).

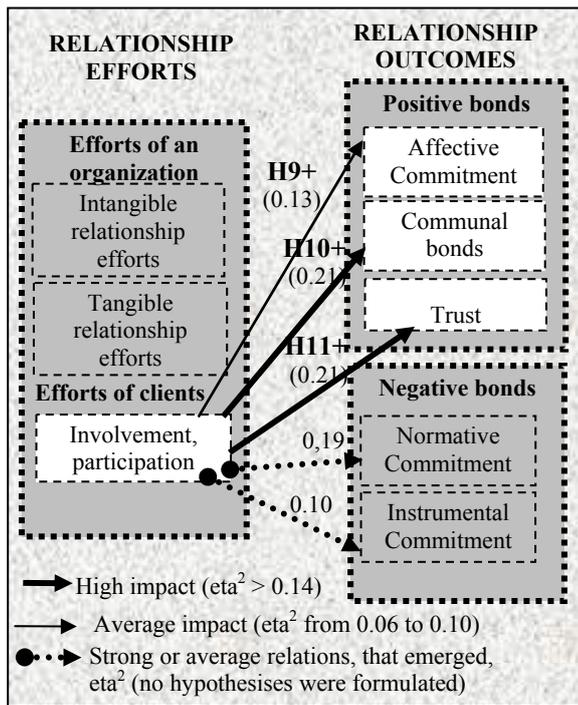


Figure 3. Relations of client relationship efforts with relationship outcomes (H9-H11 hypotheses)

Client relationship efforts also display an especially strong impact in determining positive bonds (client relationship efforts → affective commitment (0.13); client relationship efforts → communal bonds (0.21); client relationship efforts → trust (0.21). The ascertained relation between clients' relationship efforts with positive bonds confirms hypotheses H9, H10, H11, and proves the influence of clients' relationship efforts (client involvement into activities that develop relationships) on positive relationship outcomes (see Figure 3). At this point, it is important to notice that service organization should treat clients as active operant resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), empower their clients by motivating willingness to perform the necessary activities, giving them greater decision competence, more tasks, and also more responsibility, i.e., shifting of power from the service firm to the client.

Research data also revealed that client relationship efforts have an impact on normative and instrumental commitment. The eta squared with the association

coefficient of 0.19 in the case of normative commitment and the value of 0.10 in the case of instrumental commitment means that client involvement, participation in relationship enhancing activities to some level influences attachment to organization that is motivated by the constraints or moral obligations.

Conclusions and recommendations

The tested relationships suggest that both tangible and intangible relationship efforts of an organization have positive links with relationship outcomes. The results show that intangible relationship efforts have a stronger effect on positive relationship bonds. This allows to state about the importance of emotional, social and personal relationship building incentives on the formation of meaningful, significant relationships with an organization.

Theoretical as well as empirical argumentation enables to state, that invisible and intangible variables – organization's relationship competencies (skills and knowledge), as well as client's resources have a great impact on relationship outcomes, thus supporting Vargo and Lusch's (2004) view which emphasizes the intangible organization resources and the co-creation of value.

As hypothesized, tangible relationship efforts of an organization had an effect on negative bonds which namely suggests for service organizations applying different and specific relationship bonding tactics, stating that the development of strong relationships with clients' demands incorporation of more than tangible features in the organizational relationship building strategies.

The results for client relationship efforts supported hypotheses concerning the effects of clients' relationship efforts on positive bonds. By focusing on these implications, it is suggested that service organizations must actively empower their clients to make more relationship building efforts when competing for deep, meaningful relationships.

To be able to develop stronger and meaningful relationships, developing strategies to create higher level of meaning in a relationship organizations must encourage and enable their contact people to demonstrate personalized relationship efforts, based on insight, change, creativity, and humanistic values.

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Santykių pastangų ir santykių rezultatų ryšys aukšto kontakto paslaugų rinkoje

Santrauka

Atsižvelgiant į ilgalaikę klientų išlaikymo svarbą, suvokiant inovatyvių vertę kuriančių marketingo sprendimų paieškos aktualumą ir pripažįstant daugumos koncepcijų, pagrįstų tradicinio marketingo principais, rezultatyvumo mažėjimą (Virvilaite, 2008), *ilgalaikiai klientų ir organizacijos santykiai* pripažįstami ilgalaikio, sunkiai imituojamo konkurencinio pranašumo šaltiniu (Uлага ir Chacour, 2001; Harker ir Egan, 2006; Payne ir Holt, 2001; Uлага ir Eggert, 2006). Visuotinai pripažįstama, jog sėkmingiems ilgalaikiams santykiams plėtoti reikalinga abipusius santykius palaikančių pastangų, kurios reiškiasi tiek apčiuopiamo, tiek neapčiuopiamo pobūdžio formomis.

Probleminiai klausimai. Nors ilgalaikiams kliento ir organizacijos santykiams tyrėjai skiria nemažai dėmesio, tačiau nėra aiški organizacijos *apčiuopiamo* ir *neapčiuopiamo* pobūdžio santykių pastangų įtaka santykių rezultatams, neaišku, kaip klientai vertina jų pačių (*klientų*) santykių pastangas, t. y. kokią įtaką klientų santykių pastangos turi sėkmingų santykių plėtojimuisi.

Straipsnio tikslas – nustatyti apčiuopiamų ir neapčiuopiamų kliento ir aukšto kontakto paslaugų organizacijos santykių pastangų įtaką santykių rezultatams.

Tyrimo metodologija

Straipsnyje taikyta sisteminė ir lyginamoji mokslinės literatūros analizė. Empirinis tyrimas (anketinė apklausa) atliktas Lietuvos sporto ir sveikatingumo klubų rinkoje, atstovaujančioje aukštam kontakto paslaugų sektoriui (n=1325). Apklausos duomenų statistinė analizė atlikta naudojant SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences 11 for Windows) programinę įrangą, skaičiuojant ryšio koeficientus η^2 ir Spearman ρ .

Konceptualios straipsnio nuostatos ir tyrimo hipotezės.

Pritariant Liang ir Wang (2006), šiame straipsnyje laikomasi pozicijos, jog santykių pastangos ir pastangos, orientuotos į pagrindinės paslaugos kokybę, yra atskiri vertės šaltiniai, remiantis Christy et al. (1996), organizacijos santykių pastangos skiriamos į *apčiuopiamų* ir *neapčiuopiamų* pastangų kategorijas. *Apčiuopiamo* pobūdžio santykių pastangoms priskiriamos finansinės arba finansiniam atlygiui artimos iniciatyvos. *Neapčiuopiamo* pobūdžio pastangų kategorija atspindi santykių pastangas išskirtinumo, socialinio statuso, savigarbos poreikiams tenkinti (Christy et al., 1996) ir glaudžiai siejasi su „minkštaisiais“ žmogiškųjų išteklių resursais, įgalinčiais suteikti organizacijai ilgalaikį konkurencinį pranašumą (Kazlauskaitė, Bučiūnienė, 2008).

Atsižvelgiant į mokslinėje literatūroje akcentuojamą santykių pastangų abipusiškumo principą, klientas traktuojamas kaip aktyviai formuojantis procesus, kuriuos kuria ir palaiko su organizacija, ir įsitraukiantis į santykius su ja (Patterson et al., 2006). Straipsnyje teigiama, jog klientų santykių pastangos reiškiasi kliento dalyvavimu, informacijos apie save teikimu, įsitraukimu į kitas santykius plėtojančias veiklas.

Straipsnyje santykių rezultatas siejamas su organizacija, kai pripažįstama, jog sėkmingos santykių pastangos formuoja klientų lojalumą, stiprinantį sąsajas su organizacija (Palmatier et al., 2006; Liljander ir Strandvik, 1995). Remiantis nuostata, jog kliento elgsena gali remtis tiek apribojimais (baime), tiek atsidavimu (noru) Liljander ir Roos 2002; Fournier, 1998), skiriamos teigiamas ir neigiamas konotacijas turinčios sąsajos: teigiamų sąsajų kategorijai priskiriamas pasitikėjimas, bendruomeninės sąsajos, emocinis įsipareigojimas, neigiamų sąsajų kategorijai – moralinis ir instrumentinis įsipareigojimas.

Remiantis tuo, kad mokslinėje literatūroje akcentuojama emocinio socialinio, pobūdžio pastangų svarba, formuojantis tikriems, reikšmingiems santykiams ir pripažįstama kliento įsitraukimo, dalyvavimo santykiuose reikšmė, formuluotos hipotezės, kuriomis siekiama patikrinti, jog:

- *neapčiuopiamo pobūdžio organizacijos santykių pastangos pasižymi didesniu įtakos laipsniu tikrų, reikšmingų santykių formavimuisi nei apčiuopiamo pobūdžio organizacijos santykių pastangos* (H1-H6 hipotezės);
- *apčiuopiamos organizacijos santykių pastangos turi įtakos neigiamų sąsajų su organizacija formavimuisi* (H7-H8 hipotezės);
- *klientų santykių pastangos turi įtakos teigiamomis sąsajomis pasižyminčių santykių su organizacija formavimuisi* (H9-H11 hipotezės).

Pagrindinės išvados

Nustatyti gana stiprūs *santykių pastangų ryšiai su santykių rezultatus atspindinčiais konceptais: pasitikėjimu, emociniu įsipareigojimu, bendruomeninėmis sąsajomis, moraliniu įsipareigojimu. Patvirtintos H1-H8 hipotezės apie apčiuopiamo ir neapčiuopiamo pobūdžio organizacijos santykių pastangų ryšį su teigiamomis sąsajomis. Neapčiuopiamo pobūdžio santykių pastangų stipresnė įtaka leidžia daryti išvadą apie didesnę emocinio, socialinio ir asmeninio pagrindo santykių pastangų poveikį tikrų, reikšmingų, emocinėmis sąsajomis grįstų santykių su organizacija formavimuisi. Nustatyta, jog apčiuopiamo pobūdžio organizacijos santykių pastangos turi ryšį su neigiamomis sąsajomis kaip išėjimo trukdžiais, tačiau įtakos laipsnis gerokai mažesnis nei teigiamų sąsajų atvejais.*

Nustatytas klientų santykių pastangų ryšys su teigiamomis sąsajomis patvirtina H9, H10 ir H11 hipotezes – įrodo klientų santykių pastangų (klientų įsitraukimo į santykius plėtojančias veiklas) įtaką pozityviems santykių rezultatams.

Tyrimo duomenys rodo, jog tiek kliento, tiek organizacijos santykių pastangos turi įtakos moraliniam įsipareigojimui, kuris tam tikru laikotarpiu palaiko organizacijai naudingą klientų elgseną.

Raktažodžiai: *santykių pastangos, santykių rezultatai, ryšys, pasitikėjimas, įsipareigojimas.*

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