

RELATIONSHIP QUALITY IN ONLINE MARKETING FROM THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

Estetika Iman Saputri^{1*}, Mugi Harsono²

Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta, Indonesia

Email : estetikaimans@gmail.com^{1*}, mugiharsono_fe@staff.uns.ac.id²

*Correspondence

ABSTRACT

Keywords:	Relationship Quality; Epistemology; Methodology; Online Marketing.	This study explores the concept of relationship quality from the philosophy of science. The study focuses on the scientific paradigm that forms the foundation and core of research. Relationship quality emphasizes the importance of strong relationships in creating value for customers and maintaining their loyalty in the long term. Marketing has evolved from a product-oriented approach to a customer relationship-oriented approach, making relationship quality the key to competitive advantage. This study examines the philosophical perspective of science concerning ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. The research method employed is a literature review to explore the development of research on relationship quality. Mapping previous research from 2016 to 2023 provides insights into the latest trends related to the concept of relationship quality in the domain of online marketing. The results identify information sharing, online relationship bonds, and customer experience as antecedent variables of relationship quality, while the consequence variables include the intention to co-create brand value. This study proposes a research model of relationship quality from these antecedent and consequence variables.
------------------	--	--



Introduction

The assumptions and principles within research paradigms can aid and guide scientific discoveries. Understanding the specific assumptions within these paradigms assists in explaining the quality of research findings supporting scientific studies and identifying areas where strong evidence may be lacking. Scientific research involves systematically seeking knowledge from various research paradigms that hold beliefs about how the world works (Park, Konge, & Artino Jr, 2020). These research paradigms serve as philosophies of science, directing how scientific knowledge is formed by establishing fundamental elements. These elements consist of several aspects, including ontology (how reality is perceived), epistemology (how the nature of knowledge is understood), axiology (the role and values of research processes), and methodology (the process of scientific research). Comprehending scientific knowledge across these four elements can provide a comprehensive overview for researchers across diverse fields (Brun, Rajaobelina, & Ricard, 2016).

In marketing, Evert Gummesson introduced the concept of relationship quality to marketing practitioners and researchers in 1985. Relationship quality is one of the pillars of relationship marketing that emerged from marketing theory. Relationship marketing aims to create and sustain value-added relationships among involved parties. Relationship

quality evaluates the overall strength and depth of the relationship between a business and its customers in meeting their goals, expectations, and desires. (Payne & Frow, 2017) argued that a good relationship should possess quality elements that provide value to customers and sustain the relationship in the long term. This view is supported by (Sheth, 2017), stating that relationship quality plays a vital role in building brand loyalty through relationship marketing orientation. This measures relationship strength and emphasizes the emotional bond and functional value of products or services (Zhou, Dong, & Zhang, 2023).

The concept of relationship quality continues to gain attention from researchers and practitioners, focusing on the role of relationships perceived by customers. Relationship quality is building a comprehensive process that nurtures and enhances personalized customer relationships, cultivating a positive brand image. Marketing ideology has shifted from a product-centric perspective to a service-oriented, customer-focused approach among marketing communities. Providing high-quality goods and services is increasingly perceived as a minimum requirement for competitiveness rather than a source of superior performance. Long-term relationship quality with partners provides companies with a foundation for competitive advantage and business success.

This study examines the concept of relationship quality through the lens of the philosophy of science, considering aspects of ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. Prior research by (Novianti, Misbahussurur, Faozah, Noviyani, and Khodijah, 2021) focused solely on ontology and epistemology concerning relationship quality. This study complements existing literature by addressing axiological and methodological aspects. This study aims to enrich the literature on relationship quality by mapping research related to the subject published between 2016 and 2023, thus exploring emerging trends associated with the concept of relationship quality.

(Aggarwal & Bhardwaj, 2016) conceptualized commitment in business as an exchange partner's belief that the ongoing relationship is so vital that the committed party strives to maintain it. The parties involved believe the relationship is worth maintaining in the long term. This commitment represents an implicit or explicit promise about the continuity of the exchange relationship (Tajvidi et al., 2021). Maintaining a valuable relationship is based on greater responsibility for making the relationship flourishing, satisfying, and profitable for both parties. Customers who perceive more significant benefits from a relationship tend to have higher levels of commitment, thus making extra efforts for the company in response to the benefits received in the past. Therefore, commitment in a relationship helps reduce feelings of vulnerability and creates social space for fostering long-term relationships among the parties involved (Osobajo & Moore, 2017).

Research Methods

This research uses a literature review study approach by mapping previous research related to relationship quality within the philosophy of science. Research mapping related to the antecedents and consequences of relationship quality was also conducted to address

the empirical gap in existing literature reviews. Antecedents are factors that can influence relationship quality, while consequences are factors that can be influenced by relationship quality. The literature search focuses on the antecedents and consequences of relationship quality in online marketing from 2016 to 2023, using the Scopus and Google Scholar databases with keywords relationship quality, online relationship quality, and relationship quality commerce.

Results and Discussion

Research mapping related to relationship quality focuses on its antecedents and consequences within online marketing. The findings are presented in Table 1

Table 1
Research Mapping of Antecedents and Consequences of Relationship Quality between 2016-2023

Year	Author	Title	Antecedents	Consequences
2016	Brun, Rajaobelina, and Ricard	Online Relationship Quality: Testing an Integrative and Comprehensive Model in the Banking Industry	Relationship characteristics and Website Characteristics	-
2016	Aggarwal and Bhardwaj	Assessing the impact of relationship quality on online adoption	-	Attitude
2017	Izogo, Ogba, Oraedu, Reza, and	Determinants of relationship quality and customer loyalty in retail banking: Evidence from Nigeria	Customer orientation, Expertise, and Information Sharing	Customer loyalty
2018	Rajaobelina	The impact of customer experience on relationship quality with travel agencies in a multichannel environment	Think, Feel, Sense, Act and Relate	-
2018	Hsu, Chen, and Kumar	How does social shopping retain customers? Capturing the essence of website quality and relationship quality	Website quality	Purchase intention
2019	Narakorn and Seesupan	Social Commerce Constructs and Buyer-Seller Relationship Quality as a predictor of Intention to Co-Creation in Branding	Rating and Reviews, Forum and Communities	Co-Creation in Branding
2019	Levin, Quach, and Thaichon	Enhancing client-agency relationship quality in the advertising industry – an application of project management	Interpersonal Relationship and Value	-
2019	Ledikwe, Roberts-Lombard, and Klopper	The perceived influence of relationship quality on brand loyalty	-	Attitudinal loyalty

2020	Wisker	Examining relationship quality in e-tailing experiences: A moderated mediated model	-	Repurchase intention
2020	Kousheshi, Aali, Bafandeh Zende, and Iranzadeh	The antecedents and consequences of online relationship quality in internet purchases	Website quality, Online relationship bonds, and Perceived Vendor reputation	EWOM, Online customer share, Online customer loyalty, Online consumer reviews
2020	Hossain, Jahan, and Kim	A mediation and moderation model of social support, relationship quality, and social commerce intention	-	Social commerce intention
2021	Tseng	Understanding the impact of the relationship quality on customer loyalty: The moderating effect of online service recovery	-	Customer loyalty
2021	Al Nawas, Altarifi, and Ghantous	E-retailer cognitive and emotional relationship quality: their experiential antecedents and differential impact on brand evangelism	Utilitarian and hedonic online shopping values	WOM and Brand Evangelism
2021	Antwi	“I just like this e-Retailer”: Understanding online consumers' repurchase intention from relationship quality perspective.	-	Repurchase intention
2021	Tajvidi, Wang, Hajli, and Love	Brand value Co-creation in social commerce: The role of interactivity, social support, and relationship quality	-	Intention to Co-create brand Value
2021	Rahardja, Hongsuchon, Hariguna, and Ruangkanjanases	Understanding impact sustainable intention of s-commerce activities: The role of customer experiences, perceived value, and mediation of relationship quality	Perceived value and Customer experience	Sustainable intention
2023	Zhou, Dong, and Zhang	The impact of interpersonal interaction factors on consumers' purchase intention in social commerce: a relationship quality perspective	Interpersonal interaction with online vendors and recommenders	Purchase intention
2023	Franck and Damperat	How social media use enhances salesperson performance	Social media use	Sales performance

Based on the research mapping in Table 3, several findings were obtained regarding the research on relationship quality evolving from year to year. The research context from

2016 to 2019 was partly conducted on websites. Starting in 2020, studies were more prevalent in social commerce, with social media as the utilized application. This indicates that the research context is adapting to changes in consumer behavior in their online shopping activities. Concerning the antecedents, there were various variables used in the studies. Meanwhile, the variables most commonly used by researchers are the consequences of relationship quality, loyalty, and purchase intention. The authors propose several antecedent and consequence variables that are interesting and relevant for further exploration.

Antecedents of Relationship Quality

Relationship quality is a concept that remains relevant, as evidenced by the conducted research mapping. Researchers in the field of marketing are still extensively exploring this concept. Therefore, the concept of relationship quality remains intriguing for further investigation. Here are several antecedent variables outlined from the research mapping.

Information Sharing

Sharing information among exchange partners has significant benefits. This practice helps set realistic customer expectations, provides clear explanations in easily understandable language, and confirms that the company values the relationship (Izogo, Reza, Ogba, & Oraedu, 2017). A critical approach to incorporating factors influencing relationship quality is to see it from the perspective of business practices responsive to consumer goals. (Canevello & Crocker, 2010) Suggest that these objectives contribute to a cycle of responsiveness between individuals, ultimately enhancing the quality of relationships between the parties involved. Therefore, when an organization is responsive and actively assists customers in achieving their goals through a more significant commitment to customer orientation and timely dissemination of information, it tends to build quality consumer relationships.

Online Relationship Bonds

Relationship marketing involves forming bonds between companies and customers. As cited by (Kousheshi et al., 2020), these bonds can be categorized into financial, social, and structural. The first layer is financial bonds, where relationship marketing focuses on attracting online customers through price incentives. It is often considered the lowest level of online relationship marketing, as competitors can easily create similar price stability. The second layer is social bonds, emphasizing the social elements arising from the possibility of making online relationships more personal and rarely imitated by competitors. The third level of relationship marketing is structural bonds for the issues faced by online customers by providing the seller's maximum capability, thus distinguishing them competitively from competitors.

Customer Experience

The main objective of marketing is to create a positive perception and understanding of a product's value from the customer's perspective, arising from direct transactional experiences (Rahardja et al., 2021). Through the concept of customer experience, sellers can design strategies based on customer behavior to reach markets and

establish competitive pricing. The customer experience concept involves five crucial elements: sense, feeling, thinking, acting, and relating (Wisker, 2020). This concept monitors digital marketing activities and assesses how customers interact with products. S-commerce poses challenges due to sensory limitations, but digital content remains significant in shaping customer perceptions. The customer experience concept continues to evolve in research, with integration not fully realized in s-commerce. This concept continues to adapt to the evolution of digital content in business and marketing.

Consequence of Relationship Quality

Loyalty and purchase intention are consequences of relationship quality that have been extensively studied, yet other exciting variables exist to explore. Intention to co-create brand value is a critical consequence variable in online marketing practices. This variable depicts the relationship between buyers and sellers to create value that suits each buyer's needs. This concept is rooted in value creation, where organizations utilize their unique advantages to meet customers' real needs and gain a competitive advantage (Kousheshi et al., 2020). Co-creating brand value shifts the role of customers from passive observers to active partners collaborating with the seller. It enables a shift from focusing on products-centric logic to customer-centric logic. In this paradigm, companies acknowledge that customers are a source of competence and must collaborate rather than focus on producing core products (Narakorn & Seesupan, 2019). Value will be realized when a company understands the customer value creation process and supports it with product information transparency. Co-creation of brand value generates value through consumer interactions with the brand, which can be applied through new design features in social commerce.

Proposed Model of Relationship Quality

The proposed research model scheme can be described as follows based on identifying antecedent and consequence variables of relationship quality.

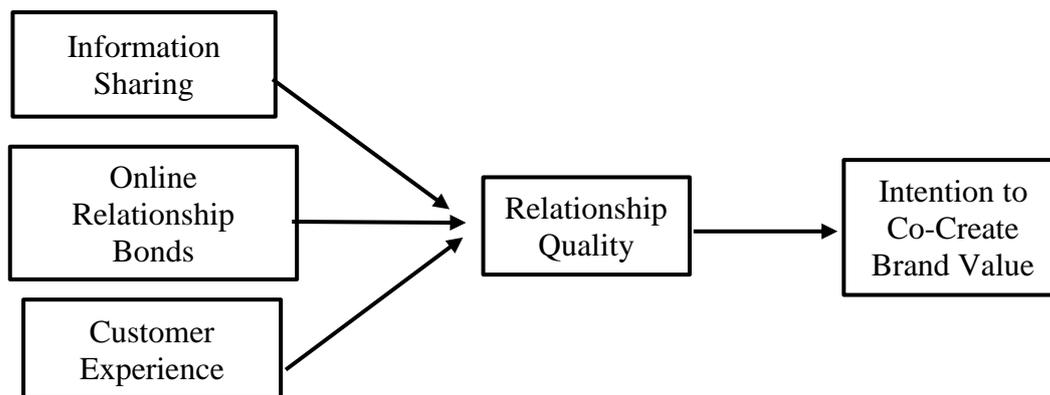


Figure 1
Antecedent and Consequence Model of Relationship Quality

Conclusion

Discussion of relationship quality from the perspective of the philosophy of science provides a comprehensive overview of this concept from ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological aspects. Regarding ontology, the dimensions of trust, commitment, and satisfaction continue to be the three main dimensions of relationship quality widely used by researchers. Epistemologically, relationship quality research predominantly adopts a positivist approach with quantitative data collection methodologies. The trend is consistent with the research mapping conducted between 2016 and 2023. Therefore, future research could adopt various qualitative methods such as case studies, grounded theory, anthropology and ethnography, action research, narrative research, or interactive to develop theories in the field of social sciences. Future studies may also utilize a pragmatic approach with triangulation procedures to accord equal importance to qualitative and quantitative research. The final part of the study discusses developing the relationship quality concept in online marketing. The research mapping identifies antecedent variables of relationship quality: information sharing, online relationship bonds, and customer experience. Meanwhile, the consequence variable is the intention to co-create brand value. Future research could adapt the proposed model from this study to provide further empirical evidence. Investigations should be carried out in the context of social commerce as an evolving marketing practice, so further exploration is needed.

Bibliography

- Aggarwal, R., & Bhardwaj, Monica. (2016). Assessing the impact of relationship quality on online adoption. *International Journal of Business Information Systems*, 5(1), 1–13.
- Brun, Isabelle, Rajaobelina, Lova, & Ricard, Line. (2016). Online relationship quality: testing an integrative and comprehensive model in the banking industry. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 15(4), 219–246.
- Canevello, Amy, & Crocker, Jennifer. (2010). Creating good relationships: responsiveness, relationship quality, and interpersonal goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 99(1), 78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018186>
- Izogo, Ernest Emeka, Reza, Abdi, Ogba, Ike Elechi, & Oraedu, Chukwunonso. (2017). Determinants of relationship quality and customer loyalty in retail banking: Evidence from Nigeria. *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies*, 8(2), 186–204.
- Kousheshi, Mohammad Reza, Aali, Samad, Bafandeh Zende, Ali Reza, & Iranzadeh, Soleyman. (2020). The antecedents and consequences of online relationship quality in internet purchases. *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, 11(1), 161–178. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-01-2019-0002>
- Narakorn, Prasittichai, & Seesupan, Tummatinna. (2019). Social commerce constructs and buyer-seller relationship quality as a predictor of intention to co-creation in branding. *Modern Applied Science*, 13(2), 169–176.
- Novianti, Cucum, Misbahussurur, Misbahussurur, Faozah, Faozah, Noviyani, Inez, & Khodijah, Khodijah. (2021). ManaJemen Pemasaran Online Olahan Ikan Desa Kedungjaya Kedawung Cirebon. *COMSERVA: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengabdian Masyarakat*, 1(3), 83–93. <https://doi.org/10.59141/comserva.v1i3.11>
- Osobajo, Oluyomi Abayomi, & Moore, David. (2017). Methodological choices in relationship quality (RQ) research 1987 to 2015: a systematic literature review. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 16(1), 40–81.
- Park, Yoon Soo, Konge, Lars, & Artino Jr, Anthony R. (2020). The positivism paradigm of research. *Academic Medicine*, 95(5), 690–694.
- Payne, Adrian, & Frow, Pennie. (2017). Relationship marketing: looking backwards towards the future. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 31(1), 11–15.
- Rahardja, Untung, Hongsuchon, Tanaporn, Hariguna, Taqwa, & Ruangkanjanases, Athapol. (2021). Understanding impact sustainable intention of s-commerce activities: The role of customer experiences, perceived value, and mediation of relationship quality: sustainability, 13(20), 11492.
- Sheth, Jagdish. (2017). Revitalizing relationship marketing. *Journal of Services*

Marketing, 31(1), 6–10.

Tajvidi, Mina, Wang, Yichuan, Hajli, Nick, & Love, Peter E. D. (2021). Brand value Co-creation in social commerce: The role of interactivity, social support, and relationship quality. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 115, 105238.

Wisker, Zazli Lily. (2020). Examining relationship quality in e-tailing experiences: A moderated mediated model. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 38(7), 863–876.

Zhou, Wangyue, Dong, Jincui, & Zhang, Wenyu. (2023). The impact of interpersonal interaction factors on consumers' purchase intention in social commerce: a relationship quality perspective. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 123(3), 697–721.