Long-Term Relationship between Footwear Manufacturer and Consumers: Relationship Spiral Model of Encounter for Services and Goods through Internet Shopping

by

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(ABSTRACT)

In the present market place situation, a consumer’s main contact with manufacturing (i.e., the production process) is through retailers or other middlemen, such as mail order catalog companies. Consumers rarely complain, but when they do, consumers complain to or request information from retailers about products (Kincade, Redwine, & Hancock, 1992). Manufacturers rarely receive information directly from consumers. Instead, they get second-hand reports from retailers or they get no information at all.

The purpose of this research was to explore the relationship between manufacturers and consumers during the relationship process using a mixed design of preexperimental research and panel analysis with in-depth interview. The major research question is: What will happen in the Relationship Spiral Model when the consumer becomes a part of the manufacturer /consumer relationship?

Twenty female participants, out of 35 who answered the screening questionnaire, were selected from students and acquaintances of the researcher in Blacksburg, VA. For the experiment, a simulated web site was used by a consumer (i.e., participant) to order two pair of customized shoes based on each consumer’s needs.

In the preexperimental design for this study, a longitudinal case study with a panel study technique, as described by Babbie (1999) and Creswell (1994), was utilized to investigate consumer characteristics (i.e., demographics, shopping orientation,
expectation, and experience), goods and service in encounter, and direct communication over time. The following procedure was conducted: (a) interviewing the subjects, (b) transcribing tapes and field notes, (c) segmenting data, (d) de-contextualizing data, (e) coding data, and (f) re-contextualizing data. Interpretational qualitative analysis was utilized for data analysis in this study.

As a result of recontextualization of the interview scripts, the Relationship Spiral Model emerged from the data. Four sub-models for four groups were refined according to the data from the Relationship Spiral Model. Further analysis was conducted on sub-models. Consumers are constantly changing and have multiple selection criteria. These criteria are constantly changing based on expectations, experiences and other situational variables.
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# Table of Contents

List of Tables .............................................................................................................. ix
List of Figures .............................................................................................................. x

CHAPTER I. Introduction ......................................................................................... 1
  Statement of Problem .......................................................................................... 3
  Relationships with Consumers ........................................................................ 5
  Purpose of Study ................................................................................................ 7

CHAPTER II. Literature Review .............................................................................. 10

  Marketing .............................................................................................................. 10
    Development of Marketing Concepts ............................................................. 11
    Development of Marketing Definition ........................................................... 12
    Study of Relationship Marketing .................................................................. 14
    Definition of Relationship Marketing ............................................................. 16
    Review of Relationship Marketing Studies ................................................. 17

  Services ................................................................................................................ 19
    Definition of Services ...................................................................................... 21
    Characteristics of Services .............................................................................. 22
      Intangibility .................................................................................................... 22
      Inseparability of production and consumption ......................................... 23
      Heterogeneity ................................................................................................ 23
      Perishability .................................................................................................. 24
    Service Encounter ........................................................................................... 24
    Interaction between Services and the Manufacturing Industry ................. 26

  Manufacturing Systems ....................................................................................... 27
    Craft Production ............................................................................................... 29
    Mass Production (Ford and Sloan System) .................................................... 30
    Lean Production (Toyota System) .................................................................. 32
    Quick Response Strategy ............................................................................... 34
    Definition ......................................................................................................... 35
Characteristics .......................................................................................... 35
Studies ........................................................................................................ 36
Technologies ............................................................................................... 36
Future ........................................................................................................... 36

Summary: Marketing, Services, Manufacturing Systems .......................... 39

CHAPTER III. Conceptual Framework and The Model ......................... 42

Market Environment .................................................................................. 42
Manufacturers ............................................................................................. 44
Consumers ................................................................................................... 44

Encounter between Consumers and Manufacturers ............................ 46

Direct Communication ............................................................................... 47

Limitations of Static Model Research ...................................................... 49
Limitations of Services and Goods Research ............................................ 49
New Research Approaches ....................................................................... 50

Relationship Spiral Model (Dynamic model at the Encounter of Services and Goods) .................................................. 50

Phase One ................................................................................................. 52
Phase Two ................................................................................................. 54

Summary ..................................................................................................... 54

CHAPTER IV. Research Design and Methods ........................................... 56

Research Design ......................................................................................... 56

Validity of the Research Design ............................................................... 58
Experimental Equipment – Web Site for Shoes ...................................... 58
The Selection of a Manufacturer .............................................................. 60
The Selection of Sample ............................................................................ 61
The Selection of a Product ......................................................................... 62
Variables .................................................................................................... 63

Procedure .................................................................................................. 64

In-depth Interview ...................................................................................... 65
Validity and Reliability of the Interviews .................................................. 67
Pilot Test of Experimental Procedure ........................................ 69
Preexperimental Design (Phase One) ........................................ 69
Preexperimental Design (Phase Two) ........................................ 70
Instruments ............................................................................. 71
Questionnaire .......................................................................... 71
Scenario of the Experiment ...................................................... 71
Interview Guide ......................................................................... 72
Reliability and Validity of the Instrument ................................. 72
Data Analysis ........................................................................... 73
CHAPTER V. Results .................................................................... 75
Purpose ................................................................................... 75
Method .................................................................................... 75
Procedure ................................................................................ 76
Demographic ............................................................................ 76
Screening Questionnaire I .......................................................... 77
Questionnaire 1 - Initial and Order Stage – Phase One ............... 81
   Shopping orientation ............................................................. 81
   Expectation ........................................................................... 82
   Past experience ..................................................................... 83
   Products (goods and services) .............................................. 84
   Direct communication ......................................................... 85
Questionnaire 2 – After Order Stage .......................................... 86
Questionnaire 3 – Before Consumption Stage ............................. 87
Questionnaire 4 – After Consumption Stage and
   Total Evaluation Stage .......................................................... 88
Questionnaire 5 - Initial and Order Stage – Phase Two .............. 89
Questionnaire 6 – After Order Stage .......................................... 90
Questionnaire 7 – Before Consumption Stage ............................. 92
Questionnaire 8 – After Consumption Stage and
   Total Evaluation Stage .......................................................... 93
List of Tables

Table 1. Comparison of Two Marketing Research Approaches .......................... 51
Table 2. Interview Process and Time: Phase One ........................................... 68
Table 3. Interview Process and Time: Phase Two ........................................... 68
Table 4. Demographic Information .................................................................. 78
Table 5. Demographic Information .................................................................. 80
Table 6. Summary of the Groups .................................................................... 99
List of Figure

Figure 1. Overall Relationships in Service Encounter Model............................... 25
Figure 2. Relationship Models in Textile and Apparel Industry: Old Model of
       Textile and Apparel Pipeline .............................................................. 37
Figure 3. Relationship Models in Textile and Apparel Industry: New
       Model of Textile and Apparel Relationships ...................................... 38
Figure 4. The Relationship among Manufacturers, Retailers, and Consumers
       in Three Production Systems ................................................................. 41
Figure 5. Overall Conceptual Framework .......................................................... 43
Figure 6. Relationship Spiral Model: Phase One .............................................. 53
Figure 7. Relationship Spiral Model: Phase Two ............................................... 54
Figure 8. Preexperimental Design ...................................................................... 59
Figure 9. Preexperimental Design Process ........................................................ 66
Figure 10. Initial Relationship Spiral Model ....................................................... 97
Figure 11. Model 1 for Group 1 ........................................................................ 101
Figure 12. Model 2 for Group 2 ........................................................................ 102
Figure 13. Model 3 for Group 3 ........................................................................ 103
Figure 14. Model 4 for Group 4 ........................................................................ 104