

Chapter 1

People–Based Interaction in Modern Marketing: Developing a B2B Relationship Quality Model

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic is interfering with one of our most important needs as human beings: people-based interactions. While a post-pandemic future is still uncertain, people feel the need to get back as soon as possible to that ‘human touch’, which has always been a fundamental characteristic of marketing. Based on a sample of representatives of hotels and their privileged interlocutors in corporate clients, this chapter focuses on the quality of business-to-business relationships, in which each organisation is represented by an individual, and proposes a relationship quality model from a people-based, inter-organisational perspective, while providing relevant insights in the context of the integration between traditional and digital approaches in modern marketing.

INTRODUCTION

The available online tools, among other technological advances, are capable to provide powerful, versatile, and effective contributions to mitigate some of the pandemic’s negative effects, such as social distancing, face masks, and infection

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risk. Indeed, video conferencing and other digital services allow for face-to-face and personalized communication and contribute to enhance the quality of personal and business relationships. This chapter focuses on the quality of business relationships between companies and corporate clients, in which each organization is represented by an individual, and proposes a relationship quality (RQ) model from a people-based, inter-organizational perspective. The development of the model calls for the identification, contextualization, and substantiation of the relational determinants and dimensions of RQ, as well as clarification about how they connect in the model, from the viewpoint of the actors who are living the phenomena under examination. To that end, this study explores the nature of marketing relationships within the corporate hotel business context. It is important to allow the actors of the business, in this case the representatives of hotels and corporate clients, to speak for themselves, aiming at exploring issues that are important to the quality of their business-to-business (B2B) relationships (which also have an unassailable personal component). The main purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to describe the process through which the proposed RQ model was developed.

A detailed description of the sample will be presented, followed by the description of the interview procedures, and the analysis strategy employed to achieve the proposed objectives. A characterisation of the nature of people-based relationships in an inter-organizational context will also be presented. Through a combination of literature and qualitative empirical evidence, the last part of the chapter describes the development of a proposed RQ model that considers the perspectives of both buyer and seller. Despite the growing importance of RQ in the marketing literature, there continues to be significant ambiguity about its nature, determinants, and dimensions. Previous research has addressed this issue predominantly from the buyer's perspective, to a lesser extent from the provider's perspective, but rarely focusing on both sides of the dyad. The buyer's perspective is certainly important; it is the buyer who evaluates the relationship and who decides to repurchase (or not). However, given that relationships are two-way, the perspective of the seller is equally important. The process described in this chapter is believed to constitute a stronger approach to modelling RQ, as compared to previous approaches. This is not only because the model was developed in a research setting that provides one of the best habitats for RQ (i.e., B2B relationships in a business setting where services are predominant and where the representatives of both organizations engage in a dyadic interaction), but also due to the adopted dyadic approach. This study suggests that people-based interaction plays a fundamental role in the digital ecosystem, and provides new avenues for future research and practice in the context of the integration between traditional and digital tools in modern marketing.

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