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A meta-analysis of satisfaction in marketing channel relationships

Inge GEYSKENS

Jan-Benedict E. M. STEENKAMP

Nirmalya KUMAR
Singapore Management University, nirmalyak@smu.edu.sg
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INGE GEYSKENS, JAN-BENEDICT E.M. STEENKAMP, and NIRMALYA KUMAR*

The authors advance a conceptual model of channel member satisfaction that distinguishes between economic and noneconomic satisfaction. The resulting model then is tested using meta-analysis. Meta-analysis enables the empirical investigation of a model involving several constructs that never have been examined simultaneously within an individual study. More specifically, the authors unify the stream of research on power use—the focus of many satisfaction studies in the 1970s and 1980s—with more recent work on trust and commitment, which usually explores antecedents other than power use. The results indicate that economic satisfaction and noneconomic satisfaction are distinct constructs with differential relationships to various antecedents and consequences. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that satisfaction is both conceptually and empirically separable from the related constructs of trust and commitment.

A Meta-Analysis of Satisfaction in Marketing Channel Relationships

During the past three decades, channel relationships have been an important area of research in marketing. Empirical investigations of channel relationships have focused on predicting several rich and interesting constructs such as power use, conflict, satisfaction, opportunism, and, more recently, trust and commitment. Of these, a literature search indicates that the most popular construct in empirical studies is satisfaction, with 71 studies between 1970 and 1996 incorporating satisfaction in their models of channel relationships. This is consistent with the position taken by various researchers who posit satisfaction as a focal consequence of channel relationships (e.g., Anderson and Narus 1990; Frazier 1983b).

The construct of satisfaction is of fundamental importance in understanding channel relationships (Ruekert and Churchill 1984). Satisfaction affects channel members' morale and resulting incentive to participate in collective activities (Schul, Little, and Pride 1985). It helps in devel-

*Inge Geyskens is Assistant Professor of Marketing, Tilburg University, the Netherlands (e-mail: I.Geyskens@kub.nl). Jan-Benedict E.M. Steenkamp is Professor of Marketing and Marketing Area Coordinator, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, and GfK Professor of International Marketing Research, Wageningen University, the Netherlands (e-mail: Jan-Benedict.Steenkamp@econ.kuleuven.ac.be). Nirmalya Kumar is Professor of Marketing and Retailing, IMD-International Institute for Management Development, Lausanne, Switzerland (e-mail: Kumar@imd.ch). The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions and helpful suggestions of Erin Anderson, the editor, and three anonymous JMR reviewers. To interact with colleagues on specific articles in this issue, see "Feedback" on the JMR Web site at www.ama.org/pubs/jmr.

oping integrated logistics management and just-in-time inventory systems (Brown, Lusch, and Smith 1991). Satisfied channel members are less prone to exit the channel, less inclined to file lawsuits against other channel members, and not as likely to seek protective legislation (Hunt and Nevin 1974). Thus, Dwyer (1980) views channel member satisfaction as the key to long-run channel viability.

Despite the importance of and the vast empirical research attention devoted to satisfaction in channel relationships, several unresolved issues remain. First, there is no consensus regarding the conceptualization and measurement of channel member satisfaction. Some researchers (e.g., Brown, Lusch, and Smith 1991) take an economic view of satisfaction, defining it as the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and actual profits. Others regard satisfaction in more noneconomic, psychosocial terms, defining it as an emotional response to the overall working relationship with the channel partner (e.g., Anderson and Narus 1984; Crosby, Evans, and Cowles 1990). Second, the 71 empirical studies relate satisfaction to more than 80 different variables, often with inconsistent findings across studies. Therefore, it would be helpful to establish the generalizability of the relationships between satisfaction and the constructs to which it is most frequently related while embedding them within an overall conceptual framework. Third, in more recent years, satisfaction often has been replaced by trust and/or commitment as the focal consequence(s) of channel relationships (e.g., Anderson and Weitz 1989, 1992; Morgan and Hunt 1994). However, there has been little attempt to elaborate if and how satisfaction differs conceptually and empirically from trust and commit-

ment. To help resolve these issues, we embark on a meta-analysis of the channel member satisfaction literature.[1]

Miller and Pollock (1995) observe that meta-analysis may be used for two different research objectives: (1) relating variability in study outcomes across the research stream to different methodological features of individual studies or (2) testing substantive hypotheses based on evidence aggregated across the research stream, including hypotheses that have not been considered previously in primary-level research. We refer to these as Type 1 and Type 2 studies, respectively. Although both types of meta-analysis use the same basic strategy of coding and aggregating information from results of individual studies, they are different in the manner in which they use this information to contribute to the literature.

In a Type 1 study, meta-analysis is the only technique that can appropriately address the issue of how methodological characteristics of studies affect research findings. For example, to the best of our knowledge, the only existing meta-analysis in the channels area is our recent investigation (Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar 1998), in which we focus on how the level of bivariate correlations between trust and other relationship constructs is affected by methodological and substantive characteristics. The results demonstrate that the use of experiments, samples drawn from multiple industries, and U.S. data produced larger effects. Using the Political Economy Framework, the correlation between trust and channel sentiments and actions was found to be particularly high. More generally in marketing, the studies reviewed by Farley, Lehmann, and Sawyer (1995) are other examples of such Type 1 meta-analyses.

In a Type 2 study, meta-analysis is "merely" a tool, because the same questions also could have been addressed by collecting primary data. However, meta-analysis is a more powerful technique because it allows for empirical generalizations (Farley, Lehmann, and Sawyer 1995). This study is a Type 2 meta-analysis. Therefore, similar to other empirical articles in the channels area, we develop our hypotheses up front. These hypotheses flow out of a conceptual model of the antecedents and consequences of channel member satisfaction, organized along a structure–conduct–outcomes (SCO) framework. Then, instead of primary data, we use meta-analysis to test our hypotheses.

Through this study, we aim to contribute to the channels literature in the following ways: First, we add to the contemporary state of knowledge about channel member satisfaction by investigating the generality of individual study findings and establishing several empirical generalizations. Second, our model investigates constructs that have not been empirically investigated simultaneously within an individual study. More specifically, we unify the stream of research on power use—the focus of many satisfaction studies in the 1970s and 1980s—with more recent work on trust and commitment, which usually explores antecedents other than power use. Third, we distinguish between economic and noneconomic satisfaction and examine the extent to which they are related differentially to various antecedents and consequences. Fourth, we examine whether satisfaction is conceptually and empirically distinct from the related constructs of trust and commitment.

The article is organized as follows: We begin with a theory section in which we propose a conceptual model of channel member satisfaction; define the constructs of satisfaction, trust, and commitment; and develop hypotheses relating economic and noneconomic satisfaction to various key antecedents and consequences. Then, we present the research method and data analysis procedure. Subsequently, we report the results. Finally, we conclude with implications and suggestions for further research.

THEORY

Channel Member Satisfaction

Channel member satisfaction is defined most frequently as a positive affective state resulting from the appraisal of all aspects of a firm's working relationship with another firm (e.g., Frazier, Gill, and Kale 1989; Gaski and Nevin 1985). Consequently, according to this view, satisfaction should capture both economic and noneconomic psychosocial aspects (Gassenheimer et al. 1994). The proportion of economic and noneconomic items included in the satisfaction scale, however, varies considerably across studies. Conceptually, the extent to which a satisfaction scale captures the economic versus noneconomic dimension should have an impact in terms of both the antecedents that affect satisfaction as well as the consequences fostered by satisfaction. Therefore, we distinguish between two types of satisfaction, that is, satisfaction focusing primarily on economic aspects of the relationship (which we label "economic satisfaction") and satisfaction focusing primarily on more noneconomic aspects of the relationship (which we label "noneconomic satisfaction").

Economic satisfaction is defined as a channel member's positive affective response to the economic rewards that flow from the relationship with its partner, such as sales volume and margins. An economically satisfied channel member considers the relationship a success with respect to goal attainment. It is satisfied with the general effectiveness and productivity of the relationship with its partner, as well as with the resulting financial outcomes.

Noneconomic satisfaction is defined as a channel member's positive affective response to the noneconomic, psychosocial aspects of its relationship, in that interactions with the exchange partner are fulfilling, gratifying, and easy (e.g., Dwyer and Gassenheimer 1992; Mohr, Fisher, and Nevin 1996). A channel member satisfied with the noneconomic aspects of the relationship appreciates the contacts with its partner and, on a personal level, likes working with it because it believes the partner is concerned, respectful, and willing to exchange ideas.

Satisfaction in a Structure–Conduct–Outcomes Framework

We use an SCO framework to help understand the role of satisfaction in marketing channels (cf. Molm 1990). Channel *structure* refers to the patterned or regularized aspects of relationships between channel participants; *conduct* refers to strategies and patterns of behavior that emerge in a relationship; and *outcomes* refer to relational, qualitative outcomes that result from the relationship. The SCO framework posits a causal sequence, in that structure leads to conduct, which in turn determines outcomes. According to the SCO framework, for a complete understanding of a

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[1]For an excellent discussion of the meta-analysis technique, see Farley and Lehmann (1986).

construct, we should consider all three types of constructs in relation to one another, because widely divergent conduct may follow from given structural conditions (and thus, structure–outcomes relationships are situation-specific and not generalizable to new settings unless conduct is taken into account) or varying qualities of outcomes may result from presumably similar conduct patterns (and thus, conduct–outcomes relationships are situation-specific and not generalizable to new settings unless structure is taken into account).

Figure 1 presents our model of channel member satisfaction, organized along the principles of the SCO framework. Channel member satisfaction, conflict, trust, and commitment repeatedly have been referred to and explored as channel outcomes (e.g., Frazier 1983b; Mohr and Nevin 1990). As previously indicated, we distinguish between economic and noneconomic satisfaction. Researchers have tried to predict these outcome variables from both structural and behavioral (conduct) constructs in the channel. Structural constructs that have figured prominently in channel member satisfaction investigations are dependence/power (e.g., Keith, Jackson, and Crosby 1990; Skinner and Guiltinan 1985), as well as centralization and formalization (e.g., Dwyer and Oh 1987a; Phillips 1982). The most pervasive channel member conduct construct that has been identified as an important determinant of channel member satisfaction is partner's use of power, and the most popular typology of power use distinguishes between coercive and noncoercive influence strategies (e.g., Frazier and Rody 1991; Gaski and Nevin 1985).

Outcomes

Conflict represents the level of tension, frustration, and disagreement in the relationship (Anderson and Narus 1990; Frazier, Gill, and Kale 1989) when one channel member perceives that another channel member is engaged in behavior that is preventing or impeding it from achieving its goals (Gaski and Nevin 1985). *Trust* frequently is described as the extent to which a firm believes that its exchange partner is honest and/or benevolent (e.g., Kumar, Scheer, and Steenkamp 1995a). Trust in the partner's honesty refers to the firm's belief that the partner will keep its promises, whereas trust in the partner's benevolence refers to the belief that the partner is interested in the firm's welfare (Kumar, Scheer, and Steenkamp 1995b). *Commitment* is a desire to continue the relationship in the future and a willingness to make short-term sacrifices to maintain the relationship (e.g., Anderson and Weitz 1992).

Noneconomic satisfaction, trust, and commitment: Similar or divergent constructs? Given its negative valence and behavioral aspects, conflict seems quite distinct from the other four outcome variables. Similarly, given its economic nature, economic satisfaction appears easily separable from the other outcome constructs. However, whether noneconomic satisfaction, trust, and commitment are separate, distinct constructs is less straightforward. It is conceivable that they all tap into some generalized positive affect. Published channel studies that directly address questions about the distinction among noneconomic satisfaction, trust, and commitment are scarce.

According to Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987), relationships evolve through five general phases: (1) awareness, (2) explo-

ration, (3) expansion, (4) commitment, and (5) dissolution. Each phase represents a major transition in how parties regard one another. Whereas perceptions of noneconomic satisfaction and the honesty component of trust are formed during the exploration phase of relationship development, the rudiments of benevolence are not established until channel relationships enter the expansion phase, that is, the phase in which parties form expectations for promising future interactions (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987; Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna 1985). Commitment does not develop fully until relationships enter the fourth and most advanced phase of buyer–seller relationship development, the commitment phase, which is characterized by parties purposefully engaging resources to maintain their relationship (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987).

Why do these constructs develop at different points in time of a relationship? There is a developmental progression in terms of the time and emotional investment required to establish each construct and what it demands in terms of the level of abstraction (Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna 1985). The degree of a firm's noneconomic satisfaction and its perception of its partner's honesty are associated largely with specific and tangible aspects of the relationship and, therefore, form more rapidly than do benevolence and commitment (Porter et al. 1974). Benevolence and commitment require a channel member to make a more comprehensive assessment of its relationship on the basis of abstract expectations and projections into the future (Kumar 1996), and thereby require more time (Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna 1985). In particular, because commitment requires a member to think in fairly comprehensive terms about the relationship (Williams and Hazer 1986) and represents the highest stage of emotional and economic resources invested in the relationship (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987), a relatively significant period of time must elapse before a channel member becomes truly committed to its partner (Porter et al. 1974).

Using the preceding reasoning as a basis, we hypothesize the following:
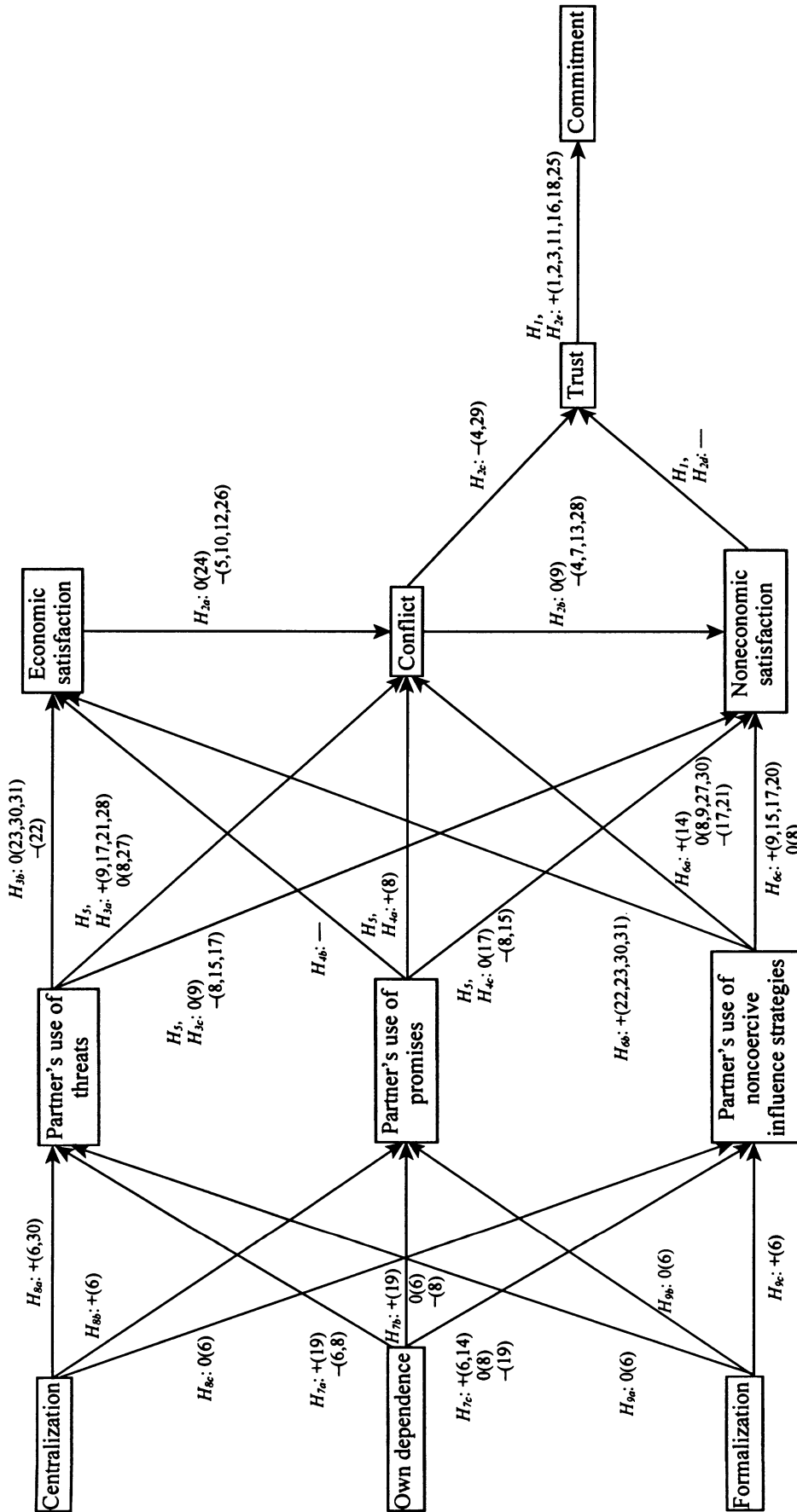
H_1: Noneconomic satisfaction, trust, and commitment are meaningful as separate, distinct channel constructs.

Interrelationships among outcome variables. Although several individual studies have examined two or more of our five outcome variables—economic satisfaction, noneconomic satisfaction, conflict, trust, and commitment—there is no consensus on the causal ordering of these five constructs. Although we acknowledge the potential for two-way relationships, in Figure 1 we delineate a causal structure of the process through which the five relationship outcomes influence one another. The basis of the causal ordering is our previous conceptual discussion on the differences between the outcome constructs and the channels literature.

Because members join marketing channels to create economic value for themselves, conflict in channel relationships is most likely to occur over economic issues and in the face of economic dissatisfaction by the parties. Channel members that are highly satisfied with the economic rewards that flow from their relationship will perceive their partner as advancing their goal achievement, as opposed to impeding or preventing it. This should reduce the level of disagreements and conflict in the relationship.

Conflict negatively affects trust both directly and indirectly through noneconomic satisfaction. Conflict generally

Figure 1

ECONOMIC AND NONECONOMIC SATISFACTION IN A STRUCTURE–CONDUCT–OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

STRUCTURE

Centralization

Own dependence

Formalization

CONDUCT

Partner's use of threats

Partner's use of promises

Partner's use of noncoercive influence strategies

OUTCOMES

Economic satisfaction

Conflict

Noneconomic satisfaction

Trust

Commitment

H_{8a}: +(6,30)
H_{8b}: +(6)
H_{8c}: 0(6)

H_{7a}: +(19)
−(6,8)
H_{7b}: +(19)
0(6)
−(8)
H_{7c}: +(6,14)
0(8)
−(19)

H_{9a}: 0(6)
H_{9b}: 0(6)
H_{9c}: +(6)

H_{3b}: 0(23,30,31)
−(22)

H_{5}, H_{3a}: +(9,17,21,28)
0(8,27)

H_{5}, H_{3c}: 0(9)
−(8,15,17)

H_{4b}: —

H_{5}, H_{4a}: +(8)

H_{5}, H_{4c}: 0(17)
−(8,15)

H_{6b}: +(22,23,30,31)

H_{6a}: +(14)
0(8,9,27,30)
−(17,21)

H_{6c}: +(9,15,17,20)
0(8)

H_{2a}: 0(24)
−(5,10,12,26)

H_{3c}: −(4,29)

H_{2b}: 0(9)
−(4,7,13,28)

H_{1},
H_{2d}: —

H_{1},
H_{2c}: +(1,2,3,11,16,18,25)

Notes: The figure was constructed on the basis of construct operationalizations. These may not always coincide with the construct designations employed in the studies. (+) Positive effect; (0) No effect; (−) Negative effect.

Studies: 1 Andaleeb 1991; 2 Andaleeb 1996; 3 Anderson and Weitz 1989; 4 Anderson and Narus 1990; 5 Arndt and Ogaard 1986; 6 Boyle and Dwyer 1995; 7 Brown and Day 1981; 8 Brown and Frazier 1978; 9 Brown, Johnson, and Koenig 1995; 10 Brown, Lusch, and Smith 1991; 11 Crosby, Evans, and Cowles 1990; 12 Dwyer 1980; 13 Frazier, Gill, and Kale 1989; 14 Frazier and Rody 1991; 15 Frazier and Summers 1986; 16 Ganesan 1994; 17 Gaski and Nevin 1985; 18 Geyskens et al. 1996; 19 Kale 1986; 20 Krapfel and Spekman 1987; 21 Lusch 1976; 22 Lusch 1977; 23 Michie 1978; 24 Mohr, Fisher, and Nevin 1996; 25 Morgan and Hunt 1994; 26 Rosenberg and Stern 1971; 27 Schul and Babakus 1988; 28 Skinner, Gassenheimer, and Kelley 1992; 29 Stern, Sternthal, and Craig 1973; 30 Wilkinson 1981; 31 Yavas and Habib

is believed to be causally antecedent to noneconomic satisfaction (e.g., Anderson and Narus 1990). Relational disagreements tend to elicit frustration, thereby causing feelings of unpleasantness and noneconomic dissatisfaction about the relationship and, eventually, distrust toward the partner.

Our model posits a sequential one-way causal flow from noneconomic satisfaction to trust to commitment. The rationale for this lies primarily in Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh's (1987) pioneering article on relationship development, which adopts a longitudinal perspective on channel relationships. As we previously argued, noneconomic satisfaction, trust, and commitment are formed during subsequent phases of relationship development. On this basis, we hypothesize that noneconomic satisfaction (which develops in the short run and is a report of past interactions) positively influences trust (which takes relatively longer to develop and has a more expectational quality to it), which in turn positively affects commitment (which develops in the long run and is future-oriented) (cf. Williams and Hazer 1986). Considerable conceptual and empirical evidence favors the conclusion that commitment is the ultimate outcome in channel relationships, with causal precedence of conflict, satisfaction, and trust (e.g., Anderson and Weitz 1992; Morgan and Hunt 1994). A meta-analysis by aggregating the evidence from several studies should help establish the generality of this sequence. We hypothesize the following:

H_{2a}: Greater levels of economic satisfaction decrease conflict.
H_{2b}: Greater levels of conflict decrease noneconomic satisfaction.
H_{2c}: Greater levels of conflict decrease trust.
H_{2d}: Greater levels of noneconomic satisfaction foster trust.
H_{2e}: Greater levels of trust foster commitment.

Conduct

The most pervasive channel member conduct construct that has been identified as a determinant of channel member satisfaction is use of power, usually referred to as "influence strategies." For the most part, channels researchers have distinguished between coercive and noncoercive influence strategies. Conceptualizations of coercive influence strategies typically include threats and promises (e.g., Frazier and Rody 1991; Frazier and Summers 1986).[2] Threats are used when the source implies to the target that failure to perform or behave in the desired way will result in negative sanctions or punishments. Promises are used when the source implies that it will provide the target with specific rewards or benefits, contingent on the target's compliance with the source's desires. In the social psychological literature (e.g., French and Raven 1959), promises are not regarded as a coercive influence strategy because they draw on reward power. However, Frazier and Summers (1984, 1986) explore promises as a coercive influence strategy because, similar to threats, promises do not attempt to alter the target's perceptions of the inherent desirability of the intended

behavioral response. Furthermore, as Frazier and Rody (1991) observe, these are contingent influence strategies in which the action (punishment or reward) of the source depends on the target's response (compliance or noncompliance). Consistent with this, Frazier's data in several studies indicate that threats and promises load onto the same factor. In contrast, in two data sets collected by Boyle and colleagues (1992), promises and threats are correlated positively but have differential effects on relationalism. In this meta-analysis, we take the opportunity to reexamine this issue and ascertain whether promises and threats have differential effects.

In contrast to coercive influence strategies, noncoercive influence strategies focus "on the beliefs and attitudes of the target rather than directly on the target's behavior, and the source does not mediate the relationship on the basis of the target's response" (Frazier and Rody 1991, p. 58). Noncoercive influence strategies in channels such as information exchange, discussion of business strategies, and requests are therefore noncontingent influence strategies. Sometimes they are operationalized as the target's perception of the quality of assistances offered by the source (Brown, Johnson, and Koenig 1995). Consistent with the majority of research on channel power (e.g., Brown and Frazier 1978; Keith, Jackson, and Crosby 1990), we focus on the partner's use of power in this article.

The impact of the partner's use of coercive influence strategies. Conflict increases when coercive influence strategies are used by the partner (Brown and Frazier 1978; Brown, Lusch, and Muehling 1983). When the partner firm frequently pressures and coerces the focal channel member (using threats and/or promises) into either taking some actions that it otherwise would not have taken or forgoing some other positive outcomes, the focal channel member is expected to feel tension and frustration because its channels operations are disrupted and its decision autonomy is constrained (Brown, Lusch, and Muehling 1983). This may result in disagreements and conflict (Frazier and Rody 1991).

Channel members often perceive some cost in complying with their partners' threats (Anderson and Narus 1990), and punishments generally decrease the channel member's outcomes (Scheer and Stern 1992). Therefore, the use of threats by the partner should decrease the focal channel member's economic satisfaction. Furthermore, noneconomic satisfaction should decrease because channel members do not appreciate interactions with parties that threaten them.

The use of promises by the partner firm should enhance the focal channel member's economic satisfaction because the channel member's outcomes generally increase in case of compliance (Busch 1980; Wilkinson 1979). Conversely, the use of promises by the partner should decrease the channel member's noneconomic satisfaction. When promises are used, the focal channel member's intrinsic motivation and sense of autonomy are likely to be undermined by the external explanation for the behavior, as will its noneconomic satisfaction (Scheer and Stern 1992). As a consequence, it will experience lower noneconomic satisfaction (Frazier and Summers 1986; Lusch 1977).

Because the partner's use of threats results in punishment (in case of noncompliance), whereas the partner's use of promises results in rewards (in case of compliance), it gen-

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[2] A third coercive influence strategy is the use of legal legitimate power (i.e., legitimate power based on contractual agreements). A large number of researchers have not distinguished the use of legal legitimate power, which is a coercive influence strategy, from the use of traditional legitimate power (i.e., legitimate power based on social norms and values), which is a noncoercive influence strategy. Because of this interpretational confounding, we do not include the use of legitimate power in our meta-analysis.

erally is agreed that the use of threats is more coercive than the use of promises (Frazier and Summers 1984). Furthermore, as Beier and Stern (1969) observe, the coercive aspects of influence strategies that use reward power, such as promises, are subtle, whereas the coercive aspects of influence strategies that directly use coercive power, such as threats, are blunt and forceful. Therefore, the use of threats by the partner will have stronger effects on conflict and noneconomic satisfaction than will the use of promises by the partner. We propose the following:

H₃: Greater use of threats by the partner fosters (a) higher conflict, (b) lower economic satisfaction, and (c) lower noneconomic satisfaction.

H₄: Greater use of promises by the partner fosters (a) higher conflict, (b) higher economic satisfaction, and (c) lower noneconomic satisfaction.

H₅: The use of threats by the partner has stronger effects on conflict and noneconomic satisfaction than the use of promises by the partner.

The impact of the partner's use of noncoercive influence strategies. The frequent use of noncoercive influence strategies by the partner fosters higher levels of agreement on business issues in the channel relationship (Frazier and Summers 1986), thereby helping alleviate conflict (Frazier and Rody 1991; Lusch 1976). Moreover, the use of noncoercive influence strategies by the partner firm should enhance the focal channel member's economic satisfaction because the channel member's outcomes generally increase when the partner provides it with high quality assistances. Furthermore, when noncoercive strategies are relied on heavily by the partner, the focal channel member is likely to perceive the partner as accomodative, responsive to its concerns, and willing to work toward solutions to problems (Frazier and Rody 1991). As a result, noneconomic satisfaction increases. We hypothesize the following:

H₆: Greater use of noncoercive influence strategies by the partner fosters (a) lower conflict, (b) higher economic satisfaction, and (c) higher noneconomic satisfaction.

Structure

In a channel setting, *dependence* usually is defined as the firm's need to maintain the relationship with its partner to achieve its goals (Frazier 1983a; Heide and John 1988). It is based in the value received by the firm through its relationship with the partner and the extent to which that partner, and the value generated, are irreplaceable (Frazier and Rody 1991). *Centralization* is defined as the degree to which decision-making authority is concentrated, as opposed to shared, within the channel system. Consistent with existing channels research on centralization, we focus on centralized decision making by the partner firm (Dwyer and Oh 1987a). *Formalization* is the extent to which decision making is regulated by explicit rules and procedures (John and Reve 1982).

The impact of own dependence. Some research has taken the position that those that are dependent on their exchange partner will be exploited through the frequent use of coercive influence strategies by that partner (Kale 1986). As the dependence of a channel member on its partner increases, that partner faces higher temptations to act opportunistically (Kumar, Scheer, and Steenkamp 1998). It has every impetus

to use its power and no reason for restraint, because its fear of retaliation is low. Thus, it increasingly will take advantage of the dependent firm by greater use of coercive power to gain a disproportionate share of benefits from the exchange.

Most researchers (e.g., Brown and Frazier 1978), however, predict that as a channel member's dependence increases, its partner will have less need to rely on coercive influence tactics. The powerful partner is more likely to be meaningful enough to the dependent channel member to make effective use of noncoercive strategies and achieve compliance without having to resort to the expense of coercive influence strategies; instead, the partner can reserve its coercive influence strategies for when they really are needed to obtain compliance (i.e., when noncoercive strategies have failed to produce the desired response) (Frazier and Rody 1991; Frazier and Summers 1986). Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H₇: Greater levels of own dependence foster (a) lesser use of threats by the partner, (b) lesser use of promises by the partner, and (c) greater use of noncoercive influence strategies by the partner.

The impact of centralization. Centralized decision making (by the partner) fosters the use of threats and promises by the partner. In relationships in which the exchange partner attempts to monopolize interfirm decisions, the focal channel member experiences alienation and frustration (Dwyer and Oh 1987a; John 1984). This would render the use of noncoercive influence strategies, such as information exchange and recommendation, less effective (Boyle and Dwyer 1995). Instead, the partner must resort to more coercive forms of influence, including threats and promises, that provide the focal channel member with a direct incentive to change its behavior. Therefore, we forward the following hypothesis:

H₈: Greater levels of centralization in favor of the partner foster (a) greater use of threats by the partner, (b) greater use of promises by the partner, and (c) lesser use of noncoercive influence strategies by the partner.

The impact of formalization. Formalized transactions allow for greater opportunity to use threats and promises as forms of influence. Formalized structures exhibit the extensive use of rules and procedures and traditionally have been viewed as having negative effects on those subjected to them (John 1984). According to Dwyer and Oh (1987a), formalized structures deter a channel member's sense of autonomy and competence, which in turn reduces its intrinsic motivation. Consequently, programs and directives targeted toward the focal channel member will be viewed negatively or even with suspicion. Again, when credibility in the partner's message is lacking, the use of noncoercive influence strategies such as information exchange and recommendation are rendered ineffective, and more coercive forms of influence are likely to be used (Boyle and Dwyer 1995). We hypothesize the following:

H₉: Greater levels of formalization foster (a) greater use of threats by the partner, (b) greater use of promises by the partner, and (c) lesser use of noncoercive influence strategies by the partner.

METHOD

Literature Search

Empirical studies appearing in the marketing or management literature and reporting on one or more relationships between any pair of constructs specified in Figure 1 were identified by means of a computer bibliographic search and issue-by-issue searches of the *Academy of Management Journal, International Journal of Research in Marketing, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Retailing, Management Science, Marketing Letters, Marketing Science, Strategic Management Journal,* and the *Proceedings of the Academy of Management, American Marketing Association,* and *European Marketing Academy.* The literature search covered the 1970–1996 period.

In all, 97 empirical articles were uncovered. Four studies were excluded because they merely reanalyzed previously reported data (e.g., Howell 1987), thereby reducing the number of studies to 93. In some studies, data from more than one sample were examined (e.g., Anderson and Narus 1990; Ganesan 1994). Thus, 107 independent samples reported in 93 studies formed the basis for our analyses. Studies included in our meta-analysis are indicated in the reference list by an asterisk (*). All relationships included data from at least two samples (Ns = 121–3550), with an average total N per relationship of 1277. This is comparable to the meta-analyses of Brown and Peterson (1993) and Brown and Stayman (1992), which were based on average total Ns per relationship of 1811 and 1328, respectively.

Procedure

When the set of studies was identified, the sample size and the correlations between variables of interest were recorded. For studies that did not report correlations, Student's t and F ratios with one degree of freedom in the numerator were converted to correlation coefficients by means of formulas provided by Hunter and Schmidt (1990, p. 272).[3]

All "harvested" correlations were categorized on the basis of the construct operationalizations. In most cases, but not all, these coincided with the construct designations employed in the studies. We distinguished between economic and noneconomic satisfaction on the basis of the percentage of economic items in the satisfaction measure. Satisfaction measures containing at least 75% economic items were labeled "economic satisfaction," whereas those measures containing at most 25% economic items were labeled "noneconomic satisfaction." To illustrate, the satisfaction constructs included in Brown, Lusch, and Smith's (1991) and Wilkinson's (1981) studies were labeled economic satisfaction because they were measured using predominantly economic items (93% and 88%, respectively). Gaski (1986) and Andaleeb (1996), conversely, measured satisfaction using few, if any, economic items (20% and 0%, respectively). Their satisfaction constructs were labeled noneconomic satisfaction.

The first step of the meta-analysis entailed calculating a pooled correlation coefficient for every pair of constructs in

our model, according to the meta-analytic procedures suggested by Hedges and Olkin (1985). To this extent, z-transformed individual study effects were averaged and weighted by an estimate of the inverse of their variance (N − 3) to give greater weight to more precise estimates. Thus,

$$(1) \qquad z_{ij} = \frac{\sum\limits_k (N_k - 3)z_{ijk}}{\sum\limits_k (N_k - 3)},$$

where z_{ijk} is the z-transform of the observed correlation between construct i and construct j in study k, and N_k is the number of respondents in study k. The pooled z-transformed study effects then were reconverted to correlation coefficients (Hedges and Olkin 1985).[4]

The structural equations corresponding to our SCO model are depicted in Figure 1. Because the path analysis model is recursive, the parameters can be estimated using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression (Pedhazur 1982). The pooled correlation coefficients constituted the model input for OLS.[5, 6] The median sample size (N = 999) from the meta-analysis of relationships among constructs in the model was used in the regression analysis.

RESULTS

The meta-analytic correlations appear in Table 1. Table 1 shows that the average absolute value of the correlations among the outcome variables is .478. Some of these average correlations are quite large. For example, trust is fairly strongly correlated with noneconomic satisfaction (r = .767), conflict (r = −.591), and commitment (r = .524). These findings suggest that, on average, the outcome variables have approximately 23% of their variance in common, with the range extending from 9.2% (between conflict and noneconomic satisfaction) to as high as 58.8% (between trust and noneconomic satisfaction). Table 1 also shows that the average correlations among the structure variables (average |r| = .186) and among the conduct variables (average |r| = .196) are modest.

Two findings pertaining to the meta-analytic correlations involving economic and noneconomic satisfaction deserve to be highlighted. First, three variables, namely, partner's use of promises, centralization, and formalization, are related positively to economic satisfaction but negatively to

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[3]The conversion formulas are as follows: r = t/√(t² + N − 2), and r = √F/√F + N − 2.

[4]The conversion formulas are as follows: z = ½ ln[(1 + r)/(1 − r)], and r = (e²ᶻ − 1)/(e²ᶻ + 1).

[5]An OLS regression requires that the correlation matrix involved is positive definite. Because of the way the correlation matrix is constructed, this is not always guaranteed in meta-analysis, but it was not a problem in this study.

[6]Individual correlations also may be affected by idiosyncratic study characteristics. We explored this issue in depth for the correlations involving our two focal constructs—economic satisfaction and noneconomic satisfaction—using Parametric Adjustability (Assmus, Farley, and Lehmann 1984; Farley, Lehmann, and Sawyer 1995). We examined the effects of type of product distribution channel (consumer versus industrial), level of integration (franchise versus independent), national culture (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism), side of the dyad (buyer versus seller), reference frame (experiment versus field study), and publication outlet (top-tier journals versus non–top-tier journals versus proceedings), while controlling for the specific construct related to economic/noneconomic satisfaction. In this case, only 1 out of 17 study characteristic effects was significant at the .05 level, which can be expected by chance alone.

Table 1
SUMMARY OF META-ANALYTIC CORRELATIONS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Outcomes										
1. Economic satisfaction	—a									
2. Noneconomic satisfaction										
3. Trust	**.393** 5 *472*	**.767** 7 *1016*								
4. Commitment	**.404** 5 *506*	**.513** 6 *938*	**.524** 11 *2494*							
5. Conflict	**-.407** 14 *831*	**-.303** 13 *1651*	**-.591** 12 *2081*	**-.401** 11 *2895*						
Conduct										
6. Partner's use of threats	**-.056** 2 *236*	**-.350** 5 *843*	**-.423** 3 *914*	**-.303** 4 *1827*	**.205** 11 *1609*					
7. Partner's use of promises	**.120** 4 *121*	**-.216** 4 *690*	**-.226** 2 *706*	**-.033** 4 *1827*	**.050** 6 *482*	**.375** 12 *2170*				
8. Partner's use of noncoercive influence strategies	**.211** 10 *1586*	**.295** 8 *1400*	**.337** 4 *1068*	**.171** 6 *2902*	**-.054** 14 *3550*	**-.031** 14 *2351*	**.182** 10 *2082*			
Structure										
9. Own dependence	**.055** 5 *443*	**.146** 6 *1151*	**.099** 7 *1070*	**.237** 11 *2547*	**-.088** 9 *2457*	**.096** 3 *504*	**.213** 3 *504*	**.022** 6 *2061*		
10. Centralization	**.187** 8 *498*	**-.182** 5 *832*	**-.221** 5 *650*	**.251** 3 *981*	**.210** 8 *1043*	**.292** 5 *757*	**.271** 4 *682*	**.099** 9 *2020*	**.182** 11 *2813*	
11. Formalization	**.268** 3 *273*	**-.058** 2 *308*	**-.079** 7 *651*	**.200** 3 *632*	**-.033** 11 *1732*	**.124** 3 *571*	**.194** 2 *465*	**.281** 4 *696*	**.111** 6 *1203*	**.265** 12 *2186*

Note: Entries are the weighted average correlation (r) values, the number of correlations obtained for each analysis (k), and the total sample size used for each analysis (N).
aPrimary studies involving satisfaction use either an economic or a noneconomic measure of satisfaction. As a consequence, correlation coefficients between economic and noneconomic satisfaction are not available.

noneconomic satisfaction. Second, most variables exhibit stronger correlations with noneconomic satisfaction than with economic satisfaction. These two findings provide evidence for the importance of discriminating between economic and noneconomic satisfaction.

Noneconomic Satisfaction, Trust, and Commitment: Distinct Constructs

In our meta-analysis, we find weighted mean correlations among noneconomic satisfaction, trust, and commitment varying between .513 and .767 (see Table 1). Although these correlations are substantial, they are significantly ($p <$ .0001) different from 1. In addition, if noneconomic satisfaction, trust, and commitment are essentially the same construct, we would expect each of these constructs to have an identical pattern of relationships with the various antecedents and consequences (Miller and Pollock 1995). Examination of Table 1 reveals that this is not the case. For example, conflict has a large negative relation with trust ($r = -.591, p < .001$) and commitment ($r = -.401, p < .001$) and a modest negative relation with noneconomic satisfaction ($r = -.303, p < .001$). Partner's use of promises has a modest negative relation with noneconomic satisfaction ($r = -.216, p < .001$) and trust ($r = -.226, p < .001$) and a nonsignificant relation with commitment ($r = -.033, p > .10$). Furthermore, formalization has a modest positive relation with commitment ($r = .200, p < .001$), a small negative relation with trust ($r = -.079, p < .05$), and a nonsignificant relation with noneconomic satisfaction ($r = -.058, p > .10$). Thus, H_1 is supported.

Satisfaction in a Structure–Conduct–Outcomes Framework

In Figure 2, we report the results of the OLS regression based on effects aggregated across the entire research stream. To avoid a clutter of arrows and numbers, only the significant parameter estimates are reported.

Interrelationships among outcome variables. Economic satisfaction reduces conflict ($\beta = -.408, p < .001$). Conflict influences trust both directly ($\beta = -.395, p < .001$) and indirectly through noneconomic satisfaction ($\beta = -.231, p < .001$). Noneconomic satisfaction has a positive effect on trust ($\beta = .646, p < .001$), which in turn has a positive effect on commitment ($\beta = .524, p < .001$). Therefore, H_{2a-e} are supported.[7]

The effects of relational conduct. The use of threats by the partner has a positive effect on the focal channel mem-

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[7]Our SCO model specifies a one-way causal flow among the outcome constructs. One reviewer argued that trust could (also) affect conflict and noneconomic satisfaction. A test proposed by Bagozzi (1980; see also Brown and Peterson 1993) was used to shed light on this issue. A model was estimated specifying reciprocal causation between conflict and trust. For identification purposes, we included an additional direct effect of formalization on trust. The reciprocal model was estimated using maximum likelihood. It was found that the effect of conflict on trust was significant and had the predicted negative valence, whereas the effect of trust on conflict was positive and significant, which makes little sense and is counter to prediction. A similar model was estimated specifying reciprocal causation between noneconomic satisfaction and trust. To achieve empirical identification, we removed the effect of conflict on noneconomic satisfaction. The effect of noneconomic satisfaction on trust was positive and significant, whereas the reverse effect was nonsignificant ($p > .20$). Thus, though the analyses are based on cross-sectional data, these findings suggest that conflict and noneconomic satisfaction are causally antecedent to trust, rather than the other way around.

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ber's perception of conflict in the relationship ($\beta = .173, p <$ .001) and negative effects on the focal channel member's sense of economic satisfaction ($\beta = -.096, p < .01$) and noneconomic satisfaction ($\beta = -.227, p < .001$). Therefore, H_{3a-c} are supported.

The effect of use of promises by the partner on conflict is nonsignificant ($p > .10$). Thus, we find no support for H_{4a}. As we hypothesized in H_{4b} and H_{4c}, the use of promises by the partner has a positive effect on the focal channel member's economic satisfaction ($\beta = .122, p < .001$) and a negative effect on the focal channel member's noneconomic satisfaction ($\beta = -.175, p < .001$).

The use of threats by the partner has a stronger effect on conflict ($\beta = .173, p < .001$) than the use of promises by the partner does ($\beta = .028, p > .10$) ($t = 2.78, p < .01$). The effects of the partner's use of threats ($\beta = -.227, p < .001$) and the partner's use of promises ($\beta = -.175, p < .001$) on noneconomic satisfaction were not significantly different from each other ($t = 1.05, p > .10$), though the difference was in the expected direction. Therefore, we find only partial support for H_5.

Noncoercive influence strategies by the partner had a nonsignificant effect on conflict ($p > .10$) and positive effects on the focal channel member's sense of economic satisfaction ($\beta = .186, p < .001$) and noneconomic satisfaction ($\beta = .307, p < .001$). Therefore, H_{6b} and H_{6c} are supported, but H_{6a} is not.

The effects of relationship structure. The higher a channel member's dependence, the more its partner will turn to the use of promises to obtain compliance ($\beta = .161, p < .001$). Centralization increases the partner's use of threats and promises ($\beta = .272$ and .210, respectively, $p < .001$), and formalization increases the partner's use of promises and noncoercive influence strategies ($\beta = .121$ and .275, respectively, $p < .001$). The remaining effects of structure on conduct are nonsignificant ($p > .10$). Therefore, the results for our hypotheses for the effects of structure on conduct are mixed. We find support for H_{8a-b} and H_{9b}, but not for H_{7a-c}, H_{8c}, H_{9a}, and H_{9c}.
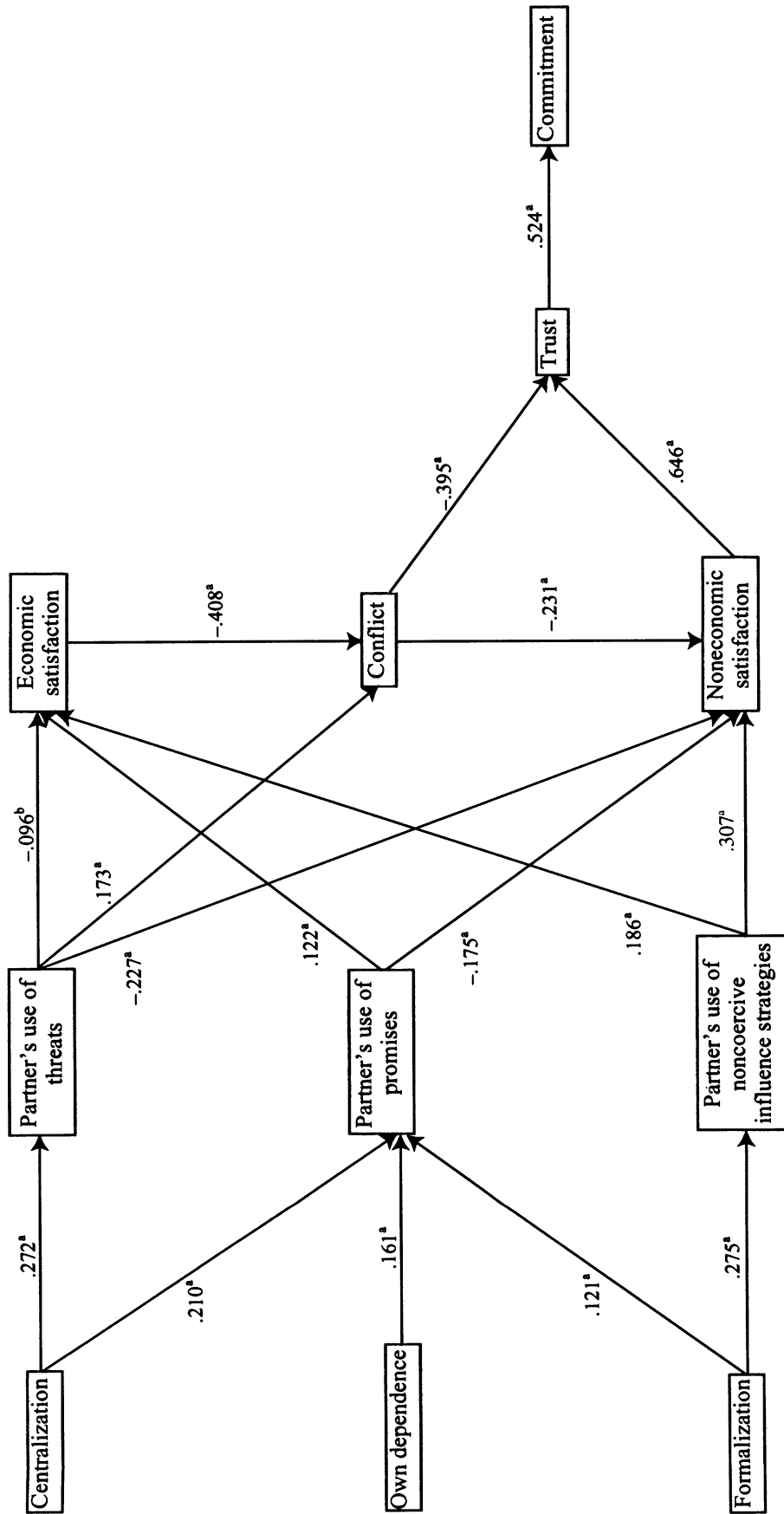
Net effects involving satisfaction. The net effects (N.E.) of the structure variables on economic and noneconomic satisfaction and of economic and noneconomic satisfaction on commitment can be calculated on the basis of our model by multiplying the appropriate regression coefficients. Overall, centralization (N.E. = –.102) and own dependence (N.E. = –.043) have negative effects on noneconomic satisfaction and small positive effects on economic satisfaction (N.E. = .005 and .013, respectively). Formalization increases both noneconomic satisfaction (N.E. = .054) and economic satisfaction (N.E. = .061). The net effects of both noneconomic satisfaction (N.E. = .339) and economic satisfaction (N.E. = .116) on commitment are positive, with the effect of noneconomic satisfaction being larger.

DISCUSSION

Channel member satisfaction has been the most popular construct in empirical studies, with 71 studies between 1970 and 1996 incorporating satisfaction in their model of channel relationships. However, the overwhelming emphasis has been on developing and testing new theory rather than on establishing empirical generalizations. Thus, despite this extensive research, no consensus has been established about

Figure 2
ESTIMATES FOR THE SCO MODEL

the relationships between satisfaction and some of it its antecedents and consequences. The problem, as Barwise (1995) recently observed, is that though most research in marketing is empirical, little of it even attempts to establish any generalizations. Given the importance of the construct and the current status of research, we systematized and quantified all available research evidence and embarked on a meta-analysis of the impressive body of evidence on channel member satisfaction. A summary of our results appears in Table 2. This meta-analysis opens several future research issues. However, before we elaborate on the implications for further research, we note the limitations of our study.

Limitations

First, we recognize that the constructs included in our model are only a portion of the potentially relevant variables that might have been included. We were constrained in selecting those variables that were related most frequently to satisfaction and those for which a sufficient number of primary studies relating them to the other constructs in the model were available. These considerations represent a restriction inherent in all models based on matrices of meta-analytic correlations. However, as the variables most frequently studied in relation to channel member satisfaction,

they are clearly of focal interest to channels researchers, and developing empirical generalizations for these variables is therefore especially relevant. Moreover, most variables not included in our meta-analysis were investigated in such a small number of studies that there would be little or no gain from quantifying the effects of these variables.

Second, in the spirit of meta-analysis and to conform to mainstream meta-analytical practice, we cumulated similar, yet different, constructs into overarching constructs. Perhaps the best example of this is with respect to conflict. With the exception of manifest conflict, there were not enough correlations available involving the individual states of conflict and the other constructs in our model. Therefore, we combined latent, perceived, affective, and manifest conflict into the overarching construct of "global" conflict. This categorization enabled us to derive empirical generalizations based on all the available evidence with respect to conflict. Reestimation of our SCO model after replacing global conflict with manifest conflict indicated that the results remain substantially unaltered.

Third, generalizations also are bound by context. Universality of parameters, perhaps with some inconsequential measurement error, is a situation that seldom occurs in practice (Farley and Lehmann 1994). Our model did not include

Table 2
SUMMARY OF RESULTS

	Hypothesized Relationship	Expected Effect	Regression Coefficient*	Hypothesis Supported?
H_1	Noneconomic satisfaction ≠ Trust	r ≠ 1	7.35**,a	Yes
	Noneconomic satisfaction ≠ Commitment	r ≠ 1	15.37**,a	
	Trust ≠ Commitment	r ≠ 1	15.02**,a	
H_{2a}	Economic satisfaction → Conflict	–	–.408a	Yes
H_{2b}	Conflict → Noneconomic satisfaction	–	–.231a	Yes
H_{2c}	Conflict → Trust	–	–.395a	Yes
H_{2d}	Noneconomic satisfaction → Trust	+	.646a	Yes
H_{2e}	Trust → Commitment	+	.524a	Yes
H_{3a}	Partner's use of threats → Conflict	+	.173a	Yes
H_{3b}	Partner's use of threats → Economic satisfaction	–	–.096b	Yes
H_{3c}	Partner's use of threats → Noneconomic satisfaction	–	–.227a	Yes
H_{4a}	Partner's use of promises → Conflict	+	.028	No
H_{4b}	Partner's use of promises → Economic satisfaction	+	.122a	Yes
H_{4c}	Partner's use of promises → Noneconomic satisfaction	–	–.175a	Yes
H_5	Partner's use of threats → Conflict versus Partner's use of promises → Conflict	>	2.78**,b	Yes
	Partner's use of threats → Noneconomic satisfaction versus Partner's use of promises → Noneconomic satisfaction	>	1.05**	No
H_{6a}	Partner's use of noncoercive influence strategies → Conflict	–	.032	No
H_{6b}	Partner's use of noncoercive influence strategies → Economic satisfaction	+	.186a	Yes
H_{6c}	Partner's use of noncoercive influence strategies → Noneconomic satisfaction	+	.307a	Yes
H_{7a}	Own dependence → Partner's use of threats	–	.041	No
H_{7b}	Own dependence → Partner's use of promises	–	.161a	No
H_{7c}	Own dependence → Partner's use of noncoercive influence strategies	+	–.014	No
H_{8a}	Centralization → Partner's use of threats	+	.272a	Yes
H_{8b}	Centralization → Partner's use of promises	+	.210a	Yes
H_{8c}	Centralization → Partner's use of noncoercive influence strategies	–	.029	No
H_{9a}	Formalization → Partner's use of threats	+	.047	No
H_{9b}	Formalization → Partner's use of promises	+	.121a	Yes
H_{9c}	Formalization → Partner's use of noncoercive influence strategies	–	.275a	No

[a]p < .001.
[b]p < .01.
*Unless otherwise indicated.
**A t-value is reported.

exogenous factors, such as rate of growth or competitive intensity in the industry, which may influence the correlations among the constructs included in the study.

Fourth, it should be noted that meta-analysis never should be considered a substitute for new primary research (Cooper and Hedges 1994). Primary research and meta-analysis are complementary parts of a programmatic stream of research. Primary studies are the basis for meta-analysis, whereas periodic meta-analysis can help ensure that the next wave of primary research is directed in the most illuminating direction. In this spirit, we offer some implications for further research.

Implications for Further Research

Channel member satisfaction research has been plagued by the variety of conceptualizations and instruments that have been offered. Overall, based on the accumulated research presented here, it appears that the proportion of economic items included in the satisfaction scale can lead to varying results. The differences between what we classify as "economic" and "noneconomic" satisfaction are intriguing and have not been addressed in primary channels research.

With respect to effects of influence strategies on satisfaction, prior research mostly has maintained that threats and promises have negative effects, whereas noncoercive influence strategies have positive effects on satisfaction. Our meta-analysis indicates that this is true when satisfaction is conceptualized as a soft construct and operationalized with the noneconomic, emotional aspects of the relationship. However, the effects on economic satisfaction are entirely different. Because promises presumably deliver rewards to the party from the partner, the use of promises by the partner increases the party's economic satisfaction.

In contrast, the use of partner threats has a much weaker negative effect on the party's economic satisfaction compared with the party's noneconomic satisfaction. Perhaps the effects of threats on economic satisfaction are also dependent on the outcomes that result from the behavior adopted by the party in compliance with the threat (Scheer and Stern 1992). This also may explain why the partner's noncoercive influence strategies have a much weaker positive effect on economic versus noneconomic satisfaction. Although noncoercive influence strategies make the party feel good, the economic effects are less obvious. It appears that parties are able to distinguish their emotional, or soft, relational feelings toward the partner from the economic aspects of the business.

The distinction between satisfaction and trust is less pronounced when satisfaction is operationalized in noneconomic as opposed to economic terms. Thus, the concern that some researchers have that the constructs of satisfaction and trust tap into the same generalized affect toward the partner seems to be more relevant in terms of noneconomic satisfaction. We can imagine situations in which, despite the lack of trust, the parties are satisfied with the economic aspects of the relationship. However, it is harder to expect that trust exists in the face of dissatisfaction with the relationship on noneconomic aspects. Our suggestion for channels research is to distinguish clearly between economic and noneconomic satisfaction.

On the basis of our meta-analysis, we also can make suggestions regarding which constructs and relationships

between constructs are worthy of further attention. Figure 1 indicates that some relationships have been overresearched, and the findings are almost unanimous. The positive relationship between trust and commitment falls in this category. If these relationships are pursued empirically in the future, it should be only to demonstrate that there may be conditions in which these relationships do not hold. For example, perhaps in the face of quickly changing market conditions, commitment (intention to continue the relationship) might not exist between trusting channel partners. The negative relationship between manifest conflict and noneconomic satisfaction also is overexamined. It would be more useful to study other states of conflict or the functionality of conflict. It long has been recognized that conflict within channels of distribution can be either functional or dysfunctional (Frazier 1983a), yet empirical demonstrations of the functionality of conflict or when conflict can lead to positive relational effects are unknown, to the best of our knowledge.

Figure 1 also indicates that some relationships, though frequently studied, demonstrate mixed results. Because primary research has found mixed results for the effects of the party's dependence on the use of threats, promises, and noncoercive influence strategies, our meta-analysis results for the dependence construct are weak (Figure 2). As suggested by more recent research (Kumar, Scheer, and Steenkamp 1995b), it is not the level of unilateral dependence that is important but rather total interdependence and relative interdependence in a relationship. Unfortunately, there were not enough correlations between satisfaction and total interdependence/relative interdependence for our meta-analysis. This indicates that the effects of the relational interdependence constructs on economic and noneconomic satisfaction should be explored. Also, more insight is needed on the role of punitive capability in building economic and noneconomic satisfaction (Kumar, Scheer, and Steenkamp 1998).

Some constructs, such as influence strategies, are deserving of greater attention, according to our meta-analysis. Despite the significant attention given to influence strategies in channels research, it appears premature to close the book on it. When a factor analysis is conducted, promises and threats are correlated positively and load on to the same factor. Thus, it seemed reasonable to combine them into a construct called "coercive influence strategies" (e.g., Frazier and Rody 1991; Frazier and Summers 1984, 1986). However, our meta-analysis indicates that, despite the positive correlation between threats and promises, the antecedents and the consequences of the two strategies are different. Thus, we recommend exploring them as distinct influence strategies using Boyle and colleagues' (1992) measures.

The present data suggest that, over time, conflict and satisfaction will develop first, trust will develop in the medium term, and commitment will emerge only in the long term. However, these conclusions are based on cross-sectional data. In this respect, our meta-analysis suffers from the same weakness as the primary studies on which it is based. There is an urgent need for longitudinal studies involving the same set of firms over an extended period of time. Such research would make a great contribution to our understanding of the process dynamics and the cumulative effects of individual exchange episodes in establishing long-term relationships. This would make possible stronger inferences about the

development of channels constructs over time, their causal sequence, and feedback effects.

Our review of channel member satisfaction demonstrates that channel researchers have devoted considerable attention to exploring the main effects between satisfaction and various constructs. Therefore, we recommend that additional research should explore more complex interactive patterns related to satisfaction. Recently, several articles (e.g., Kumar, Scheer, and Steenkamp 1995a; Mohr, Fisher, and Nevin 1996) have demonstrated the effects of interactions on commitment. On the basis of this research, it seems that some of the more promising interactions on satisfaction may be between structure and conduct variables. In addition, interaction effects with environmental constructs could be explored to establish the conditions in which general relationships do not hold.

For the purposes of efficient design of future research studies, it is important to combine several of these suggestions when planning the next study on channel member satisfaction. Doing so will maximize the contribution of this new study to the improvement of knowledge. Recently, Farley, Lehmann, and Mann (1998) developed a procedure that assists researchers in designing such studies. This procedure offers great potential for designing new primary research in the channels domain, as well as in other areas of marketing.

Finally, this article demonstrates that there has been a substantial amount of effort in channels research devoted to understanding channel member satisfaction. However, in contrast, the effects on performance have been relatively ignored. From a normative point of view, managers are more interested in assessing whether channel members are performing, rather than simply focusing on their satisfaction. In channels research, Gaski and Nevin (1985) find few common effects for satisfaction and performance, which implies that there is a weak relationship between satisfaction and performance. In contrast, Kumar, Stern, and Achrol (1992) observe substantial correlations between perceptual measures of performance and satisfaction but marginal associations between archival measures of performance and satisfaction. There is a considerable need to assess the performance implications of various channel structures and strategies. We urge channels researchers to do so.

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*Studies included in the meta-analysis are indicated by an asterisk (*).