

**RELATIONSHIP MARKETING DYNAMICS AND CUSTOMER
LOYALTY IN HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR**

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IN HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR**

By

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ABSTRACT

In response to the challenges facing higher educational institutions, including declining public funding, globalization and stiff competition, this study aims to fill literature gaps by proposing and validating a customer loyalty model based on relationship marketing for the higher education sector. Drawing upon social exchange and social learning theories, this study examines the moderating effect of long term orientation on the link between relationship marketing dynamics and customer loyalty. A total of 416 graduates and undergraduate students of federal universities in Nigeria participated in the study. The results of the partial least squares (PLS) path analysis supported the hypothesized direct and indirect effects of relationship marketing dynamics on customer loyalty. Specifically, relationship marketing dynamics of bonding, communication, and personalization were found to have significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction and trust. The results of the analysis also suggest that customer satisfaction and trust mediate the link between bonding, communication, personalization and customer loyalty. Furthermore, long term orientation moderates the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Specifically, there is more significant positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty for individual customers high in long term orientation than for individual customers low in long term orientation. However, no moderating effect of long term orientation was found on the path between trust and customer loyalty. Taken together, the findings of the study lend empirical support to the view that relationship marketing in general, and service personalization in particular, can promote customer loyalty, especially among individual customers high in long term orientation. Hence, knowledge of individual customer long term orientation can assist university administrators in managing their students profile effectively. Theoretical, managerial, and methodological implications are discussed and a conclusion is drawn.

Keywords: customer loyalty, relationship marketing, customer satisfaction, long term orientation, higher education sector

ABSTRAK

Bagi menghadapi cabaran institusi pengajian tinggi seperti kemerosotan pendanaan awam, globalisasi dan juga persaingan kompetitif, kajian ini bertujuan mengisi lompang dengan mencadang dan mengesahkan satu model kesetiaan pelanggan berdasarkan pemasaran perhubungan dalam sektor pengajian tinggi. Dengan menggunakan teori pertukaran sosial dan pembelajaran sosial, kajian ini meneliti kesan penyederhana untuk orientasi jangka panjang antara elemen pemasaran perhubungan dan kesetiaan pelanggan. Sejumlah 416 siswazah dan prasiswazah universiti awam di Nigeria telah mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Keputusan analisis pekali lintasan Kuasa Dua Terkecil Separa (Partial Least Squares) menyokong hipotesis kesan langsung dan tidak langsung elemen pemasaran perhubungan terhadap kesetiaan pelanggan. Secara lebih terperinci, elemen ikatan, komunikasi dan personalisasi mempunyai hubungan positif yang signifikan dengan tahap kepuasan dan kepercayaan pelanggan. Hasil analisis juga mendapati kepuasan dan kepercayaan pelanggan berhubung kait dengan ikatan, komunikasi, personalisasi dan kesetiaan pelanggan. Tambahan pula, orientasi jangka panjang berkorelasi dengan kepuasan pelanggan dan kesetiaan pelanggan. Secara khususnya, terdapat hubungan positif yang signifikan antara kepuasan dan kesetiaan pelanggan terhadap jumlah pelanggan individu yang tinggi dalam orientasi jangka panjang berbanding jumlah pelanggan yang rendah dalam orientasi yang sama. Walau bagaimanapun, tiada kesan penyederhana orientasi jangka panjang didapati antara kepercayaan dan kesetiaan pelanggan. Secara keseluruhannya, dapatan kajian menerusi bukti empirikal berjaya menyokong pandangan pemasaran perhubungan secara am dan personalisasi servis secara khusus boleh meningkatkan tahap kesetiaan pelanggan terutamanya bagi jumlah pelanggan individu yang tinggi dalam orientasi jangka panjang. Oleh itu, pengetahuan mengenai pelanggan individu dalam orientasi jangka panjang berupaya membantu pihak pentadbiran universiti menguruskan profil para pelajar dengan lebih berkesan. Implikasi terhadap teori, pengurusan dan metodologi juga dibincangkan dan kesimpulan dihasilkan.

Kata kunci: kesetiaan pelanggan, pemasaran perhubungan, kepuasan pelanggan, orientasi jangka panjang, sektor pengajian tinggi

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BON	Bonding
CLOY	Customer Loyalty
CMV	Common Method Variance
COM	Communication
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CS	Customer Satisfaction
f ²	Effect Size
FMOE	Federal Ministry of Education
GoF	Goodness of Fit
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Educational Institutions
HES	High Education Sector
LISREL	Linear Structural Relationship
LTO	Long Term Orientation
MBA	Master of Business Administration
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OYAGSB	Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business
PER	Personalization
PBUH	Peace Be Upon Him
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy

PLS	Partial Least Squares
Q2	Cross Validated Redundancy Measure
R2	Coefficient of Determination
RM	Relationship Marketing
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SLT	Social Learning Theory
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SWT	<i>Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala</i>
TR	Trust
USA	United States of America
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UUM	Universiti Utara Malaysia

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The strategic importance of the services marketing industry is universally acknowledged as dominating the global market (Berry, 1995; Gummesson & Gronroos, 2012) and providing over 70 per cent of employment in both the public and private domains (Berger & Humphrey, 1992; Hoffman & Birnbrich, 2012). Perhaps, this accounts for the shift in marketing theory and practice from manufacturing or goods marketing to services marketing (Gronroos, 1994). Extant literature suggests that in service context, relationship marketing (RM) is most critical because services are perceived intangible, easily perishable and less consistent (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal & Evans, 2006). Further, customers and firms are more involved in the consumption and production of services than they are for manufactured products (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1985). These basic features of services imply that consumers cannot verify claims made by service providers by mere inspection (Abubakar, 2011; Palmer, 2000) thus, making trust a critical decision making parameter in the production and consumption of services (Palmatier, *et al.*, 2006).

Within the services industry, the education sector is a key component given its critical and pivotal role in the development agenda of nations (UNESCO, 2013). The university as a social institution has the mandate to enrol and graduate students in various scientific and educational fields that are excellent in character and learning for the

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