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The Quality of Relationship with Stakeholders, Performance Risk and Competitive Advantage in the Hotel, Restaurant and Café Market

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Abstract. *While emerging markets have become an opportunity for companies in the less populated and saturated markets to expand their business, they also impose challenges for foreign partners' competitive behavior. To offer the value that would be competitive in emerging markets, companies need to improve the quality of their relationship with business partners. Relationship quality may enhance the probability of continued interchange between companies and their stakeholders, leading to increased attractiveness for the emerging markets' economy. This research explores antecedents (communication and relationship longevity) of relationship quality with stakeholders (suppliers, customers, and employ-*

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ees) and how the relationship quality with three stakeholders impacts the company's performance risk and competitive advantage in the Lithuanian hotel, restaurant, and café market. The findings suggest that communication and relationship longevity have a positive effect on relationship quality with all three stakeholders. A higher level of relationship quality with stakeholders has a more positive effect on competitive advantage and a more significant negative effect on performance risk. The study expands the understanding of relationship quality antecedents (communication and relationship longevity) and relationship quality with customers, suppliers, and employees in terms of competitive advantage and performance risk in the less populated and saturated hotel, restaurant, and café market seeking expansion to emerging markets.

Keywords: *relationship quality; performance risk; competitive advantage; hotel, restaurant, and café market; a developed country with low population.*

Introduction

As domestic markets of less populated and developed countries become more saturated (www.lpk.lt), companies consider the opportunities to expand their activities in emerging markets that are attractive for their rapid economic growth, customer, and market size. According to Hoskisson et al. (2000), emerging economies seek to maintain economic growth and willingly open their borders to other countries. The successful entry to emerging markets depends not only on the external factors but also on people-based skills (Sekliuckiene, 2013). Prior research claims that a basic relationship marketing tenet is that companies can successfully compete in the international marketplace only if they successfully develop close ties with their partners locally (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2001; Leonidou et al., 2006). Thus, the relationship quality with stakeholders may enhance the chances of successful expansion to emerging markets. The rapidly developing Baltic countries' economy and borderless marketplace has made it an imperative that researchers better understand the phenomena of the relationship quality with stakeholders that enable a less populated, saturated market expansion to emerging markets.

The importance of relationship marketing was discussed by scholars (Gummesson, 1994; Kotler & Keller, 2009) who described the concept as a paradigm shift from short-term transactional orientation to long-term relationship orientation (Vargo & Lush, 2004). Relationship quality has become one pillar of relationship marketing that significantly influences companies' relationships with stakeholders (Gummesson, 2002; Palmatier et al., 2006; Vieira et al., 2008). Relationship quality may strengthen a competitive advantage (Dowling & Staelin, 1994; Sigalas et al., 2013) and improve efficiency and effectiveness, thus gaining the benefits of lower transaction costs, assurance of supply, improved coordination, higher entry barriers, and diminishing performance risk (Egan, 2008). While the importance of relationship quality has been studied in a number of different contexts, no studies, to our knowledge, have investigated the impact of relationship quality with three main stakeholders on competitive advantage and performance risk in a context of a less populated, developed country seeking to enter emerging markets.

The present research aims to examine the role of relationship quality with the three main stakeholders (employees, customers, and suppliers) in a specific less populated, saturated, developed hotel, restaurant, and café market by considering its antecedents and consequences to company performance risk and competitive advantage, which are significant factors in seeking successful entry to emerging markets.

1. Theoretical background

1.1 Relationship quality

The relationship quality concept is defined as the overall nature of relationships between companies and their stakeholders (Egan, 2008) and comprehended as "dynamics of long-term quality formation" (Grönroos, 2000, p. 81). Researchers typically address relationship quality as a multidimensional construct composed of trust, commitment, and satisfaction (Dorsch et al., 1998; Crosby et al., 1990; Hewett et al., 2002; Roberts et al., 2003). In line with the prior studies, trust, commitment, and satisfaction constructs are considered key relationship quality dimensions in this research.

Trust. Researchers (Crosby et al., 1990; Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) have defined trust as the ability and willingness to rely on the relationship manager's integrity and behavior to meet the long-term expectations of the buyer. According to literature, a broad definition of trust sounds as "one party's belief that its need will be fulfilled in the future by actions undertaken by the other party" (Anderson & Weitz, 1992, p. 312). The trust dimension involves judgment and partner reliability during the product/service exchange process (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust can enhance effectiveness and productivity as both parties, customers, and suppliers become confident regarding the partnership and cooperation. This dimension also ensures partners that the lack of fairness or justice will disappear in the short term, and that a long-term oriented benefit is created (Dwyer et al., 1987; Anderson & Weitz, 1992).

Satisfaction. Storbacka et al. (1994) provide a definition of satisfaction, stating that it is a "customers' cognitive and affective evaluation based on their personal experience across all service episodes within the relationship" (p. 25). This definition states that consumers who are not satisfied with the supplier's service would not have a sound and sustainable relationship in future cooperation. It means that a customer's satisfaction might stand as the core of an effective and productive exchange relationship. The argument provided by Crosby et al. (1990) states that the satisfaction of a customer could be performed as a summarized estimation that evaluates all the interactions with the stakeholders and combines an assumption about the quality of future cooperation.

Commitment. In the literature, commitment is defined as "an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" (Moorman et al., 1992, p. 312). Some researchers go further and assume that commitment to the stakeholders can show the highest level of relational bonding (Dwyer et al., 1987). A buyer's commitment to a service supplier might demonstrate the strength of relationship "bonds", which influences partners' relationship quality. Parasuraman et al. (1991) state that commitment is one of the most valuable indicators of relationship quality with stakeholders as the core of the relationship is the foundation of a mutual commitment.

In line with prior studies, trust, satisfaction, and commitment dimensions are predicted to indicate relationship quality with the three stakeholders (employees, suppliers, and customers) in a less populated, saturated, developed hotel, restaurant, and café market.

1.2. Relationship quality antecedents

Research has shown that communication quality and relationship longevity contribute to perceptions of relationship quality, increase partners' satisfaction, and are associated with positive outcomes (Verhoef, 2003; Theron et al., 2008). Communication in business relationships is considered as a significant antecedent of relationship quality and effectiveness (Coote et al., 2003), it could enhance commitment to relationship (Goodman & Dion, 2001) and trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). It is also agreed in prior studies that strong relationships develop over time and have positive impact on relationships trust and commitment (Dweyer et al., 1987; Bove & Johnson, 2000). In line with prior research, communication and relationship longevity constructs are examined in this study as the antecedents of relationship quality.

Communication. Communication is described as the ability to use a unique combination of code, content, and rules to communicate effectively (Williams & Spiro, 1985). The authors define communication as a basic process in any exchange or interaction. According to researchers, only effective communication increases trust within dyads (Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Prior research states that the communication construct could be used as an antecedent of both commitment (Friman et al., 2002) and satisfaction (Leuthesser, 1997).

Relationship longevity. Many authors examined relationship longevity (Wray et al.,1994; Bejou et al., 1996; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Storbacka et al., 1994; and Friman et al., 2002) and assumed that the longevity of a relationship increases trust, positively influencing commitment and satisfaction (Ganesan, 1994; Doney & Cannon, 1997).

Following the prior research, it is assumed that communication and relationship longevity may be explored as the antecedents of relationship quality dimensions: trust, satisfaction, and commitment in a smaller populated, saturated, developed hotel, restaurant, and café market.

1.3. Performance risk and competitive advantage as relationship quality outcomes

Prior studies have provided evidence that performance risks with the stakeholders may lead to relationship failures, and that adequate risk performance management is critical for the successful relationships with the partners (Munnukka & Järvi, 2015). The quality of the relationship with stakeholders is also recognized as an important source of competitive advantage (Davis & Spekman, 2004; Dyer, 2000). In line with these studies, performance risk and competitive advantage are considered to be relationship quality outcomes in this study.

Performance risk. Several researchers have performed studies investigating the role of risk in an organizational context (Liu et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2011; Gao, Leichter & Wei, 2012; Baldwin & Lopez-Gonzalez, 2013). According to Dowling and Staelin (1994), the risk is defined as "a buyer's perception of the uncertainty and adverse consequences of buying a product/service" (p. 120). The majority of studies exploring organizational purchase-related perceived risk treated it as a one-dimensional construct (Woodside et al.,1999; Laios & Moschuris, 2001). However, Hornibrook et al. (2005) agreed that organizational perceived risk could be defined as a multidimensional construct including performance risk, psychological risk, financial risk, and time-loss risk. Psychological risk relates to the risk that the procurement manager would be dissatisfied with the buying process. Financial risk captures the potential for negative financial outcomes. Time-loss risk refers to the assumption that the product/service will consume time which could be spent more productively on another task. Physical risk refers to physical harm and, finally, performance risk relates to uncertainty toward the technical quality or product suitability to the customer. Cullen et al. (2000) noted that risk dimensions as performance, psychological and financial risks have an important role in the organizational purchase process. Authors state that enterprises that best define and prevent their customers' perceived purchase-related risks acquire a significant competitive advantage in the marketplace (Munnukka & Järvi, 2015).

Competitive advantage. Sigalas et al. (2013) define competitive advantage as "the above industry average manifested exploitation of market opportunities and neutralization of competitive threats" (p. 63). According to the research, the sources of competitive advantage include mobility barriers (the ability of firms to enter or exit an industry), the market positions (niche market focus or other), idiosyncratic firm resources (inimitable and non-substitutable financial, human, relational resources) and idiosyncratic capabilities (inimitable and non-substitutable tangible and intangible resources). The prior research indicates positive interactions between relationship quality and competitive advantage (Cannon & Perreault, 1999; Sezen & Yilmaz, 2007; Sigalas et al., 2013).

Building on the conducted studies, in the present research, performance, financial and psychological risks and competitive advantage will be examined to evaluate the impact of the relationship quality dimensions on these outcomes.

2. Hypotheses and the research model

Resource-advantage theory alongside stakeholder theory provides a conceptual backbone and constructs for working out hypotheses relevant for the analysis of the impact of the quality of the relationship with stakeholders on a company performance risk and competitive advantage in the context of the hotel, restaurant and café market of less populated, developed countries.

One of the most important components of a company's ability to develop and maintain a relationship with external partners is committed and motivated employees (Ballantyne, 2003). According to Kotler and Keller (2009), internal relationship marketing is a way to enhance a supply chain relationship and maintain interactive, long-term, profitable relationships with customers. In reference to literature, we expect that internal relationship quality will have a positive effect on the quality of relationship with customers and suppliers in the context of the hotel, restaurant and café market of developed countries with lower population.

H1: Internal relationship quality has a positive effect on the quality of the relationship with customers.

H2: Internal relationship quality has a positive effect on the quality of the relationship with suppliers.

Hoyt and Hug (2000) and Theodorakioglou et al. (2006) have offered theoretical assumptions which established that mutually beneficial, long-term, and trustful relationship between a supplier and a customer leads to a competitive advantage. Moreover, Sezen and Yilmaz (2007) and Sigalas et al. (2013) have determined interactions between the quality of the relationship with suppliers and organization capabilities. Ballantyne (2000) research findings emphasize the significance of internal relationship quality to a company's competitive performance. Overall, a company that has better developed relationships with the three main stakeholders (employees, suppliers, customers) should gain advantage in terms of better access to information and sales opportunities and be more efficient at maintaining these relationships thus increasing competitive advantage also in the context of the hotel, restaurant and café market of developed countries with a lower population.

H3a: Internal relationship quality has a positive effect on competitive advantage.

H3b: The quality of the relationship with suppliers has a positive effect on competitive advantage.

H3c: The quality of the relationship with customers has a positive effect on competitive advantage.

According to the literature, risk management is an inherent part of the organizational decision-making process and business relationship that can affect the customer-buying decision (Liu et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2011; Gao et al., 2012). Moreover, strong internal relationship quality and the quality of the relationship with customers can prevent psychological disagreements and financial or performance risks. The quality of the relationship with organization suppliers can ensure supply chain stability, high-quality products, and products' sustainable prices to enterprise customers (Dowling & Staelin, 1994). With these considerations, when confronted with a risk in the transaction context with the stakeholders, companies trust partners involved in high-quality relationships more to reduce the risk. Consequently, we expect that this will be true in the context of the hotel, restaurant and café market of the developed countries with a smaller population.

H4a: Internal relationship quality has a negative effect on performance risk.

H4b: The quality of the relationship with suppliers has a negative effect on performance risk.

H4c: The quality of the relationship with customers has a negative effect on performance risk.

The researchers propose that the interaction exists between organization risk performance and competitive advantage (Sigalas et al., 2013). Therefore, the dimensions of financial, psychological, and performance risks are also assumed to affect competitive advantage, however, negatively. Given these considerations, we hypothesize that the performance risk may negatively affect the competitive advantage of companies functioning in the hotel, restaurant and café market of developed countries with lower population.

H5a: Performance risk with suppliers has a negative effect on competitive advantage.

H5b: Internal performance risk has a negative effect on competitive advantage.

H5c: Performance risk with customers has a negative effect on competitive advantage.

In a buyer-seller relationship, communication is assumed relevant to the relationship quality from a long-term partnership between customer and supplier. According to Williams and Spiro (1985), communication is the antecedent of relationship quality. The critical role of communication among the partners in business transactions has been stressed in the studies by Goodman and Dion (2001) and Morgan and Hunt (1994). We, therefore, argue that communication may positively affect the quality of the relationship with the main three stakeholders in the hotel, restaurant and café market of developed countries with lower population.

H6a: Communication has a positive effect on the quality of the relationship with the supplier.

H6b: Communication has a positive effect on internal relationship quality.

H6c: Communication has a positive effect on the quality of the relationship with the customer.

Researchers have assumed that the longer a company cooperates with stakeholders, the stronger their relationships are (Ganesan, 1994; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Lee & Dawes, 2005). Relationship longevity is considered an important factor in business relationships, as long-run customers become more profitable, suppliers-attached, and employees develop loyalty to the company. Relationship strength and effectiveness are proposed to be higher in longer lasting relational exchanges than discrete transactions, therefore we expect that the longevity of the cooperative relationships in the hotel, restaurant and café market of less populated developed countries will positively affect the quality of the relationship with the partners.

H7a: Longevity of the relationship has a positive effect on the quality of the relationship with the supplier.

H7b: Longevity of the relationship has a positive effect on internal relationship quality.

H7c: Longevity of the relationship has a positive effect on the quality of the relationship with the customer.

The hypotheses and the research model are presented in Figure 1.

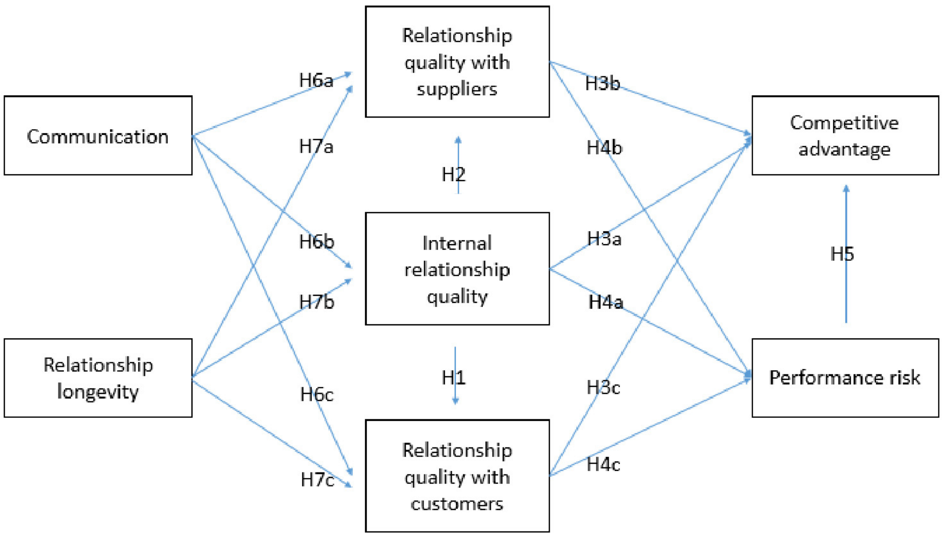

FIGURE 1: **Research model and hypotheses**

3. Methodology

3.1. Data gathering and research instrument operationalization

This research aims to evaluate the effect of relationship quality antecedents (communication and relationship longevity) on the quality of the relationship with stakeholders (suppliers, customers, and employees) and the impact of the relationship quality with the three stakeholders on the company‘s performance risk and competitive advantage. This study was conducted in the Lithuanian hotel, restaurant, and café (HoReCa) market chosen to represent a saturated less populated developed country seeking expansion to emerging markets.

According to the information provided by the Lithuanian Association of Hotels and Restaurants (www.lvra.lt) and supported by the Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists (www.lpk.lt), there are approximately 1548 registered companies in Lithuania in the HoReCa industry. Research questionnaires were distributed via e-mail to 550 B2B companies functioning in the Lithuanian hotel, restaurants, and cafés market. The final number of collected questionnaires was 128, with 123 surveys suitable for further analysis. The sample size of n = 123 respondents represents opinions of the HoReCa industry companies and ensures research data according to a 95% guarantee ± 2.75% selection bias limit.

The measures used in the study were modified from previous studies to suit the research aim and context. The items (except demographics) were measured on a seven-point scale with a ranking from 1 to 7(from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”). The relationship quality with suppliers, employees, and customers was measured as individual items for each stakeholder group. The relationship quality constructs included the dimensions of trust (in honesty and benevolence), satisfaction, and commitment. Four items that operationalized trust to measure honesty and four items to measure benevolence were adapted from Moorman et al. (1992) and Morgan and Hunt (1994). Satisfaction was measured by five items adapted from Jap and Ganesan (2000). Commitment was measured by five items adapted from Morgan and Hunt (1994). The importance of the relationship longevity was operationalized with three items adapted from Ganesan (1994). Performance risk constructs included the dimensions of performance risk (4 items), financial risk (2 items), and psychological risk (2 items) that were adapted from Stone and Grønhaug (1993). Communication with stakeholders included five items adapted from Heide and John (1992).

4. Research results

4.1 Demographic analysis

The total number of respondents who answered the questionnaires was 123. According to the position in the company, detailed distribution was: 88 (71.5%) CMOs, heads of departments or sales directors; 27 (22%) sales, procurement, or brand managers; 3 (2.4%) assistant directors; 3 (2.4%) CFOs; and 2 (1.6%) employees responsible for product groups. The respondents’ answers regarding their product portfolio were: 53 (43.1%) supplying food and beverages; 19 (15.4%) tableware, kitchenware, or barware; 13 (1.6%) chemistry or cleaning product/services. Respondents’ answers regarding the company size were: 65 (52.8%) of respondents work at companies with less than 50 employees; 31 (25.2%) between 50 and 100 employees; 19 (15.4%) between 101 and 200 employees; 5 (4.1%) between 201 and 500 employees; and 3 (2.4%) over 500 employees. The HoReCa market majority (78%) were small or medium-sized companies.

4.2 Measure validation

Table 1 presents indexes of internal reliability of the scales.

TABLE 1. **The indexes of the internal reliability of questions sub-scales**

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Subscales</th><th>Number of statements</th><th colspan="2">Cronbach α</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Overall RG with stakeholders (RQ_OVERALL)</td><td>3</td><td colspan="2">0.610</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">RQ with suppliers (RQ_SUP)</td><td>Trust in suppliers' honesty</td><td>4</td><td>0.827</td><td rowspan="4">0.934</td></tr>
<tr><td>Trust in suppliers' benevolence</td><td>3</td><td>0.678</td></tr>
<tr><td>Suppliers' satisfaction</td><td>5</td><td>0.881</td></tr>
<tr><td>Suppliers' commitment</td><td>5</td><td>0.769</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Internal RQ with employees (RQ_INTER)</td><td>Trust in employees' honesty</td><td>4</td><td>0.912</td><td rowspan="4">0.958</td></tr>
<tr><td>Trust in employees' benevolence</td><td>3</td><td>0.806</td></tr>
<tr><td>Employees' satisfaction</td><td>5</td><td>0.919</td></tr>
<tr><td>Employees' commitment</td><td>5</td><td>0,812</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">RQ with customers (RQ_CUST)</td><td>Trust in customers' honesty</td><td>4</td><td>0.741</td><td rowspan="4">0.913</td></tr>
<tr><td>Trust in customers' benevolence</td><td>3</td><td>0.661</td></tr>
<tr><td>Customers' satisfaction</td><td>5</td><td>0.858</td></tr>
<tr><td>Customers' commitment</td><td>5</td><td>0.719</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Communication with suppliers (COM_SUP)</td><td>5</td><td colspan="2">0.858</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Internal communication (COM_INTER)</td><td>5</td><td colspan="2">0.853</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Communication with customers (COM_CUST)</td><td>5</td><td colspan="2">0.759</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Longevity of relationship with suppliers (LONG_SUP)</td><td>3</td><td colspan="2">0.938</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Longevity of relationship (internal) (LONG_INTER)</td><td>3</td><td colspan="2">0.943</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Longevity of relationship with customers (LONG_CUST)</td><td>3</td><td colspan="2">0.910</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Performance risk (with suppliers) (PR_SUP)</td><td>Performance risk (with suppliers)</td><td>4</td><td>0.920</td><td rowspan="3">0.879</td></tr>
<tr><td>Financial risk (with suppliers)</td><td>2</td><td>0.665</td></tr>
<tr><td>Psychological risk (with suppliers)</td><td>2</td><td>0.622</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Performance risk (internal) (PR_INTER)</td><td>Performance risk (internal)</td><td>4</td><td>0.870</td><td rowspan="3">0.903</td></tr>
<tr><td>Financial risk (internal)</td><td>2</td><td>0.785</td></tr>
<tr><td>Psychological risk (internal)</td><td>2</td><td>0.807</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Performance risk (with customers) (PR_CUST)</td><td>Performance risk (with customers)</td><td>4</td><td>0.903</td><td rowspan="3">0.882</td></tr>
<tr><td>Financial risk (with customers)</td><td>2</td><td>0.687</td></tr>
<tr><td>Psychological risk (with customers)</td><td>2</td><td>0.638</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Competitive advantage (with suppliers) (COMP_SUP)</td><td>3</td><td colspan="2">0.722</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Competitive advantage (internal) (COMP_INTER)</td><td>3</td><td colspan="2">0.796</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Competitive advantage (with customers) (COMP_CUST)</td><td>3</td><td colspan="2">0.669</td></tr>
</table>

4.3 Relationship quality

First, relationship quality with suppliers, employees, and customers and its indicators of trust level, satisfaction level, and commitment level were analyzed. Table 2 shows that differences between the overall stakeholders' trust level, satisfaction level, and commitment level were statistically significant ($chi^2 = 62.79$, $p < 0.001$). According to the research results, the stakeholder's trust level in companies was high (Mean Rank = 2.33), satisfaction level was weaker (Mean Rank = 2.13), and commitment level was the weakest (Mean Rank = 1.54).

TABLE 2. **Comparison of indicators: RQ with stakeholders**

Measures	M ± SD	Mean Rank	chi²	Sig.
Overall Stakeholders trust level	6.06 ± 0.89	2.33	62.79	0.000***
Overall Stakeholders satisfaction level	5.91 ± 0.80	2.13		
Overall Stakeholders commitment level	5.10 ± 1.14	1.54		
Overall RQ with stakeholders (RQ_OVERALL)	5.68 ± 0.71			

**** Differences are statistically significant when p < 0.001*

Analysis of the indicators of the quality of the relationship with suppliers, the trust in honesty, trust in benevolence, satisfaction, and commitment showed that differences between these indicators were statistically significant ($chi2 = 75.13$, $p < 0.001$). Suppliers tend to be satisfied with companies (Mean Rank = 3.12), suppliers trust in benevolence (Mean Rank = 2.65); however, they trust less in the honesty of the companies (Mean Rank = 2.49) and are weakly committed to companies (Mean Rank = 1.74) (see Table 3).

TABLE 3. **Comparison of indicators: RQ with suppliers**

Measures	M ± SD	Mean Rank	chi²	Sig.
Trust in suppliers' honesty	5.74 ± 0.73	2.49	75.13	0.000***
Trust in suppliers' benevolence	5.78 ± 0.68	2.65		
Suppliers' satisfaction	5.86 ± 0.70	3.12		
Suppliers' commitment	5.39 ± 0.77	1.74		
RQ with suppliers (RQ_SUP)	5.70 ± 0.64			

**** Differences are statistically significant when p < 0.001*

Analysis of the indicators of the quality of the relationship with employees, the trust in honesty, trust in benevolence, satisfaction, and commitment showed that differences between these indicators were statistically significant ($chi^2 = 161.09$, $p < 0.001$). According to the results, employees trust in the honesty of the companies (Mean Rank =3.24), they trust less in benevolence (Mean Rank = 2.93), they are less satisfied (Mean Rank = 2.50), and are not committed to the company (Mean Rank = 1.33) (see Table 4).

TABLE 4. **Comparison of indicators: RQ with employees**

Measures	M ± SD	Mean Rank	chi²	Sig.
Trust in employees' honesty	6.06 ± 0.89	3.24	161.09	0.000***
Trust in employees' benevolence	5.87 ± 0.87	2.93		
Employees' satisfaction	5.75 ± 0.84	2.50		
Employees' commitment	5.23 ± 0.83	1.33		
Internal RQ with employees (RQ_INTER)	5.72 ± 0.80			

**** Differences are statistically significant when p < 0.001*

Analysis of the indicators of the quality of the relationship with employees, the trust in honesty, trust in benevolence, satisfaction, and commitment showed that differences between these indicators were statistically significant ($chi^2 = 135.95$, $p < 0.001$). According to the results, customers satisfaction level was high (Mean Rank = 3.31); customers trust in the company's benevolence (Mean Rank = 2.85) and honesty (Mean Rank = 2.33), however, they are weakly committed to the companies (Mean Rank = 1.51) (see Table 5).

TABLE 5. **Comparison of indicators: RQ with customers**

Measures	M ± SD	Mean Rank	chi²	Sig.
Trust in customers' honesty	5.35 ± 0.61	2.33	135.95	0.000***
Trust in customers' benevolence	5.48 ± 0.61	2.85		
Customers' satisfaction	5.71 ± 0.70	3.31		
Customers' commitment	5.00 ± 0.69	1.51		
RQ with customers (RQ_CUST)	5.38 ± 0.57			

****Differences are statistically significant when p < 0.001*

4.4 Communication and longevity of the relationship

Evaluation of the indicators of communication with suppliers, employees, and customers showed that differences between these indicators were statistically significant ($chi^2 = 103.89$, $p < 0.001$). The strongest company's communication was with employees (Mean Rank = 2.63), weaker communication was with suppliers (Mean Rank = 1.96), and the weakest with customers (Mean Rank = 1.40) (see Table 6).

TABLE 6. **Comparison of indicators: communication**

Measures	M ± SD	Mean Rank	chi²	Sig.
Communication (with suppliers) (COM_SUP)	5.02 ± 0.93	1.96	103.89	0.000***
Communication (internal) (COM_INTER)	5.60 ± 0.87	2.63		
Communication (with the customer) (COM_CUST)	4.69 ± 0.70	1.40		

****Differences are statistically significant when p < 0.001*

Evaluation of the longevity of the indicators of the relationship with suppliers, employees, and customers showed that differences between them were statistically significant ($chi^2 = 39.54$, $p < 0.001$). The longest companies' relationship was with suppliers (Mean Rank = 2.31), shorter with employees (Mean Rank = 2.05), and the shortest with customers (Mean Rank = 1.63) (see Table 7).

TABLE 7. **Comparison of indicators: longevity of the relationship**

Measures	M ± SD	Mean Rank	chi²	Sig.
Longevity of relationship (with suppliers) (LONG_SUP)	5.95 ± 0.90	2.31	39.54	0.000***
Longevity of relationship (internal) (LONG_INTER)	5.69 ± 1.02	2.05		
Longevity of relationship (with the customer) (LONG_CUST)	5.45 ± 0.86	1.63		

****Differences are statistically significant when p < 0.001*

4.5 Performance risk

Analysis of the performance risk indicators with suppliers, the performance risk, financial risk, and psychological risk showed that differences between them were statistically significant ($chi^2 = 91.31$, $p < 0.001$). For suppliers in cooperation with companies, the most common was the performance risk (Mean Rank = 2.33), financial risk was lower (Mean Rank = 2.24), and the psychological risk was found to be the lowest (Mean Rank = 1.43) (see Table 8).

TABLE 8. **Comparison of indicators: PR with suppliers**

Measures	M ± SD	Mean Rank	chi²	Sig.
Performance risk (with suppliers)	1.77 ± 0.96	2.33	91.31	0.000***
Financial risk (with suppliers)	1.76 ± 0.69	2.24		
Psychological risk (with suppliers)	1.21 ± 0.36	1.43		
Performance risk (with suppliers) (PR_SUP)	1.58 ± 0.56			

****Differences are statistically significant when p < 0.001*

Analysis of the indicators of performance risk with employees, the performance risk, financial risk, and psychological risk showed that differences between them were statistically significant ($chi^2 = 85.08$, $p < 0.001$). For employees in cooperation with companies, the most common was a financial risk (Mean Rank = 2.30), performance risk was lower (Mean Rank = 2.25), and the psychological risk was the lowest (Mean Rank = 1.45) (see Table 9).

TABLE 9. **Comparison of indicators: PR with employees**

Measures	M ± SD	Mean Rank	chi²	Sig.
Performance risk (internal)	1.72 ± 0.79	2.25	85.08	0.000***
Financial risk (internal)	1.78 ± 0.83	2.30		
Psychological risk (internal)	1.32 ± 0.56	1.45		
Performance risk (internal) (PR_INTER)	1.61 ± 0.64			

**** Differences are statistically significant when p < 0.001*

Analyzing performance risk indicators with customers, the performance risk, financial risk, and psychological risk results showed that differences between them were statistically significant ($chi^2 = 70.16$, $p < 0.001$). For customers in cooperation with companies, the most common was a financial risk (Mean Rank = 2.33), performance risk was found to be lower (Mean Rank = 2.22), and the psychological risk the lowest (Mean Rank = 1.45) (see Table 10).

TABLE 10. **Comparison of indicators: PR with employees**

Measures	M ± SD	Mean Rank	chi²	Sig.
Performance risk (with customers)	2.09 ± 0.85	2.22	70.16	0.000***
Financial risk (with customers)	2.10 ± 0.75	2.33		
Psychological risk (with customers)	1.52 ± 0.58	1.45		
Performance risk (with customers) (PR_CUST)	1.91 ± 0.61			

****Differences are statistically significant when p < 0.001*

4.6 Competitive advantage

Evaluation of the indicators of the competitive advantage with suppliers, employees, and customers showed that differences between these indicators were statistically significant ($chi^2 = 39.47$, $p < 0.001$). According to respondents' answers, competitive advantage was mostly influenced by employees (Mean Rank = 2.26), less by the suppliers (Mean Rank = 2.11), and least by customers (Mean Rank = 1.63) (see Table 11).

TABLE 11. **Comparison of indicators: competitive advantage**

Measures	M ± SD	Mean Rank	chi^2	Sig.
Competitive advantage (with suppliers) (COMP_SUP)	5.47 ± 1,06	2.11	39.47	0.000***
Competitive advantage (internal) (COMP_INTER)	5.56 ± 1.15	2.26		
Competitive advantage (with customers) (COMP_CUST)	5.16 ± 0.94	1.63		

****Differences are statistically significant when p < 0.001*

4.7 Verification of research hypotheses

Linear regression analysis was applied, and Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated to test hypotheses H1 and H2:

H1: Internal relationship quality (RQ_INTER) positively affects relationship quality with customers (RQ_CUST).

H2: Internal relationship quality (RQ_INTER) positively affects relationship quality with suppliers (RQ_SUP).

From the provided results (Table 11), it was concluded that the rectilinear regression model was suitable for the present dataset. Both model analyses showed that the ANOVA test level of significance was equal to 0.000 and was less than 0.05 in both cases. When the dependent variables were relationship quality with customers (RQ_CUST) or relationship quality with suppliers (RQ_SUP), the square of the determination coefficients was accordingly 0.373 and 0.410. When the dependent variables (dependent) were relationship quality with customers (RQ_CUST) and relationship quality with suppliers (RQ_SUP), beta coefficients were 0.611 and 0.644 respectively, so the results are statistically significant, $p < 0.05$. According to the results above, hypotheses H1 and H2 are confirmed. Therefore, the hypothesized model is:

H1: Internal RQ (RQ_INTER) → RQ with customers (RQ_CUST);

H2: Internal RQ (RQ_INTER → RQ with suppliers (RQ_SUP).

Tables 12 and 13 concluded that the rectilinear regression model was suitable for the present dataset. The analysis showed that the model's ANOVA level of significance was equal to 0.000 and less than 0.05 (see Table 12). When independent variables (predictors) were relationship quality with customers (RQ_CUST) and relationship quality with suppliers (RQ_SUP), the square of determination coefficient was 0.471 (see Table 13).

TABLE 12. **ANOVA test 1**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	36.802	2	18.401	53.470	.000a
	Residual	41.296	120	.344		
	Total	78.098	122			

TABLE 13. **Model 1 summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.686a	.471	.462	.58663	1.543

Also, Table 14 shows that when the independent variables (predictors) were relationship quality with customers (RQ_CUST) and relationship quality with suppliers (RQ_SUP), the beta coefficients were 0.322 and 0.426 respectively. Therefore, the results were statistically significant, $p < 0.05$. According to the mentioned results, hypotheses H1 and H2 are confirmed.

TABLE 14. **RQ cust. and RQ sup. Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.304	.533		.570	.570
	RQcust	.451	.126	.322	3.573	.001
	RQsup	.525	.111	.426	4.720	.000

Dependent Variable: RQinter

Further verification of the link between relationship quality and construct outcomes/ antecedents was needed. To verify the hypotheses H3a, H3b, and H3c and to determine the strength of the link between relationship quality and competitive advantage, a Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated. According to the statistical analysis, internal relationship quality (RQ_INTER) was directly related to competitive advantage (COMP_INTER) ($r = 0.476$, $p < 0.001$), relationship quality with suppliers (RQ_SUP) was directly related to competitive advantage (COMP_SUP) and had the strongest connection ($r = 0.577$, $p < 0.001$). Relationship quality with customers (RQ_CUST) was directly related to competitive advantage (COMP_CUST) ($r = 0.457$, $p < 0.001$). Overall relationship quality with stakeholders was directly related to overall competitive advantage ($r = 0.532$, $p < 0.001$). In reference to the results provided above, the following hypotheses are confirmed:

H3a: Internal relationship quality (RQ_INTER) positively affects competitive advantage (COMP_INTER).

H3b: Relationship quality with suppliers (RQ_SUP) positively affects competitive advantage (COMP_SUP).

H3c: Relationship quality with customers (RQ_CUST) positively affects competitive advantage (COMP_CUST).

The Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated to verify hypotheses H4a, H4b, and H4c and to determine the strength of the link between relationship quality and performance risk. Internal relationship quality (RQ_INTER) indicated the strongest negative correlation with performance risk (PR_INTER) ($r = -0.771$, $p < 0.001$), relationship quality with suppliers (RQ_SUP) had a weaker correlation. However, there was a significant reverse correlation with performance risk (PR_SUP) ($r = -0.669$, $p < 0.001$), and the weakest correlation was observed between relationship quality with customers (RQ_CUST) and performance risk (PR_CUST) ($r = -0.422$, $p < 0.001$). Overall relationship quality with stakeholders had a strong negative effect on performance risk ($r = -0.730$, $p < 0.001$). According to the analysis results provided above, the following hypotheses are confirmed:

H4a: Internal relationship quality (RQ_INTER) has a negative effect on performance risk (PR_INTER).

H4b: Relationship quality with suppliers (RQ_SUP) has a negative effect on performance risk (PR_SUP).

H4c: Relationship quality with customers (RQ_CUST) has a negative effect on performance risk (PR_CUS).

To test further hypotheses (H5a, H5b, and H5c) and to determine the strength of the link between performance risk and competitive advantage, a Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated. Performance risk (PR_INTER) had a negative correlation with competitive advantage (COMP_INTER) ($r = -0.562$, $p < 0.001$), performance risk (PR_SUP) had the most significant negative correlation with competitive advantage (COMP_SUP) ($r = -0.622$, $p < 0.001$), and the weakest correlation was identified between performance risk (PR_CUST) and competitive advantage (COMP_CUST) ($r = -0.365$, $p < 0.001$). However, overall performance risk with stakeholders had a significantly strong negative effect on competitive advantage ($r = -0.562$, $p < 0.001$). According to the results, the following hypotheses are confirmed:

H5a: Organization performance risk (PR_SUP) has a negative effect on competitive advantage (COMP_SUP).

H5b: Organization performance risk (PR_INTER) has a negative effect on competitive advantage (COMP_INTER).

H5c: Organization performance risk (PR_CUST) has a negative effect on competitive advantage (COMP_CUST).

To verify hypotheses H6a, H6b, and H6c and to determine the strength of the link between relationship quality and communication antecedent, a Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated. Communication (COM_INTER) correlated directly and had the strongest link with internal relationship quality (RQ_INTER) ($r = 0.810$, $p < 0.001$). A weaker connection was determined between communication (COM_SUP) and relationship quality with suppliers (RQ_SUP) ($r = 0.714$, $p < 0.001$), but the weakest correlation was found between communication (COM_CUST) and relationship quality with customers (RQ_CUST) ($r = 0.685$, $p < 0.001$). According to the analysis of the results, the following hypotheses are confirmed:

H6a: Communication (COM_SUP) positively affects relationship quality with the supplier (RQ_SUP).

H6b: Communication (COM_INTER) positively affects internal relationship quality (RQ_INTER).

H6c: Communication (COM_CUST) positively affects relationship quality with the customer (RQ_CUST).

To test hypotheses H7a, H7b, and H7c and to determine the strength of the link between relationship quality and longevity of the relationship, a Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated. Longevity of relationship (LONG_INTER) correlated directly and had the strongest link with internal relationship quality (RQ_INTER) ($r = 0.764$, $p < 0.001$). A weaker link was determined between the longevity of relationship (LONG_SUP) and relationship quality with suppliers (RQ_SUP) ($r = 0.772$, $p < 0.001$); the weakest correlation was found between the longevity of relationship (LONG_CUST) and relationship quality with customers (RQ_CUST) ($r = 0.581$, $p < 0.001$). According to the analysis of the results, the following hypotheses are confirmed:

H7a: Longevity of relationship (LONG_SUP) positively affects relationship quality with the supplier (RQ_SUP).

H7b: Longevity of relationship (LONG_INTER) positively affects internal relationship quality (RQ_INTER).

H7c: Longevity of relationship (LONG_CUST) positively affects relationship quality with the customer (RQ_CUST).

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical contribution

The key objective of this research was to extend the study of relationship quality in the developed, saturated hotel, restaurant, and café market with a lower population which seeks to enter emerging markets by considering its antecedents and consequences to company performance risk and competitive advantage. Because competition is tough in such economies, referring to resource-advantage (R-A) theory we propose that high quality relationships with the stakeholders enable companies to successfully enter emerging markets and better compete in them. Specifically, the successful relational exchanges with the stakeholders (employees, suppliers, and customers) in internal market predict a successful entry and development of the business in external markets.

The study expands understanding of the effect of relationship quality antecedents (communication and relationship longevity) on relationship quality with customers, suppliers, and employees, indicating that communication has the strongest link with internal relationship quality, a weaker link with suppliers, and the weakest link with customers in saturated smaller developed countries' hotel, restaurant, and café market seeking expansion to emerging markets. This finding expands Williams and Spiro (1985), Theron et al. (2008), and Goodman and Dion (2001) research on communication significance to business relationships with different stakeholders in a big developed country market context.

An interesting observation drawn from the results relates to the communication effect on the trust dimension of stakeholders' relationship quality, indicating that the more companies communicate with stakeholders, the higher the trust. According to the results, communication impacts stakeholders' relationship quality, influencing a company's competitive advantage. Thus, the more a company communicates with the stakeholders, the more information and knowledge is accumulated which can be used as a source of competitive advantage in further operations. This finding supports Anderson and Weitz (1989), claiming that communication is positively related to trust in channels. Moreover, communication was proven to have a significant impact on internal relationship quality. Anderson and Narus (1990) and Ganesan (1994) discussed the significance of communication in business relationships; however, the construct was studied only in the context of relationship quality with customers (Fynes et al., 2004).

Also, the results indicated a positive impact of the internal relationship quality on the relationship quality with customers and suppliers, supporting Gordon (1998), Grönroos (2000), Kotler and Keller (2009), and Ballantyne (2003) research findings.

A significant result of the study is that internal relationship quality showed the strongest negative impact on performance risk and a weaker (than relationship quality with suppliers) positive impact on competitive advantage. This finding suggests that internal relationship quality responds differently to firm performance and competitive advantage and adds to the general internal relationship quality benefit to external marketplace performance knowledge (Sigalas et al., 2003; Hogg et al., 1998). Relationship quality with external and internal stakeholders in the hotel, restaurant, and café market of a small developed country positively influences competitive advantage and negatively impacts performance risks. More specifically, relationship quality with suppliers and customers may be determined by internal relationship quality. Higher relationship quality with employees reinforces better relationships with external stakeholders and may enhance performance (Van Den Bukte & Wuyts, 2007). This finding points to the need to consider the significance of internal relationships and their role in seeking to develop business to emerging markets since the stronger the employees perceive the importance of relationships in general, the more likely the company is to develop stronger relationships with new suppliers and customers. Our theoretical propositions and study findings highlight the complementary nature of resource-advantage (R-A) theory and the importance of the quality of interactions with the stakeholders (employees, suppliers, and customers) for entering emerging markets and may provide guidelines for future research in the field.

5.2. Practical implications

This study provides insights for improving the strategies of hotel, restaurant, and café companies seeking to successfully enter emerging markets. In line with the resource-based view, the study supports the need to take a contingent approach to stakeholder relationship quality management as the relational assets are difficult to imitate and may improve the joint knowledge about relationship partners and consequently increase competitive advantage (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, 2007).

First, managers should target their relationship development efforts towards customers and suppliers, and employees as their knowledge and skill could determine the decision of the customers of emerging markets.

Second, managers should develop a strategy to improve stakeholders' commitment level, as commitment shows the highest level of relational bonding. The establishment of regular and positive emotional responses, continuous communication, the formation of mutually beneficial agreements, and the development of plans to secure future relationships could achieve higher commitment with stakeholders (suppliers, customers, and employees).

Third, according to the study findings, communication directly influences stakeholder relationship quality, which positively influences the company's competitive advantage. Proper communication management may help to maintain the relationships within the emerging markets' context (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). Seeking to maintain successful relationships, managers should integrate all communication messages to support establishing and maintaining relationships with stakeholders (Grönroos, 2004). Information exchange is the key communication focus which helps stakeholders understand each other's abilities and supports, making the extension to emerging markets smoother. Communication facilitates learning about suppliers and customers and sharing knowledge and information internally, thus developing mutually beneficial relationships in emerging markets.

To sum up, the study findings demonstrate relationship quality value for the development of cooperation with stakeholders leading to the assumption that it is also significant in developing partnerships with emerging markets' business partners. The successful management of relationships with present stakeholders indicates that the firm will develop effective partnerships with other stakeholders (Sekliuckiene, 2013) and achieve better results in starting the relationships with stakeholders in emerging markets.

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