CAUSES AND OUTCOMES OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS MARKETS RELATIONSHIP MARKETING IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CEMENT MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

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Abstract

Close relationships between cement manufacturers and their customers in business-to-business markets are becoming a necessity in today's competitive markets. The literature search reveals that, three constructs of relationship marketing (trust, commitment and satisfaction) are the most studied and well known. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by adding two constructs (supplier competencies and communication) as vital causes to customer satisfaction and the outcome being customer loyalty and cooperation. The study produced a framework of dimensions of relationship marketing in the South African Cement Industry and its hoped will help marketing managers in the industry and related sectors in coming up with relationship marketing strategies that can go a long way in helping them retain, attract, satisfy, and achieve long-term profitable relationships for both the supplier and the customer. A judgemental sample of major cement customers (362) throughout South Africa's nine provinces were contacted using face-to-face interview technique with self-administered questionnaires. The results support the conceptual model presented; supplier competencies, trust, commitment and communication have a positive association with satisfaction; and satisfaction, in turn, relates positively to all the two outcomes of cooperation and loyalty. It is recommended that a cement manufacturer must invest in strategies that enhance trust, communication, commitment and supplier competencies in order to satisfy its customers who will in turn contribute to customer cooperation and loyalty.

Key Words: Satisfaction, Trust, Commitment, Supplier Competencies, Cooperation, Loyalty, Relationship Marketing, South African Cement Manufacturing Industry

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1. Introduction

According to (Svensson *et* al., 2010:1), "Close working relationships between buyers and suppliers in business markets are becoming more and more essential to achieving business success". This view is supported by Anderson and Narus 1990; Ganesan 1994; Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar 1999; Morgan and Hunt 1994 who state that strong relationships in business-to-business markets ensures stability to both suppliers and buyers.

The three most studied dimensions of relationship marketing in literature are trust, commitment and satisfaction (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Svensson *et* al., 2010; and Barry *et* al., 2008) and there is no agreement on "how satisfaction fits in a nomologigal network with trust and commitment remains an issue in need of resolution", Svensson *et* al., 2010:1). In addition to these differences, there seems to be evidence from literature of a lack of specific constructs of relationship marketing in business-to-business markets to specific industries. Trust and commitment are seen as the most important

constructs of relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Barry *et* al., 2008; Caceres and Paparoidamis 2007; Bansal 2007).

There is lack of consensus about the position of satisfaction in relationship marketing models and no agreed constructs that make up the relationship marketing models in different industries as shown by the findings of Papassapa and Miller 2007; Rayruen and Miller 2007; Skermeas and Robson 2008; Barry *e*t al., 2008; Palmatier *et* al., 2006; Ulaga and Eggert 2006, in which satisfaction, trust and commitment are all simply put as dimensions of higher order. This supported with by the research outcomes on Relationship Marketing (RM) by Theron & Terblanche (2009), Athanasopoulou, (2009), Gilaninia *et* al., (2011), Gounaris, (2005), and Gummesson, (1994) among others as outlined above, who argue that despite the existence of Relationship Marketing as first coined by Berry (1983), there exist no agreement on uniform dimensions/variables that constitute Relationship Marketing management.

This article aims to provide some insight into the position of satisfaction and determine what other

constructs apart from trust and commitment can cause a customer to be satisfied and what outcomes of satisfaction specifically for the cement industry customers. Therefore, the researcher will attempt to add more constructs of relationship marketing to the existing dimensions mostly studied. The researcher added supplier competencies and communication as other causes of satisfaction and the outcomes being loyalty and cooperation.

The cement industry in South Africa was chosen for the study because of the role it plays. According to Rossouw (2015: Online), "The cement industry adds significant value to South Africa and its people. The value received by cement employees represented 69% of the value created. This is a significant contribution. According to Stats SA, more than 1.8 million people are employed by the cement industry. The state received 19% of value created in the form of direct taxes. The reality is that the state receives significantly more if one takes into account the tax on employee income deducted from the employees' salaries and net indirect taxes like value added tax".

"With South Africa's massive unemployment rate (25%), mostly unskilled labour, the construction industry is seen as the sector which can provide a solution as it a labour intensive sector", Olivier (2015: Online). He goes further to say, "While inadequate infrastructure maybe the single biggest threat to Africa's long-term growth, at the same time it also represents a significant opportunity for investors in cement industry to finance infrastructure such as the construction of ports, power stations and housing projects". "Therefore the cement industry remains a key sector, serving all sectors of the South African economy. It has a strategic role to fulfil if the country is to develop and grow, as envisaged in the National Development Plan. Analysts believe that if government is to make inroads into solving the unemployment crisis, the housing backlog, a proactive relationship with the cement industry needs to be developed", Gauteng Development Agency (2015: Online).

2. Literature review, conceptual model, hypotheses and objectives of the study

"Relationship marketing as a management concept is important for acquiring sustainable profitability and as a means of protecting an organisation from the effects of competition. It has been proven that, those organisations that embrace relationship marketing, are in a better position to lower their marketing costs and be in a position to achieve their long term goals", Theron & Terblanche (2009:384). Athanasopoulou, (2009:583), states that, "researchers have concluded that it is five times more expensive to acquire new customers than to keep existing ones". Organisations thus strive to develop long-term relationships with

their customers in order to build customer loyalty and increase profitability.

This paper supports the position of satisfaction as mediator between trust and commitment as supported by Svensson *et* al., (2010:2). To add value, the researcher has added two more constructs i.e. communication and supplier competencies, Goffin *et* al., 2005. Therefore in this study satisfaction is seen as a mediator between trust, commitment, supplier competencies and communication with important outcomes such as loyalty/or continuity and cooperation. The reasons for this as given by Svensson *et* al., (2010:2) are as follows; "First, some studies show that trust and/or commitment appear to be antecedents or precursors to satisfaction, secondly, satisfaction may have a stronger association with certain outcomes in comparison to trust and thirdly, satisfaction may be the strongest component of relationship quality". In support of these findings, Skarmeas *et* al., (2008:25) state, "Satisfaction is a focal outcome of buyer-seller relationships that is generally unlikely to develop in the absence of trust and commitment". In this study, the researcher have added two more (supplier competencies and communication) as stated by Goffin *et* al., (2005:203). The above three reasons suggest that satisfaction may serve as a more proximal cause of important outcomes than trust or commitment. Therefore this study positions satisfaction as a mediator between trust, commitment, supplier competencies and communication with important outcomes of loyalty/or continuity and cooperation.

In support of the inclusion of supplier competencies and communication in the researcher's conceptual framework, Goffin *et* al., (2005:203) state that, "Before partnership is possible, supplier's competencies are vital and once supplier competencies exist then detailed communication is required". Communication is very vital in the industry under study because of its technical nature. Therefore product services need to be communicated timeously and effectively. Also supplier competencies become very important in this industry, as quality and timeously delivery is of paramount importance. The above reasons made the researcher to include the two constructs in the study.

In support of the inclusion of the outcomes (loyalty/or continuity and cooperation), Palmatier *et* al., (2006) identified both continuity expectancy and cooperation as two most important outcomes of key relational mediators of satisfaction, trust and commitment. They reported that these relational mediators had the largest combined influence on the dyadic outcome of cooperation and had a substantial impact of continuity expectation. In support of this augment, Ulaga and Eggert (2006) discovered that satisfaction and commitment have a negative association with propensity to leave a relationship. In conclusion, the literature supports the inclusion of continuity/or loyalty and cooperation as outcomes of

the dimensions of relationship marketing when implemented correctly. Therefore the two outcomes are included in this study's conceptual framework.

Based on the above literature, below is the proposed conceptual framework for the study:

Table 1. Theoretical Framework of RM in Cement Manufacturing Industry in South Africa
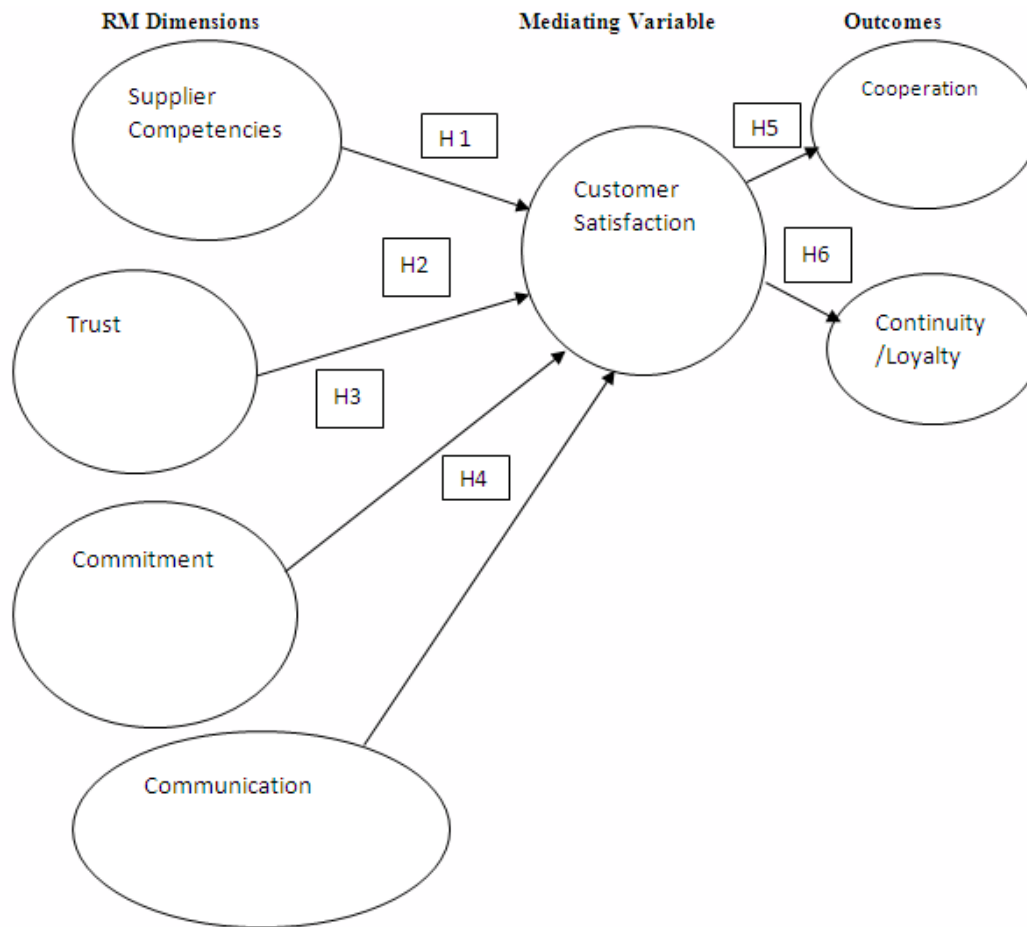
The following are the proposed hypotheses for the study:

H1: Supplier competencies have a positive association with satisfaction

H2: Trust has a positive association with satisfaction.

H3 Commitment has a positive association with satisfaction.

H4 Communication has a positive association with satisfaction.

H5 Satisfaction has a positive association with cooperation.

H6 Satisfaction has a positive association with loyalty.

The following are the objectives of the study:

- To determine if supplier competencies have an association with satisfaction;
- To determine if trust has an association with satisfaction;
- To determine if commitment is associated with satisfaction;
- To determine if communication has an association with satisfaction;
- To determine if satisfaction has an association with cooperation;
- To determine if satisfaction has an association with loyalty.

3. Research Method

This article adopted a survey research design in order to determine the causes and outcomes of customer satisfaction in the South African Cement manufacturing industry. "The survey research method requires that individuals answer the same predetermined set of questions and that responses are selected from a set of possible answers to be recorded in a structured, precise manner", Joseph *et* al., (2009:235). Saunders *et* al., (2007:177) state that "surveys are usually conducted using questionnaires which allow for the collection of standardised data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way and the survey strategy is perceived as authoritative by people in general and is both comparatively easy to explain and to understand". Therefore, they continue, "the survey strategy allows

you to collect quantitative data which you can analyse quantitatively using descriptive and inferential statistics and data collected using a survey strategy can be used to suggest possible reasons for particular relationships between variables and to produce models of these relationships" (177). The personal survey method (interview administered survey) was chosen for this study to obtain information from decision makers in the cement industry. As indicated by Wilson (2012:131), "personal-interviewing methods involve meeting the respondent face-to-face and interviewing them using a paper based questionnaire, a lap-top computer or an electronic notepad". The personal-interviewing was chosen because it is more suitable for "business-to-business or organisational research which requires interviews with business executives" Burns & Bush (2010:280).

Non-probability sampling in the form of judgemental sampling was used. Judgemental sampling was chosen because it is the most suitable sampling technique for business-to-business markets, according to Wilson (2012:192). Also of particularly importance is the fact that "a carefully chosen judgemental sample may be better able to represent the mix of potential respondents in a population than even a probability sample as you can balance your sample to be in keeping with known market characteristics" Wilson, (2012:192).

The sample elements/respondents were major customers of the three main cement manufacturing firms in South Africa. A total of 362 respondents (in all the nine Provinces) were targeted, making it a large enough sample to be in a position to generalise the results to the entire population. The judgemental sampling method was chosen because, to reiterate, the research was conducted with the major customers of cement suppliers. A judgemental sampling design is "used where the collection of specialised informed inputs on the topic area researched is vital, and the use of any other sampling design would not offer opportunities to obtain the specialised information" Sekaran and Bougie, (2013:259).

4. Data Collection Method

Research assistants were used to collect data using structured, self-administered questionnaires. The research assistants were to set appointments and sit with the respondents while the respondents completed the questionnaire. This was done in order to improve the response rate. Questionnaires were placed in envelopes and after completing them the respondents would then place them back in the envelopes provided and seal them. Another reason research assistants were used is because of the nature of the sample design and the characteristics of the respondents, who are senior business people who are difficult to get hold of and who have little free time or

are unlikely to complete questionnaires when left alone to do it.

The assistants were trained on issues relating to data collection, including how to approach respondents and ethics in data collection. This approach is supported by Sekaran and Bougie (2013:120), who state that "interviewers have to be thoroughly briefed about the research and trained in how to start an interview, how to proceed with the questions, how to motivate respondents to answer, what to look for in the answers and how to close an interview". The training also helped the assistants to familiarise themselves with the contents of the questionnaire. Respondents were approached in their places of work/offices.

Face-to-face interview technique with self-administered questionnaires was chosen because, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2013:124), this tactic has the advantage that "the researcher can clarify doubts, ensure that questions are properly understood, they have the ability to rephrase the questions, can establish and motivate respondents and this approach usually yields high response rate. The disadvantages may be that it takes time, costs more when a wide geographical region is covered, respondents may be concerned about confidentiality of information given, interviewers need to be trained and can introduce interviewer bias". Despite these disadvantages, the face-to-face interview was chosen as it provides a higher response rate than other methods of interviewing.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Reliabilities and Validity of Measurement Scales used in the Study

Before subjecting the constructs to correlations, firstly the reliabilities of the scales were carried out using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient measurement. Reliability "is the degree to which the observed variable measures the 'true' value and is 'error' free", Hair et al., (2006:8).

The validity of a scale refers to the degree to which it measures what it is supposed to measure, Pallant (2007:7). The following activities were performed to ensure validity:
- The questionnaire was directly aligned by the research objectives
- Feedback from the pilot study was used to make the necessary adjustments to the final questionnaire
- A large sample was used to improve the accuracy of the results

The closer the values are to 1, the greater the reliability of the scale. All the Cronbach's Alpha of the scales considered in this study indicates a good reliability (>.7).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Mean of the computed constructs	Std. Deviation (computed)	Mean on a scale of 7	Std Deviation on a scale of 7
Competency_factor	356	24.55	3.521	6.14	0.88
Trust_factor	356	19.43	2.467	6.48	0.82
Commitment_factor	352	18.80	2.568	6.27	0.86
Communication_factor	355	19.13	2.531	6.38	0.84
Satisfaction_factor	354	25.33	3.222	6.33	0.81
Cooperation_factor	352	37.68	7.025	6.28	1.17
Loyalty_factor	353	18.71	2.669	6.24	0.89
Valid N (listwise)	331				

All the means on **table 2** are around 6, meaning that in general the sample agrees with all the items of various construct involved in the study. All the Standard deviation which are less than 1 indicates that the opinions about the items of the various constructs are not significantly different across the sample.

5.2 Correlation among constructs

According to Hair *et* al., (2006:171), "Correlation coefficient (r) indicates the strength of association between any two metric variables. The sign (+ or -) indicates the direction of the relationship. The value range from +1 to -1, with +1 indicating a perfect positive relationship, 0 indicating no relationship, and -1 indicating a perfect negative or reverse relationship (as one variable grows larger, the other variable grows smaller)".

Table 3. Correlation among constructs

Correlations		Compe-tencies_factor	Trust_factor	Commit-ment_factor	Communi-cation_factor	Satisfac-tion_factor	Coopera-tion_factor	Loyalty_factor
Competencies_factor	Pearson Correlation	1	.747**	.572**	.825**	.580**	.529**	.551**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	362	362	362	362	362	362	362
Trust_factor	Pearson Correlation	.747**	1	.507**	.751**	.640**	.553**	.595**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	362	362	362	362	362	362	362
Commitment_factor	Pearson Correlation	.572**	.507**	1	.574**	.388**	.348**	.369**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	362	362	362	362	362	362	362
Communication_factor	Pearson Correlation	.825**	.751**	.574**	1	.680**	.622**	.546**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	362	362	362	362	362	362	362
Satisfaction_factor	Pearson Correlation	.580**	.640**	.388**	.680**	1	.813**	.643**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	362	362	362	362	362	362	362
Cooperation_factor	Pearson Correlation	.529**	.553**	.348**	.622**	.813**	1	.748**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	362	362	362	362	362	362	362
Loyalty_factor	Pearson Correlation	.551**	.595**	.369**	.546**	.643**	.748**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	362	362	362	362	362	362	362

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. Below summarises the findings and interpretation of **table 3** on correlations among constructs

Construct	Finding	Factor Loading
Competencies Factor	There is a significant association between competencies factor and trust factor	.747
	There is a moderate association between competencies factor and commitment factor	.572
	There is a perfect positive association between competencies factor and communication factor	.852
	There is a moderate association between competencies factor and satisfaction factor	.580
	There is a moderate association between competencies factor and cooperation factor	.529
	There is a moderate association between competencies factor and loyalty	.551
Trust Factor	There is a moderate association between trust factor and commitment factor	.507
	There is a significant association between trust factor and communication factor	.751
	There is a strong association between trust factor and satisfaction factor	.640
	There is a strong association between trust factor and cooperation factor	.553
	There is a strong association between trust factor and Loyalty factor	.595
Commitment Factor	There is a moderate association between commitment factor and communication factor	.574
	There is a moderate association between commitment factor and satisfaction factor	.388
	There is a moderate association between commitment factor and cooperation factor	.348
	There is a moderate association between commitment factor and loyalty factor	.369
Communication Factor	There is a significant association between communication factor and satisfaction factor	.680
	There is a strong association between communication factor and cooperation factor	.622
	There is a moderate association between communication factor and loyalty factor	.546
Satisfaction Factor	There is a perfect positive association between satisfaction factor and cooperation factor	.813
	There is a strong association between satisfaction factor and loyalty	.643
Cooperation Factor	There is a significant association between cooperation factor and loyalty factor	.748

Interpretation of findings on correlations using the structural model

– Correlation between Competencies and Trust is equal to .75; which means that when one of these two variables grow positively of one unit of standard deviation, the other variable also grows positively of .75 unit of standard deviation.
– Correlation between Competencies and commitment is equal to .57; which means that when one of these two variables grow positively of one unit of standard deviation, the other variable also grows positively of .57 unit of standard deviation.
– Correlation between Competencies and communication is equal to .83; which means that when one of these two variables grow positively of one unit of standard deviation, the other variable also grows positively of .83 unit of standard deviation.
– Correlation between Trust and commitment is equal to .51; which means that when one of these two variables grow positively of one unit of standard deviation, the other variable also

grows positively of .51 unit of standard deviation.

- Correlation between Trust and communication is equal to .75; which means that when one of these two variables grow positively of one unit of standard deviation, the other variable also grows positively of .75 unit of standard deviation.
- Correlation between Commitment and communication is equal to .57; which means that when one of these two variables grow positively of one unit of standard deviation, the other variable also grows positively of .57 unit of standard deviation.
- Correlation between Competencies and Trust is equal to .75; which means that when one of these two variables grow positively of one unit of standard deviation, the other variable also grows positively of .75 unit of standard deviation.
- Correlation between Competencies and Trust is equal to .75; which means that when one of these two variables grow positively of one unit of standard deviation, the other variable also grows positively of .75 unit of standard deviation.

5.3 Discussion of the empirical results.

In this study, trust has the strongest positive association with all the variables. This is consistent with most of the research in relationship marketing. Trust is mostly widely accepted concept in relationship marketing (Svensson *et* al., 2010; Skarmeas *et* al., (2008); Skarmeas and Robson (2008); Morgan and Hunt (1994); Dwyer *et* al., (1987). Trust according to Wilson (1995:337), "is a fundamental relationship model building block and as such is included in most relationship models". "In a business-to-business relationship, (as in the case of this study), the customer will attempt to reduce its perceived risk by selecting a supplier seen as capable of performing reliably (credibility) and demonstrate its interest in the buyer's well-being (benevolence)", Eggert and Ulaga (2004:315). In this industry, customers trust a cement supplier if there is constant, timely and regular communication, if the supplier demonstrate competence in the products they offer, if they are satisfied with the supplier and if they cooperate with the supplier. Therefore in the cement industry, trust is one of the most important dimension of relationship marketing.

Communication has a very strong association with satisfaction, cooperation, trust, loyalty and competencies because, it plays a vital role as according to Gilaninia *et* al., (2011:795), "Communication in relationship marketing means keeping in touch with valued customers, providing timely and trustworthy information on service and

service changes, and communicating proactively if a delivery problem occurs".

Satisfaction has a significant association with trust, cooperation and communication. Cooperation has the strong association with loyalty. Loyal customers are likely to cooperate with suppliers. Competencies have strong association with trust and a moderate association with commitment, satisfaction, cooperation and loyalty.

All the constructs studied in this paper, are correlated. Therefore all the hypotheses of this study are accepted and the conceptual framework as presented in table 1 is adopted as the model of relationship marketing in the South African cement industry in South Africa.

6. Conclusions

The outcomes of this study indicate that satisfaction plays a central role in relationship building in the South African Cement Industry. Customer satisfaction has the strongest influence on customer cooperation and loyalty. Thus making customer satisfaction the most important finding as customer satisfaction plays a pivotal role in relationship marketing in the cement industry in South Africa as it leads to important outcomes of cooperation and loyalty. The two outcomes are crucial for business success in terms of repeat purchase, referrals (word-of-mouth marketing), retention and long-term profitability.

Supplier competencies, Trust, Commitment and communication have been found to have a significance influence on satisfaction and in turn, satisfaction have significance influence on cooperation and loyalty in the South African Cement Industry

Thus, overall, to maintain customer loyalty and cooperation to a cement supplier, a cement supplier may enhance all five aspects of relationship marketing dimensions which are supplier competencies, trust, commitment, communication and satisfaction. As a result the empirical results suggest a major paradigm shift from production/sales orientation towards relationship marketing orientation.

It is recommended that a manufacturer of cement products must predominantly develop strategies and procedures that ensures that products or services offered matches or exceeds customer expectations. This means a cement manufacturer has to invest a lot of resources in satisfying customer needs in order to meet organisational goals and objectives. Satisfaction leads to cooperation and loyalty which are important for a supplier to have a competitive advantage. Loyal customers are more profitable and are likely to stay with the supplier for long. These spread good word of mouth about the organisation. Satisfaction leads to long-term relationships commitment and decreased propensity

to terminate relationships. "Thus it is fundamental that cement manufacturers must deliver a quality service at all times to their customers, stressing not just the core service but also the peripheral ones, and striving to cover aspects related not only to the technical quality but also to the functional quality"' Alvarez et.al (2011:27).

It is recommended that, for a cement manufacturer to be able to consolidate its position in the market, retain customers and become more profitable, it must be able to generate trust, have effective communication strategies, must have committed customers, must be competent and must satisfy its customers. By doing this, a cement manufacturer will be in a position to gain loyal customers, customers willing to cooperate, customers who are willing to remain in a relationship for a long time and customers who are willing to spread positive word of mouth, thus helping to improve the firm's reputation in the market.

Most studies in relationship marketing put trust, commitment and satisfaction as the mostly commonly cited dimensions of relationship marketing. This study makes a theoretical contribution by adding other dimensions (supplier competencies, communication, cooperation and loyalty).

Although there are numerous studies which examine the relationships between trust, commitment, communication, satisfaction, cooperation and continuity, there is no available evidence in literature for an existence of an integrated model of the relationships between these constructs as so far as it relates to Relationship Marketing especially in the cement industry. There exists evidence from literature of an outcry for future studies to limit studies of relationship marketing to specific industry. This study contributes to theory and practice by closing that gap, by providing a framework of dimensions of RM specifically aimed at the cement industry specifically.

One of the limitations of the study is that, a judgemental sample was used and the results may be interpreted to only represent the population of those like the respondents. Therefore this limits the generalisation of the results to the entire South African population industries.

The research was aimed at those organisations that contribute 80% to the organisational profitability, since relationship marketing is undertaken with key customers. This leads to another limitation in that, the study was undertaken in South Africa with major cement customers. This limits the ability to generalise the findings to other different industries in other countries or of different cultures.

This study lays a foundation for further studies to be carried out in similar industries operating under similar environments. Further studies can be carried out to expand the dimensions of RM. For this reason, it is recommended that this study can be replicated to other industries in South Africa and undertaken in other industries in different countries with different cultures.

This study gives an opportunity to conduct future studies on other business-to-business relationships among different countries and cultures. A further study into smaller organisations may differ from this but this study lays a foundation for further studies.

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