

# Exploring opportunism, conflict, noneconomic satisfaction and economic satisfaction in a B2B context – A buyer and seller perspective



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**Purpose:** The purpose of the study is to test the relationships between the antecedents of noneconomic satisfaction and its influence on economic satisfaction from both a seller's and a purchaser's perspective.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Purchase and sales managers working for Taiwanese companies were included in the sample. Snowball sampling was applied and a total of 218 purchase managers and 208 sales managers participated in the study. Structural equation modelling was applied to the study.

**Findings:** Opportunism was determined as an antecedent to conflict, while opportunism did not have a negative relationship with noneconomic satisfaction. Conflict was established as having a negative relationship with noneconomic satisfaction, which related positively to economic satisfaction in B2B relationships.

**Practical implications:** The findings give purchase and sales managers insights that enable them to understand how opportunism relates to conflict, how these two antecedents relate to noneconomic satisfaction and how noneconomic satisfaction relates to economic satisfaction in purchase and sales business relationships. The tested model validates the hypothesised relationships between opportunism and conflict, conflict and noneconomic satisfaction, and noneconomic satisfaction and economic satisfaction from both a purchaser's and a seller's perspective. However, the negative relationship between opportunism and noneconomic satisfaction in purchaser–seller relationships could not be confirmed.

**Originality/value:** No existing study has focused on relationship marketing in business-to-business relationships from both a purchaser's and a seller's perspective to establish whether noneconomic satisfaction functions as a connector between economic satisfaction and opportunism and conflict.

**Keywords:** business-to-business (B2B) relationship; opportunism; conflict; economic satisfaction; noneconomic satisfaction; purchase manager; sales manager.

## Introduction

Most B2B studies explore the measurement of satisfaction by focusing on the social aspects of B2B relationship-building (Geyskens, Steenkamp & Kumar, 1999; Graça, Barry & Doney, 2016). Yet, B2B literature clearly confirms that there are two categories of satisfaction requiring consideration in a B2B context, namely economic and noneconomic satisfaction (social satisfaction). Researchers such as Ferro et al. (2016) and Geyskens and Steenkamp (2000) opine that B2B research should acknowledge the existence of these two types of satisfaction in business channel relationships. They argued that satisfaction in a B2B context should not be conceptualised as a unidimensional construct. Economic satisfaction encompasses the evaluation of financial aspects perceived as tangible (e.g. profitability, sales growth and sales volume). Noneconomic satisfaction relates to the assessment of intangible, social factors relevant to the collaboration of B2B partners (e.g. emotions and feelings of contentment, joy, happiness). To address this concern, the study measures satisfaction from both an economic and a noneconomic satisfaction perspective. Scholars (e.g. Del Bosque Rodríguez et al., 2006; Ferro et al., 2016) argue that limited research explores satisfaction as a multidimensional construct in business channel research and supports increased levels of research in this area (e.g. multiple-partner research perspectives).

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The second concern focuses on establishing, from published research, the outcomes of satisfaction. According to researchers like Farrelly and Quester (2005), the numerous outcomes from measuring satisfaction can be the result of various reasons. For example, different items are used to measure satisfaction, and the measurement of satisfaction can also be done in varying settings. In their seminal work on the measurement of satisfaction in a B2B context, Geyskens et al. (1999) cautioned against the measurement of satisfaction as a unidimensional construct. They argued that through the exploration of numerous studies where the measurement of satisfaction was secured as a unidimensional construct, the results varied because of the inclusion of nonproportional economic and noneconomic satisfaction items. Furthermore, it has been established that cultural factors can influence the dynamic nature of B2B relationships, inclusive of relational factors that could reflect different value importance between business partners (Voldnes, Grønhaug & Nilssen, 2012). As a result, parties to a business relationship may perceive successful relationship-building strategies differently (Clampit et al., 2015).

A third concern is how satisfaction is positioned to different variables in business-related studies to develop enhanced knowledge of the relationship-building process between parties. In this study, the proposed relationship between satisfaction, opportunism and conflict is of particular concern. As indicated, satisfaction is critical in the evaluation of B2B relationships (Lussier & Hall, 2018), while opportunism and conflict are perceived as factors that can impair the relationship-building process (Cortez & Johnston, 2020). Opportunism in the context of this study refers to one party's pursuit of self-centredness through the use of treachery. This can encompass aspects such as dishonesty, theft and deception. It can furthermore also encompass one party's revealing of misleading or incomplete information, with the intent to deceive, falsify, conceal or create confusion (Pathak, Ashok & Tan, 2020; Williamson, 1985, p. 47). In addition, conflict refers to the perception of one party to a relationship that their interest in the B2B partnership is influenced negatively, resulting in the overall relational experience to be destructive (Standifer & James, 2010).

Numerous research studies highlight the negative influence of opportunism and conflict on existing and future relational intentions between business partners, although predominantly from a purchaser or a sales business perspective (Kang & Jindal, 2015; Varela, Svensson & Mpinganjira, 2019) and not a purchaser and a sales business perspective combined. Furthermore, it appears that most studies focus on exploring the relationship between opportunism, conflict and satisfaction (economic and noneconomic satisfaction) from a purchaser or a sales business perspective (Ferro et al., 2016; Varela et al., 2019). However, these studies neglect to explore the influence of opportunism and conflict on the economic and noneconomic satisfaction of B2B partners in the relationship-building process from both a purchaser and a sales business

perspective. Researchers such as Jeong and Oh (2017) claim the need to further explore the influence of opportunism and conflict on B2B relationship satisfaction, as they can impair the need for continuous relational intention. Wang and Yang (2013) concurred, arguing that further research on opportunism and conflict from an interfirm perspective is imperative to develop enhanced understanding of the perceptions of all parties to a business relationship (a purchaser and a sales business). These perceptions will secure an enhanced comprehension of the influence of these variables on the multidimensional nature of satisfaction and how it influences the purchaser's and the sales business's future relationship intentions. The research proposed in this study develops a sales business–purchaser relationship model that considers the views of the purchaser and the sales business. The study aims to assess the direct and indirect relationships between the postcedents of opportunism and conflict, and the postcedents of noneconomic and economic satisfaction. Figure 1 outlines the structural relationships in the antecedents and postcedents research model. This aim is measured by focusing on both purchaser and sales business relationships.

The research makes various contributions to existing theory within the context of B2B literature, providing a perspective on future relationship-building from the perspective of both the business purchaser and the sales business. Firstly, it contributes to the knowledge on business relationships from the perspective of both parties (business purchaser and sales business). This is contrary to numerous previous studies that have focused on a purchaser or a sales business perspective only (Hawkins, Pohlen & Prybutok, 2013; Kang & Jindal, 2015). This is an important contribution, as the study provides the perspective of both the purchaser and the seller in terms of the role played by opportunism and conflict in influencing noneconomic satisfaction and the influence of the latter on economic satisfaction. The building of long-term relationships between B2B partners cannot be secured, in a competitive B2B market, purely from the perspective of only the buyer or the seller. To develop and maintain long-term relationships between all parties to a B2B relationship, a deeper understanding

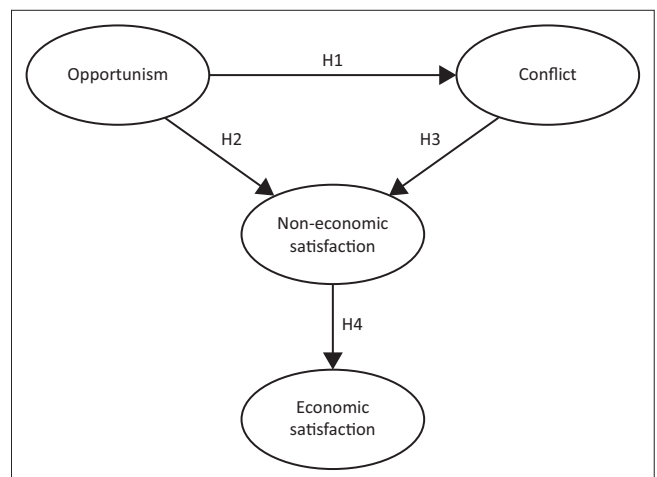


FIGURE 1: Proposed research model.

of the perspectives of both purchaser and seller is required. Therefore, partner expectation towards future relational development is mutual in nature, requiring further research exploring both a purchaser and sales perspective on future relational intention in a B2B context (Alamäki & Korpela, 2021; Guan et al., 2021). Secondly, satisfaction is measured at an organisational level and not an individual level, integrating both economic and noneconomic satisfaction within one model. Through this approach, consideration is provided for the need to secure a global assessment of this aspect in the study of B2B relationship building (Palmatier, Gopalakrishna & Houston, 2006). Thirdly, the study proposes an integrated model that explores the relationships between opportunism, conflict, noneconomic satisfaction and economic satisfaction. To the best of the authors' knowledge, the proposed model has not been tested among both the purchaser and the sales business in purchaser–sales business relationships, although previous studies have tested the proposed model from the perspective of just the purchaser or the sale business. The exploration of these constructs and the proposed relationships between these constructs from the perspective of both the purchaser and the seller is critically important to secure the future survival of B2B partnerships. Increased competition in the B2B environment necessitates both the purchaser and the seller to develop a deeper understanding of the role played by the selected constructs on future relational intention (Sharma et al., 2022). Also, it becomes increasingly important to develop a holistic understanding of changing partner perceptions towards the selected constructs. Through such a deeper understanding, partners are able to develop knowledge of the other party's perception towards the role of opportunism, conflict, noneconomic satisfaction and economic satisfaction in the building of long-term B2B relationships. From an industry perspective, the study contributes by assisting B2B purchasers and sales businesses to better understand how both parties view opportunism and how it can cause conflict in a purchaser–sales business relationship. In addition, both parties to a B2B relationship (i.e. purchaser and sales business) will develop an enhanced understanding of how the other party views opportunism and conflict (as negative precursors) to influence noneconomic satisfaction and how it can impact economic satisfaction.

## Theoretical framework

The study draws on the principles of the social exchange theory and the relationship marketing theory concerning the proposed constructs. Social exchange theory refers to social exchange as a tangible or intangible interchange of activities between a purchaser and a sales business that is grounded on a trade-off between benefits and costs (Jeong & Oh, 2017). Blau (1986) opined that parties to the relationship will evaluate the benefit–cost ratio continuously to guarantee benefits accrued from the relationship are maximised and costs are limited. These benefits can be economic (e.g. material benefits like increased profits or sales) or psychological and social (also known as nonmaterial benefits). The business itself receives the most value from the economic benefits derived, while the employees of the

business benefit from nonmaterial benefits such as happiness and contentment (Dai & Chen, 2015). The latter can be derived from a trustworthy partner who secures peace of mind, especially because the employees of the business engage with other employees in terms of the B2B engagement process (Liao, 2008).

Regarding relationship marketing theory, Sarmiento, Simões and Farhangmehr (2015) argued that collaborative relationships among business cohorts are based on the principle of mutual gains. Such gains are critical in driving future engagement and need to be characteristic of economic and noneconomic benefits to secure future engagement (Ferro et al., 2016). By successfully managing purchaser–sales business relationships, parties to the relationship can secure increased revenue, thereby driving higher profits in the long term (Mpinganjira, Roberts-Lombard & Svensson, 2017). This is especially important to understand, considering that Payan et al. (2019a) confirmed the evolutionary dynamic proposed by relationship marketing, where relationship building is not just secured through market transactions but also through noneconomic principles such as contentment and joy. Therefore, the development of relationships over the long term should have benefits to all parties concerned and be driven by a focus towards relationship-building that is long-term-orientated (Youssef et al., 2018).

## Theoretical model development

Literature pertaining to the hypotheses proposed below are predominantly derived from a purchaser perspective (as indicated in the introduction). Hence, this study extends existing theory and previous research on the purchaser perspective to also explore the sales perspective. It should be noted that the sales perspective has rarely been explored in the contextual setting of this study's research model. Therefore, this study applies current theory and former studies on the purchaser perspective to justify and verify the validity and reliability based on the sales perspective as well. Against this background, it is imperative to note that the Open Science Collaboration (2015, p. 7) validates the need to confirm the validity and reliability of research findings. It highlights the inadequate reproducibility of research, arguing that 'a single study almost never provides definitive resolution for or against an effect and its explanation'. This argument is further supported by Open Science Collaboration (2015), securing pragmatic confirmation and significance on international validation and replication. Through a collaborative research study, 100 researchers worldwide attempted to confirm the validity and reliability of 270 research findings published in high-impact research journals in psychology. The confirmation (i.e. validation or replication research) of results established that most (two-thirds) of the conveyed research results were not corroborated. The confirmation established that the research results were not similar in nature when compared to the original research results reported in the journals. Lai (2007) further highlighted the need to confirm current theory and previous research results over a period and across global time and settings.

In addition, Svensson (2013, 2015) argued that disregarding the confirmation of validity and reliability of research results is counterproductive to the development of theory that is perceived as being rigorous, as well as the creation of valuable research.

Høgevold, Svensson and Roberts-Lombard (2020) investigated a proposed framework of precursors and outcomes of noneconomic satisfaction in a Norwegian B2B context. The study's limitation is that the proposed framework has not been explored within an Asian B2B context but only within a European setting as a developed market context. It should be noted that B2B settings globally are different in terms of the type of industry, country and continent they operate in. Consequently, it is critical to also explore the proposed framework in an emerging market, such as Taiwan, to further confirm the relevance of the proposed framework. Scholars like Hair et al. (2014) emphasise the need to confirm the validity and reliability of previous research results to develop a platform of useable and dependable theory.

### Contextual similarities and differences

Countries that are geographically near each other illustrate increased similarity in terms of business characteristics, compared to countries that are geographically further removed (O'Grady & Lane, 1996). Taiwan is in Asia, compared to Norway in Europe. Against this background, it should be noted that cultural and socio-economic factors are both similar and different when comparing Taiwan and Norway (CIA, 2017; Hofstede, 1983; Kirkman, Lowe & Gibson, 2006). Hofstede (1983) and Kirkman et al. (2006) asserted that socio-economic factors can be used as a benchmark to compare countries. Taiwan and Norway are both included in the lists of Hofstede (1983) and Kirkman et al. (2006) in terms of the different dimensions relating to national culture: individualism versus collectivism (IC), a measure of the relationship between individuals and their fellow human beings; large or small power distance (PD), a measure of the distribution of power on an unequal basis in society; strong or weak uncertainty avoidance (UA), which can be described as the extent of how a society deals with uncertainty and is associated with the inclination of a culture to institute laws and formal rules; and masculinity versus femininity (MF), a measure of the division of roles between the genders in society. The list assigns a score (0–100) on each individual dimension – Table 1 reflects the scores on the different dimensions for Taiwan and Norway.

Hofstede's (1983) dimensions of national culture indicate that Taiwan has similarities and differences. In terms of PD, Taiwan

**TABLE 1:** National dimensions of culture.

Country	PD	IC	MF	UA
Norway	31	69	8	50
Taiwan	58	17	45	69

Source: Adapted from Hofstede, G. (1983). National cultures in four dimensions: A research-based theory of cultural differences among nations. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 13(1–2), 46–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.1983.11656358>

PD, power distance; IC, individualism versus collectivism; MF, masculinity versus femininity; UA, uncertainty avoidance.

scored 58, which is much higher than Norway (31), while on IC, Taiwan (17) scored much lower than Norway (69). On MF, Taiwan scored 45, while Norway scored 8. Finally, on the UA, Taiwan scored 69, while Norway scored 50, which is a much lower score. Against this background, Taiwan provides a research setting that is dissimilar to Norway to confirm the validity and reliability of the business sustainability framework.

### The importance of opportunism and conflict as important variables to explore in a business-to-business relational context

More than 3 decades ago, scholars such as Anderson and Weitz (1986), Dwyer and Oh (1987) and Heide and John (1992) validated the need to explore the negative influence of opportunism in the development of B2B relationships. Heiman and Nickerson (2002) later confirmed the adverse influence of opportunism on a B2B partnership and its ultimate potential in creating conflict in the relationship-building process. Scholars such as Chowdhury, Gruber and Zolkiewski (2016) and Kang and Jindal (2015) furthermore emphasise the ability of opportunism to impair the relationship-building process between B2B partners due to its ability to create conflict and disagreement between parties, thereby impairing future relational intent. These authors also emphasise the need to explore these two constructs and their influence on multiple outcomes in future B2B research, because of their influence on future relational intention within a B2B context. More recently, scholars such as Lianu et al. (2022) and Struwe and Slepnirov (2021) confirmed the undesirable influence of opportunism and conflict on the relationship-building process between B2B partners, confirming the need to explore these constructs further in multiple business partner settings to establish their influence on the relationship-building process in a B2B context. Considering this, the importance of exploring opportunism and conflict and their influence on multiple factors remains relevant in B2B research, as confirmed by research over the past three decades.

### Interrelationship of opportunism and conflict

Opportunism is widely acknowledged in marketing literature as a variable that influences conflict in the B2B relationship-building process (Chowdhury et al., 2016; Pathak et al., 2020). Most of these studies focus on the perspective of the purchaser or the sales business in the B2B relationship in terms of the interrelationship between opportunism and conflict (Pathak et al., 2020; Prince et al., 2016). The perspective of both the purchaser and the sales business, when considering opportunism and conflict, is not clearly argued. Opportunism implies a self-centred approach towards relationship-building, with the intent to drive personal benefit (Kang & Jindal, 2015). Zardkoohi, Harrison and Josefy (2017) argued that opportunism is short-term-focused, as it drives conflict between parties, impairing the intent to develop and sustain long-term relationships. Hence, when one party (e.g. a sales business) illustrates opportunistic behaviour in a B2B relationship, there is a greater possibility of conflict with the other party (e.g. the purchaser) because of a lack of mutual

benefit accruing from the relationship. Considering this, the following hypothesis is proposed on the purchaser perspective:

H1a: Opportunism relates positively to conflict in purchase business relationships.

In addition, the following hypothesis is considered based on the sales perspective:

H1b: Opportunism relates positively to conflict in sales business relationships.

### Interrelationship of opportunism and noneconomic satisfaction

Research published in the B2B domain has validated the relationship between opportunism and noneconomic satisfaction (Mpinganjira et al., 2017; Payan et al., 2019b). However, these relationships have been confirmed in marketing literature predominantly from the perspective of a purchaser in a B2B context (Mpinganjira et al., 2017; Payan et al., 2019b). These researchers have emphasised the importance of understanding the influence of opportunism on noneconomic satisfaction and how such an influence can hinder or stimulate future relationship building between business partners. Opportunism is viewed as the opposite of sustainable relationship building, limiting opportunities for parties to remain in the relationship in the future (Foss & Weber, 2016). Scholars such as Hill (1990) have stated more than three decades ago that opportunism weakens the relationship between business partners, reducing feelings of contentment with the relationship. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H2a: Opportunism relates negatively to noneconomic satisfaction in purchase business relationships.

Furthermore, the following hypothesis is considered based on the sales perspective:

H2b: Opportunism relates negatively to noneconomic satisfaction in sales business relationships.

### Interrelationship of conflict and noneconomic satisfaction

Marketing scholars such as Del Bosque Rodríguez et al. (2006) have argued widely that conflict in B2B relationships negatively influences noneconomic satisfaction. Still, the validation of these relationships provides limited clarity on the interrelationship between conflict and noneconomic satisfaction from both the perspective of a purchaser and a sales business in a B2B context. Conflict in a B2B relationship results due to the development of barriers by each partner to the relationship, lowering the potential of the other partner to reach its targeted objectives (Hübner, Wagner & Kurpjuweit, 2018). Research by Lee, Yi and Son (2020) states that conflict in a B2B relationship lowers the feeling of contentment between business partners, ultimately reducing the relational benefits flowing from the relationship in the long term. Thus, conflict has a negative influence on future collaboration between parties because it lowers experiences of contentment in the relationship (Varela et al., 2019). As a result, it is argued that conflict is negatively related to

noneconomic satisfaction, as it reduces purchaser and sales business intent to continue with the relationship in the future (Payan et al., 2019b). Against this background, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H3a: Conflict relates negatively to noneconomic satisfaction in purchase business relationships.

In addition, the following hypothesis is considered based on the sales perspective:

H3b: Conflict relates negatively to noneconomic satisfaction in sales business relationships.

### Interrelationship of noneconomic satisfaction and economic satisfaction

In B2B marketing literature, satisfaction can be viewed in terms of noneconomic satisfaction and economic satisfaction (Sales-Vivó, Gil-Saura & Gallarza, 2020; Zietsman, Mostert & Svensson, 2020). On the one hand, noneconomic satisfaction encompasses intangible relational factors such as emotional and social traits that result in feelings of joy, contentment and happiness between B2B partners (Ferro et al., 2016; Sanzo et al., 2003). On the other hand, economic satisfaction refers to tangible outcomes of the business relationship, such as overall business performance and profit and sales growth (Ferro et al., 2016). Scholars like Farrelly and Quester (2005) and Del Bosque Rodríguez et al. (2006) have argued extensively that noneconomic satisfaction is an antecedent to economic satisfaction. They contended that relationship-building in the initial phase of the B2B relationship is only built on economic principles, and that emotional and social aspects of the relationship are initiated once the relationship is established (Farrelly & Quester, 2005). Consequently, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H4a: Noneconomic satisfaction relates positively to economic satisfaction in purchase business relationships.

The following hypothesis is also considered based on the sales perspective:

H4b: Noneconomic satisfaction relates positively to economic satisfaction in sales business relationships.

Against the background provided above, the proposed model (Figure 1) shows the direct and indirect relationships between two antecedents (opportunism and conflict) and two postcedents (economic and noneconomic satisfaction) in purchase and sales business relationships. It argues that from both a purchaser and sales business perspective in a B2B setting, opportunism and conflict are related to noneconomic satisfaction, and the latter relates to economic satisfaction. Furthermore, the model proposes that opportunism is related to conflict in purchase and sales business relationships. Therefore, this model purports that opportunism and conflict are antecedents to noneconomic satisfaction only and not economic satisfaction (Figure 1). The proposed model illustrates that noneconomic satisfaction functions as a mediator between opportunism and conflict and economic satisfaction in purchase and sales business relationships.

## Research methodology

### Research context and sample

Taiwan plays a central role in the global supply chain, especially in high-tech industries. With a complete information and communication technology (ICT) value chain, Taiwan is a key convergence point for global ICT product trade. Among these industries, Taiwan accounts for more than 60% of global foundry revenue in semiconductor production (TrendForce, 2021). The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has highlighted Taiwan's importance to the global economy. This study includes a cross-industrial sample of Taiwanese businesses across two samples, targeting purchase and sales managers to examine both purchase and sales business relationships in the same study based on the same context and at the same time. Snowball sampling was applied to target knowledgeable key purchase and sales managers in each Taiwanese business. Table 2 provides a summary of the businesses participating in this study by describing their nature of business, full-time employee equivalent and annual turnover. It should be noted that henceforth, the author team reports the statistics based on the purchase managers in 'normal' font, while the statistics based on sales managers are in italics (i.e. XX/XX).

The targeted purchase and sales managers were asked to think of either one important supplier or customer with whom they engaged with in the last year and to keep this supplier or customer in mind when filling in the questionnaire.

**TABLE 2:** Nature of business, full-time employee equivalent and annual turnover (purchase/sales business relationships).

Nature of business	Count	Full-time employee equivalent	Count	Annual turnover (Euros)	Count
Accommodation, café or restaurant	19/21	1–4	22/20	0–4.9 million	24/23
Agriculture, forestry or fishing	2/3	5–9	22/15	5–9.9 million	30/27
Communication services	10/9	10–19	33/21	10–24.9 million	57/38
Construction	38/19	20–49	42/32	25–99.9 million	65/52
Cultural or recreational services	9/3	50–99	22/25	100+ million	42/68
Education	5/5	100–249	29/23	-	-
Electricity, gas or water	2/1	250+	38/72	-	-
Finance and/or insurance	15/18	-	-	-	-
Government administration or defence	1/3	-	-	-	-
Health and community services	9/11	-	-	-	-
Mining	1/10	-	-	-	-
Manufacturing	24/54	-	-	-	-
Personal and other services	15/15	-	-	-	-
Property and business services	10/7	-	-	-	-
Retail trade	20/20	-	-	-	-
Transport and storage	13/7	-	-	-	-
Wholesale trade	19/7	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>218/208</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>218/208</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>218/208</b>

To safeguard confidentiality, the purchase and sales managers were not required to reveal the supplier or customer they considered when filling in the questionnaires. A total of 300 purchase managers and 300 sales managers were contacted, with 218/208 (purchase managers/sales managers) returning a filled-in questionnaire generating a response rate of 72.6%/69.3%. These respondents agreed to participate in the study.

### Constructs and items

The questionnaire items used in the study were derived from studies targeting purchase business relationships, but they were adapted for this study to also target sales business relationships. This was done by changing the word 'supplier' in the purchase questionnaire to 'customer' in the sales questionnaire in each item (Table 3). The original sources used for the construct items in this study are as follows:

- *Opportunism* – Dahlstrom and Nygaard (1999).
- *Conflict* – Brown, Lusch and Nicholson (1995); Coughlan et al. (2001).
- *Economic satisfaction* – Sanzo et al. (2003); and
- *Noneconomic satisfaction* – Geyskens et al. (1999).

The application of a five-point Likert-type scale was secured to determine the degree to which purchase managers and sales managers agreed or disagreed with the items in the questionnaire relating to the antecedents and postcedents of noneconomic satisfaction in purchase and sales business relationships. The scale points ranged from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree'. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Amos version 26.0 was used in the study to conduct the multivariate analyses of each sample of purchase and sales

**TABLE 3:** Antecedents and postcedents construct items in purchase and sales business relationships.

Purchase managers	Sales managers
<b>Constructs and items</b>	
<b>Opportunism</b>	
a) This supplier does not always keep to what is promised.	a) This customer does not always keep to what is promised.
b) This supplier alters the facts slightly in order to get what they need.	b) This customer alters the facts slightly in order to get what they need.
c) This supplier is not always honest with us.	c) This customer is not always honest with us.
<b>Conflict</b>	
a) We often have disagreements with this supplier.	a) We often have disagreements with this customer.
b) We often have different opinions when dealing with this supplier.	b) We often have different opinions when dealing with this customer.
c) There is much conflict in the relationship with this supplier.	c) There is much conflict in the relationship with this customer.
<b>Economic satisfaction</b>	
a) This supplier contributes to our sales goals.	a) This customer contributes to our sales goals.
b) This supplier contributes to our financial performance.	b) This customer contributes to our financial performance.
c) This supplier generates economic growth for us.	c) This customer generates economic growth for us.
<b>Noneconomic satisfaction</b>	
a) The relationship between us and this supplier is positive.	a) The relationship between us and this customer is positive.
b) Our firm is content about its relationship with this supplier.	b) Our firm is content about its relationship with this customer.
c) The relationship between us and this supplier is satisfying.	c) The relationship between us and this customer is satisfying.

managers in two phases. Phase 1 contained a confirmatory factor analysis (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993), while Phase 2 contained structural equation modelling (Hair et al., 2014).

### Empirical findings

The confirmatory factor analyses in both samples of purchase and sales managers were applied to examine the constructs' measurement characteristics (Table 3). Furthermore, structural equation modelling was applied based on both samples to examine the hypothesised relationships in the examined the antecedents and postcedents research model. A total of four constructs and 12 items were used in both phases (Figure 2).

The mean, standard deviation, variance explained and factor loading of each item per construct are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 shows that the nonresponse bias is zero in both samples, with 218/208 valid responses across all construct items of opportunism, conflict, noneconomic satisfaction and economic satisfaction. Moreover, Table 4 shows the explained variance of construct items in both samples (0.66–0.88/0.68–0.90) and their respective factor loadings (0.81–0.94/0.83–0.95). Therefore, the authors concluded that the construct items meet the recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2014) of 0.5 for variance explained and 0.7 for factor loadings.

### Measurement and structural models

The examination of the measurement model in the purchase and sales manager samples demonstrated satisfactory goodness-of-fit measures (Hair et al., 2014), with chi-square of 74.599/76.331 and 48/48 degrees of freedom with *p*-values of 0.008/0.006 based on samples of 218/208. The fit statistics were also satisfactory: normed chi-square ( $X^2/df$ ) = 1.554/1.590; normed fit index (NFI) = 0.964/0.966; relative fit index (RFI) = 0.951/0.953; incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.987/0.987; Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.982/0.982; comparative fix index

(CFI) = 0.987/0.987; and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.051/0.053. The authors concluded that the empirical findings based on the measurement models in both samples of purchase and sales managers were satisfactory. Consequently, the structural models in each sample were examined (see Figure 2).

The structural models for both samples of purchase and sales managers also show satisfactory goodness-of-fit measures (Hair et al., 2014), with chi-squares of 87.501/77.470 and 50/50 degrees of freedom with *p*-values of 0.001/0.008, based on samples of 218/208. The fit statistics were satisfactory:  $X^2/df$  = 1.750/1.549; NFI = 0.958/0.965; RFIs = 0.945/0.954; IFI = 0.982/0.987; TLI = 0.976/0.983; CFI = 0.981/0.987; and RMSEA = 0.059/0.052.

The hypothesised relationships in the antecedents and postcedents research model (refer to Figure 2) were significant with *p*-values of 0.000–0.029/0.000–0.009, except for the hypothesised relationship between opportunism and noneconomic satisfaction in both samples, which were not significant with *p*-values of 0.480/0.317 (see Table 5). The regression coefficients in the samples of purchase and sales managers were 0.255–0.745/–0.298–0.733, except for the hypothesised relationship between opportunism and noneconomic satisfaction in both samples, which were –0.083/0.114 (see Table 5). Opportunism and noneconomic satisfaction were significantly correlated in the measurement model based on purchase business relationships, indicating conflict has a mediating effect, while it was not significantly correlated based on sales business relationships. Consequently, the empirical findings confirmed a coherency that the three out of four hypotheses tested based on the antecedents and postcedents research model in Taiwanese purchase and sales business relationships.

### Construct reliability and validity

The discriminant validity of the antecedents and postcedents research model in both samples of purchase and sales

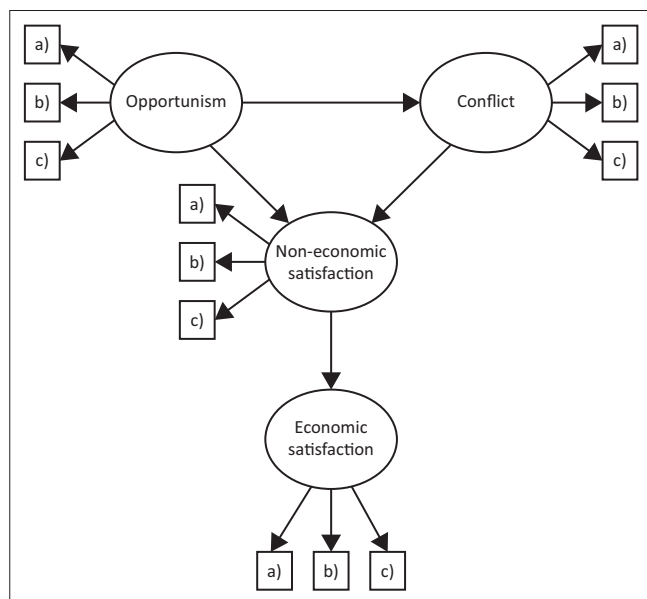


FIGURE 2: Antecedents and postcedents research model in purchase and sales business relationships.

TABLE 4: Univariate statistics.

Item	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance explained	Factor loading
<b>(Purchaser/Seller)</b>					
<b>Opportunism</b>					
a)	218/208	2.73/2.83	1.09/1.20	0.74/0.76	0.86/0.87
b)	218/208	3.08/3.09	1.02/1.16	0.71/0.74	0.84/0.86
c)	218/208	2.71/2.79	1.14/1.18	0.78/0.90	0.88/0.95
<b>Conflict</b>					
a)	218/208	2.89/2.75	0.98/1.12	0.79/0.85	0.89/0.92
b)	218/208	2.55/2.56	0.94/1.09	0.82/0.89	0.90/0.94
c)	218/208	2.42/2.41	0.97/1.06	0.74/0.74	0.86/0.86
<b>Economic satisfaction</b>					
a)	218/208	3.78/4.11	0.96/0.84	0.66/0.77	0.81/0.88
b)	218/208	3.64/4.13	0.97/0.88	0.75/0.82	0.87/0.90
c)	218/208	3.61/4.02	0.93/0.95	0.77/0.89	0.88/0.94
<b>Noneconomic satisfaction</b>					
a)	218/208	3.84/4.05	0.84/0.76	0.74/0.68	0.86/0.83
b)	218/208	3.81/3.99	0.82/0.82	0.84/0.71	0.92/0.84
c)	218/208	3.79/3.97	0.83/0.83	0.88/0.83	0.94/0.91

managers was examined by comparing the variance extracted with the squared interconstruct correlations (Hair et al., 2014). Table 6 shows that the variance extracted for all constructs satisfactorily exceeds the corresponding squared interconstruct correlations. It illustrates that the tested research model shows satisfactory discriminant validity in both samples of purchase and sales business relationships. Subsequently, three out of the four hypothesised relationships of the antecedents and postcedents research model (H1, H3, and H4) shown in Figure 2 are significant (see Table 6), offering satisfactory nomological validity. H2 was not significant in the Taiwanese business setting for the reason previously explained.

The variance extracted of the constructs exceeds 50% (72.7–82.0%/74.0–82.7%), showing satisfactory convergent validity. Furthermore, the composite trait reliability of the constructs shows satisfactory reliability, with the range of 0.90–0.99/0.91–0.94. Hence, the authors concluded that the antecedents and postcedents research model shows satisfactory validity and reliability in Taiwanese purchase and sales business relationships.

## Rival and refined models

Rival and refined models were examined in connection with the antecedents and postcedents research model (see Figure 2) to verify the position of noneconomic

**TABLE 5:** Regression coefficients and significances in purchase and sales business relationships.

Hypothesis	Exogenous construct	Endogenous construct	Regression coefficients	Significance	Results
1	Opportunism	Conflict	0.745/0.733	0.000/0.000	Supported/Supported
2	Opportunism	Noneconomic satisfaction	-0.083/0.114	0.480/0.317	Not supported/Not supported
3	Conflict	Noneconomic satisfaction	-0.255/-0.298	0.029/0.009	Supported/Supported
4	Noneconomic satisfaction	Economic satisfaction	0.627/0.674	0.000/0.000	Supported/Supported

**TABLE 6:** Squared interconstruct correlations, variance extracted and composite trait reliability of constructs in purchase and sales business relationships.

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Economic satisfaction	1.000	-	-	-
(2) Noneconomic satisfaction	0.40/0.45	1.000	-	-
(3) Opportunism	0.00/0.00	0.08/0.02	1.000	-
(4) Conflict	0.00/0.01	0.11/0.05	0.55/0.54	1.000
Variance extracted	72.7%/74.0%	82.0%/82.7%	74.3%/80.0%	78.0%/82.7%
Composite trait reliability	0.90/0.91	0.99/0.94	0.93/0.93	0.92/0.94

**TABLE 7:** Comparison of goodness-of-fit measures in purchase and sales business relationships.

Index	Parsimony-adjusted fit measures			Baseline comparisons – incremental fit measures				Badness of fit	Hypothesised relationships		
	PRATIO	PNFI	PCFI	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI		CFI	RMSEA	H
Research model	0.76/0.76	0.73/0.73	0.74/0.75	0.96/0.97	0.95/0.95	0.98/0.99	0.98/0.98	0.98/0.99	0.06/0.52	4	4
Rival model	0.73/0.73	0.70/0.70	0.72/0.72	0.96/0.97	0.95/0.95	0.99/0.99	0.98/0.98	0.99/0.99	0.05/0.05	6	4
Refined model	0.77/0.77	0.74/0.75	0.76/0.76	0.96/0.97	0.95/0.95	0.98/0.99	0.98/0.98	0.98/0.99	0.06/0.05	3	3

Notes: PRATIO, parsimonious ratio; PNFI, parsimonious normed fit index; PCFI, parsimonious comparative fit index; NFI, normed fit index; RFI, relative fit index; IFI, incremental fit index; TLI, Tucker-Lewis index; CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation.

satisfaction as a mediator between opportunism and conflict on the one hand and economic satisfaction on the other hand. The authors tested the rival model containing the direct relationship between opportunism and economic satisfaction, as well as the direct relationship between conflict and economic satisfaction. Both relationships were nonsignificant. The relationship between opportunism and economic satisfaction was nonsignificant at a  $p$ -value of 0.108/0.509, with a regression coefficient of 0.162/0.979. The relationship between conflict and economic satisfaction was also nonsignificant at a  $p$ -value of 0.414/0.062, with a regression coefficient of 0.083/0.003. Table 7 shows that the parsimony-adjusted fit measures offer satisfactory empirical evidence that the fit of the antecedents and postcedents research model based on both purchase and sales business relationships are comparatively higher than that of the rival model. There are no direct relationships between opportunism and conflict on the one side and economic satisfaction on the other; there are only indirect relationships through noneconomic satisfaction. This study differs, considering that opportunism did not significantly relate to noneconomic satisfaction, as shown in Table 5 –  $p$ -values of 0.480/0.317, with regression coefficients  $-0.083/0.114$  – based on Taiwanese purchase and sales business relationships in contrast to Høgevold et al. (2020), who found it significant in purchase business relationships in Norway. However, conflict relates significantly to noneconomic satisfaction, as founded by the same authors.

The reason why opportunism does not relate to noneconomic satisfaction in Taiwanese purchase and sales business relationships may be that Taiwanese companies have long played the role of contract manufacturing or processing in the global industrial division of labour. When they face the pressure of upstream suppliers or downstream customers, they can always show strong resilience to quickly absorb impacts and self-rationalise the self-interested behaviours of partners.

Therefore, the authors tested a refined model excluding the direct relationship between opportunism and noneconomic satisfaction in both samples of purchase and sales managers. Table 7 shows that the parsimony-adjusted fit measures based on both Taiwanese purchase and sales business relationships are comparatively higher than that of the research and rival models. Consequently, this study confirms the validity and reliability of the refined antecedents and postcedents research model in both purchase and sales business relationships.



## Theoretical and managerial implications

The contribution made by the study is of both a theoretical and practical nature. Theoretically, the findings show that the items used to measure noneconomic satisfaction, its antecedents (opportunism and conflict) and postcedent (economic satisfaction) are valid and reliable. The findings of the study confirm that opportunism has a positive and significant influence on conflict in both purchase and sales business relationships. It was furthermore validated that conflict negatively impairs noneconomic satisfaction in purchase and sales business relationships. Farrelly, Quester and Clulow (2008) and Pathak et al. (2020) concurred, stating that opportunism is a destructive force in the building of relationships between partners, impairing the ability of partners to benefit from the relationship, become satisfied and commit to the relationship in the long term. Furthermore, noneconomic satisfaction relates positively to economic satisfaction in both purchase and sales business relationships. This validates the importance of psychological elements of relationship-building, as they reinforce future relational intention and stimulate the economic benefits potential (such as profitability) for all parties. Previous research (Ferro et al., 2016) supports this outcome, stating that if partners perceive a relationship to be engaging, supportive and interactive, they are more intent to remain in the relationship, if its economic value reflects potential for growth. Interestingly, it was established that opportunism does not relate negatively to noneconomic satisfaction in both purchase and sales business relationships in the context of Taiwan. This finding is interesting in a B2B context as previous research validates the negative influence of opportunism on the psychological well-being of partners in a B2B relationship (Liu et al., 2010).

### Improved knowledge on the development of a win-win situation for both purchaser and sales business in a business to business context

The findings of the study confirm the importance of developing a win-win situation in long-term relationship-building for both the purchaser and the sales business. Understanding of the direct relationships as proposed in the study is of critical importance, considering that it has suggestions for marketing theory. It would seem that sustaining long-term relationships for both purchasers and sales businesses in an Asian B2B context is guided by both noneconomic and economic factors. Improved insight of the factors that guide the noneconomic and economic satisfaction of purchasers and sales businesses can strengthen their long-term intention to remain in the relationship. When purchasers and sales businesses feel that the relationship is satisfying and generates economic growth due to professional engagement that is transparent and beneficial for all parties concerned, a win-win relationship approach is established (Parida & Jovanovic, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). A win-win situation is desired for both purchase and sales managers to make business relationships survive in the long term. Hence, it becomes crucial in purchase and sales business relationships to ensure that opportunism and conflict are avoided to strengthen noneconomic satisfaction (Del Bosque Rodríguez et al., 2006).

This may lead to improving the outcome of economic satisfaction. Consequently, having policies in place could avoid negotiations that are not perceived as fair and other aspects of opportunism that creates fewer disagreements between parties. Thereafter, purchase and sales business relationships can be improved, resulting in a stronger long-term relational intent that also holds economic benefits for all parties involved. Extant B2B literature has investigated the importance of noneconomic satisfaction as a precursor to economic satisfaction in the relationship-building process between business partners, as well as the influence of opportunism and conflict on noneconomic satisfaction (Lambe, Wittmann & Spekman, 2001; Payan et al., 2019a). However, the findings of this study expand on the proposed relationships between opportunism, conflict, noneconomic satisfaction and economic satisfaction from both a purchaser and a sales business perspective, illustrating the important role of these variables from multiple-partner perspectives in the B2B relationship-building process in an emerging Asian market.

### An enhanced understanding of the role of opportunism in the creation of conflict in a business to business context

The research findings confirm the relationship between opportunism and conflict in a B2B market context. Previous research studies have confirmed the relationship between opportunism and conflict and its ability to impair future relationship-building intentions from predominantly a purchaser's perspective (Hawkins et al., 2013; Kang & Jindal, 2015). In the case of this study, the findings show that opportunism is positively related to conflict in both purchase and sales business relationships. Thus, opportunism is an antecedent to conflict in Taiwanese purchase and sales business relationships. Furthermore, conflict relates negatively to noneconomic satisfaction in purchase and sales business relationships. The presence of opportunism limits the outcome of noneconomic satisfaction in business relationships, because purchase or sales managers perceive conflict as a limitation to their overall level of noneconomic satisfaction. The poor outcome of noneconomic satisfaction negatively influences economic satisfaction and imposes constraints in the long-term potential of the relationship. Therefore, it would seem that in the case of both the purchaser and the sales business in an emerging Asian B2B environment, opportunism and conflict remain critical impediments to the development of relationships between partners that are built on contentment and open engagement. Studies conducted in the future could expand on the results of this study by exploring relationship quality as an independent relational variable and explore opportunism and conflict as mediators in B2B relationship-building to establish its influence on business partner noneconomic and economic satisfaction.

### A perspective on noneconomic and economic satisfaction in both purchaser and sales business-to-business relationships

The results of the study validated the direct relationship between noneconomic satisfaction and economic satisfaction

in both purchaser and sales B2B relationships (refer to Table 5 and Table 7). Therefore, it would seem that when the relationship between a purchaser and a sales business is positive and transparent and stimulate feelings of contentment between the partners, economic benefits such as profitability is strengthened due to continuous business engagement in the long-term (Kushwaha et al., 2021; Taghizadeh et al., 2022). Furthermore, the empirical findings reported on the antecedents and postcedents research model provide an improved contextual understanding of the relationship between noneconomic satisfaction and economic satisfaction in Taiwanese purchase and sales business relationships. This study therefore confirms this relationship in previous studies (Ferro et al., 2016; Rodríguez et al., 2022). Conclusively, the elements that are perceived as important in strengthening the noneconomic satisfaction and economic satisfaction-link are perceived as similar by both purchasers and sales businesses in an emerging Asian B2B market context.

## Managerial implications

From a management perspective, it is apparent that in the supply chain system, the relationship between members should be long-term, symbiotic and interdependent, and co-creating value is extremely important to the stability of the system. For example, in B2B partnerships, such value includes not only economic gains but also noneconomic satisfaction, such as happiness and positive feelings obtained from the partnership. Parties therefore want to experience feelings of contentment, open engagement and transparency in their business dealings with each other. Therefore, noneconomic satisfaction will affect the satisfaction of economic benefits obtained from the cooperation. As a result, understanding how to establish and maintain noneconomic satisfaction in a collaborative relationship is essential to the practical operation of relationship marketing. Especially because noneconomic satisfaction guides continued relational intention between partners, influencing the future financial performance and economic growth of all parties to the relationship.

Also, the findings of the study established that, whether in a purchase relationship or a sales relationship, if the two parties often have disagreements or conflict, this will significantly reduce the sense of satisfaction and dependence with the partner, which will have a serious impact on the business relationship. Consequently, any manufacturer in the supply chain should realise that even if there is a quotation competition between B2B companies, the long-term benefits generated from a solid partnership will be greater than the short-term benefits obtained by plundering the other party's gross profit. For example, B2B partners will need to keep to what is promised, be honest and engage with integrity when dealing with the other party in securing future relational intention.

In summary, the nonopportunistic behaviours, such as keeping promises and honesty, demonstrated by both parties in the cooperative relationship will help reduce conflicts between partners, increase their satisfaction with the business

relationship and create a long-term and stable cooperation atmosphere. Firstly, regular open communication between business partners and secondly the establishment of conflict resolution mechanisms between the parties can reduce possible misunderstandings and conflicts and improve the long-term sustainability of the relationship.

## Conclusions and suggestions for future research

The study concluded that the antecedents and postcedents research model in purchase and sales business relationships reveals that conflict only relates directly to noneconomic satisfaction, while opportunism relates indirectly. The model further uncovers that noneconomic satisfaction relates to economic satisfaction, with noneconomic satisfaction as a mediator between its antecedents (i.e. opportunism and conflict) and economic satisfaction. The antecedents and postcedents research model also shows that opportunism relates positively to conflict. These findings are especially important considering that they reflect both a purchaser and a sales business perspective, aligning B2B partners' view on the role of opportunism, conflict, noneconomic satisfaction and economic satisfaction in long-term B2B relationship building from an emerging market perspective.

Finally, although this study is valuable to current theory and previously published studies, it has numerous limitations that provide opportunities for further research on antecedents and postcedents in both purchase and sales business relationships. The research is limited to Taiwanese purchase and sales business relationships, but it offers a research model that enables testing of antecedents and postcedents in the business relationships of other countries. It focuses on both purchase and sales business relationships, offering an opportunity to apply this dual approach in other business settings. Furthermore, the study is limited to the negative antecedents of opportunism and conflict as postcedents of economic and non-economic satisfaction, offering an opportunity to test other negative antecedents as well. Future research could secure a comparison of the purchaser-sales business model in emerging markets from different continents or expand the model through the inclusion of trust and commitment as mediating or intervening constructs to the study.

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### Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

### Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally to this work.

### Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in Taiwan, and Taiwan does not require ethical clearance for academic studies.

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## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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