

Predictors of business-to-business loyalty and repurchase intentions in South Africa's concrete product market



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Research Project Registration:

Project Research Number:
LAMD1

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Dates:

Received: 31 July 2022
Accepted: 04 May 2023
Published: 31 Aug. 2023

How to cite this article:

Masitenyane, L.A., &
Dhurup, M. (2023). Predictors
of business-to-business
loyalty and repurchase
intentions in South Africa's
concrete product market.
*South African Journal of
Business Management*, 54(1),
a3575. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v54i1.3575>

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Purpose: Relational exchanges between buyers and sellers in business-to-business (B2B) contexts are becoming important in today's competitive markets. With increases in the number of concrete product manufacturer-supplier (CPMs) organisations in the construction industry, customers still express dissatisfaction with supplier relationship quality. This study examined associations between relationship quality and commitment leading to customer loyalty and repurchase intention in South Africa's concrete product market.

Design/methodology/approach: Civil and building engineering contractors, are the study participants owing to their scope and size of work in Gauteng province of South Africa. Quantitative cross-sectional data collection approach was applied using self-administered structured questionnaires. Only 560 responses were received, and data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS).

Findings/results: The results revealed that CPMs relationship quality and commitment contributions do lead to customer satisfaction as precursor of loyalty and repurchase intention. Elevated satisfaction levels do accelerate the relationship between the study constructs.

Practical implications: CPMs and their customers should embrace applying relational exchanges that promote long-term B2B relationships and business survival. Also, they should invest in strategies that improve customer satisfaction and eternal loyalty towards long-term B2B repurchase intention and survival.

Originality/value: No study primarily in an emerging South African concrete product market examined the relationship between the study constructs and hence this study adds new insights into the existing body of knowledge relating to how CPMs' relationship quality and commitment influence customer satisfaction, loyalty and repurchase intention.

Keywords: concrete products; relationship intention; commitment; satisfaction; loyalty; repurchase intention.

Introduction

Background

The South African concrete product market embedded in the construction industry is one significant sector that impacts the country's infrastructure expansion and economic growth (Perrie, 2022). The South African public sector accounts for almost 65% of concrete product business, while the rest is held by the private sector (Construction Industry Development Board CIDB, 2018). The construction industry is overwhelmed with projects that span from the advancement of civil and building infrastructure to non-residential and suburban developments (CIDB, 2016). This is an industry that largely comprises multinational organisations that deal with diverse business processes permeated by a variety of challenges (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2016). Construction Industry Development Board (2018) reports that in recent times, the construction industry's operating environment has been characterised by inefficiency and many uncertainties regarding, among others, project materials' excessive demand and supply obstacles. Poor civil and building contractor performance often demonstrated by such obstacles culminates in contractor ineffectiveness, flawed material quality or shortage, and financial challenges prevalent in the construction industry (Windapo, 2016). In addition, high levels of corruption in tender processes, transaction costs and tax

evasion tendencies have been reported by Price Waterhouse Coopers (2016) as other rife challenges found in this industry.

Furthermore, various civil and building engineering contractors primarily engage in arm's-length and short-term business transactions such as sub-contracting as a business model (Windapo, 2016). The concern regarding the use of such a framework is that it tends to hinder stakeholder relationship quality (Almutairi, 2022). For example, a common procurement arrangement of concrete product manufacturer-supplier (CPMs) for a residential building project is awarded to the principal civil and building contractor to carry out, while the role of material supply is played by a sub-contractor following the developers' specifications and requirements. According to de Valence (2018), such an approach is susceptible to failure, if the relationship between the principal contractor and the sub-contractor is poorly managed. More importantly, if both contractors' relationship with their CPMs is not beneficial to their joint business venture, this might have a negative effect on project planning and rollout (Tan et al., 2017). Bbenkele and Madikiza (2016) mention that effective rollout of infrastructure projects primarily relies on a properly functioning construction materials supply sector. This is hardly the case in South Africa's construction industry, characterised by numerous asymmetrical and adversarial joint venture relationships (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2016). Considering the prevailing situation and the competitive nature of the construction industry, it would be advisable for industry stakeholders, particularly, civil and building contractors and their material suppliers, to consider business-to-business (B2B) relational exchange practices for their long-term survival (Robert-Lombart et al., 2017).

Relational exchange strategies have become necessary for many organisations and therefore, civil and building contractors including CPMs are no exception to this development. Lately, B2B relational exchanges are regarded as a strategic and effective tool for organisations to apply for continued survival (Liao, 2016). Thus, an understanding of the factors that influence the quality of long-term business relationships leading to sustained and continued existence, especially, from the customer's perspective is very important (Inayat et al., 2015). In the light of differences of opinion among researchers on the association of relationship marketing variables, this study seeks to establish the correlation between relationship quality, commitment, satisfaction, loyalty and repurchase intention in South Africa's B2B concrete product market. The researchers advocate that relationship quality is a precursor of commitment, which leads to customer (civil and building contractor) satisfaction, loyalty and repurchase intention of concrete products from their preferred CPMs. Accordingly, this study focuses on customer loyalty and repurchase intention as outcome variables of B2B relational exchanges, premised on the relationship marketing theory (RMT) and social exchange theory (SET). This study, consequently, is

set, against a context of performance by civil and building contractors with the delivery of concrete product infrastructure developments in South Africa.

The significance of this study is in examining various relational exchange constructs as laid down in the proposed study model. Because many relationship marketing studies are built on findings from developed markets and no empirical study has been carried out to investigate the proposed study constructs from RMT and SET perspectives, particularly, in the concrete product market within the construction industry. By examining the proposed theoretical model in South Africa's developing construction industry, the study contributes to the existing relationship marketing body of knowledge in various ways. Firstly, as opposed to previous studies from both B2B as well as business-to-consumer (B2C) settings, the study determines the suitability of customer loyalty and repurchase intention as outcomes of long-term customer-supplier relationships in the concrete product market. Secondly, considering that very limited empirical evidence exists to validate this view, especially in this industry, new empirical evidence on B2B relational exchange efficacies from the concrete product and construction environment is shared. Thirdly, contingent on the argument that although relational exchanges and extant research have been conducted in B2B settings across a variety of industries in other markets, there is insufficient evidence of its practice, specifically in the South African construction fraternity.

The study is arranged as follows. Firstly, the introduction and background that frame the study are given and followed by a literature review. Secondly, deliberations on the theoretical context to support the theoretical model proposed for the inquiry and the associated hypotheses are offered. Thirdly, the methodology applied in the study is provided, followed by discussions on the data analysis and study results. Fourthly, a submission on the research and management implications is presented. Finally, presentations on the study's limitations, future research, and conclusions are provided.

Literature review

Over the years, notable attention has been given to relationship marketing as organisations looked for ways of increasing profits through sustainable business relationships (Mostert et al., 2018). With attempts to meet and exceed customer needs, many organisations consider relationship marketing strategies to be helpful in understanding customer perceptions and meeting their demands (Voss et al., 2019). Liao (2016) concurs that relational marketing strategy has been viewed as a valuable approach for organisations to reach this objective. However, for many organisations to attract and maintain customers in the long term has proved challenging as the nature of customer-supplier relationships is not always conducive (Lee & Zhong, 2020). In view of the general B2B relational exchange challenges, scholars such as Voss et al. (2019) and Roberts-Lombard et al. (2017) recommend that for organisations to successfully apply this strategy, it is important for them to appreciate relationship development from the customer's viewpoint. In B2B settings,

supplier organisations should appreciate the nature and diverse qualities of their customers surfacing as organisations. This is important because B2B customers invest a lot in their material purchases and satisfying them for longer, could present the suppliers with improved returns on investment (Liao, 2016). This assertion suggests that the importance of attracting and maintaining loyal customers strengthens their confidence levels and improves profits (Lee et al., 2019). Hence, undivided attention to building a lasting loyal support base is of great importance to also gain more customer insights and build quality relationships.

The existing marketing literature advocates relationship quality as a multifactorial measure of relationship strength with its compound structure, reaffirmed by commitment and satisfaction (Han & Hyun, 2015). Scholars such as Liao (2016) emphasise the importance of these fundamental concepts in long-term business relationship-building processes. Jiang et al. (2016) support the idea that high levels of relationship quality in the creation of value for customers, directly contribute towards high levels of relationship commitment. Høgevold et al. (2022) maintain that commitment is an essential pillar of strength in relational exchanges, where customers are driven by previous encounters with their suppliers. Therefore, the more committed customers are towards their suppliers, the greater the level of satisfaction expectation from those suppliers (Roberts-Lombard et al., 2019). Kuhn and Mostert (2016) posit that satisfaction takes place when customers' perceived experiences have met or surpassed expectations during their business encounters. Accordingly, it is understood that satisfaction is a psychological assessment in which the results of customer expectancies or service performance are linked (Lee et al., 2015). It is for such reasons that the relationship quality construct should be understood as a strong precursor of successful long-term customer-supplier in B2B relationships, leading to greater customer loyalty and repurchase intentions (Balla et al., 2015).

Grace and Yee (2020) describe loyalty as a customer's promise to re-patronise a supplier encouraged by psychological and emotional attitudes, which could bring continual returns and low expenses to the organisation along with long-term repeat purchase behaviour. In behavioural expressions, loyalty is founded on the frequency of purchases measured by customer consumption patterns (De Leaniz et al., 2015). Pather (2016) refers to repurchase intention as customer behaviour ensuing from previous satisfying purchasing encounters of the same product or service from the same organisation. Many preceding relationship marketing studies such as Kuhn and Mostert (2016) as well as Roberts-Lombard et al. (2019) were undertaken within dissimilar B2C settings. This study investigates customer perceptions of their supplier's relationship quality and commitment towards customer satisfaction, loyalty and repurchase intention in a B2B context.

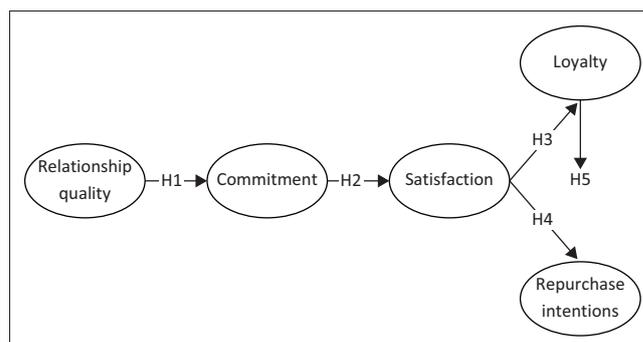
Theoretical framework and hypotheses development

The theoretical model proposed for this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

Theories underpinning the study

This study is grounded on the premise of RMT and SET relative to the theoretical model representing the proposed association between the study constructs. Relationship marketing theory is a frame of reference that highlights the value derived from participating in relational exchanges (Samiee et al., 2015). The prime objective of RMT is to nudge organisations away from impersonal marketing strategies towards personalised on-going successful business relationships (Roberts-Lombard et al., 2017). Morgan and Hunt (1994) state that the RMT advocates that organisations need to develop ongoing relationships with customers, instead of focusing on short-term business transactions (Bulut, 2015). Voss et al. (2019) argue that relational exchanges embrace customer-centric approaches with the objective of increasing long-term customer preservation, improved profits, reduced costs and customer loyalty. Accordingly, only when organisations and customers distinctly understand the RMT and its benefits, they would be more inclined to participate in such arrangements in the relational exchange process (Ndubisi & Nataraajan, 2016). Therefore, RMT is initiated on the foundation of the relational exchange partner's commitment and satisfaction, including the development of reciprocal understanding, and capacity to deliver on expectations built on earlier encounters that induce customer loyalty and repurchase intentions (Taheri & Akbari, 2016).

Consistent with the SET, RMT also assents to the SET notion of nurturing reciprocally beneficial relations with customers, potentially to ensure value-added profitability and greater competitiveness (Tanskanen, 2015). Social exchange theory is a wide conceptual paradigm that covers various social science disciplines (Samiee et al., 2015). The theory of interpersonal relations that is developed within the SET paradigm is founded on the confidence of an individual's own accord to be involved in an exchange relationship with the aim of acquiring value from either a B2C or B2B setting in the relational process (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Thus, SET is well-positioned as a basis for building relationships in B2B environments (Voss et al., 2019). Accordingly, SET encourages counter-exchange norms in which, the formation of value will be beneficial for both relational partners (Tanskanen, 2015). Therefore, the exchange notion experienced through a sociological lens advocates reciprocal rewards in a perceptible form – used to satisfy needs resulting in certain behaviours.



H, Hypothesis.

FIGURE 1: Theoretical framework.

Ndubisi and Natarajan (2016) state that customers who perceive their relationship as beneficial and rewarding will sustain their association with that supplier. The presence of alternatives and their inclination to continue with the same supplier symbolises their commitment towards their association. Kuhn and Mostert (2016) highlight that a greater degree of relationship quality will encourage customer decisions to remain in the relationship with the organisation and form solid relations of being committed with increased levels of relationship loyalty. Samiee et al. (2015) reiterate that considering that customer-supplier relations are constantly developing, an understanding of RMT and SET is required to ensure successful long-term business relationships, based on the notion that customer commitment and satisfaction lead to customer loyalty and repurchase intention. Against this background, the researchers draw from the basics of RMT and SET to hypothesise the relationship between the proposed study constructs in a B2B setting of the South African concrete product market.

Relationship between relationship quality and commitment

Originally the conception of relationship quality was advocated as an insinuation of how suitable a relationship is for specific undertakings; accordingly, it was rapidly utilised in relationship marketing. According to Balla et al. (2015), a relationship quality signifies the strength of a relationship and the development of a customised, one-to-one association between customers and supplier organisations that gradually develops and learn new undertakings from each (Tehubijuluw, 2015). Wang et al. (2019) highlight that from a behaviour standpoint, commitment is an act of beginning and preserving progressive long-term relationships and forfeiting temporary profits in an exchange relationship, with the aim of gaining long-term profits. In this study, relationship quality refers to civil and building contractors' perceptions and evaluations of how well their CPM satisfies their needs, expectations, objective and desires regarding their concrete product requirements.

In an examination of relationship quality between organisations and customers, it was found that; note worth has a effect on customer inclination to disperse positive impressions about the organisation and its offerings (Purnasaria et al., 2015). Furthermore, the authors found that the attitude portrayed by the customers towards their suppliers influenced them to commit to the relationship, as they were satisfied with that organisation and its contributions. Roberts-Lombard et al. (2017) state that customers tend to continue with the relationship as they felt that their needs and expectations were satisfactorily met. Jiang et al. (2016) echo that from an attitude standpoint, commitment is the relational partner's propensity to develop and maintain a long-term relational exchange. When acceptable levels of commitment are presented willingly, the relational partners will establish a reliable business association and eliminate possible relationship

termination. Previous studies such as Purnasaria et al. (2015) reveal that between relationship quality and the commitment construct a relationship does exist. Therefore, this study hypothesises that:

H1: CPMs' relationship quality positively influences their relationship commitment.

Relationship between commitment and satisfaction

Roberts-Lombard et al. (2017) refer to commitment as an emotional feeling through which attitudes relating to relationship continuation with a business partner are shaped. Roy et al. (2022). refer to commitment as the relational companion's readiness to form a longstanding relationship with another.

For this study, customer organisational commitment is viewed as an important component in the quest to secure lasting B2B relationships. Taking from the behavioural commitment seminal work of Salancik (1977), this study argues that organisational commitment is influenced by the relational attachment displayed by the supplier from their own free will. This study refers to commitment as the CPM managers' attitudes towards their relationship with concrete product customers and the efforts placed to their association in the quest to increase customer repurchase behaviour. The bigger the extent of customer satisfaction and trust towards the relationship, the greater the degree of relationship commitment (Purnasaria et al., 2015). In this theoretical lens, CPMs' behaviour crafts situations through which their emotional state of commitment to a relationship with their customers is achieved. Consequently, a high level of commitment would offer better levels of satisfaction in the relationship. However, satisfaction will be stimulated only if both the relational partners are completely committed to the relationship (Purnasaria et al., 2015). Previous studies such as Roberts-Lombard et al. (2019) established that a relationship between satisfaction and commitment does exist as particularly in B2B relational exchanges. Following this discussion, it can be hypothesised that:

H2: CPMs' relationship commitment positively influences civil and building contractors' satisfaction.

Relationship between satisfaction and loyalty

Lee et al. (2019) emphasise that customer satisfaction is important as it influences loyalty by means of progressive effects on positive recommendations, price tolerance and repurchase intention. In addition, loyalty comes as a consequence of customer increased satisfaction, self-assurance and commitment towards the relationship with the purpose of ensuring continued patronage (Grace & Yee, 2020). Thus, in developing and maintaining long-term customer loyalty, organisations need to make sure that they satisfy their customers and continue to do so for longer periods. Accordingly, it is advisable for product suppliers to

form exchange relationships with customers who show high relationship intent, as organisations can better satisfy customers and harness loyalty with the intention of retaining their support. Correspondingly, Ngoma and Ntale (2019) maintain that satisfaction is significant because it forms the basis of longstanding customer relationships, ensuing in trustworthiness and retention. Preceding studies that corroborate the presence of a relationship between satisfaction and loyalty that eventually leads to increased profitability include, among others, Lee et al. (2019). Accordingly, it can be hypothesised that:

H3: Civil and building contractors' satisfaction positively influences their loyalty towards CPMs.

Relationship between satisfaction and repurchase intention

Kumar et al. (2003) refer to repurchase intention as the likelihood of consuming the same supplier's service yet again in the future. Pather (2016) mentions that repurchase intention is a behavioural component, wherein eagerness and continuing interest of purchasing a certain product repeatedly are very high. Consequently, drawing from these explanations it can be posited that repurchase intention is the probability that concrete product users will repurchase concrete products from the same CPM over time. The prominence of customer satisfaction is thus unparalleled as it impacts on customers' repurchase intentions (Lee et al., 2015). This statement is true as it gains strength from other studies (Grace & Yee, 2020). Previous studies such as Anha et al. (2020) also found that a relationship does exist between satisfaction and repurchase intention constructs. Accordingly, it can be hypothesised that:

H4: Civil and building contractors' satisfaction positively influences their concrete product repurchase intentions.

Relationship between loyalty and repurchase intentions

Loyalty is an emotional strength formed by constant satisfaction coupled with psychological attachment by a customer to the service provider (Grace & Yee, 2020). Loyalty leads to progressive approaches such as repeat purchases and whole-hearted recommendations, which could influence other potential customers (Ngoma & Ntale, 2019). When customers are willing to continue supporting their supplier organisation, they may show a propensity to be loyal (Kuhn & Mostert, 2018). Accordingly, Anha et al. (2020) contend that the repurchase intention variable can be considered as one crucial relational exchange marketing outcome intended to enhance the organisation's long-term goals. Previous studies, such as Balla et al. (2015) established that a relationship between customer loyalty and repurchasing intention exists; therefore, this study hypothesised that:

H5: Civil and building contractors' loyalty positively influences their repurchase intention of concrete products.

Research methodology

Research design

This study takes the shape of descriptive research design using deductive methods (Zikmund & Babin, 2015). The quantitative research approach and the survey method were employed following the methodological philosophy of post-positivist research paradigm (Creswell, 2014). The motivation behind the choice of this method is that it is useful in increasing generalisability. Permission to draw the study sample from the CIDB register of contractors was obtained (CIDB, 2016). A probability sampling procedure was followed to select the study respondents, using a systematic random sampling technique (Zikmund & Babin, 2015).

Population and sample

The target population was civil and building engineering contractors based in Gauteng province, who purchased concrete products for use in the South African construction industry. Procurement managers representing civil and building contractor groups ranging from Grades 1 to 9, following the CIDB grading scale, were included in the study sample (CIDB, 2016). The reason for selecting these grades is that contractors in these categories qualify and have the capacity to handle construction projects and directly purchased concrete products from various CPMs and as such, their involvement makes them more conversant with customer-supplier relational matters. The study sample was purged at 600 participants, sufficient to conduct (Structural Equation Modelling (STEM) to examine the relationship between the proposed study constructs.

Research instrument and data collection procedure

Primary data were collected using the survey approach employing a self-administered structured paper-based questionnaire. Zikmund and Babin (2015) lend credence to the uses and role of a structured questionnaire in management inquiries regarding data collection. The internal consistency reliability test was conducted to investigate if the study questionnaire will assess the same thing more than once and if the outcomes will be the same every time (Cant et al., 2005). The measuring instrument had a set of screening questions to identify the illegible study participants from the target population. Fieldworkers who were trained in the distribution of the study questionnaire were employed to collect data. The foundation of the research inquiry was first explained by the fieldworkers with no pressure exerted on the respondents to choose to participate or to ignore answering the research questions. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the data collection process. Participation in the study was voluntary and the respondents were not requested to disclose personal information, thereby preserving their anonymity. Only 30 of the returned study questionnaires

were unusable and, consequently, excluded for analysis, owing to inaccuracy of responses or incomplete answers to questions. Consequently, 560 properly completed questionnaires were used for statistical data analysis purposes.

Measures and scale items

Firstly, a pilot survey using 40 participants was assumed to validate the accuracy of the scale items (Zikmund & Babin, 2015). Measurement scales utilised to validate the proposed study model were operationalised from earlier research studies. All scale items were rearticulated to accurately adhere to the context of this study. The reason for using this approach is that items adapted from preceding studies reinforce their credibility and validity. Consistent with Nunnally's (1978) recommendation, each construct had a minimum of three items to guarantee apposite reliability. Secondly, the relationship quality construct was measured by means of a four-item scale and the commitment construct used a six-item scale, both adapted from Ulaga and Eggert (2006). To measure satisfaction, a three-item scale adapted from Homburg et al. (2003) study was used. Loyalty was measured with the use of a seven-item scale adapted from Dagger et al. (2011). In measuring repurchase intentions, a four-item scale adapted from Homburg et al. (2003) was used. The measuring instrument's response selections were offered on a five-point Likert-type scale affixed by strongly disagree = 1 and strongly agree = 5 to reveal the extent of agreement or disagreement to the questions.

Empirical findings

Descriptive statistics

The results revealed that most respondents ($n = 205$; 36.6%) were procurement managers, succeeded by site managers ($n = 125$; 22.3%), followed by quantity surveyors ($n = 75$; 13.4%) and project managers ($n = 71$; 12.7%). The managing directors ($n = 67$; 12%) as well as other concrete product users comprised the remainder of the sample ($n = 17$; 3%). On questions relating to the respondents' organisational speciality, the majority specialised in both civil and building works ($n = 332$; 59%), followed by those who focused only on general building work ($n = 122$; 21%) and those only dealing with civil engineering work ($n = 105$; 18%). In terms of the respondents' length of support towards their preferred CPM offerings, 196 (35%) purchased concrete products for longer than 1 but less than 3 years, followed by 120 (21.4%) who procured products for less than a 1-year period. Only 96 (17.1%) procured concrete products for a period of three but less than 5 years and 88 (15.7%) bought concrete products for more than five but less than 7 years, while 60 (10.8%) purchased concrete products for 7 years and longer. Regarding the respondents' total yearly expense rate on their purchases, 202 (36.1%) spent between R1 000 001.00 and R6 500 000.00 in a year and 131 (23.4%) spent less than R650 000.00 per year, while 90 (16.1%) spent between R6 500 001.00 and R13 000 000.00 per year. Only 68

(12.1%) spent between R13 000 001.00 and R40 000 000.00 per year and 50 (8.9%) used between R40 000 001.00 and R130 000 000.00 per year. Finally, 19 (3.4%) spent between R130 000 001.00 and more on their concrete product requirements per year.

Construct reliability and validity

Reliability denotes the extent to which measures are free from errors and consequently yield invariable results (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Construct reliability was established by computing Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded reliable values ranging from 0.72 to 0.91, above the baseline threshold of 0.7 recommended by Nunnally (1978). This result postulates that the measurement scales employed in this study were reliable. Furthermore, construct validity was verified using factor loadings obtained from the exploratory factor analysis procedure. All factor loadings were greater than the minimum baseline value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2014) indicating that construct validity was acceptable.

Furthermore, the study results endorse a valid convergence of constructs in the measurement model. It is commonly suggested that the factor loading for convergent validity must be significant and not lower than 0.5, while the composite reliability (CR) ought to be greater than 0.7 baseline as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The average variance extracted (AVE) values should be greater than 0.5 (Panhwar et al., 2017). An evaluation of convergent validity tested the CR, AVE, and factor loadings, which all surpassed the required benchmark. Table 1 illustrates the study's reliability and validity measures of all items per construct.

Pearson correlations

Correlation analysis is aimed at assessing the intensity and direction of the linear relationship between two or more measurable constructs (Franzese & Iuliano, 2019). Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test construct associations, as data were normally distributed using parametric correlation. The results of the Pearson correlations show that CPMs' relationship quality and commitment is significantly and positively associated with customer satisfaction, loyalty and repurchase intention. This result is consistent with Moon's (2016) findings on these associations. Table 2 depicts the results of the correlation analysis.

Measurement and structural research model

With the purpose of extracting consistent results on the psychometric indices of the proposed study model, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to examine the stability and consistency of the scale factors (Hair et al., 2014). Confirmatory factor analysis of the measurement model originating from five constructs employing SPSS 26.0 software and AMOS 26.0 software was

TABLE 1: Reliability and validity measures.

Research construct	Descriptive statistics		Cronbach's test		CR	AVE	AVE √ ROOT	Shared variance	Factor loadings
	Mean	s.d.	Item total	α Value					
Relationship quality (REL)	3.77	0.92	-	0.91	0.71	0.73	0.86	0.49	-
C1	-	-	0.70	-	-	-	-	-	0.73
C2	-	-	0.83	-	-	-	-	-	0.89
C3	-	-	0.85	-	-	-	-	-	0.91
C4	-	-	0.82	-	-	-	-	-	0.87
Commitment (COM)	3.95	0.83	-	0.87	0.86	0.55	0.46	0.36	-
D1	-	-	0.66	-	-	-	-	-	0.71
D2	-	-	0.69	-	-	-	-	-	0.71
D3	-	-	0.64	-	-	-	-	-	0.72
D4	-	-	0.64	-	-	-	-	-	0.73
D5	-	-	0.66	-	-	-	-	-	0.74
D6	-	-	0.70	-	-	-	-	-	0.82
Satisfaction (SAT)	4.00	0.84	-	0.72	0.72	0.50	0.29	0.30	-
E1	-	-	0.52	-	-	-	-	-	0.65
E3	-	-	0.55	-	-	-	-	-	0.66
E4	-	-	0.55	-	-	-	-	-	0.73
Loyalty (LOY)	3.92	0.84	-	0.86	0.86	0.50	0.50	0.47	-
F1	-	-	0.61	-	-	-	-	-	0.62
F2	-	-	0.69	-	-	-	-	-	0.73
F3	-	-	0.77	-	-	-	-	-	0.79
F4	-	-	0.66	-	-	-	-	-	0.66
F5	-	-	0.59	-	-	-	-	-	0.62
F6	-	-	0.63	-	-	-	-	-	0.70
F7	-	-	0.54	-	-	-	-	-	0.62
Repurchase intention (REP)	3.99	0.70	-	0.88	0.86	0.61	0.56	0.47	-
G1	-	-	0.69	-	-	-	-	-	0.69
G2	-	-	0.75	-	-	-	-	-	0.74
G3	-	-	0.73	-	-	-	-	-	0.84
G4	-	-	0.76	-	-	-	-	-	0.85

CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted; SD, standard deviation.

TABLE 2: Correlations among variables.

Constructs	Relationship quality	Commitment	Satisfaction	Loyalty	Repurchase intentions
Relationship quality	1	-	-	-	-
Commitment	0.705	1	-	-	-
Satisfaction	0.573	0.606	1	-	-
Loyalty	0.502	0.581	0.547	1	-
Repurchase intentions	0.413	0.503	0.433	0.688	1

employed to examine the study model (Arbuckle 2008). Jöreskog (1993) states that the factor model is deemed suitable when the covariance structure indicated by the model complements the covariance structure of the data. The examination of the study model yielded reliable and acceptable findings. The suitability of the model is shown in its goodness-of-fit index found from the relevant function that evaluates the relationship between the examined covariance matrices. The goodness-of-fit measures relative to the measurement and structural properties of the research model fell within the recommended benchmark (Bentler & Bonett, 1980), founded on five constructs built in as exogenous variables (Hair et al., 2014). The CFA outcomes revealed that the normal chi-square χ^2/DF ratio of 2.95, met the model fit requirements as recommended by Bentler and Bonett (1980). The normed fit index (NFI) was 0.93. It is generally agreed that the comparative fit index (CFI) ought to be more than 0.90 to indicate model fit (Bentler, 1990). The CFI for this study was 0.95, suggesting that the model

fits the data. Additionally, MacCallum et al. (1996) allude that the model is suitable if the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is lower than 0.08. In this study, the RMSEA is 0.059, much lower than 0.08 threshold. Centred around the satisfactory results of testing customer-supplier measurement model, no additional items were cut out from any of the study constructs. Consequently, the structural (path) model was evaluated to establish the relationships hypothesised in the study model. Table 3 illustrates the goodness-of-fit measures of the structural model.

The results support only four paths (H1, H2, H3 and H5) depicted in the conceptual model. The first hypothesis, H1, advanced that there is a positive relationship between CPMs' relationship quality and commitment. The empirical outcomes of the study provide evidence that CPMs' relationship quality positively and significantly impacted their relationship commitment levels, towards their relationship with civil

and building contractors (path coefficient = 0.824, $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis H1 is accepted following the high commitment levels, which demonstrate the significance of the relationship and the dedication to continue with the association (Van Tonder & Roberts-Lombard, 2015). Liao (2016) highlights that when high commitment levels are experienced in B2B relationships, a similarly higher level of obligation to render the relationship affluent and reciprocally satisfying is realised.

The second hypothesis, H2, proposed that CPMs' commitment has a positive effect on civil and building contractors' satisfaction. H2 is accepted as CPMs' commitment positively and significantly influenced civil and building contractors' satisfaction levels (path coefficient = 0.688, $p < 0.01$). This outcome was further reinforced by a strong correlation coefficient ($r = 0.606$, $p < 0.01$) between commitment and satisfaction. These results are in line with Roy et al. (2022) study, which revealed that customer satisfaction is a direct outcome of buyers' commitment. Roy et al. (2022) also found that prospects of an ongoing B2B relationship are significantly affected by supplier commitment levels, which intensify customer relationship satisfaction.

The third hypothesis, H3, proposed an affirmative association between civil and building contractors' satisfaction and loyalty. Hypothesis H3 is accepted. The empirical results provide evidence that civil and building contractors' satisfaction level positively and significantly influenced their loyalty towards the CPM (path coefficient = 0.676, $p < 0.01$). This result was further reinforced by a strong correlation coefficient ($r = 0.547$, $p < 0.01$) between satisfaction and loyalty. These results are consistent with Zeithaml et al. (2009) assertion that greater heights of customer satisfaction are associated with high levels of customer loyalty. Contrariwise; Shang and Bao (2022) caution that even if there seems to be a positive association between customer satisfaction and loyalty, this association is not linear, as satisfied customers may still switch to other suppliers.

The fourth hypothesis, H4, proposed that a positive association between civil and building contractors' satisfaction and repurchase intentions exists. In this study, no significant relationship was found between civil and building contractors' satisfaction and repurchase intention of concrete

products from the same CPM. H4 was accordingly not supported (path coefficient = -0.060, $p < 0.01$). This result is inconsistent with Anha et al.'s (2020) findings that satisfaction seems to be a reliable predictor of repurchase intentions.

The fifth hypothesis, H5, posited that there is a positive link between civil and building contractors' loyalty and repurchase intentions. This hypothesis was supported (path coefficient = 1.116, $p < 0.01$), demonstrating that respondents' loyalty inspired their concrete product repurchase intentions. The high level of loyalty shown by the respondents demonstrates the possibility of a successful running of a B2B relationship, which is mostly true in the later stages of the relationship (Bagdoniene & Zilione, 2009), which subsequently could improve customer repurchase intentions (Balla et al., 2015). According to the supported hypotheses, the civil and building engineering contractors' satisfaction following their CPMs' relationship quality and relationship commitment, does significantly influence the envisaged customer loyalty outcome. Table 4 illustrates the tests of the study hypotheses and Figure 2 depicts the structural model.

Theoretical implications

This study offers some theoretical contributions of relationship marketing in predicting loyalty and repurchase intention through customer satisfaction. The theories that underpin this study relative to the theoretical model postulated the essence of building lasting business relationships using relational exchange strategies. The empirical findings present invaluable insights into the resultant rationality of using relationship marketing constructs in examining B2B relationship building from the customer's viewpoint. Relationship marketing theory that propels organisations to move away from short-term transaction based to long-term business relationships is proven operative in B2B relational exchanges (Bulut, 2015; Roberts-Lombard et al., 2017). Researchers such as Høgevoida et al. (2022) and Padin et al. (2017) also found that the resultant rationality of RMT in B2B relations is applicable from the customer's viewpoint.

Considering that relational exchanges involve customer centric advances that seek to develop socially motivated and dependable business relationships (Voss et al., 2019). Consistent with the SET that promotes mutually beneficial

TABLE 3: Goodness-of-fit measures of the structural model.

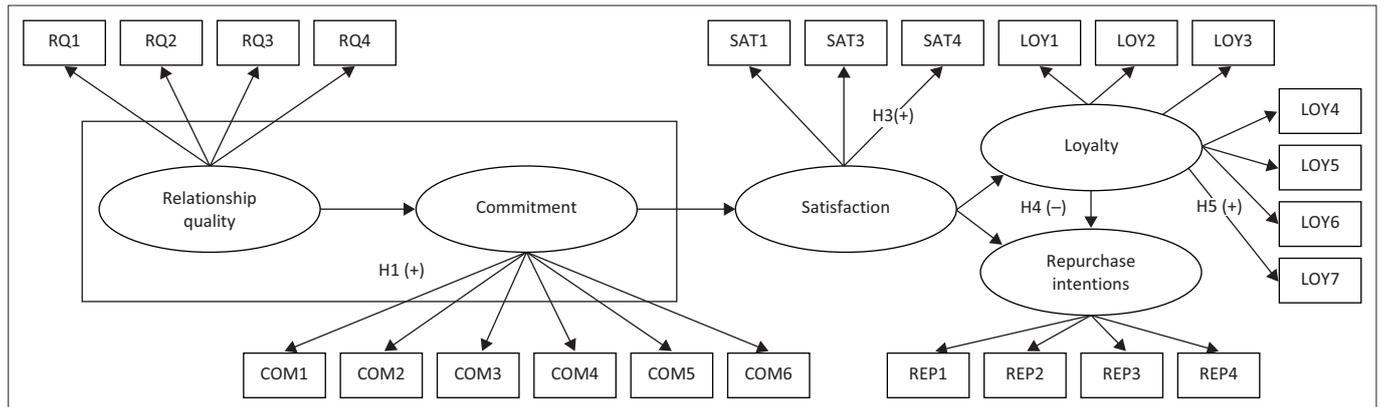
CMIN	DF	<i>p</i>	CMIN/DF	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
631.365	214	0.00	2.950	0.93	0.95	0.93	0.95	0.059

CMIN, minimum value of the discrepancy; df, degrees of freedom; *p*, *p*-value; NFI, normed fit index; IFI, incremental fit index; TLI, Tucker–Lewis co-efficient; CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation.

TABLE 4: Tests of hypotheses.

Hypotheses	Exogenous construct	Endogenous construct	Estimates	Significance (<i>p</i> -value)	Finding
1	Relationship quality	Commitment	0.824	***	Accepted
2	Commitment	Satisfaction	0.688	***	Accepted
3	Satisfaction	Loyalty	0.676	***	Accepted
4	Satisfaction	Repurchase intention	-0.060	0.460	Not accepted
5	Loyalty	Repurchase intention	1.116	***	Accepted

***, Significance (*p*-value).



RQ, relationship quality; COM, commitment; SAT, satisfaction; LOY, loyalty; REP, repurchase intentions; H, Hypothesis.

FIGURE 2: Structural model.

relationships (Tanskanen, 2015), the study results also reveal that suppliers who understand the importance of quality relationships to be rewarding are susceptible to building long-term socially oriented relationships with their customers. The proclivity to continue the relationship signifies their level of commitment to the relationship. Therefore, in view of this, the SET, has also been found to stimulate supplier commitment leading to customer satisfaction, loyalty and repurchase intention (Lioukas & Reuer, 2015). Therefore, this study proposes an inclusive and practical model that is easy to apprehend and apply for it proves valuable for theoretical understanding of the theme. This is an invaluable insight, considering that customers' and suppliers' viewpoints vary in business relationships. The study results present insights that lead organisations through diverse relational marketing variables to develop astute relational exchange strategies. Furthermore, relationship quality was confirmed as a significant variable to predict long-term relationship commitment leading to customer satisfaction. Moreover, customer satisfaction does lead to customer loyalty. Therefore, this study's findings are congruent with Zeithaml et al.'s (2009) study findings, whereby it was found that intensified levels of customer satisfaction are associated with high levels of loyalty. Furthermore, this study established that satisfaction in a relationship influences loyalty and eventual repurchase intention in B2B relational exchanges. Accordingly, this study contributes to RMT as per the proposed study model that presents the influence of relationship quality and relationship commitment, which leads to customer satisfaction and ultimately impacts their loyalty and repurchase intentions. Consequently, the positive influence of B2B customer satisfaction on their loyalty, tends to lead to customer repurchase intentions, which could assist CPMs to gain improved market share, higher profits and greater competitive advantages within a South African context.

Managerial implications

From a managerial perspective, this study provides diverse directions for CPMs and other construction industry stakeholders in an emerging South African concrete product environment. As to what would be the best route to take to understand the effects of B2B relationship quality and

commitment on satisfaction that encourages loyalty and repurchase intention, relational exchanges could be instrumental for relationship survival (Grace & Yee, 2020), within the highly competitive concrete product market. This study verified that positive customer satisfaction influences relationship-building processes and thus, attention in establishing and strengthening relationship quality and commitment to gain customer satisfaction, which leads to loyalty and repurchase intention should be noticed. However, this study also demonstrated that organisations must understand that long-standing customer-supplier relationships in B2B environments do not happen in a vacuum because of numerous reasons that may impact the durability of the relationship (Høgevold et al., 2022). Greater heights of competitiveness that characterise the South African concrete product environment and the construction industry have direct effects on the subsistence of B2B formations. Furthermore, the success of B2B relational exchanges can be reinforced by establishing a more intimate working relationship between the relational partners, especially in the concrete product environment. Commitment to the relationship is also found to directly impact customer satisfaction. This could be because of customer allegiance, which exemplifies pro-activeness in easing up the steps to be taken in initiating and sustaining B2B relationship exchanges. Hence, greater levels of satisfaction by the relational exchange partners could be enjoyed. This assertion affirms the views of Roy et al. (2022), who posit that commitment is a vital component of relationship security that ensures prosperous relationship outcomes.

Accordingly, marketing practitioners should exercise greater awareness on the prominence of relationship commitment by intensifying the quality of their relationship in the quest to satisfy customers. They can distinctively improve customer satisfaction by showing an inclination to make adjustments that suit B2B relational requirements, by offering custom-made services, and by displaying agility when delivering services to customers. Finally, predominantly in B2B settings, preceding investigations found that the inclination to continue the relationship with the same supplier depends on cognitive attributes, such as value for money and emotional

attachments relating to harmony or acrimony between the relational partners (Correa et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important for CPMs to understand their customers' cognitive determination and perceptions of product value supplied and services rendered, which directly and indirectly influence their future relationship and explain a large part of the variance in customer repurchase intention.

Conclusion, research limitations and future research

This study managed to identify the relationship marketing constructs, which can predict customer loyalty and repurchase intention in the long-term B2B concrete product market within the South African construction industry. The inter-relationships between the study constructs, namely relationship quality, commitment, satisfaction, loyalty and repurchase intention in hypothesised B2B relationships were examined. The proposed study reveals the relationship quality construct as a positive driver of commitment and satisfaction. Furthermore, commitment is postulated as a constructive antecedent to satisfaction. Also, satisfaction is hypothesised as a positive driver towards loyalty. The geographic scope was one of the study limitations focused strictly in Gauteng province of South Africa. The consequence of this decision is that the results of this study cannot be generalised beyond the geographical area where the study took place and where the study respondents were selected for the purpose of this inquiry. Furthermore, it is vital to note that the proposed study constructs were applied only from the buyer's point of view. Therefore, constraints that develop from this are that customers and suppliers might perceive their level of relationship quality, commitment and satisfaction towards each other in different ways. Stemming from this study's limitations are further future research prospects. Business-to-business relational exchange studies can be conducted in other provinces of South Africa as a developing market, using enhanced understanding of how best to augment the relationship quality constructs' position in ensuring better relational building outcomes in other provinces of the country. Similarly, future research can ponder on the effects of customer relationship satisfaction from various relationship marketing scenarios, particularly, considering the impact of satisfaction or expanding the proposed study model by adding other relational-related outcomes such as customer word-of-mouth and retention.

Acknowledgements

Sections of this manuscript were published in a thesis submitted by the corresponding author in, L.M; in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Technologiae in the Faculty of Management Sciences at the Vaal University of Technology, South Africa, entitled 'Dimensions and outcomes of buyer-seller relationship intentions for concrete products in the construction environment'. The Supervisor of this thesis was; Prof. M.R.

The thesis can be viewed here; digiresearch.vut.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10352/532/LA_Masitenyane_PhD_Thesis_2020_5_August_2020.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1.

The authors would like to thank the Faculty of Management Sciences of the Vaal University of Technology for funding the publication fees.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

L.M. was responsible for the conceptual development of the theoretical argument, literature review, project administration and data collection. M.D. wrote the research methodology, data analysis and the results of the manuscript.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Vaal University of Technology Faculty Research Integrity Committee (FRIC) (No.FRECMS-20102021-091).

Funding information

This study received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, L.M., upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

The views and sentiments voiced in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reveal the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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