The Impact of Individual Level Cultural Value Orientation as A Moderator of Seller Influence Tactics, Relationship Quality, and Customer Loyalty

Veerasak Prasertchuwong·

ABSTRACT

As competitions in marketing intensify and many marketers offer products that are similar, salespersons are forced to adapt their marketing strategies to survive. Relationship marketing has become the suitable strategy that salespersons employ to cope with this situation. Nevertheless, each and every customer is unique, so a better understanding of customers at the individual level is essential. Thus, this research examined the effects of cultural value orientations of customers at the individual level on the relationship between seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty. The questionnaire was launched to 511 respondents gathered from several central business districts in Bangkok metropolitan, Thailand. I employed the structural equation modeling approach to investigate the issues. The findings show that many relationship channels between coercive influence seller tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty which was influenced by a customer's cultural value orientation are not statistically significant. In contrast, quite a number of relationship paths between non-coercive seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty are significant. Moreover, the linkage between relationship quality and customer loyalty influenced by cultural value orientation is significantly strong.

Keywords: Relationship Quality, Coercive Seller Influence Tactics, Non-Coercive Seller Influence Tactics, Individual Level Cultural Value Orientation

บทคัดย่อ

ในสภาพที่ตลาดมีการแข่งขันอย่างยิ่งยวด ผู้ค้าต่างนำเสนอสินค้าที่มีคล้ายคลึงเป็นอย่างมาก พนักงานขายจึงถูกบังคับให้ปรับกลยุทธ์การ-ตลาดเพื่อที่จะอยู่รอด ดังนั้นการตลาดเชิงความสัมพันธ์ดูเสมือนเป็นกลยุทธ์ที่เหมาะสมที่พนักงานขายจะนำมาใช้เพื่อจัดการกับสถานการณ์นี้ แต่ทว่าลูกค้าทุกคนมีความต้องการแตกต่างกัน การทำความเข้าใจในลูกค้าแต่ละคนจึงเป็นสิ่งสำคัญที่ขาดไม่ได้ ดังนั้นการทำความเข้าใจความเชื่อม-โยงระหว่างการตลาดเชิงความสัมพันธ์กับวัฒนธรรมระดับปัจเจกบุคคล จึงเหมาะสมสำหรับรายงานฉบับนี้ รายงานฉบับนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายในการศึกษาผลกระทบของวัฒนธรรมระดับปัจเจกบุคคลกับความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างกลยุทธ์การขายแบบชี้นำ การตลาดเชิงความสัมพันธ์ และความภักดีของลูกค้าต่อพนักงานขาย ในการนี้แบบสอบถาม จำนวน 511 ชุด ได้ถูกนำไปสอบถามกลุ่มเป้าหมายในย่านการค้าและธุรกิจต่างๆ อาทิเช่น ถนนสีลม-สาธร ถนนพหลโยธิน-ซอยอารีย์ และถนนศรีนครินทร์-ซีคอนสแควร์-พาราไดซ์ปาร์ค ผลการวิจัยพบว่าการใช้กลยุทธ์การขายแบบบังคับชี้นำของพนักงานขาย ไม่ก่อให้เกิดความสัมพันธ์กับการใช้กลยุทธ์การตลาดเชิงความสัมพันธ์ และความภักดีต่อพนักงานขาย ในแทบทุกประเภทของวัฒนธรรมระดับปัจเจกบุคคล ในทางตรงกันข้ามการใช้กลยุทธ์การขายแบบให้คำแนะนำของพนักงานขายก่อให้เกิดความสัมพันธ์กับการใช้กลยุทธ์การตลาดเชิงความสัมพันธ์และก่อให้เกิดความภักดีต่อพนักงานขาย ในแทบทุกประเภทของวัฒนธรรมระดับปัจเจกบุคคล นอกจากนี้ผล-การวิจัยยังพบว่า มีความสัมพันธ์ที่มีนัยสำคัญระหว่างการใช้กลยุทธ์การตลาดเชิงความสัมพันธ์กับความภักดีต่อพนักงานขาย ในทุกประเภทของวัฒนธรรมระดับปัจเจกบุคคล

คำสำคัญ: การตลาดเชิงความสัมพันธ์, กลยุทธ์การขายแบบบังคับชี้นำ, กลยุทธ์การขายแบบให้คำแนะนำ, วัฒนธรรมระดับปัจเจกบุคคล

INTRODUCTION

In a fiercely competitive market, where most marketers offer products that are largely similar, sales organizations are forced to adopt various marketing strategies in order to survive or maintain a sustainable competitive advantage (Dwyer, Hill, & Martin, 2000). Salespersons are expected to meet specific sales targets by acquiring new customers and retaining existing ones. Thus, salespersons have to employ strategies tailored to fit each individual customer. Researchers have found that some selling strategies produce better performances than others (Dubinsky 1980; Dubinsky & Rudelius, 1980; Hite & Bellizzi, 1985), and the integration of more than one selling strategy can be key to the success for any salespersons in a market of homogeneous goods. Among many selling processes, relationship marketing seems an outstanding selling approach to achieve such an objective.

The essence of relationship marketing is to build and maintain the relationship with customers (Gronroos, 1994, 1999). Prior to establishing a relationship, a salesperson has to contact with the customer. This process of interaction has to be well prepared by the seller in order to communicate effectively with the customer and be successful in influencing him or her (Dubinsky, 1980; Dubinsky & Rudelius, 1980; Hite & Bellizzi, 1985). Therefore, salespersons have to employ appropriate tactics when initiating communication with customers. The tactics which salespersons may use are referred to as seller influence tactics, which aim to develop the salesperson-customer relationship (Frazier & Summer, 1984; Frazier & Kale, 1989; Frazier & Rody, 1991).

Therefore, a better knowledge of an individual customer's behavior is essential. Among various approaches to better understand the uniqueness of each individual customer, the association of selling strategies with the cultural value orientations of different customers is a focus in this study. Cultural value orientations each customer possesses have an impact on the selling process. Thus, the objectives of this study are to investigate these issues and to empirically identify and assess the effects of various cultural value orientations at the individual level on relational marketing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relational marketing paradigm is an emerging marketing perspective that fulfills the basic marketing structure by focusing on the setup and maintenance of long-term relationships between buyers and sellers rather than the traditional selling concept of the marketing mix paradigm, which views the process of exchange as a single and one-time transaction, and fails to achieve a long-term buyer-seller relationship (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Gronroos, 1994, 1999). I, in the paper, would like to explore relational marketing with relevant concepts and strategies, such as seller influence tactics, relationship quality, customer loyalty, and cultural value orientations of customers.

Seller Influence Tactics

At the early stage, building a relationship between a salesperson and a customer is important to the selling process since it seems natural that more successful salespersons may put greater emphasis on building relationships than their less successful counterparts. An effective salesperson is likely able to improvise and select the most appropriate selling strategy depending on the characteristics of the individual customer and the contingent situation (Weitz, 1978; Spiro & Weitz, 1990; Creyer 1994; Roman & Iacobucci, 2010).

Selling influence tactics can be defined as the process that includes the structure and content of communications from a seller to a buyer. The propose of such tactics is to influence the buyer's behavior as desired (Frazier & Rody, 1991). Salespersons exercise some degree of influence over consumer behavior by using these selling tactics, such as non-coercive and coercive tactics based on the controlling power of the salesperson in either the reward or the punishment process over the customers (Frazier & Summers, 1984; Frazier & Rody, 1991).

Non-coercive seller influence tactics

Non-coercive seller influence tactics which a salesperson may employ is a persuasive approach, which attempts to influence the decision and behavior of a customer by conveying and suggesting the benefits from performing a specific action (Frazier & Summers, 1984). Below are several common non-coercive seller influence tactics.

An **information exchange** strategy is a strategy whereby the salesperson uses discussions on general product or service issues by communicating information and soliciting questions in order to alter the customer's general perception of the product. However, this strategy poses no specific target action by the salesperson. (Frazier & Summer, 1984; Frazier & Rody, 1991; McFarland, Challagalla, & Shervani, 2006).

Recommendation is a strategy used by the salesperson to stress a point of interest, or to convince a potential customer to adopt a narrower set of behaviors, whereby the salesperson predicts that the customer would acquire greater benefits if he or she follows the salesperson's suggestions (Frazier & Summer, 1984; Frazier & Rody, 1991; Boyle, Dwyer, Robicheaux, & Simpson, 1992; McFarland et al., 2006).

Request occurs where the salesperson informs or asks the customer to take a specific desired action without mentioning or explaining the result or consequence of such an action. This tactic is likely most appropriate in situations where the level of dependency of the customer on the salesperson is greater than the switching cost of changing to another seller. Sticking with the existing seller would result in benefiting both parties (Frazier & Summer, 1984; Frazier & Rody, 1991).

Coercive seller influence tactics

Coercive seller influence tactics are mechanisms which a salesperson can employ while communicating with the customer. Implementation of such tactics depend on power balance between the salesperson and the customer. Coercive influence tactics involve the process in which the salesperson exerts direct pressure on the customer in order to force him or her to behave in a specific manner.

Under a **promise** strategy, the salesperson assures to offer the customer a specific incentive which meets the customer's expectations and satisfies the salesperson's stated desires (Angelmar & Ster, 1978; Venkatesh, Kohli, & Zaltman, 1995). The faithful implementation of the promised strategy over time will bring about an increase in the dependence of the customer and will strengthen the identification of such a customer with the salesperson (Frazier & Summer, 1984; Frazier & Rody, 1991; McFarland et al., 2006).

Threat is a negative sanction which the salesperson may apply to the customer who does not behave as desired (Frazier & Summers, 1984; Boyle & Dwyer, 1995). Such influence tactics are subject to the personal relationship between the salesperson and the customer. Threat influence tactics can have a negative impact on the relationship because they likely reduce the quality of the relationship and thereby decrease the

customer's dependence on the salesperson and may increase the odds of terminating the relationship (Venkatesh et al., 1995).

Relationship Quality

Relationship quality is more effective when customers prefer to engage in relationships with salespersons rather than selling firms. A quality relationship requires a precise understanding of customer needs. Salespersons, thus, need focus on the marketing activities that support the relationship. Previous studies demonstrated the role of the salesperson in building and maintaining the relationship with his or her customer by increasing the level of trust, relationship satisfaction, and commitment that such a customer perceive from the salesperson (Smith, 1998a, 1998b; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Bowdent, 2011; Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2005; Rauyruen & Miller, 2007).

Trust is the confidence which a customer perceives from interactions with his or her salesperson. The level of trust varies and it depends on the perception of the customer toward the salesperson's reliability and integrity. A high level of trust results in behaviors such as honesty, consistency, and benevolence. Trust in a buyer-seller interaction increases the positive level of the relationship and leads to the intention to extend the business cooperation (Dwyer et al., 1987; Gundlach & Murphy, 1993).

Calculative commitment is the state where the customer recognizes the need to maintain a relationship with the salesperson and evaluates the economic benefits that may derive from continuing the relationship with the salesperson (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Wetzels, de Ruyter, & van-Birgelen, 1998; Gounaris, 2005).

Affective commitment is the internal emotional appeal that the customer feels about the salesperson. Such an appeal reflects the psychological bond in the form of affective fashion, for example, sense of identification, belongingness, liking, or involvement (Bansal, Irving, & Taylor, 2004), and exists only when the individual customer prefers to maintain the relationship with the specific salesperson (Gruen, Summers, & Actio, 2000; Fullerton, 2005).

Relationship satisfaction occurs where the customer has a pleasurable experience when doing business with the salesperson. Operationally, customer relationship satisfaction develops continuously in the long term as a result of prior interactions with the salesperson (Dwyer et al., 1987; Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990; Beatty, Mayer, Coleman, Reynolds, & Lee, 1996).

Individual Level Cultural Value Orientation

In the literature on culture, Hofstede's seminal work (Hofstede, 1980, 2001) defined culture as the collective encoding pattern of ideas, emotions and responses which differentiate one in the social environment from another. Five dimensions can be identified, namely, power distance; collectivism and individualism; uncertainty avoidance; masculinity and femininity; and finally long-term and short-term orientations.

The studies of cross cultural consumer behavior in the past often employed an over simplified process by using Hofstede's national scores to investigate the differences in consumer behavior and perception in cross cultural environments. This leads to ecological fallacy since the aggregate cultural value orientation at the national level may not truly represent the variety of cultural values of the people in the country, because cultural value orientations at the individual level may not be the same as those at the national level (Yoo & Donthu, 2002; Sharma, 2010). Thus, for this study, I adopt the

typology of cultural values at the individual level proposed by Yoo, Donthu, & Lenartowicz (2011), to investigate the cultural influences on a relationship marketing program and would like to present these cultural value orientations through the following perspectives: power distance; uncertainty avoidance; individualism and collectivism; masculinity and femininity; and long-term orientation.

Power distance is the state where people in a social environment perceive and accept the distribution of power (Hofstede, 1980). In a society with a high power distance culture, unequal power distribution is more likely to prevail and this leads to an uneven distribution of resources. On the other hand, in a society with a low power distance culture, people are more likely to be liberated and, thus, more comfortable in presenting their ideas since they view others as their equals (Hofstede, 1991; Sharma, 2010; Yoo et al., 2011).

Uncertainty avoidance is the state at which people in the social environment feel less comfortable in uncertain states such as unstructured, unknown, or unfamiliar situations and would like to avoid these situations by strictly adhering to rules and regulations (Lam, Lee, & Mizerski, 2009). People with such a cultural value orientation—high uncertainty avoidance—are security seekers and want to reduce ambiguity and risk, by adopting clear written rules and structured instructions. In contrast, people who are of low uncertainty avoidance are more likely to endure uncertain situations, tend to be risk takers, and prefer to control the environment, and situations in their surrounding circumstance (Yoo & Donthu, 2002; Sharma, 2010; Yoo et al., 2011).

The **individualism and collectivism** dimension reflects the extent to which people in the social environment get together and join groups. In the individualistic culture, people tend to favor a society where individuals look after and take care of only themselves and members of their immediate family (Hofstede, 1991; Lam, Lee, & Mizerski., 2009). In contrast, the collectivism dimension reflects people who are more likely to set up a strong connection with others within the social environment and this leads people to establish strong loyalty so as to continue the mutual exchange among parties in the group (Hofstede, 1991).

Masculinity and femininity are the concept that illustrates the relative dominance of gender roles and such a pattern influences the behavior of people in the society (Hofstede, 1980). People with a masculine orientation is more likely to value assertiveness, ambition, performance, independence, and place more emphasis on transactional benefits. Instead, people with a feminine orientation are likely more concerned about the quality of life, and care more about the environment, interdependence, and focus more on relationship benefits (Lam et al., 2009; Yoo et al., 2011).

Long-term orientation (Confucian dynamism) is the state in which people have a cultural value concerning the future, such as persistence, thriftiness, and a sense of shame (Hofstede, 1991). People with such a characteristic tend to communicate with others for exchanging information or soliciting recommendations for alternative choices (Arnol & Bianchi, 2001; Lam et al., 2009). On the other hand, people with a short-term orientation are more likely to place their interests on current or short-term benefits, a single transaction, monetary basis, and present requirements rather than be more concerned about future actions (Yoo & Donthu, 2002; Lam et al., 2009; Sharma, 2010; Yoo et al., 2011).

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty has become an intriguing topic for researchers in both service marketing contexts and product industry contexts since it has strong effects on profitability (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Rust & Zahorik, 1993; Rust, Zeithaml, & Lemon, 2000; Homburg & Giering, 2001; Verhoef, 2003). The expense of serving and maintaining the relationship with existing customers is much less than the cost of finding new ones (Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1987; Reichheld & Teal, 1996; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002). Thus, customer loyalty can be viewed as the state of strong commitment from customers to repeat purchases of a chosen product or service in the future (Oliver, 1999).

FRAMEWORK

This study explores the social exchange theory. I organize the exploration into three main parts. The first one focuses seller influence tactics (Weitz, 1981; Weitz, Sujan, & Sujan, 1986; Spiro & Weitz, 1990; McFarland et al., 2006). In this study, I present two kinds of seller influence tactics: non-coercive and coercive ones. These tactics act as the antecedents of relationship quality and are influenced by each dimension of cultural value orientations. In the second part, I investigate relationship quality by exploring the integration of trust theory, commitment theory (affective commitment and calculative commitment), and satisfaction theory (Dwyer et al., 1987; Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Doney & Cannon, 1997; De Wulf, Odekerken-Schroder, & Iacobucci, 2001; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). In the last part, cultural value orientations at the individual level are examined by employing social culture value theory environments (Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 2001; Lau, Chiu, & Lee, 2001; Yoo & Donthu, 2002, 2005; Soares, Farhangmehr, & Shoham, 2007; Lam et al., 2009; Sharma, 2010; Yoo et al., 2011).
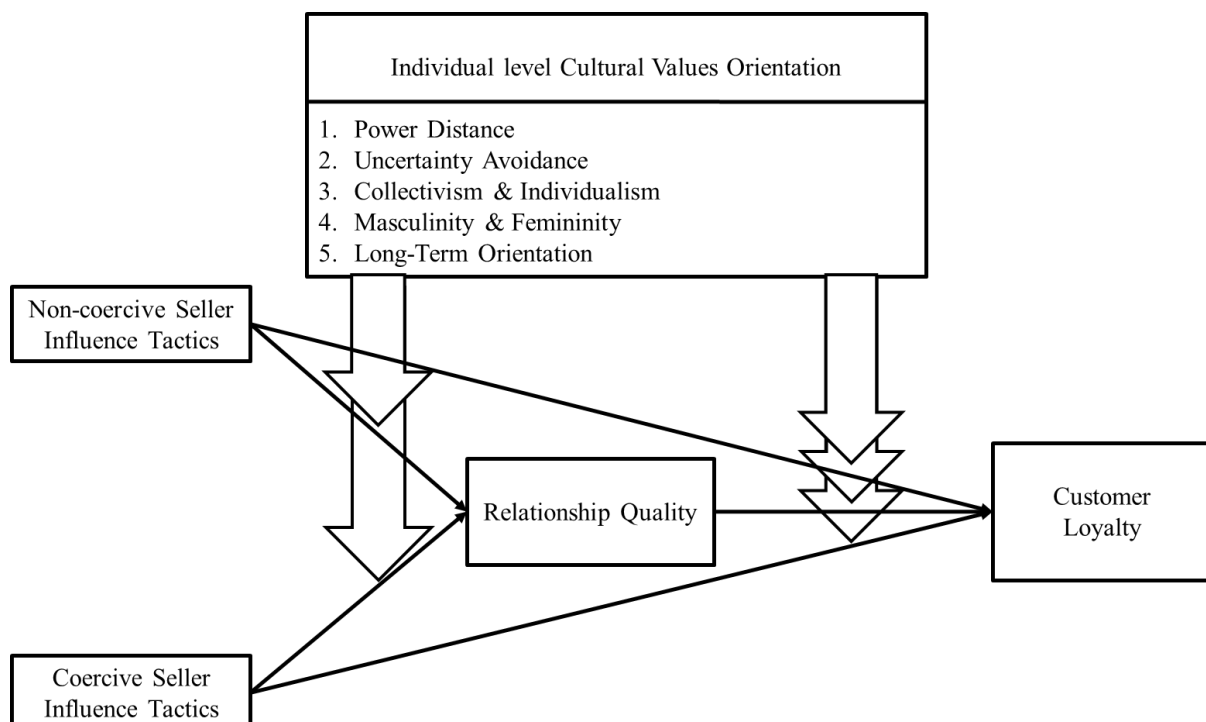

FIGURE 1

Conceptual Model

Based on the literature and the theoretical frameworks reviewed and outlined above, this study attempts to analyze the relationship between seller influence tactics and relationship quality, the relationship between seller influence tactics and customer loyalty, and the association between relationship quality and customer loyalty, and to explore the effects of individual cultural value orientations on the relationship between seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty. The conceptual model is proposed as shown in Figure 1 above.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The Relationship between Seller Influence Tactics and Relationship Quality

The seller influence tactics are actions a salesperson decides to employ to influence customers. In order to do so, the salesperson has to classify customers by gathering information from listening and observing their behaviors, and then implementing the selling tactics either non-coercive seller influence tactics (information exchange, recommendation, and request) or coercive seller influence tactics (promise and threat), which are based on the characteristics of individual customers. Thus, the seller influence tactics perform as the antecedents of relationship quality. The main purpose of these tactics is to achieve successful relationships with customers by engendering trust, affective commitment, calculative commitment, and relationship satisfaction (Anderson & Weitz, 1989; Crosby et al., 1990; Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992; Ganesan, 1994; Doney & Cannon, 1997). Therefore, the hypotheses are formulated as follows.

H1: *The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson has a positive relationship with relationship quality.*

H2: *The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson has a positive relationship with relationship quality.*

The Relationship between Seller Influence Tactics and Customer Loyalty

The difference between coercive seller influence tactics and non-coercive seller influence tactics is the process to alter the customer behavior. For coercive seller influence tactics, the influence process involves strong direct pressure in either using rewards or punishment. Nevertheless, such tactics can lead to anxiety and frustration experienced by customers, which may be counterproductive and cause the termination of the relationship. In contrast, non-coercive seller influence tactics are methods to affect the beliefs of the customer and they depend on the ability to provide effective, logical, and moving arguments and persuasion, and the possibility to complete dialogues (Frazier & Summers, 1984; Boyle & Dwyer, 1995; Lai, 2007). Therefore, the hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H3: *The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson has a negative relationship with customer loyalty.*

H4: *The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson has a positive relationship with customer loyalty.*

The Relationship between Relationship Quality and Customer Loyalty

Relationship quality is a composite factor which aims to assess the quality of the relationship between a customer and his or her salesperson through trust, commitment, and relationship satisfaction, and requires an understanding of the customer's needs, and that enables a focus on marketing efforts to achieve customer loyalty (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, the hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H5:   *Relationship quality has a positive relationship with customer loyalty.*

The Effects of Cultural Value Orientations at the Individual Level on Relationship Marketing Model

Cultural knowledge reflects the reactions and responses of an individual toward the social environment. People with different cultural conditioning carry out different responses (Hofstede, 1991). Thus, customers with different cultural value orientations are expected to respond to the social environment in the following manner.

The effects of power distance on seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty

With an orientation of high power distance, customers would prefer formal relationships and be more likely to trust salespersons who are formal and exercise the influence tactics, like promise and threat, which strictly direct them to perform a specific behavior (Arnold & Bianchi, 2001; Leonidou, Kvasova, Leonidou, & Chari, 2013). Nevertheless, the use of coercive seller influence tactics can be counterproductive and damage the relationship (Frazier & Summers, 1984; Frazier & Rody, 1991; Gelderman, Semeijn, & Zoete, 2008).

Customers who are of a low power distance orientation are likely to be more liberated and more comfortable in presenting their ideas (Hofstede, 1991; Sharma, 2010). They would prefer informal relationships with their salespersons which lead both parties to trust each other more, relate better, and result in increased customer loyalty (Arnold & Bianchi, 2001; Leonidou et al., 2013). Therefore, the hypotheses are formulated as follows.

H6:   *The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a high power distance orientation has a positive relationship with relationship quality.*

H7:   *The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a low power distance orientation has a positive relationship with relationship quality.*

H8:   *The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a high power distance orientation has a negative relationship with customer loyalty.*

H9:   *The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a low power distance orientation has a positive relationship with customer loyalty.*

H10a: *Relationship quality for customers with a low power distance orientation has a positive impact on customer loyalty.*

H10b: Relationship quality for customers with a high power distance orientation has a positive impact on customer loyalty.

The effects of uncertainty avoidance on seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty

Customers with a high uncertainty avoidance orientation are expected to prefer traditional styles, show resistance to changes, and remain loyal rather than to switch to a new salesperson (Ndubisi, Malhotra, Ulas, & Ndubisi, 2012). The customers are more likely to stick, commit, engage, and trust with their existing salespersons who are formal and promise gains in order to maintain the sense of security and to avoid a switching risk and cost (Arnol & Bianchi, 2001; Ndubisi, 2004).

Customers with a low uncertainty avoidance orientation tend to be more ease in dealing with risks and to be more flexible in everyday life. They exhibit less ritualistic behaviors and such a flexibility allows them to identify alternative processes. Thus, they likely obtain information and recommendations about the alternative choices from salespersons who are more informal and this results in increased customer loyalty (Arnold & Bianchi, 2001; Leonidou et al., 2013). I, therefore, formulate the hypotheses as follows.

H11: The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a high uncertainty avoidance orientation has a relationship with relationship quality.

H12: The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a low uncertainty avoidance orientation has a relationship with relationship quality.

H13: The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a high uncertainty avoidance orientation has a negative relationship with customer loyalty.

H14: The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a low uncertainty avoidance orientation has a positive relationship with customer loyalty.

H15a: The relationship quality for customers with a low uncertainty avoidance orientation has a positive impact on customer loyalty.

H15b: The relationship quality for customers with a high uncertainty avoidance orientation has a positive impact on customer loyalty.

The effects of individualism and collectivism on seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty

Customers with an individualism orientation have a stronger personal identity, be more independent and self-oriented, and tend to have less interpersonal communication. They are expected to prefer a salesperson who commits and promises them benefits in order to maintain their objective benefits (Arnol & Bianchi, 2001; Ndubisi, 2004). Nevertheless, they feel discomfort about the coercive seller influence tactics implemented by the salesperson (Frazier & Summers, 1984; Frazier & Rody, 1991; Boyle & Dwyer, 1995; Lai, 2007; Gelderman et al., 2008).

Customers with a collectivist orientation would appreciate the power of the group and prefer to build and maintain relationships. They are likely influenced by friends,

family, and relatives when searching for information and obtaining recommendations when making decisions (Murray, 1991; Singelis, 1994; Ndubisi, 2004). They tend to value people over the performance of the product in question and put more concentration on the interpersonal factors which concern about psychological rewards more than the unassuming exchange of money and goods (Kale & Mcinyre, 1991; Friman, Garling, Millett, Mattsson, & Johnston, 2002). An increase in customer loyalty may occur (Arnold & Bianchi, 2001; Leonidou et al., 2013). Therefore, the hypotheses are formulated as follows.

H16: *The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has an individualism orientation has a positive relationship with relationship quality.*

H17: *The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a collectivism orientation has a positive relationship with relationship quality.*

H18: *The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has an individualism orientation has a negative relationship with customer loyalty.*

H19: *The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a collectivism orientation has a positive relationship with customer loyalty.*

H20a: *The relationship quality for customers with a collectivism orientation has a positive impact on customer loyalty.*

H20b: *The relationship quality for customers with an individualism orientation has a positive impact on customer loyalty.*

The effects of masculinity on seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty

Customers with a masculinity orientation tend to focus on competition, wealth, and challenges. These focuses likely lead them to place a strong emphasis on material accomplishments such as being big, strong, fast or rich. They are appreciated and willing to trust and commit to a specific salesperson who would promise to provide benefits with a superior performance over than the others (Arnol & Bianchi, 2001; Ndubisi, 2004). Nevertheless, they are frustrated about coercive seller influence tactics used by the salesperson which result in decreased customer loyalty (Frazier & Summers, 1984; Frazier & Rody, 1991; Boyle & Dwyer, 1995; Lai, 2007; Gelderman et al., 2008).

On the other hand, customers who have a feminine orientation are likely more friendly, caring, gentle, cooperative, and interdependent. These characteristics make the customers feel more comfortable to communicate with salespersons and enjoy relationship benefits which are not on the monetary basis. Customer loyalty may arise consequently through such a fashion (Arnol & Bianchi, 2001; Lam et al., 2009). Therefore, the hypotheses are formulated as follows.

H21: *The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a masculinity orientation has a positive relationship with relationship quality.*

H22:   *The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a femininity orientation has a positive relationship with relationship quality.*

H23:   *The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a masculinity orientation has a negative relationship with customer loyalty.*

H24:   *The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a femininity orientation has a positive relationship with customer loyalty.*

H25a: *The relationship quality for customer with a femininity orientation has a positive impact on customer loyalty.*

H25b: *The relationship quality for customer with a masculinity orientation has a positive impact on customer loyalty.*

The effects of long-term orientation on seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty

Customers who have a long-term orientation would overlook a single transaction and would support long-term reciprocal benefits (Dwyer et al., 1987; Gundlach & Murphy, 1993). These individuals tend to communicate with salespersons for information exchange or recommendations for alternative choices. Thus, they are more likely to purchase products from acquainted or known salespersons since they have trusted and felt satisfied with such salespersons and this results in an increase in the customer loyalty (Arnol & Bianchi, 2001; Lam et al., 2009).

On the contrary, customers with a short-term orientation would prefer salespersons who commit and promise to give them benefits in either monetary or transactional terms at the moment rather than being concerned about benefits potentially provided in the future (Arnol & Bianchi, 2001; Ndubisi, 2004). Nevertheless, they may feel stressed if salespersons who use coercive tactics to influence them (Frazier & Summers, 1984; Frazier & Rody, 1991; Boyle & Dwyer, 1995; Lai, 2007; Gelderman et al., 2008). Therefore, the hypotheses are formulated as follows.

H26:   *The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a short term orientation has a positive relationship with relationship quality.*

H27:   *The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a long term orientation has a positive relationship with relationship quality.*

H28:   *The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a short term orientation has a negative relationship with customer loyalty.*

H29:   *The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a long term orientation has a positive relationship with customer loyalty.*

H30a: *The relationship quality for customers with a long term orientation has a positive impact on customer loyalty.*

H30b: The relationship quality for customers with a short term orientation has a positive impact on customer loyalty.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To test these hypotheses, I employed a survey approach. In a cultural context, it is difficult to conclude whether the differences of customer behavior occur due to cultural value orientations or other demographic factors (Hofstede, 1991; van de Vijver & Leung, 1997; Yoo & Donthu, 2002, 2005). As a result, the questionnaire was designed and used as the research instrument to gather a sample of respondents, controlling demographic characteristics. In other words, I surveyed a group of individuals with similar demographic characteristics. The questionnaire was launched to 511 respondents who had recently purchased cosmetics and personal care products. The logic behind choosing such a product group is that it belongs to the direct selling industry, and in Thailand it had almost 93 billion Baht sales in 2013 with 11.1 million salespersons. The volume of sales and the number of salespersons have increased over time (WFDSA, 2013). I also selected the respondents who had recently graduated from a university in Thailand within the last 5 years. The survey was conducted and gathered in the central business districts in Bangkok metropolitan: Silom-Sathorn road, Phaholyothin-Aree road, and Srinakarin-Bangna. The process of translation and back translation was employed to ensure identical concepts of the measurement items in the questionnaire (Arttachariya, 2008).

The questionnaire comprises three major parts: (1) the perception toward the salesperson; (2) general attitudes and opinions; and (3) respondent's demographic characteristics. In the first part, perception toward the salesperson consists of the measurement of the relationship marketing construct. I include 45 items, representing information exchange, recommendation, request, promise, threat, trust, calculative commitment, affective commitment, relationship satisfaction, and customer loyalty. The second part, general attitudes and opinions, consists of the measurement of the cultural value orientation construct. There are 26 items representing power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism/individualism, masculinity/femininity, and long-term orientation. All these items are on a seven-point Likert type scale, where 1 denotes as strongly disagree, and 7 denotes as strongly agree. The last part of questionnaire gathers the respondent's demographic characteristics, such as, gender, age, working experience, income, and education. I employ the structural equation modeling approach (SEM) to analyze the relationship between seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty for hypotheses: H1-H5, and to analyze the relationship between seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty which was influenced by the individual level cultural value orientation for H6-H30.

RESULTS

The demographics of respondents provide some insight. Most respondents were female (81.0 percent), around 24-26 years old (51.2 percent), with a bachelor degree (98.8 percent), and had 4 to 5 years of working experience (54.4 percent), and earned more than 18,000 Baht per month (83.0 percent). Table 1 presents the items in the construct of non-coercive seller influence tactics (IE1-IE5 for information exchange, RD1-RD5 for recommendation, and RQ1-RQ4 for request), coercive seller influence tactics (PM1-PM5 for promise, and TH1-TH5 for threat), relationship quality (T1-T4 for trust, AC1-AC3 for affective commitment, CC1-CC3 for calculative commitment, and

RS1-RS5 for relationship satisfaction), customer loyalty (CL1-CL6), and individual level cultural value orientations (PD1-PD5 for power distance, UA1-UA5 for uncertainty avoidance, CV1-CV6 for collectivism & individualism, MT1-MT4 for masculinity & femininity, and LT1-LT6 for long term orientation).

I performed exploratory factor analysis for all constructs. The results of adequacy testing for the correlation matrix and exploratory factor analysis show supportive outcomes for all groups of constructs as proposed in the conceptual model. The internal consistency procedure performed by Cronbach's alpha analysis (Ho, 2006) was used to analyze the consistency of the constructs. The results of the reliability analysis show that all constructs are reliable because all of the constructs provide a level of internal consistency ranging from 0.705 to 0.933, exceeding the recommend threshold value of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Confirmatory factor analysis and structural model analysis are also performed. The results of CFA (confirmatory factor analysis) indicated that the value of RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) ranged from 0.051-0.071 and the results of SEM indicated that the value of RMSEA ranged from 0.045-0.059 supported the fit of the model (Ho, 2006).

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics for constructs of the study

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
IE1 - IE5	5.4442 - 5.8904	0.69086 - 0.96422
RD1 - RD5	5.5930 - 5.7534	0.80616 - 0.89045
RQ1 - RQ4	4.2681 - 4.4912	1.08387 - 1.19616
PM1 - PM5	3.7652 - 4.5342	0.88023 - 1.17155
TH1 - TH5	3.3346 - 3.6145	0.95976 - 1.28112
T1 - T4	5.2564 - 5.7045	0.74935 - 0.87382
AC1 - AC3	5.5636 - 5.8160	0.67329 - 0.78676
CC1 - CC3	3.3425 - 3.4051	1.27327 - 1.45733
RS1 - RS5	5.2231 - 5.9413	0.70327 - 0.92309
CL1 - CL6	5.5010 - 6.0920	0.79067 - 0.98457
PD1 - PD5	2.5969 - 2.9804	0.99151 - 1.43740
UA1 - UA5	5.8434 - 6.4305	0.70433 - 0.94141
CV1 - CV6	4.8023 - 5.1859	0.93470 - 1.11938
MT1 - MT4	3.4481 - 3.7299	1.21811 - 1.40847
LT1 - LT6	5.7730 - 6.1781	0.71783 - 0.94731

TABLE 2

Results for hypothesis testing for H1-H30

No.				Group	β	b	P	Result
H1	Relationship Quality	←	Coercive	Direct	0.287	0.185	0.036	Supported
H2	Relationship Quality	←	Non-Coercive	Direct	0.248	0.213	0.009	Supported
H3	Customer Loyalty	←	Coercive	Direct	-0.302	-0.275	0.043	Supported
H4	Customer Loyalty	←	Non-Coercive	Direct	0.398	0.483	***	Supported
H5	Customer Loyalty	←	Relationship Quality	Direct	0.6	0.85	***	Supported
H6	Relationship Quality	←	Coercive	High PD	0.348	0.306	0.23	Not supported
H7	Relationship Quality	←	Non-Coercive	Low PD	0.311	0.266	0.025	Supported
H8	Customer Loyalty	←	Coercive	High PD	-0.288	-0.284	0.285	Not supported
H9	Customer Loyalty	←	Non-Coercive	Low PD	0.508	0.856	0.001	Supported
H10a	Customer Loyalty	←	Relationship Quality	Low PD	0.465	0.916	***	Supported
H10b	Customer Loyalty	←	Relationship Quality	High PD	0.753	0.843	***	Supported
H11	Relationship Quality	←	Coercive	High UA	0.078	0.014	0.934	Not Support
H12	Relationship Quality	←	Non-Coercive	Low UA	0.334	0.269	0.006	Support
H13	Customer Loyalty	←	Coercive	High UA	-0.058	-0.016	0.935	Not Support
H14	Customer Loyalty	←	Non-Coercive	Low UA	0.464	0.481	***	Support
H15a	Customer Loyalty	←	Relationship Quality	Low UA	0.614	0.791	***	Support
H15b	Customer Loyalty	←	Relationship Quality	High UA	0.496	0.76	***	Support
H16	Relationship Quality	←	Coercive	Ind	0.493	0.469	0.056	Not supported
H17	Relationship Quality	←	Non-Coercive	Col	0.402	0.433	0.002	Supported
H18	Customer Loyalty	←	Coercive	Ind	-0.043	-0.049	0.71	Not supported
H19	Customer Loyalty	←	Non-Coercive	Col	0.11	0.219	0.302	Not supported
H20a	Customer Loyalty	←	Relationship Quality	Col	0.734	1.354	***	Supported
H20b	Customer Loyalty	←	Relationship Quality	Ind	0.326	0.389	0.003	Supported
H21	Relationship Quality	←	Coercive	Mas	0.334	0.234	0.045	Supported
H22	Relationship Quality	←	Non-Coercive	Fem	0.058	0.058	0.743	Not supported
H23	Customer Loyalty	←	Coercive	Mas	-0.271	-0.238	0.089	Not supported
H24	Customer Loyalty	←	Non-Coercive	Fem	0.536	0.838	0.021	Supported
H25a	Customer Loyalty	←	Relationship Quality	Fem	0.703	1.112	***	Supported
H25b	Customer Loyalty	←	Relationship Quality	Mas	0.463	1.354	0.002	Supported
H26	Relationship Quality	←	Coercive	Short-term	0.329	0.26	0.122	Not supported
H27	Relationship Quality	←	Non-Coercive	Long-term	0.478	0.447	0.022	Supported
H28	Customer Loyalty	←	Coercive	Short-term	-0.5	-0.558	0.099	Not supported
H29	Customer Loyalty	←	Non-Coercive	Long-term	0.277	0.309	0.116	Not supported
H30a	Customer Loyalty	←	Relationship Quality	Long-term	0.537	0.64	0.001	Supported
H30b	Customer Loyalty	←	Relationship Quality	Short-term	0.655	0.926	***	Supported

DISCUSSION

The objectives of hypothesis statements 1 to 5 are to test the relationships between the non-coercive seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty and the relationship between the coercive seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty. The objectives of hypothesis statements 6 to 30 are to test the relationships between the non-coercive seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty and the relationship between the coercive seller influence tactics, relationship quality, and customer loyalty which was influenced by cultural value orientations at the individual level, namely, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity, and finally long-term orientation. The results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 2.

The results reveal that the implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by salespersons has a significant relationship with relationship quality (C.R. = 2.099, $p < 0.05$), which supports H1. The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics has a significant relationship with relationship quality (C.R. = 2.607, $p < 0.05$), which supports H2. The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics has a significant negative relationship with customer loyalty (C.R. = -2.020, $p < 0.05$), which supports H3. The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics has a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty (C.R. = 4.096, $p < 0.05$), which supports H4. Finally, relationship quality has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty. Thus, the higher level of relationship quality, the higher level of customer loyalty (C.R. = 6.785, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.600$), which supports H5. The results of H1-H5 imply that non-coercive and coercive seller influence tactics are antecedents of relationship quality and have an impact on customer loyalty as hypothesized.

The results of the regression weights for low and high power distance value orientations reveal that the implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer with a high power distance orientation has no relationship with relationship quality (C.R. = 1.200, $p > 0.05$). H6 is not supported from the empirical results. The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a low power distance orientation has a significant relationship with relationship quality (C.R. = 2.237, $p < 0.05$). Such a result supports H7. The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a high power distance orientation has no significant, negative relationship with customer loyalty (C.R. = -1.069, $p > 0.05$), refusing H8. The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a low power distance orientation has a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty (C.R. = 3.250, $p < 0.05$), which supports H9. Finally, relationship quality for customers with either a low power distance or high power distance orientation has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty. The higher level of relationship quality leads to a higher level of customer loyalty (C.R. = 3.809, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.465$, and C.R. = 5.408, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.753$ respectively). Both H10a and H10b are verified.

The results of the regression weights of low and high uncertainty avoidance value orientations reveal that the implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a high uncertainty avoidance orientation has no significant relationship with relationship quality (C.R. = 0.082, $p > 0.05$), which does not support H11. The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a low uncertainty avoidance orientation has a significant relationship with relationship quality (C.R. = 2.769, $p < 0.05$), which supports

H12. The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a high uncertainty avoidance orientation has no significant negative relationship with customer loyalty (C.R. = -0.082, p > 0.05), which refutes H13. The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a low uncertainty avoidance orientation has a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty (C.R. = 3.582, p < 0.05), which supports H14. Finally, relationship quality for customers in both high and low uncertainty avoidance orientation groups has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty. The higher level of relationship quality, the higher level of customer loyalty (C.R.=5.226, p < 0.05; β = 0.614, and C.R.=4.186, p < 0.05; β = 0.496 respectively). This finding supports H15a and H15b.

The results of the regression weights for individualism and collectivism orientations reveal that the implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has an individualist orientation has no significant relationship with relationship quality (C.R. = 1.908, p > 0.05). H16 is not supported by such a result. The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a collectivist orientation has a significant relationship with relationship quality (C.R. = 3.062, p < 0.05), which supports H17. The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has an individualist orientation has no significant negative relationship with customer loyalty (C.R. = -0.372, p > 0.05), which does not support H18. The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a collectivist orientation has no significant positive relationship with customer loyalty (C.R. = 1.031, p > 0.05), which does not support H19. Finally, relationship quality for customers in both individualism and collectivism orientation groups has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty, thus, the higher level of relationship quality, the higher level of customer loyalty (C.R. = 3.014, p < 0.05; β = 0.326, and C.R. = 5.904, p < 0.05; β = 0.734 respectively). This finding supports both H20a and H20b.

The results of the regression weights of individual level femininity and masculinity orientations reveal that the implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a masculine orientation has a significant relationship with relationship quality (C.R. = 2.009, p < 0.05) which supports H21. The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a feminine orientation has no significant relationship with relationship quality (C.R. = 0.329, p > 0.05), which does not support H22. The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a masculine orientation has no significant negative relationship with customer loyalty (C.R. = -1.702, p > 0.05), which does not support H23. The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a feminine orientation has a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty (C.R. = 2.311, p < 0.05), which supports H24. Finally, relationship quality for customers with either feminine or masculine orientation has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty. The higher level of relationship quality, the higher level of customer loyalty (C.R. = 5.448, p < 0.05; β = 0.703, and C.R.=3.065, p < 0.05; β = 0.463 respectively), which supports H25a and H25b.

The results of the regression weights for long-term and short-term orientations reveal that the implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a short-term orientation has no significant relationship with relationship quality (C.R. = 1.545, p > 0.05), which does not support H26. The

implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a long-term orientation has a significant relationship with relationship quality (C.R. = 2.292, $p < 0.05$), which supports H27. The implementation of coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a short-term orientation has no significant negative relationship with customer loyalty (C.R. = -1.648, $p > 0.05$), which does not support H28. The implementation of non-coercive seller influence tactics by a salesperson toward a customer who has a long-term orientation has no significant positive relationship with customer loyalty (C.R. = 1.572, $p > 0.05$), which does not support H29. Finally, relationship quality for customers in both short and long term orientation groups has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty. The higher level of relationship quality, the higher level of customer loyalty (C.R. = 5.168, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.655$, and C.R. = 3.249, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.537$ respectively), which supports H30a and H30b.

The results of the regression weights which was moderated by cultural value orientations at the individual level for the channel related to coercive seller influence tactics (H6, H8, H11, H13, H16, H18, H21, H23, H26, and H28) reveal that only H21 is supported and the rest are not supported. Such results suggest that coercive seller influence tactics cannot be used to set up the relationship between a salesperson and his or her customer, and cannot achieve customer loyalty. On the other hand, the results of the regression weights which was moderated by cultural value orientations for the channel related to non-coercive seller influence tactics (H7, H9, H12, H14, H17, H19, H22, H24, H27, and H29) show a variety of outcomes. The results show that non-coercive seller influence tactics can be used to set up the relationship in the group with a low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, and long-term orientation but cannot be used in the group with a femininity orientation. Customers in such a group are friendlier, tender in nature, cooperative, and interdependent. These characteristics make them build comparable relationships to all salespersons who approach them.

Moreover, the results show that non-coercive seller influence tactics can achieve the customer loyalty in the group of low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, femininity, and long-term orientation but cannot achieve the customer loyalty in the group of collectivism and long-term orientation. This suggests that although customers with a collectivism orientation appreciate the power of the group and prefer to build and maintain relationships, customers in such a group put more emphasis on the value of the interpersonal closeness of the relationship. This can result in them to switch to another salesperson who has an appeal of interpersonal closeness. For customers with a long-term orientation, although they are more likely to enjoy relationship benefits which are not on a monetary basis, the nature of the product in direct selling provides them more variety and more specifications, which can meet their specific needs. This can in turn lead to a switching to another product or salesperson. Finally, the results of the regression weights for the all paths between relationship quality and customer loyalty (H10a, H10b, H15a, H15b, H20a, H20b, H25a, H25b, H30a, and H30b) are supported, which imply that once the relationship between a salesperson and his or her customer is set up, it has the positive effects on customer loyalty.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study are fruitful to both academics and practitioners as the results of the study provide a better understanding and extend four bodies of

knowledge: seller influence theory, adaptive selling theory, cultural value orientation theory, and relationship marketing theory. First, this study provides a better understanding about seller influence tactics at an individual level since it applies seller influence tactics to individual end users rather than on an industry basis. Second, the study explores different seller influence tactics by classifying them into coercive and non-coercive types, which can be applied in situations with regard to the variety of customers identified by their cultural value orientations. Third, the study focuses on the effects of cultural value orientations at the individual level in five different dimensions on the relational marketing model. To my knowledge, such a study has not been performed in prior work.

The discoveries of the current research are useful to practitioners since the results of this research provide some practical and feasible guidelines which can be applied to create a competitive advantage for companies and salespersons in either selecting suitable selling tactics for a given situation or in implementing an appropriate relational concept to maintain good relationships with customers. First, the results of the study confirm that seller influence tactics are antecedents of relationship quality. Second, the study not only suggests that companies and salespersons should employ non-coercive seller influence tactics, but also provides information about matching non-coercive seller influence tactics to specific groups of customers. Third, the results of the study on the relationship between relationship quality and customer loyalty show that all relationship paths between these two constructs are strongly significant, implying the loyalty of a customer depends on the quality of the relationship.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In setting up this current study, I am aware of some limitations. First, the samples of the study have specific demographic characteristics as a result of performing cultural research. Further studies might explore various demographic groups of respondents in order to provide a more comprehensive picture. Second, the study context was focused on a direct selling industry, which may limit the generalizability of the research. The product characteristics in a direct selling industry may produce different results from industries that are not into direct selling since a perfect substitutable product in such a direct selling industry provides little discomfort to consumers. Further work can be conducted in industries that are not direct selling. Third, the study only employed customer loyalty as the single dependent variable, which likely limits the generalizability of the study. Including more relevant and dependent variables may better understand these issues and contribute to the relational marketing literature. Finally, future work should extend to focus on non-coercive seller influence tactics since the paper employs the integration of information exchange, recommendation, and request as the representatives of non-coercive seller influence tactics. Future work may include ingratiation and inspirational appeal to broaden the knowledge as suggested by McFarland et al. (2006).

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