RESEARCH ON IDENTIFYING THE EXTENT IN WHICH ATTACHMENT AND COMMUNICATION HAS AN IMPACT ON SATISFACTION

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Abstract

The main purpose of the present scientific paper is to identify the degree in which bidirectional communication and the dimensions of the emotional attachment can, with increased effectiveness and efficiency, act as part of customer satisfaction strategy. The most recent studies in the relational marketing field show that the marketing strategy requires an increased accuracy in order for the customers' satisfaction, in the present market conditions, to be a sustainable objective. We have applied a quantity type research in order to obtain data as complex as possible. The study contains two levels of analysis and is configured based on three econometric models.

Keywords: emotional attachment, relational marketing, bidirectional communication, satisfaction

JEL classification: M31

1. Introduction

Communication, from the social point of view, represents one of the first activities that favored the appearance and development of networking and, at present, there is an increasing interest shown by the researchers from the relationship marketing area. The concept of relationship marketing is based on the interaction and dialogue with individual entities. It is, thus,

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necessary to responsibly handle the communication policies which gain new valences due to its role in the relationship process.

Taking into consideration the significance of relationship marketing and of the concept of satisfaction, situated in a central position in the contemporary marketing reality, it is necessary to identify and clarify the elements that make the real levers for obtaining customer satisfaction. In this context, it is necessary to determine the role and place held by communication and by attachment (concept that contains more dimensions) in the endeavor to cross from transactional exchanges to collaborative exchanges.

As many of the existing scientific works from the specialty literature reason the need to implement interactive, bidirectional communication as an efficient practice for obtaining positive results of relationship marketing, we consider it useful to start from this premise. Therefore, the *general purpose* of the present scientific paper is to identify the degree in which bidirectional communication and the dimensions of the emotional attachment can, with increased effectiveness and efficiency, act as part of customer satisfaction strategy.

2. Literature review
2.1. Bidirectional communication

According to Groonros *bidirectional communication* is a process of reasoning together in order for two or more parties to develop a common dialogue platform. "Relationship marketing is facilitated provided that this platform enables a supplier to create additional value for its customers on top of the value of the goods and services which are exchanged in the relationship. For a relationship dialogue to emerge, in an on-going process the communication effects of planned communication efforts and of product and service-based interactions between a supplier and its customers have to support each other" (Grönroos, 2002).

The analysis of the present reference study regarding bidirectional/ interactive communication shows some characteristics resulted from the contraposition of the traditional/ unidirectional communication. Thus, the main dimensions that define the new communication concept (interactive communication) are: the bidirectional orientated flow, the high level of transparency, the frequency, the increased level of information, the direct communication.

Ch. Fill (Fill, 2009), well-established author in marketing communication, surprises in his work "Marketing Communications: Interactivity, communities and content" the essence of a "collaborative communication strategy". For this purpose, the considered criteria were the following:

- Direction. According to this criterion, communication can be achieved horizontally or vertically with a unidirectional or bidirectional flow.
- Means. Means sets the character of formal, informal or a combination of the two types for the communication.
- Content. Depending on the content, the communication can be direct or indirect. The direct communication strategy aims at an immediate behaviour change, while the indirect one has effects on a psychological level by changes of attitude and beliefs.

2.2. Emotional attachment

By analyzing the current level of research in the reference field, we can state with certainty that "both the emotional attachment as well as the rational one can lead to long-term relations, consolidating the organization's performance" (Ahmed, 2009). Accordingly, there is a clear need to identify the dimensions of the attachment that has a significant impact on customer satisfaction.

The concept of "emotional attachment" has a number of definitions, "each one receiving strong arguments from the supporting authors. Among the definitions that received a large range of acceptance we mention (Gustafsson, Johnson, Roos, 2005):

Customer engagement represents:

- The intent to keep a relation;
- A guarantee of continuity between parties;
- The sacrifice or potential sacrifice in case a relation comes to its end;
- The lack of competing proposals" (Neagoe, 2013)

2.3. Customer satisfaction

Many scientific studies have been written about the concept of satisfaction with arguments based on different variables. A brief definition, but in our opinion a very comprehensive one, belongs to Kotler who states that

"customer satisfaction is the measure in which the supplied product/ rendered service corresponds to the customers' expectations" (Armstrong, Kotler, 2007) with the argumentation that the role of economic agents is to supply the promised value.

The strategic planning of relationship marketing programs requires precision in attaining the customer satisfaction objective as recurrent satisfaction leads to long-term relations, thus consolidating the organization's performance. It is recommended to not only strictly fulfill the promises but also to add value for customer enthusiasm. However, in the relationship marketing context, it has to be taken into consideration the statement of Oliver which states that, "loyal clients have a tendency to be stronger both in the positive sense when performance exceeds expectations as well as forming stronger negative feelings when performance does not meet customer expectations". (Oliver, 2006, p.583)

3. Research Methodology

In order to fulfill the proposed objective, the use of a quantity type marketing research was decided. Inquiry is the used research method and the questionnaire is the instrument used to actually collect the information.

The materialization of results for the debated issue is achieved through a selective research among 260 persons from our country. The 260 respondents have been chosen randomly from the customers from the Romanian insurance market.

3.1. Research objectives

The objectives of the present study are of causal type and aim for obtaining some directions that could lead to optimizing the customer satisfaction strategies:

a) Determine the measure in which the emotional attachment has an impact on customer satisfaction;

b) Determine the existing correlations between bidirectional/ interactive communication and emotional attachment;

c) Determine the impact of bidirectional/ interactive communication on customer satisfaction;

d) Determine the variation degree of the "satisfaction" variable determined by the simultaneous action of the two variables (emotional attachment and bidirectional communication);

The actual questioning has been carried out personally in order to obtain as clear as possible information and to supply the possible necessary explanations.

3.2. Research results

For the study of the impact of each variable taken into consideration in relation with satisfaction, the (simple and multiple) linear regression model considered extremely useful due to the purpose of the research was used.

In order to obtain more complex data, the study contained two levels of analysis: the individual action of the two independent variables (emotional attachment and bidirectional communication) on satisfaction and the impact of the simultaneous action of the two variables.

- Research model and tools

From the analysis of the reference theoretical stage, a series of dimensions that helped build the work items for each tested variable was set apart.

Table 1: Research tools

Independent variables	
Emotional attachment	**Bidirectional communication**
- In choosing the insurance company, quality is the most important criterion - I trust the products and/ or services provided by the insurance company - Signing the insurance policies has always been a transparent process - The insurance company has a favorable reputation within the market - The insurance company is benevolent with reference to solving my problems - The optimum solving of prejudices is the main criteria for renewing the insurance policy with the same insurance company	- Between the customers and the insurance company there is a mutual exchange of information - The information exchange is frequent - Between the insurance and company the customers the communication is direct and interactive (phone, face-to-face, etc.) - The information exchange between company and customers is transparent (without hidden intentions) - The more the insurance company requests feedback from customers, the better they can fulfill their requirements - Most often, insurance companies inform the customers regarding new, more advantageous offers

Source: Own representation

By representing the dimensions of the two independent variables, the methodological frame obtains an optimized form, by concretely highlighting the elements with a representative impact on customer satisfaction and on expressing the intent to continue the relation with an insurance company.

Taking into consideration the purpose of the research, the following reference model for obtaining results has been build.

Figure 1: Research conceptual model
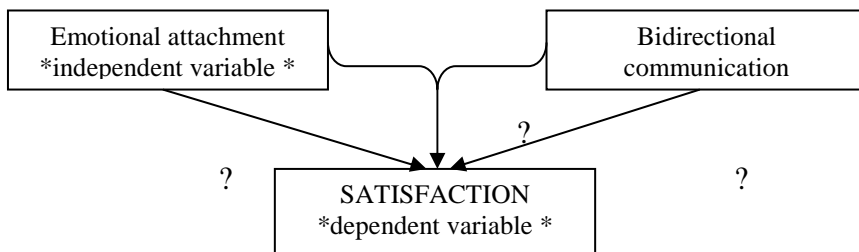
Source: Own representation

The analysis of the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable was based on the construction of two simple linear regression models and of one multiple linear regression model. The activity of each independent variable on the effect variable shall be analyzed with the help of the simple linear regression and the impact of the cause parameters' simultaneous action on the dependent variable shall be highlighted with the help of the multiple linear regression.

Please note that the items marked with "*" shall be excluded from future analyses because the significance threshold does not meet the validation conditions. The results of the econometric models are presented below.

- Interpreting the regression models

Model 1: emotional attachment and satisfaction (simple regression)

$$a + b*X + \varepsilon = Y$$

X- emotional attachment (independent variable)
Y - satisfaction (dependent variable)
a, b – regression coefficients

By running the first model we notice that it is valid, as the simple linear regression parameters are significantly different from 0 (likely <0,05), and the Fisher test is sufficiently high (F = 46.573). The independent variable (emotional attachment) explains a percentage of 56,4% from satisfaction (see Table 3).

Tablel 2: Econometric results - ANOVA[b]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	359.104	7	51.301	**46.573**	.000[a]
	Residual	277.583	252	1.102		
	Total	636.687	259			

Source: Own research supported by using the SPSS 19 statistic program

Table 3: Summary model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.751[a]	**.564**	.552	1.04953

a. Predictors: (Constant), Q5_1., Q5_2, Q5_3, Q5_4, Q5_5. Q5_6., Q5_7.

Source: Own research supported by using the SPSS 19 statistic program

The analysis of the results from the point of view of regression coefficients leads to obtaining some mostly surprising information. As can be seen, in the below table "the organization's reputation" has the largest impact on satisfaction (coefficient value = 0.254), followed by displaying "special attention in solving the clients' problems" (coefficient value = 0.245) and by "the perception of company high performance" (coefficient value = 0.133).

Table 4: Value of the linear regression coefficients
x= emotional attachment and y = satisfaction

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant) * *the items that describe the X independent variable* *	2.258	.399		5.657	.000
	Ae1 In choosing the insurance company, quality is the most important criterion	.073	.044	.093	1.650	.033
	Ae 2 I trust the products and/ or services provided by the insurance company	.023	.056	-.025	1.418	.041

Ae 3	Signing the insurance policies has always been a transparent process	.061	.039	.081	1.553	.045
Ae 4	The insurance company has a favorable reputation within the market	**.254**	.051	.293	5.005	.000
Ae 5	The insurance company is benevolent with reference to solving my problems	**.245**	.041	.337	5.926	.000
*Ae6	The optimum solving of prejudices is the main criteria for renewing the insurance policy with the same insurance company	.006	.044	.008	.145	.885
Ae 7	I do not perceive the competing insurance companies as being more efficient	**.133**	.032	.198	4.171	.000

Source: Own research supported by using the SPSS 19 statistic program
*The dimensions marked with * is excluded as it does not have a considerable impact*

The quality of the provided product (dimension 1) has a low intensity impact in explaining the variation of satisfaction. The phenomenon can be interpreted through the specific of the insurance market where the specific products are mostly standardized. Interpreting this result leads to the statement that the insured perceive a similar quality of the products and services provided by the company and improving these relations can be achieved by diversifying the offer. In these conditions, the customers pursue other attributes to differentiate the insurers (ex. by reputation) and this information completes the conceptual frame from the reference literature with valuable information.

Model 2: Bidirectional communication and satisfaction (simple regression)

$$c + d*W + \mathcal{E} = Y$$

W- bidirectional communication (independent variable)
Y - satisfaction (dependent variable))
c, d – regression coefficient

The second model is also valid as the linear regression parameters are significantly different from 0 (likely <0,05), and the Fisher test (see Anova, Table 6) is sufficiently high (F = 60.784). The independent variable (bidirectional communication) explains a percentage of 59% from satisfaction (see Model Summary, Table 5).

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.768[a]	**.590**	.581	1.01525

Source: Own research supported by using the SPSS 19 statistic program

Table 6: Econometric results - ANOVA[b]

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	375.911	6	62.652	**60.784**	.000[a]
	Residual	260.776	253	1.031		
	Total	636.687	259			

Source: Own research supported by using the SPSS 19 statistic program

The influence of each item, which describes the *interactive communication,* on satisfaction can be highlighted by analyzing the below table that contains the regression coefficients:

Table 7: Value of the linear regression coefficients
x = bidirectional communication and y = satisfaction

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant) * the items that describe the X independent variable	3.334	.383		8.707	.000
Cb1	Between the customers and the insurance company there is a mutual exchange of information	.219	.045	.346	4.850	.000
Cb2	The information exchange is frequent	-.074	.042	-.122	-1.784	.046
Cb3	Between the insurance and company the customers the communication is direct and interactive (phone, face-to-face, etc.)	.130	.042	.190	3.113	.002
Cb4	The information exchange between company and customers is transparent (without hidden intentions)	.283	.040	.413	7.047	.000
*Cb5	The more the insurance company requests feedback from customers, the better they can fulfill their requirements	-.024	.039	-.028	-.606	.545
Cb6	Most often, insurance companies inform the customers regarding new, more advantageous offers	.122	.037	.142	3.339	.001

Source: Own research supported by using the SPSS 19 statistic program

While interpreting the results, it is clear that *transparency* (coefficient value = 0.283) is the bidirectional communication dimension with the highest impact on satisfaction, followed by insuring a direct and *bidirectional communication* flow (coefficient value = 0.219), *directly and interactively* (coefficient value = 0.130).

Please note, within this model, the item that describes *communication frequency*. Because the regression slope has a negative sign (coefficient value = -.074) it signals a reverse relation between the two variables (communication frequency and satisfaction). Therefore, should the communication frequency increase with 1%, satisfaction changes in reverse with 0,074%.

Model 3: Emotional attachment, bidirectional communication and satisfaction (multiple regression)
The bi-factorial has the following shape:

$$a + bX + cW + \mathcal{E} = Y$$

X – emotional attachment (independent variable)

W - interactive communication (dependent variable)

Y – satisfaction (dependent variable)

The F test has been used in order to check the validity of the regression model. As the resulted value of F=203.234 and the significance threshold is lower 0.05 (Sig,=0.00), the build bi-factorial regression model is valid and can be used for analyzing the dependence between the three variables.

The determination coefficient showed a significant improvement of the model. Therefore, the simultaneous action of the two exogenous variables explains 61.3% of satisfaction variation.

In order to emphasize the contribution brought to the variation of the satisfaction variable for each independent variable, the regression coefficients shall be analyzed.

Table 8: Value of the multiple linear regression coefficients
x1 = emotional attachment, x2 = bidirectional communication, y = satisfaction

Coefficients[a]

| Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.429	.360		3.974	.000
q5_all *Emotional engagement*	.415	.059	.419	7.809	.000
q6_all *Interactive communication*	.459	.051	.432	8.061	.000

a. Dependent Variable: q7q8_all
Source: Own research supported by using the SPSS 19 statistic program

Interpreting the information originated from the analysis of the regression coefficients leads to hardly surprising conclusions taking into consideration the results of the individual action of each independent variable. Note that the emotional attachment adds to a smaller degree to satisfaction variation than interactive communication.

The conceptual model validated for the experimental group (the action of the relationship marketing variables) as well as accentuating the action of each considered dimension (excluding those whose significance threshold is not adequate, Sig.<0.05) on the dependent variable (satisfaction) is represented in the below figure:

Figure 2: Validated model and the independent variables coefficients
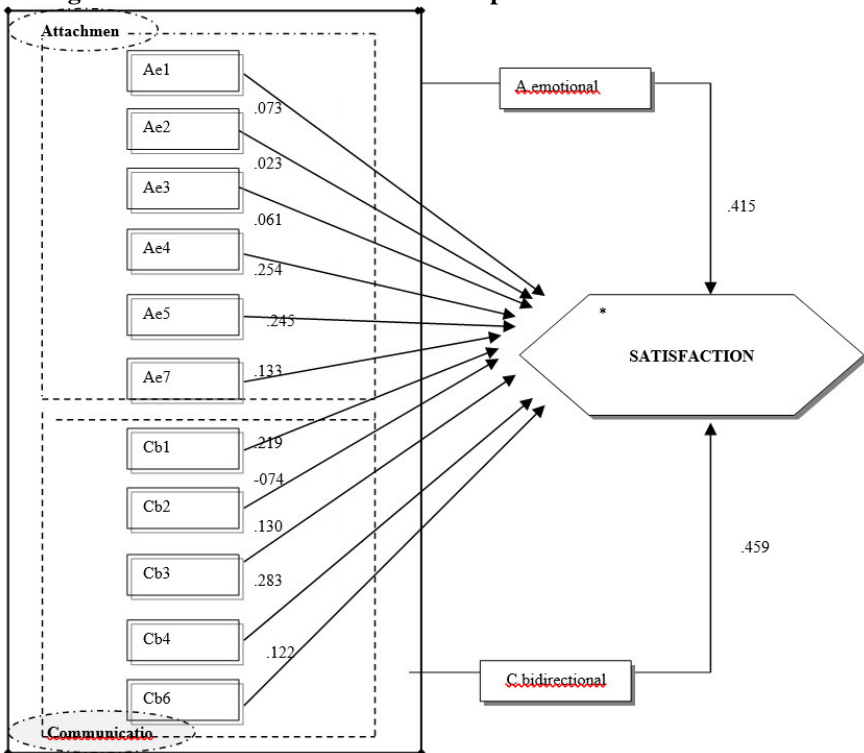
The above figure contains all three regression models presented before as well as the main obtained results.

4. Conclusions and managerial implications

When operating with strictly objective criteria and following the value of the regression parameters, some valuable judgments can be observed. In terms of customer satisfaction, bidirectional communication (.459) has a larger impact on satisfaction than increasing the emotional attachment (.415). If the organization's objective points toward increasing the customers' satisfaction degree, the strategy shall be developed on the dimensions indicating the highest impact (the coefficients with the highest values), with a slight emphasis on planning the interactive communication with strategic actions of transparency and reciprocity. An increased attention should be granted to communication frequency so as to reduce the risk of obtaining adverse effects. The communication activities that take place at short intervals of time can be perceived by the insured as irritating and their satisfaction can be highly affected.

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