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PROPOSED APPLICATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP MARKETING IN INTERORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONS

[1]Juliane Laviniki Neumann
[2]Claudionor Guedes Laimer

ABSTRACT

Objective: Relationship marketing is applied in the study of the relational exchanges and are commonly studied in the relations between companies and clients and / or suppliers. This study aims to propose a conceptual model for understanding the relations among competing companies, based on relationship marketing and social exchange theory.

Method: A theoretical essay was carried out with the main aspects of the literature on relationship marketing in the elaboration of a conceptual model, presenting propositions to test the relations among competing companies.
Originality / Relevance: The research is relevant and innovative by using a classical theory in an unconventional context. In addition, it contributes to the theoretical advance on relational exchanges among competitors.

Results: The propositions, based on the social exchange theory, suggest some aspects of relationship marketing positively influence the relations among competing companies (cooperation, trust, shared values, commitment, communication, empathy and reciprocity). While others negatively influence (coercive power, comparison of alternatives and opportunistic behavior).

Theoretical / methodological contributions: The study contribution is to propose the use of relationship marketing concepts as a theoretical lens to understand the relations among competing companies.

Social / managing contributions: The managerial contribution is to provide subsidies for understanding and maintaining long-term relations among competing companies. Moreover, the study encourages the discussion and development of new research so that the relations among competing companies can be analyzed empirically through relationship marketing.

Keywords: Marketing of relationship. Social exchange theory. Relational exchanges. Relations among competing companies. Co-opetition.

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[1] Mestrado em Adminsitração IMED, Rio Grande Do Sul (Brasil). Orcid: < https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1953-3080>: Email: <ju.laviniki@hotmail.com>
[2] Mestrado em Adminsitração IMED, Rio Grande Do Sul (Brasil). Orcid: < https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5696-8043>: Email: <claudionorlaimer@gmail.com>

PROPOSTA DE APLICAÇÃO DO MARKETING DE RELACIONAMENTO NAS RELAÇÕES INTERORGANIZACIONAIS

RESUMO

Objetivo: O marketing de relacionamento é utilizado no estudo das relações de troca, sendo comumente estudado nas relações com os clientes ou com os fornecedores da empresa. Este estudo tem como objetivo propor um modelo conceitual para compreender a relação entre empresas concorrentes, a partir do marketing de relacionamento e da teoria das trocas sociais.

Método: Realizou-se um ensaio teórico e utilizando-se de achados sobre o marketing de relacionamento foram desenvolvidas algumas proposições para a relação entre empresas concorrentes.

Originalidade/Relevância: A pesquisa é relevante e inovadora ao utilizar uma teoria clássica dentro de um contexto não convencional.

Resultados: Amparado pela teoria das trocas sociais, alguns aspectos do marketing de relacionamento influenciam positivamente nas relações entre empresas concorrentes (cooperação, confiança, compartilhamento de valores, comprometimento, comunicação, empatia e reciprocidade). Enquanto outros influenciam negativamente (poder coercivo, comparação de alternativas e comportamento oportunista).

Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas: A contribuição do estudo é propor a utilização dos conceitos de marketing de relacionamento, como uma lente teórica para compreender as relações entre empresas concorrentes.

Contribuições sociais / para a gestão: E a contribuição do gerencial está em fornecer subsídios para a manutenção de relações de longo prazo entre empresas concorrentes. Desse modo, o estudo estimula a discussão e o desenvolvimento de novas pesquisas para que a relação entre empresas concorrentes possa ser analisada empiricamente, através do marketing de relacionamento.

Palavras-chave: Marketing de relacionamento. Teoria de troca social. Tranferência relacional. Relações entre empresas concorrentes. Coopetição.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, structural changes in different contexts and in different aspects such as social, economic and technological, have caused changes in the transactional patterns, which in some cases began to be based on relational exchanges. Thus, relationship marketing came to represent a new theoretical perspective to understand the market transactions.

The studies evolution, mainly from the 1990s, presented innumerable forms of relational exchange in substitution and / or complementation to the discrete transactions, hitherto predominant. Some studies, such as Morgan and Hunt (1994), who presented countless ten forms of relational exchanges, based on different market stakeholders. As such, relational exchanges can contribute to create a competitive advantage for the company and also be a source of interorganizational competitive advantage (Dyer & Singh, 1998).

In this context, database research indicates that most of the studies on relationship marketing have been developed in the business-to-consumer (B2C) context, while the smallest portion of the studies have been developed in the business-to- business (B2B). In this sense, bibliometric surveys of the national literature, which analyzed the period between 1990 and 2013, indicated that 2/3 of the studies have been carried out in the B2C context, while 1/3 of the studies have been carried out in the B2B context (Almeida, Lopes & Pereira, 2006, Coelho & Reinaldo, 2014, Faria, Giuliani, Pizzinatto & Spers, 2014, Demo, Fogaça, Ponte, Fernandes & Cardoso, 2015).

However, as far as studies in the B2B context are concerned, bibliometric surveys do not present the type of relational exchanges partner, that is, if relational exchanges occur between the company and its competitors or between the company and other actors. Thus, in relational exchanges it must be recognized that in certain cases there is no client and / or consumer, but a competitor (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Success in transactions depends on cooperative efforts between companies and long-term continuous interactions (Fontenot & Wilson, 1997). These relational exchanges between competitors have not been sufficiently researched, lacking propositions of theoretical models for the understanding of the phenomena resulting from these relations (Santos & Baptista, 2015).

Thus, to fill this gap, this theoretical essay aims to propose a conceptual model to understand the relational exchanges among competing companies, from relationship marketing and social exchange theory. Thus, according to Hamel, Doz and Prahalad (1989), co-operation among companies can be a low-cost strategy to achieve competitive advantage. For this, the study explores the main aspects of relationship marketing literature in the elaboration of a conceptual model, such as: commitment, trust, cooperation, communication, power, shared values, empathy, reciprocity, comparison of alternatives and opportunistic behavior.

To understand how these aspects of relationship marketing apply to competing companies, the study addressed the relations among competing companies and the social exchange theory. Finally, the propositions are presented elaborated based on aspects of relationship marketing related to competing companies.

Therefore, it is expected that, with the proposed conceptual model, it will be possible to expand the understanding about the behavior of competing companies inserted in interorganizational relations, starting from the definition of the aspects related to the relational exchanges, propitiating new studies that present empirical evidence and corroborate to explain the phenomenon. In the managerial context, it is expected that the study can provide subsidies for the maintenance of relations among competing companies, from the understanding of aspects that can influence the companies behavior and create competitive advantage.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Marketing can be divided into two perspectives (Bearden, Ingram, & LaForge, 1995): transactions marketing is short-term oriented, focused on sales, emphasizing persuasion and characterized by manipulation and conflict; relationship marketing is long-term oriented, focusing on profits, emphasizing support and characterized by trust and cooperation.

The Nature of Relationship Marketing

The term relationship marketing was first used by Berry in 1983, later in 1985 by Jackson who used the term relating it to the Business-to-Business context (Grönroos, 2004). However, the relationship approach has existed since individuals started exchanging goods and services (Grönroos, 2004, Wilson, 1995). Thus, there came a time when the theory of exchanges, by itself, became insufficient to explain the continuing relationship nature (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). Authors affirm that the perception of some benefits, besides the exchange, propitiates the desire to maintain relational links (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006).

The relationships, over time, have developed trust and friendship, and have currently become strategic to achieving organizational goals (Wilson, 1995). Thus, relationship marketing is centered on the establishment, development and maintenance of successful and long-term relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) among the parties involved in the exchanges (Callaghan, McPhail, & Yau 1995, Wilson

1995) generating profitable relationships (Miquel-Romero, Caplliure-Giner, & Adame-Sánchez, 2014).

The seminal work of Morgan and Hunt (1994) makes a distinction between the relational exchanges that the company performs (Figure 1):

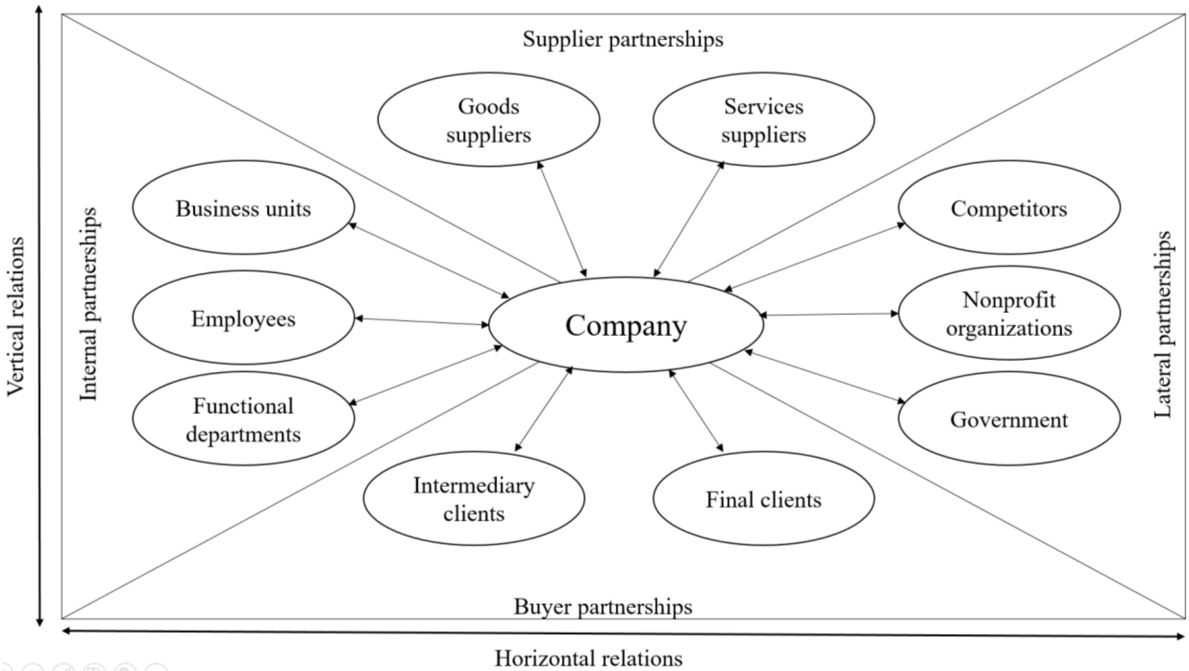

Figure 1 – Relationship Marketing Relational Exchanges
Source: Adapted from Morgan and Hunt (1994).

According to the model proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994), relational exchanges can be: vertical relations, when they occur between suppliers of goods or services and / or buyers, who are the intermediary or final clients; and horizontal relationships that occur with lateral partners such as competitors, government and nonprofits, and internal partnerships among business units, employees, and functional departments of the organization.

Relationship marketing has as its central focus the relational exchanges. Table 1 highlights the aspects studied in relationship marketing.

ASPECTS	INFORMATION	AUTHORS
Cooperation	• refers to actions taken among partners to achieve mutual outcomes with the expectation of reciprocal growth over time; • creates cooperative behavior among partners to ensure that both receive the benefits of the relationship; • The success of relationship marketing, in all its context, requires cooperative behavior.	Anderson & Narus (1990); Wilson (1995); Morgan & Hunt (1994)
Trust	• involves the belief that both will act in the best interests towards the other partner; • represents an affective attribute that facilitates the relations among organizations and is central to all exchange relationships; • the higher your level, the greater the likelihood of long-term relationship continuity.	Wilson (1995); Callaghan *et al.* (1995); Morgan & Hunt (1994); Sin *et al.* (2005)
Shared values	• partners divide beliefs about behaviors, goals, policies; • if partners share values they are more committed to the relationship.	Morgan & Hunt (1994); Sin *et al.* (2005)
Commitment	• is the desire to continue the relationship with the other party; • a committed partner will cooperate with their partners in the desire to make the relationship work;	Wilson, (1995);

	• implies the importance of working to garantee the continuity of this relationship.	Morgan & Hunt, (1994)
Communication	• includes sharing timely and important information with partners; • positively influences the relationship commitment.	Sin *et al.* (2005); Morgan & Hunt, (1994)
Power	• is the capability/ability to influence the decisions/behavior of others, it is usually one-sided and requires a state of interdependence; • is important because it evidences the participants predisposition to cooperate with others.	Martins, Faria, & Farina (2016); Farina & Gouvêa (2012); Morgan & Hunt, (1994)
Empathy	• can be understood as the quest to understand the desires and goals of exchange partners.	Sin *et al.* (2005)
Reciprocity	• has to do with the capability of partners to offer favors or subsidies to each other in exchange for future returns; • It is a condition for maintaining the relationship with the other party.	Callaghan *et al.*, (1995); Abbasi *et al.* (2016)
Comparison of alternatives	• serves as a yardstick for measuring the sources of alternatives available to companies. Few alternatives can be a source of uncertainties and dependence, and excess can affect the nature of relations.	Cannon & Perreault (1999)
Opportunistic behavior	• is defined as the crafty quest to achieve their own interests over others.	Farina & Gouvêa (2012)

Table 1 – Aspects of Relationship Marketing
Source: Prepared by the authors.

With the advent of relationship marketing it has been recognized that there are two basic differences in relationships: discrete transactions and relational exchanges. The relational exchanges, which are of interest to this study, are the collaborative exchanges characterized by proximity links, information exchange and social exchanges (Day, 2000). When exchanges reach the collaborative stage, they have a greater connection, information is privileged, and a social link is created that engenders commitment and results in long-term relationships (Hutt & Speh, 2010).

These collaborative relationships have been studied as an essential component for the formulation of strategies to obtain competitive advantage (Larentis & Slongo, 2008; Macedo, Martins, Rossoni, & Martins, 2017), since it is based on trust and contributes to the formation of social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

Competitive advantage, in turn, can be developed if the company knows how to efficiently perform a set of activities in order to obtain lower costs than its competitors or to organize its activities in order to deliver a differentiated value to clients (Porter, 1991). And it can evolve into a sustainable competitive advantage, which reflects the company's ability to maintain an acquired advantage "by generating a perennial positive impact on the company's performance" (Tunes & Monteiro, 2017, p.300).

Using the proposal of Morgan and Hunt (1994), one can use the term clients for the other party involved in the relational exchange. For much of what is necessary, whether tangible or intangible (knowledge, reciprocity, empathy), can only be obtained from others (Nahapiet, 2014). For this, it is necessary to understand the relational exchanges.

Social exchange theory

In order to understand the complexity of relationships, marketing utilized various theoretical sources and disciplines such as Industrial Economics, Political Science, Social Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology (Rocha & Luce, 2006). The authors state that from these theoretical sources it is possible to understand the study of relationships with the use of "social exchange theory" (Rocha & Luce, 2006, p.88).

The theory of social exchanges, developed in 1958 by Homans, provides support in understanding the behavior of the actors involved in social exchanges. For the author, the parties involved in the exchange seek not only the exchange of resources but also benefits. These benefits may be monetary or not, such as love, esteem, affection, approval (Homans, 1958). In 1964, Blau adds more information to the social exchange theory. He compares economic exchanges and social exchanges. According to the author, only social exchanges imply future obligations and tend to generate feelings of personal obligations, gratitude and trust. Blau (1964) further explains that because social exchanges do not have an exact price, in terms of being paid for by a single means, they imply long-term social relations.

Nahapiet (2014) lists two important characteristics of relationships: appropriability, which recognizes that a contact can represent the relational exchange at an opportune time; and reciprocity, which is the expectation of mutual exchange. Appropriability is also understood as social connections made and can be used for purposes other than the original (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Coleman, 1988). The importance of appropriability is that it suggests varied opportunities starting at social connections (Nahapiet, 2014). And reciprocity is seen as a principle that corroborates social exchanges, including interorganizational relations (Nahapiet, 2014).

Nowadays the social exchange theory dominates research among relationships in the perspective of networks (Zhaoquan & Yi, 2014). The authors state that the social exchange theory is adopted to understand the influences of the interaction among companies. Based on this, one can draw a parallel between the social exchange theory and relationship marketing. Given that relationship marketing seeks to establish and maintain successful relational exchanges (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) between the two parties involved (Callaghan et al., 1995) with long-standing relationships (Wilson, 1995), characterized by exchanges non-monetary (Day, 2000). Beyond the understanding of relational exchanges, it is important to understand the relations among competing companies a little more.

Relations among competing companies

The relations among competing companies that were initially based on competition have passed to be based on cooperation, due to a number of factors, such as increased competition, scarce resources, etc. (Bleeke & Ernst, 1993; Solomon, 1992). Thereby, global companies have realized that they must collaborate to compete and that competition requires cooperation (Solomon, 1992). That is, to be an effective competitor, it becomes important to be a good cooperator (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Thus, companies began to cooperate in certain situations in order to obtain collective gains, which would hardly be obtained in an individualized way.

In relations among competitors, companies can be seen only as competitors or as cooperators, thus occurring a duality in every relationship - by virtue of the dynamics of concurrent elements of competition and cooperation (Nalebuff & Brandenburger, 1996). Although they traditionally represent opposing poles, alternatives must be found to force coexistence, because when this occurs, companies benefit from duality (Doz & Hamel, 2000).

The company strategy definition is linked to the identification of the competitive elements and cooperation in their relations with other organizations. Thus, cooperation allows organizations to share costs and benefits, reducing the learning curve (Nalebuff & Brandenburger, 1996).

Competition relations with cooperation came to be identified as co-opetition (Nalebuff & Brandenburger, 1996). In this way, co-opetition is pointed out as a key factor for the companies success (Cygler & Sroka, 2017). Galdeano-Gómez, Pérez-Mesa and Aznar-Sánchez (2016) affirm that cooperation strategies among competitors have positive effects, especially when competitors unite because of a supplier with much power. Macedo, Martins, Rossoni and Martins (2017) assure that the competitors who commit themselves to a horizontal relationship realize that the accomplishment of joint activities helps to strengthen the business.

Although reports on co-operation among competitors have been in place since the 1980s, these relationships have not been analyzed to the same extent as vertical relations with clients and / or suppliers (Bengtsson & Kock, 1999). This is because, according to the authors, horizontal relations are informal, invisible and constructed in social exchanges and of information, while vertical relations involve activities, resources and economic exchanges.

It is foolish to think that only large companies enter into a co-opetition relationship, as shown by Flanagan, Lepisto and Ofstein (2018). The authors investigated the collaborative relationship among small breweries, which recommended / promoted their competitors to their own clients. Thus, it was possible to identify that small companies, still in the beginning of their activities, manage to overcome the adversities of the market through collaborative relationships with their competitors.

In the relational exchanges described by Morgan and Hunt (1994), there is a prominence for the relationship among competitors. Likewise, Hunt, Lambe and Wittmann (2002) emphasize the importance of strategic alliances between companies and their competitors. These authors draw attention to the different types of resources accessed by companies, such as financial, physical, legal, human, organizational, informational, being one of the most important, the relational resource that represents relations with other companies.

Strategic alliances or networks are characterized by reciprocal communication (Powell, 1990) and by continuous exchanges (Podolny & Page, 1998; Powell, 1990). Networks can be defined by the union of competing companies in long-term relationships (Thorelli, 1986) with the aim of gaining or maintaining competitive advantage (Jarillo, 1988).

One way to understand competitive advantage is through relations among companies (Dyer & Singh, 1998).

Therefore, in order to be possible to understand the behavior of competing companies, the aspects of relational exchanges are addressed in order to explain the phenomenon of interorganizational relations. Thus, the definitions of aspects related to relational exchanges are presented.

Cooperation

Cooperation can be a low-cost strategy for companies to achieve competitive advantage (Hamel et al., 1989). Larentis and Slongo (2008) argue that cooperative relationships, increasingly cited, may be a competitive advantage strategy through which organizations seek partnerships with other organizations. In this sense, cooperative relations are greater between competing and networked companies (Centenaro & Laimer, 2017). And for Larentis and Slongo (2008: 218), cooperation is a consequence of trust and commitment, that is, the results indicate a "positive and meaningful relationship with sustainable competitive advantages based on the relationship".

The difficulty dealing with competitiveness is a factor that causes companies to cooperate with each other (Balestrin & Verschoore, 2008). However, cooperation only works if both companies pursue mutual objectives that otherwise could not be achieved (Farina & Gouvêa, 2012). In addition, it is through cooperation that actors can learn about each other, participate in common projects, share creative solutions (Bengtsson & Kock, 1999). This cooperative relationship among companies, in pursuit of mutual objectives, increases the perception of compatibility among the companies, resulting in feelings of satisfaction with the partnership (Anderson & Narus, 1990). Partnerships, characterized by cooperation among the actors, become effective in the development of idiosyncratic resources, which leads to a greater chance of keeping the relationship (Hunt et al., 2002).

In cooperation, the exchanges are frequent, usually the social exchanges and of information that are based on social norms and trust (Bengtsson & Kock, 1999), which are directly affected by the trust and commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Since cooperation can occur with companies regardless of size and resources limitation (Flanagan et al., 2018). In addition, situations such as company culture, relationship time, the form how actors move, can influence cooperation (Wilson, 1995). Based on the arguments presented, the following proposition is formulated:

Proposition 1: Cooperation has a positive influence on the relations among competing companies.

Trust

Morgan and Hunt (1994) argue that trust in the relationship among partners occurs when: (i) the offer of benefits is superior to the offer of alternative partners; (ii) is higher when partners have similar values; (iii) share valuable information; and (iv) partners avoid opportunistic behavior in the relationship. Thus, the greater the confidence, the greater the likelihood of maintaining a long-term relationship (Sin et al., 2005).

Trust is a fundamental item for the construction of relationships, so it is included in several models of relationships (Wilson, 1995). Therefore, according to the author, trust involves the belief that the partner in the relationship will act in the best interest of both. As exchanges are also composed of symbolic elements, trust becomes a fundamental element of the relationships pursue by relationship marketing (Lourenço & Pereira, 2011). Therefore, trust is considered as the propellant to establish lasting relationships (Silva, Gaspar, Farina, & de Siqueira, 2014).

Macedo et al. (2017) conducted a study of trust in (competing) horizontal relations and identified that it is more significant than trust in vertical relations (clients and suppliers). The authors conclude that because of the proximity of competitors, they maintain ties of social relationships that can attenuate external competition and capture the benefit of social capital. Therefore, the following proposition is developed:

Proposition 2: Trust has a positive influence on the relations among competing companies.

Shared values

The values shared among the companies, contribute to the intention to perform relational exchanges, because there are common desires and therefore actions can be taken together (Morgan & Hunt, 1994)). When there are shared values, trust and commitment are established to the actors' development (Farina & Gouvêa, 2012; Larentis & Slongo, 2008). In the study by Abbasi et al., (2016), significance was found in the relationship between shared values and the desire to continue the relationship.

Shared values directly influence both trust and commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In this sense, Farina and Gouvêa (2012) corroborate with their findings, that is, shared values positively influence trust. Thus, the following proposition was elaborated:

Proposition 3: Shared values act positively in relations among competing companies.

Commitment

Commitment with the relation was considered to be the strongest determinant of the satisfaction and continuity of alliance partners (Ramaseshan & Loo, 1998, Wilson, 1995). It also influences commitment and trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In the study by Farina and Gouvêa (2012), the commitment showed a significant relationship with cooperation.

Commitment is important in understanding the strength of a relationship (Ndubisi, 2004). In addition, assumed commitment brings future benefits to partners (Wilson, 1995). Thus, the following proposition is formulated:

Proposition 4: Commitment has a positive influence on the relations among competing companies.

Communication

The communication role in the relationship is to facilitate understanding among partners and improve their collaboration (Ramaseshan & Loo, 1998). Communication precedes trust and aims at the formal and informal exchange of relevant information (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and timely for relationship (Sin et al., 2005) among partners.

The influence of communication on trust was significant in the research conducted by Farina and Gouvêa (2012). With this, it becomes pertinent that communication is an important factor for the connection among the actors (Balestrin & Vargas, 2003). Based on this information, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Proposition 5: Communication has a positive influence on the relations among competing companies.

Coercive power

Power and dependency are distributed equally among cooperating competitors (Bengtsson & Kock, 1999). But these are influenced by the proximity or distance among the actors (Bengtsson & Kock, 1999). However, organizations with higher power can act in a way that exploits weaker partners (Ramaseshan & Loo, 1998).

The coercive power can generate fear, resentment and a greater propensity to leave the relationship, since it is based on the forced submission of the weaker actor in the relation (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Farina and Gouvêa (2012) tested the hypothesis that power has a negative influence on confidence, but this hypothesis was not significant. On the other hand, Martins et al. (2016) have found a positive relationship between power and cooperation. Thus, the following search proposition is presented:

Proposition 6: The coercive power acts in a negative way in the relations among competing companies.

Empathy

Empathy empowers the relationship to remain, reducing the need for legal means of compliance, as it makes the actors in the relationship treat others as they would like to be treated (Ndubisi, 2004). It is a necessary condition to promote a positive relationship among the parties (Cannon & Perreault, 1999), because it allows the parties to see the point of view of the other (Yau et al., 2000).

Empathy directly promotes relationship marketing because it is related to commitment that is enhanced as relationships grow (Ndubisi, 2004). Sin et al. (2005) state, based on their findings, that empathy is important for long-term relationships. Thus, the following proposition is formulated:

Proposition 7: Empathy has a positive influence on relations among competing companies.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is the process of interaction and sharing among the parties (Yoganathan, Jebarajakirthy, & Thaichon, 2015). Reciprocity demonstrates the ability of a company to be willing to do something for another in favor of a good relationship among them (Stanko, Bonner, & Calantone, 2007). According to the authors, reciprocity has a positive and significant influence on commitment. Abbasi et al. (2016), found significance in the relations between reciprocity and propensity to continue the relationship.

Relationship marketing shows that the moral contract, like reciprocity, continues to be important in exchange relationships (Lourenço & Pereira, 2011). Alves and Pereira (2013) emphasize that many companies believe in the principle of reciprocity and end up acting defensively if some principle is violated. Rossi (2008) argues that reciprocity positively influences trust among partners and that their presence is justified by the need to exchange resources among partners. Cannon and Perreault (1999) contribute by saying that reciprocity is an important factor and can determine success or failure among relationships with other actors, since reciprocal agreement is indicative of cooperation. Thus, the following proposition is elaborated:

Proposition 8: Reciprocity has a positive influence on relations among competing companies.

Comparison level of alternatives

The comparison of alternatives may lead to dependence due to the lack of adequate alternatives (Wilson & Vlosky, 1997) or in function of the investments made (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The lack of alternatives can also be a source of uncertainty (Cannon & Perreault, 1999). This promotes collaboration in search of mutual benefits for the organizations (Wilson & Vlosky, 1997). Moreover, when companies invest together, they both have a greater interest in maintaining the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Thus, the scarcity of alternatives increases the preference for the available alternative (M. John, Melis, Read, Rossano, & Tomasello, 2018). The increase in preference for the alternative is based on the fear of losing an opportunity, especially when dealing with uncertainties in the presence of competitors.

On the other hand, the excess of alternatives can generate uncertainties and dependence, since it makes it difficult to evaluate all the alternatives (Cannon & Perreault, 1999). Wilson (1995) states that if there is a great variety of alternatives, within the relationship, high quality, the propensity to leave the relationship is low. But if the quality of the alternatives is low the chance of leaving the relationship will be high. Thus, the following proposition is presented:

Proposition 9: The comparison level of alternatives acts in a negative way in the relations among competing companies.

Opportunistic behavior

Opportunistic behavior is a negative point in relations among companies. Despite the importance of relationship as a form of competitive advantage, opportunistic behavior may become a weak point (Cannon, Achrol, & Gundlach, 2000). It is more easily perceived and manifested more easily in long-term relationships (Gibbons, 1999).

Opportunistic behavior can occur in two ways: by active effort, that is, by facts alteration to achieve goals in favor of oneself; or by inaction, which is the retention of efforts to obtain something, that is, by the passive stance of the actor because the benefit may not be of interest to the same (G. John, 1984). This behavior can be detrimental to the relationship when several mechanisms are created to protect the relationship from opportunism, which weakens the relational exchange (Cannon et al., 2000, John, 1984).

Lancastre and Lages (2006) point out that opportunistic behavior negatively affects cooperation. In addition, it directly affects trust and commitment indirectly (Farina & Gouvêa, 2012). Moreover, organizations that act opportunistically can hardly establish long-term relationships (Pereira et al., 2010). Based on these studies, the following proposition is proposed:

Proposition 10: Opportunistic behavior has a negative influence on relations among competing companies.

Based on the propositions formulated, the conceptual model is presented to understand the relational exchanges among competing companies, starting from relationship marketing and the social exchange theory.

Conceptual model

Interorganizational relations have been an increasingly important unit of analysis for understanding competitive advantage (Dyer & Singh, 1998). In the field of interorganizational relations, relationship marketing is used to explain long-term relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Although relationship marketing has been little used for the analysis of relations among competing companies, in spite of the importance of the aspects that base the relational exchanges and that make possible to improve the understanding of the phenomena that occur in interorganizational relations. Thus, based on the arguments presented and the formulated propositions, the conceptual model for the application of relationship marketing in the understanding of relations among competing companies is presented (Figure 2):

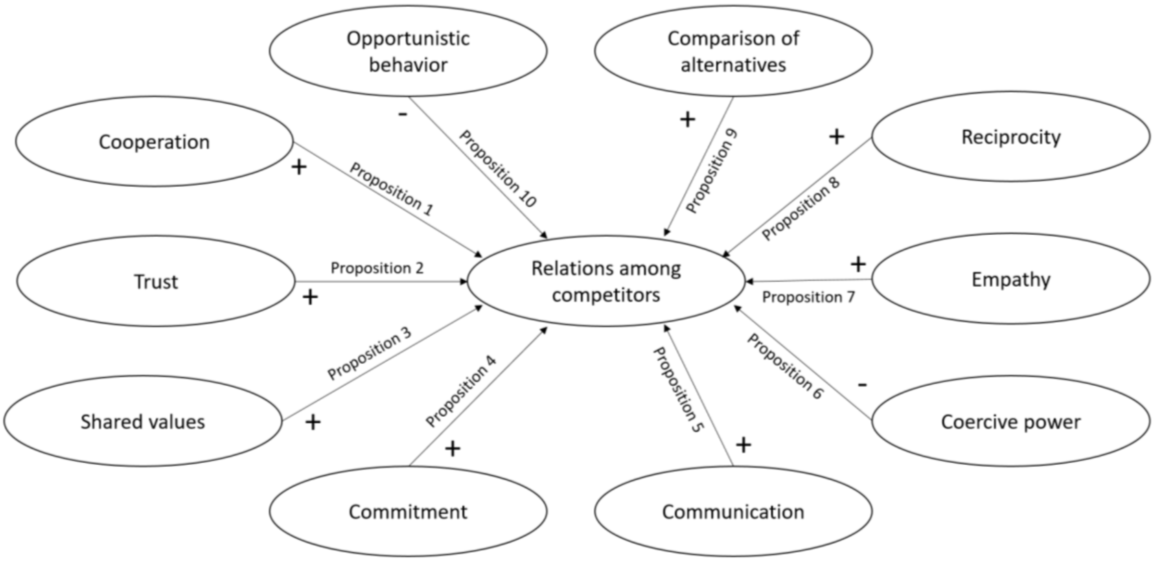

Figure 2 – Conceptual model proposed for relations among competing companies
Source: Prepared by the authors.

According to the proposed model and the research results that investigated the relations between companies and clients and / or suppliers, it is proposed that in relations among competing companies: cooperation, trust, shared values, commitment, communication, empathy and reciprocity influence positively; and coercive power, comparison of alternatives and opportunistic behavior influence negatively.

CONCLUSION

With support in the social exchange theory, the present theoretical essay tried to make a connection between the aspects of relationship marketing and the social exchange theory to explain the long-term relations among competing companies. In addition, this paper aims to propose the use of relationship marketing in relations among competing companies, as in the case of networks or strategic alliances. This is because relational exchanges that occur in networks can be a source of competitive advantage, which reinforces the need to address this type of relationship more effectively.

Relations among competing companies are based on relational exchanges, that is, non-monetary and characterized by appropriability and reciprocity. Therefore, it is understood that it is possible to apply relationship marketing to this type of interorganizational relations. This is because relationship marketing seeks to establish and maintain successful relational exchanges. If in the relations among competing companies there are exchanges, which promote competitive advantage, and the objective is that these relationships will last in the long term, it is possible to use relationship marketing.

It can be concluded that the relations among competing companies can also be studied with the use of relationship marketing, as proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994). However, it is necessary to test empirically the propositions formulated to verify if they are applied in the relations among competing companies.

Thus, this study contributes to the proposition of a conceptual model for the application of relationship marketing concepts as a theoretical lens to understand the phenomenon of relations among competing companies. Thus, the proposed conceptual model aims to help in the understanding of the competing companies behavior inserted in interorganizational relations. That is, this research aims to provide a conceptual basis for new research that provides empirical evidence and corroborate to explain the phenomenon. As proposed by Santos and Baptista (2015), the development of theoretical references and the proposition of models is fundamental for the understanding of the phenomena on the relations among competing companies.

As a managerial contribution, this study provides support for the maintenance of relations among competing companies, making it possible to understand the variables that influence the behavior of companies inserted in interorganizational relations.

However, the study stimulates the discussion and development of new research so that relations among competing companies can be analyzed empirically, including through relationship marketing. Thus, the proposed conceptual model can help in the understanding of the companies behavior, explaining the phenomenon of the relations among competing companies.

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