

The Effect Of Relationship Quality On Attitude Mediated By Word Of Mouth In The Perspective Of Relationship Marketing (A Case Study In The Election Of The Member Of The Regional People's Representative Council Of Lampung, Indonesia)

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Abstract

The concept of relationship quality has been substantially recognized in the relationship marketing literature; however, no research identifies the causality between the relationship quality of regional people's representative council and public attitudes. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the effect of relationship quality among members of the regional people's representative council on public attitudes mediated by word of mouth. In this study, 198 respondents were selected as the samples by using purposive random sampling technique through a questionnaire. Data were analyzed using a quantitative analysis software named SEM. The results show that the relationship quality positively affects word of mouth and attitudes. Also, word of mouth positively affects attitudes. Furthermore, it was found that word of mouth fully mediates the effects of relationship quality on attitudes. The limitation in this study is the cross-sectional research design implemented to test the hypothesis model using SEM. Future researches may use different methodologies, such as longitudinal studies to examine the dynamic relationship between the constructs in this study. This study implies that the good relationship quality built by members of the regional people's representative council will form a positive perception or attitude that can build high-quality relationships with the community. The most important finding of this study is that the word of mouth has a mediating effect on the relationship between the quality of the relationship among the members of the regional people's representative council and the attitude of the people of Lampung Province. This study contributes significantly to marketing theory and practice due to the diversity and fragmentation in Lampung Province in religion, belief, and ethnicity.

Keywords: relationship quality, attitude, word of mouth

Introduction

Relationship Marketing (RM) has received a lot of attention for its potential to provide greater customer value by building customer relationships (Gronroos, 1994; Prayag et al., 2019). Relationship quality is one of the aspects of relationship marketing (Prayag et al., 2019) which is good if it brings satisfaction, commitment, and trust in the relationship (Palmatier et al., 2006). On

the other hand, relationship quality is the main producing factor in building relationships with consumers that will form loyalty (Anderson et al., 1994; Kousheshi et al., 2019; Palmatier et al., 2006).

Almomani (2019), Bejou et al. (1996), and Bojei & Alwie (2010) stated that relationship quality was an extension of the relationship marketing concept considered as successful long-term

relationships between producers and consumers. Likewise, Jarvelin & Lehtinen (1996) and Wong & Sohal (2002) stated that the relationship quality was the consumer's perception of how well the relationship that has been established with the producer to meet consumers' desires was, so that consumers built an impression of the values provided by the company as a whole. Therefore, good relationship quality is considered beneficial, including increasing consumers' trust in producers consistently and building successful long-term relationships (Bejou et al., 1996; Crosby et al., 1990; Wong & Sohal, 2002).

Literature review on relationship quality with broad themes in relationship marketing research reveals that there are antecedents and consequences of relationship quality, although consensus on the effect of relationship quality between producers and consumers is weak (Segarra-Moliner et al., 2013). Besides, Segarra-Moliner et al. (2013) and Sheth & Parvatiyar (1995) revealed that the determining relationship quality had become a fundamental precursor to manage relationship marketing, not only based on managerial and practical objectives, but also from a conceptual or theoretical perspective. The relationship quality has been widely applied to the profit-oriented business sector, particularly in the manufacturing sector (Chong Tan et al., 2011), banking sector (Izogo et al., 2016, 2017; Ledikwe et al., 2019), pharmaceutical sector (Almomani, 2019), and tourism sector (Alves et al., 2019). However, testing the antecedents and consequences of relationship quality has not been proven in the service sector, especially non-profit services; therefore, it is necessary to conduct several studies in this sector (Segarra-Moliner et al., 2013). Deb (2018) stated that researches on relationship quality in other sectors could strengthen the theoretical development of relationship marketing research and confirm the generalization of previous research results (Rootman et al., 2011).

Ngoma & Ntale (2019) stated that word of mouth would affect behavior. Likewise, Baber et al. (2016) stated that word of mouth would determine attitudes. Furthermore, Akrouf & Nagy (2018), Delafrooz et al. (2019), and Ngoma & Ntale (2019) added that good relationship quality would positively affect word of mouth and directly affect the formation of positive attitudes. This implies that word of mouth can mediate the effect of relationship quality on attitudes.

We have not found a research that discusses word of mouth mediating the quality of relationships and attitudes. Therefore, we examined the relationship referring to several opinions from the previous studies. In addition, this study aims to see the relationship between the relationship quality and public attitudes mediated by word of mouth in the public sector, especially the election of members of the Indonesian regional people's representative council in the perspective of relationship marketing. This research is expected to have a practical contribution, particularly for members of the Regional People's Representative Council to the community, so that they may encourage excellent communication through high-quality relationships and get positive feedback from the community through word of mouth. In addition, it is also expected to change the public's negative perceptions on the behavior of performance of members of the Regional People's Representative Council. Based on this explanation, the research model can be formulated as in Figure 1.

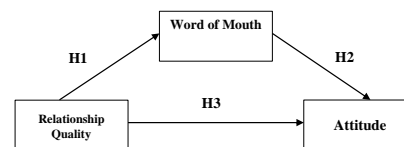


Figure 1. Research Framework

Literature Review

Relationship Marketing

The basis of relationship marketing began with the development of the symbiotic marketing concept by Adler (1966). Then, Berry (1983) coined the term relationship marketing in the service marketing literature. He argued that relationship marketing was related to producer relationship management in improving relationships with consumers, so that they could re-select products or services in the future. Relationship marketing aims to maintain sustainable relationships that can provide satisfaction to consumers during the service period by producers (Adomah-Afari and Maloreh-Nyamekye, 2018).

Various definitions of relationship marketing are expressed from various points of view. Grönroos (1990) and Kotler et al. (1996) defined relationship marketing as a commercial relationship between producers and consumers in forming, maintaining, and enhancing strong relationships. Besides, Landry (1998) stated that relationship marketing was a long-term relationship formed to obtain an image from consumers by forming a pattern of relationships in delivering simple information and services. Furthermore, Armstrong & Kotler (2007) concluded that relationship marketing was a process of improving the sustainable relationship between producers and consumers.

On the other hand, Achen (2019) and Morgan & Hunt (1994) revealed that relationship marketing was a marketing activity directed at developing and maintaining successful relationship exchanges on a large scale. Besides, Palmer (1994) argued that a relationship marketing strategy focused on the long-term relationship between producers and consumers. Likewise, Evans & Laskin (1994) argued that relationship marketing was a process of building long-term relationships in order for producers and consumers to be cooperative in achieving goals. In addition, Brey et al. (2007), Fam et al. (2004), Hennig-thurau et al. (2001), and Wu & Chen (2012) defined relationship marketing as a formal

behavior that encouraged the creation of reciprocal relationships between producers and consumers.

Relationship Quality

Relationship quality is one of the concepts of relationship marketing (Athanasopoulou, 2009; Crosby et al., 1990; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Prayag et al., 2019). According to Barry & Graca (2019), relationship marketing researchers need to pay attention to the relationship quality related to trust, conflict alignment, and communication behavior.

Although relationship quality has considered the role of informal institutions in corporate governance (Barry & Graca, 2019; Boddewyn & Doh, 2011; Estrin & Prevezer, 2011; Peng et al., 2008; Sauerwald & Peng, 2013), researches on relationship quality have not paid attention to the public sector in building relationships between internal and external consumers. Furthermore, Almomani (2019), Bejou et al. (1996), and Bojei & Alwie (2010) stated that relationship quality was an extension of relationship marketing considered as the success of building a relationship between consumers and producers. Besides, Harker (1999) and Morgan & Hunt (1994) described relationship quality as a targeted marketing activity that always proactively retained valuable customers.

Moreover, Ndubisi (2007) found that relationship quality ensured closeness between producers and consumers, allowing producers to better satisfy consumers' needs. There are several crucial reasons to understand relationship quality: 1) Relationship quality as a maintaining tool for consumer and producer relationship can be used as an effective solution to solve consumer welfare problems; 2) Relationship quality as a component of consumer loyalty is the most essential part in building attitudes (Kyoum Kim et al., 2011; Roberts et al., 2003; Wiesel et al., 2008).

Attitude

Attitude is part of the consumer affective component developed by Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) with the Theory of Reasoned Action which was then referred by several researchers and academics, such as Ajzen & Fishbein (2005), Katz (1960), and Mohd Isa et al. (2019). They defined attitude as an individual affective response in evaluating an object positively and negatively. In addition, Ajzen & Fishbein (1980) stated that attitude was the key factor in determining a consumer's future behavior in making or not making purchase decision.

Furthermore, the definition of developing attitude is argued by the following experts. Grace & O'Cass (2005), Han et al. (2019), and Low & Lamb (2000) argued that attitude was a consumer's evaluation of the overall product or service that occurred as a result of consumer satisfaction and perceptions. On the other hand, Chen & Wells (1999) and Limbu et al. (2012) defined attitude as an individual's tendency to respond to activities in positive and negative contexts.

Meanwhile, Batra & Ahtola (1991), Holbrook & Hirschman (1982), and Lee & Goudeau (2014) stated that consumer attitudes toward the election consisted of two components, namely 1) Utilitarian which focused on benefits and needs and 2) Hedonic which was based on emotional satisfaction and experience. Although those two components are often debated, they are related in building attitudes (Babin et al., 1994; Lee and Goudeau, 2014; Scarpi, 2006). Furthermore, Allport (1935), Cocolas et al. (2020), and Thurstone (1928) stated that attitude was an individual's basic construction in evaluating a situation. In addition, Ajzen (2001), Akhgari et al. (2018), Argyriou & Melewar (2011), Eagly & Chaiken (2007), and Homer (2008) stated that individuals' attitudes were formed based on their confidence in services and the relationship quality.

Word of Mouth

In the 1960s, Arndt (1967) carried out a research on word of mouth and assumed word of mouth as a marketing phenomenon to get consumers positively. Furthermore, Bansal & Voyer (2000), Berman (2016), Schmitt et al. (2011), and Sundermann (2018) proved that word of mouth was more effective than other marketing tools. Word of mouth is an intangible service; however, it can have a greater impact than tangible services (Sundermann, 2018; Webster, 1991; Zeithaml et al., 1993).

According to King et al. (2014), word of mouth has evolved from a traditional form to an electronic form. As it is known, electronic word of mouth has gone through various social media to provide information to many more people. Babić Rosario et al. (2016), Berger (2014), Floyd et al. (2014), Lu et al. (2014), and Tan & Lee (2019) said that experience-based word of mouth had an essential influence on consumer behavior. Equally important, Söderlund & Mattsson (2015) argued that word of mouth was carried out voluntarily without any reward mechanism.

In addition, Gruen et al. (2006) and Matute et al. (2016) argued that word of mouth acted as a form of loyalty that could motivate consumers to one another with positive experiences (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2018; Nyffenegger et al., 2015; Papista & Dimitriadis, 2019). Word of mouth is an informal communication between two or more people to provide information voluntarily (W. G. Kim et al., 2001; Moslehpour et al., 2017).

Hypothesis Development

According to Arndt (1967), word of mouth is a marketing phenomenon to get consumers positively. Word of mouth can be recommendations, opinions, and suggestions communicated by consumers to other consumers (Day, 1971). Word of mouth delivered can be in the form of positive and negative news, depending on the relationship quality between producers and consumers. A better relationship quality will also affect the word of mouth shared by these

consumers. This is in line with the results of researches by Brown et al. (2005), Lien & Cao (2014), Molinari et al. (2008), Ng et al. (2011), Papista & Dimitriadis (2019), and van Tonder et al. (2018) which showed that relationship quality had a positive influence on word of mouth. From this description, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: relationship quality affects word of mouth

Word of mouth is believed to be more effective than other marketing tools in promoting a product or service (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Berman, 2016; Schmitt et al., 2011; Sundermann, 2018). Martin & Lueg (2013) stated that word of mouth was closely related to consumer attitudes, which could influence consumer behavior. Furthermore, Baber et al. (2016) argued that attitude was an essential aspect that formed consumer behavior. Besides, Al-Wugayan (2019) defined word of mouth as an interpersonal communication aiming at introducing oneself, regulating emotions, obtaining information, building social relationship, and inviting others (Berger, 2013, 2014). Based on this statement, it can be concluded that word of mouth has a significant influence on attitude, as shown by the findings of Baber et al. (2016) and Podnar & Javernik (2012). From this description, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Word of mouth affects attitude

Attitude is a consumer's assessment of the producer's service that is reflected in relationship quality (Grace & O'Cass, 2005). The assessment can show consumer behavior in making a decision. Furthermore, Ndubisi (2007) argued that relationship quality ensured closeness between producers and consumers, allowing producers to better satisfy consumer needs. It is expected that the services provided by producers can give a positive attitude to consumers that make them re-select the products or services produced by such producers. This statement is supported by the results of researches by Kyoum Kim et al. (2011)

and Silva et al. (2017) that relationship quality has a positive effect on attitudes. From this description, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: relationship quality positively affects attitude

Harrison-Walker (2001) defined word of mouth as informal communication among people about a product or service. Furthermore, Ngoma & Ntale (2019) stated that word of mouth would form behavior. On the other hand, Baber et al. (2016) stated that word of mouth would form attitude. In addition, Kim & Cha (2002) stated that relationship quality was a perception involving consumers' emotion and feeling towards the services provided by the producer. Moreover, Akrouf & Nagy (2018) stated that good relationship quality would affect word of mouth which had a direct effect on attitude (Jalilvand et al., 2012). Then, Ajzen & Fishbein (1980) stated that attitude was the key in determining a consumer's future behavior in making or not making purchase decision. From this description, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Word of mouth mediates the effect of relationship quality on attitude.

Methodology

In this study, we used a non-probability sampling technique, specifically the purposive sampling method, defined as a unit chosen at random without replacing a specific portion of the population to obtain samples that will provide the best estimation of the selected population parameter (Guarte & Barrios, 2006). The unit of analysis in this study is the people who have the right to vote. Furthermore, the determination of the minimum sample size in this study refers to the statement from Kline (2005). Kline (2005) stated that the minimum number of samples required for SEM estimation was > 200. According to Hair et al. (2010), the representative sample size for using SEM analysis is at least 5 or 10 times the number of parameters to be estimated. In this study, the

number of parameters is 19; therefore, the minimum number of samples is $19 \times 10 = 190$.

The questionnaire was measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 7 = “Strongly Agree”. Relationship quality was measured by nine items (Li, 2015). Word of mouth was measured by five items (Mohd Isa et al., 2019). Attitude was measured by five items (Kim et al., 2019). Then, data were analyzed using SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) technique with Lisrel 8.80 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1996).

Results

Model Measurement

The results of the model fit test show that $\chi^2 / df = 6.17$, GFI = 0.67, AGFI = 0.58, and RMSEA = 0.16 indicate marginal fit, while CFI = 0.94, NFI = 0.93, NNFI = 0.93, IFI = 0.94, RFI = 0.91, and ECVI = 5.08 show good fit. Furthermore, the results of the validity and reliability tests are described in the following table.

Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	CR	VE
Relationship Quality	RQ1	0.60		
	RQ2	0.80		
	RQ3	0.83		
	RQ4	0.89		
	RQ5	0.88	0.93	0.61
	RQ6	0.83		
	RQ7	0.68		
	RQ8	0.86		
	RQ9	0.61		
Word of Mouth	WOM1	0.84		
	WOM2	0.87		
	WOM3	0.87	0.94	0.77
	WOM4	0.91		
	WOM5	0.90		
Attitude	ATT1	0.89		
	ATT2	0.92	0.93	0.72
	ATT3	0.74		

ATT4	0.77
ATT5	0.91

Structural Model

The test results in this study can be seen in Figure 2 and Figure 3. Then, the explanation of the structural model will be described in hypothesis testing.

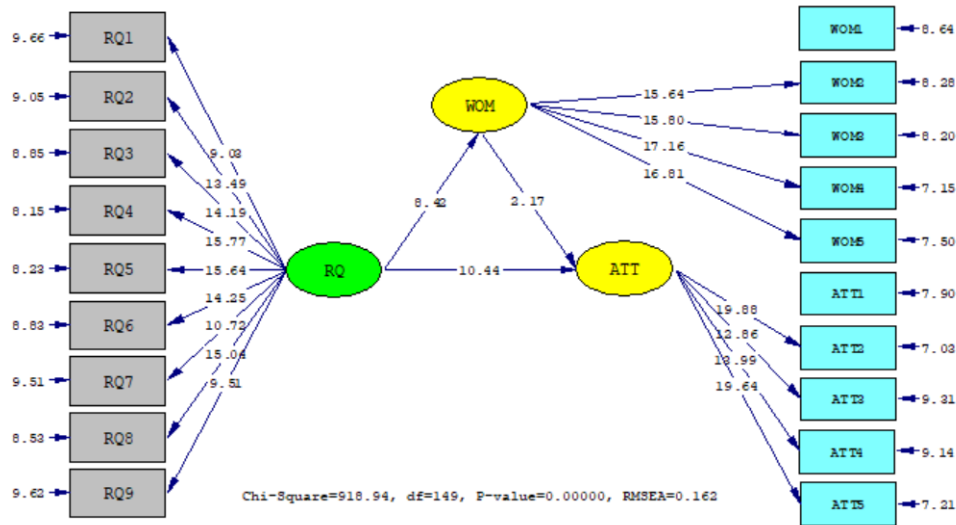


Figure 2. Lisrel Model (T-value)

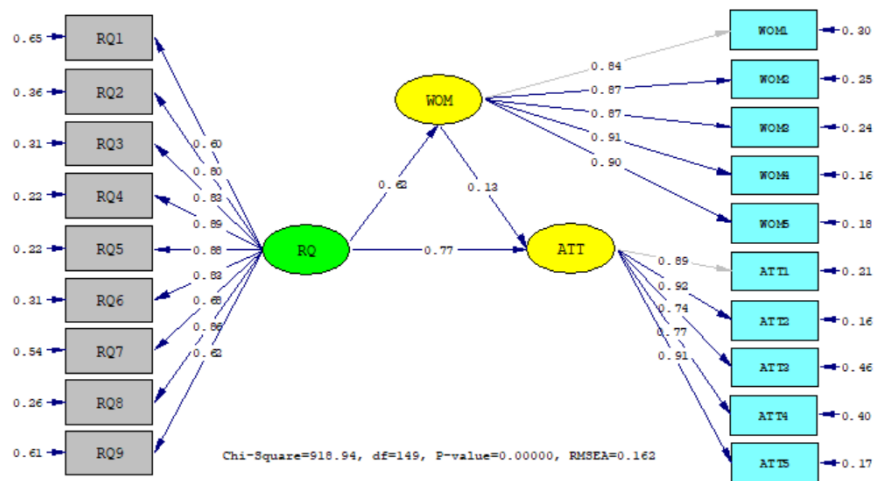


Figure 3. Lisrel Model (Standardized Solution)

Hypothesis Testing

Relationship Quality and Word of Mouth

The first hypothesis states that relationship quality affects word of mouth. The test results indicate that relationship quality has a positive and

significant influence on word of mouth. It can be seen from the t-value of $8.42 > 1.96$, $p < 0.01$, and $\beta = 0.62$. Therefore, it can be concluded that hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Relationship Quality and Attitude

The second hypothesis states that relationship quality affects attitude. The test results indicate that the relationship quality has a positive and significant influence on attitude. It can be seen from the t-value of $10.44 > 1.96$, $p < 0.01$, and $\beta = 0.77$. Therefore, it can be concluded that hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Word of Mouth and Attitude

The third hypothesis states that word of mouth affects attitude. The test results indicate that word of mouth has a positive and significant influence on attitude. It can be seen from the t-value of $2.17 > 1.96$, $p < 0.01$, and $\beta = 0.13$. Therefore, it can be concluded that hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Word of Mouth Mediates Relationship Quality and Attitude

The fourth hypothesis states that word of mouth mediates the influence of relationship quality on attitude. The test results show that the indirect effect of relationship quality on attitudes through word of mouth is 0.08 ($\beta = 0.62 \times 0.13 = 0.08$, $p < 0.01$), while the direct effect of relationship quality on attitude is 0.77 . The indirect effect is lower than the direct effect. Therefore, it can be concluded that hypothesis 4 is accepted.

Conclusion and Suggestion

As it is known, relationship quality is one of the concepts of relationship marketing (Athanasopoulou, 2009; Crosby et al., 1990; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Prayag et al., 2019). Although relationship quality has considered the role of informal institutions in corporate governance (Barry & Graca, 2019; Boddewyn & Doh, 2011; Estrin & Prevezer, 2011; Peng et al.,

2008; Sauerwald & Peng, 2013), researches on relationship quality have not paid attention to the public sector in building relationship between internal and external consumers. Therefore, this study illustrates how people's attitudes regarding the relationship quality that has been formed so far by both candidates and elected members of the regional people's representative council are.

Contextually, it is well known that the public's opinion toward the members of the regional people's representative council is negative. This is shown by protests or demonstrations carried out by the people. For example, thousands of students and members of the public marched to the DPR (people's representative council) building in September 2019 to protest the ratification of the revision of the KPK law and plans to approve a number of contentious laws. Furthermore, the people also held an action in front of the DPR building, where the masses protested the Draft Criminal Code (RKUHP), the Correctional Bill, the Land Bill, the Mineral and Coal Mining Bill, and the Manpower Bill. They also urged that the Bill on the Elimination of Sexual Violence should be ratified immediately (Persada, 2019). This condition indicates that the people's representative council has not been able to absorb the aspirations of the people; therefore, the relationship quality between them can be said to be poor.

The results of this research indicate that the relationship quality that is formed well will produce a positive attitude that increases public's trust in members of the regional people's representative council. However, this research does not examine the trust variable. For future research, this research can be replicated by adding the trust variable in other sectors. In addition, future research may use different methodologies, such as longitudinal studies to examine the dynamic relationship between the constructs in this study.

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