

Trust and Commitment in Professional Service Marketing Relationships in Business-to-Business Markets

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This paper examines two very important concepts in marketing relationships – trust and commitment – whereby commitment is regarded as consisting of three components: affective, calculative and normative. The context of this study is professional services in a business-to-business market, more specifically the marketing research industry in Slovenia. The results show that trust in the marketing research provider and its work is very high among interviewed clients. The clients also appear to be affectively committed to the relationship with the provider, whereas calculative and normative commitment are low. The study's results confirm the positive influence of trust on affective commitment and the weak negative influence of trust on calculative commitment.

Key Words: trust, affective commitment, calculative commitment, normative commitment, business-to-business markets

JEL Classification: M31, M39

Introduction

In the last 20 years a significant change has occurred in the way companies in business-to-business markets approach their suppliers and buyers (Morris et al. 1998; Håkansson and Snehota 1998; Håkansson et al. 2004). Firms are increasingly looking to have fewer, yet more intense relationships with their partners (Geyskens et al. 1998). In most exchanges in the business-to-business market, achieving a sale is not the completion of a single effort but an event taking place within a broader endeavour to build and maintain a long-term relationship with the customer and ensure that sales keep coming. Therefore, the main research question is what influences the customer's willingness to remain with the existing supplier and further to advance the relationship by investing in strengthening ties with the supplier (Gounaris 2005). Within this broader research stream, trust and commitment are two highly interrelated concepts (Kumar et al. 1995) which stimulate a relational bond between the supplier and the customer.

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Han et al. (1993) found that both buyers and sellers in business-to-business markets see trust as being by far the most important factor of a good relationship. Companies began to realise that in order to be competitive in the market one has to be a trusted co-operator (Morgan and Hunt 1994). The need for trust arises in any supplier-client marketing relationship characterised by a high degree of risk, uncertainty, and/or a lack of knowledge or information on the part of the interacting party (Mayer et al. 1995). This need for trust is particularly important in service industries, where risk and uncertainty are increased to the extent that the client is unable to examine a service before purchase (Parasuraman et al. 1985).

Besides trust, researchers recognise commitment as a central ingredient of establishing and maintaining long-term relationships (Dwyer et al. 1987; Geyskens et al. 1996; Gundlach et al. 1995; de Ruyter and Wetzels 1999; Håkansson and Snehota 1995; Kim and Frazier 1997b; Rylander et al. 1997; Tellefsen and Thomas 2005). Commitment is also one of the most common dependent variables used in buyer-seller relationship studies (Wilson 1995). While researchers agree on the importance of this construct, there are differences in its conceptualisation. Most proposed relationship models in marketing have conceptualised and operationalised commitment as a global construct. However, researchers observing relationships in organisational and social psychology have pointed out three distinct motivations (affective, calculative/continuance and normative) that underlie the desire for continuity (Allen and Meyer 1990; Adams and Jones 1997) and over the last decade some researchers (Kumar et al. 1994; de Ruyter and Semeijn 2002; de Ruyter and Wetzels 1999; de Ruyter et al. 2001; Gilliland and Bello 2002; Gounaris 2005; Bansal et al. 2004; Berghäll 2003; Kim and Frazier 1997a; 1997b; Kelly, 2004) have transferred this framework to marketing relationships. Geyskens et al. (1996) pointed out that using the general expression 'commitment' to describe any of the three very different components creates confusion in the interpretation of theories, models and empirical findings related to commitment. At the same time, it limits our understanding of this problem and the variability of relations between the components of commitment and determinants and consequences of commitment studied in the literature (Kelly 2004; Kim and Frazier 1997b).

Geyskens et al. (1998) in their meta-analysis of studies about trust pointed out that the overwhelming emphasis has been on developing

and testing new theory rather than on establishing empirical generalisations. Thus, despite this extensive research no consensus has been established about the relationship between trust and other variables. The purpose of this study is to work towards establishing empirical generalisations by researching the relationship between trust and the components of commitment in professional services in business-to-business markets in a post-transitional economy. Although the relationship between trust and commitment measured as a one-dimensional construct has been over-researched and the results are almost unanimous (Geyskens et al. 1999), relatively little attention has been paid to relationships between trust and the components of commitment. In addition, almost all studies were conducted in the contexts of developed Western countries and there is a lack of studies in transitional or post-transitional economies examining commitment as consisting of three components and relating it to other relationship variables.

Trust and Commitment in Marketing Relationships

Trust is an essential relationship model building block and has often been defined as a belief that one relationship partner will act in the best interests of the other (Wilson 1995). It has also been referred to as the key element of successful relationship development (Naudé and Buttle 2000; Goodman and Dion 2001). Geyskens et al. (1998, 225) on the basis of a meta-analysis of studies about trust pointed out that most studies in marketing build on interpersonal research and define trust as 'the extent to which a firm believes that its exchange partner is honest and/or benevolent' or some variant thereof. Two definitions of trust very often cited are those by Moorman et al. (1992) and Morgan and Hunt (1994). Moorman et al. (1992, 82) define trust as 'a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence'. According to Morgan and Hunt (1994, 23), trust exists 'when one party has confidence in an exchange's partner reliability and integrity'. Their definition is similar to that proposed by Moorman et al. (1992) except that Morgan and Hunt leave out 'willingness' because they believe it does not add value to the definition. Doney and Cannon (1997, 36) built on social psychology literature and similarly defined trust as the 'perceived credibility and benevolence of a target of trust'.

This study adopts the definition of Moorman et al. (1992) who studied trust in relationships between suppliers and buyers of marketing research services. An important aspect of their definition is the concept of trust

as a belief, feeling or expectation about an exchange partner, which can be judged from the partner's expertise, reliability and intentions. This definition reflects two components of trust: credibility and benevolence. Credibility reflects the buyer's belief that the supplier has sufficient expertise to perform the job effectively and reliably. Benevolence reflects the extent of the buyer's belief that the seller's intentions and motives are beneficial to the buyer even when new conditions arise about which a commitment was not made (Ganesan 1994). Geyskens et al. (1998) also pointed out trust in the partner's honesty, which is one firm's belief that its partner is reliable, stands by its word, fulfils its promises and is sincere.

Commitment implies the importance of the relationship to the relationship partners and their desire to maintain the relationship in the future (Wilson 1995). Dwyer et al. (1987, 19) defined it as 'an implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity between exchange partners'. Moorman et al. (1992, 316) similarly proposed it is 'an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship'. What is common to the different definitions of commitment is that commitment is characterised by a disincentive to replace relationship partners (Young and Denize 1995).

Researchers have used a 'more is better' approach when studying commitment in marketing relationships (Fullerton 2003) and have focused on the common construct of commitment assuming that it is better for a company to have more committed buyers. This approach works if we define commitment as a construct directed at the identification and attachment that bonds a customer to the company (Morgan and Hunt 1994). However, marketing academics and practitioners now realise that commitment is a complex multidimensional construct that includes numerous components. On the basis of findings from the context of interpersonal relationships and organisational behaviour, Kumar et al. (1994) noted that (attitudinal) commitment consists of different components that have different influences on marketing relationships. These components are: affective commitment, calculative/continuance commitment and normative commitment. All these components of commitment pertain to psychological states but they originate from different motivations for maintaining a relationship (Geyskens et al. 1996). Allen and Meyer (1990) suggested we should understand affective, calculative/continuance and normative commitment as components and not types of commitment because the different levels of each can be present in the relationship between the employee and the organisation.

Affective commitment in marketing relationships, similarly as in the employee-organisation relationship, originates from identification, com-

mon values, attachment, involvement and similarity (Bansal et al. 2004; Fullerton 2003; Geyskens et al. 1996; Gruen et al. 2000). Affectively committed customers also continue the relationship because they like the provider and enjoy working with it (Fullerton 2005a; 2005b; Geyskens et al. 1996). On the other hand, *calculative (continuance) commitment* stems from the perceived structural constraints that bind a company to its partners and reflects some kind of negative motivation for continuing the relationship (Geyskens et al. 1996). It presents some kind of constraining force that develops in the presence of high switching costs or a perceived lack of alternative providers and binds the customer to the company out of need (Bansal et al. 2004; Fullerton 2003; 2005). *Normative commitment* reflects a force that binds a customer to the provider due to a perceived obligation (Bansal et al. 2004). Hackett et al. (1994) pointed out that this attitude develops on the basis of the internalisation of normative pressures that are used before or after entering the relationship. People who act morally feel they 'have to' act in a certain way because this is their obligation or duty (Etzioni 1988). Kumar et al. (1994) stated that a normatively committed firm continues the relationship because it feels it should do so due to moral imperatives.

Development of the Hypotheses

Several empirical studies have discovered the positive influence of trust on commitment that was measured as a global construct (Moorman et al. 1992; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Goodman and Dion 2001; Perry et al. 2002; Friman et al. 2002; Lohtia et al. 2005; Rodriguez and Wilson 2002; Tellefsen and Thomas 2005; Walter and Ritter 2003). Because many of the unidimensional conceptualisations of commitment in marketing research contexts have in fact tapped the affective dimension of commitment we already have some evidence that trust might act as a driver of this type of commitment. Researchers who conceptualised commitment with two or three components have discovered the positive influence of trust on affective commitment (Geyskens et al. 1996; Wetzels et al. 1998; de Ruyter et al. 2001; de Ruyter and Wetzels 1999; Wetzels et al. 2000; de Ruyter and Semeijn 2002; Gounaris 2005). Studies have also shown that trust has a positive influence on normative (de Ruyter and Semeijn 2002) and a negative influence on calculative commitment (Geyskens et al. 1996; Wetzels et al. 1998; Wetzels et al. 2000; de Ruyter et al. 2001; de Ruyter and Wetzels 1999; de Ruyter and Semeijn 2002; Gounaris 2005). Trust leads firms to focus on a 'positive' motivation to stay in the relationship because of a feeling of connectedness and identification with

each other and less on calculative reasons for staying with the supplier (de Ruyter et al. 2001). With a lack of trust it is unlikely that the partners would be affectively committed (Geyksens et al. 1996). When trust is low, firms more thoroughly examine and monitor the behaviour of their counterpart and probably base their decisions as to whether to continue or end the relationship on the calculation of direct benefits and costs (Geyskens et al. 1996). When trust increases, there are fewer reasons to continue the relationship on the basis of calculative commitment (de Ruyter et al. 2001). Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated for the relationships between trust and the components of commitment:

- H1 *Trust positively influences affective commitment.*
- H2 *Trust negatively influences calculative commitment.*
- H3 *Trust positively influences normative commitment.*

In the second step we propose relationships between components of commitment in order to test if there is any interaction among these components. Researchers in the area of organizational psychology and marketing relationships have found a positive and strong correlation between affective and normative commitment (Bansal et al. 2004; Kelly 2004; Kumar et al. 1994; Meyer et al. 2002) and a moderate positive correlation between normative and calculative commitment (Kelly 2004; Kumar et al. 1994). On the other hand, researchers have found mixed results regarding the relationship between affective and calculative commitment. While Kelly (2004) found this correlation to be positive, Kumar et al. (1994) found no correlation between these two components. In this study we build on the results of Kumar et al. (1994) and we propose that these two components of commitment are not correlated. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed for the relationships between the components of commitment:

- H4 *Affective and normative commitment are positively correlated.*
- H5 *Affective and calculative commitment are not correlated.*
- H6 *Calculative and normative commitment are positively correlated.*

Research Design

OPERATIONALISATION OF THE VARIABLES AND DATA GATHERING

Variables for the model were operationalised on the basis of operationalisations from past research with some modifications and developments based on nine in-depth interviews with clients of marketing

research providers conducted in the exploratory phase in November 2004–January 2005. Commitment was measured on the scale of Kumar et al. (1994) for three components of commitment that was developed on the basis of Allen and Meyer's (1990) scale drawn from organisational psychology. Trust was operationalised with the modification of scales proposed by Moorman et al. (1992), Doney and Cannon (1997) and Gounaris and Venetis (2002). Respondents were asked to express their agreement with a given statement using a seven-point Likert-type scale (from 1 – not at all true, to 7 – completely true). All variables except two were measured in a positive direction. Two variables for trust that had a negative direction were reversely scored in the further analysis. After a scale refinement in line with five experts' opinions the questionnaire was tested on ten members of the population.

The context of this study is the marketing research industry in Slovenia. The context of marketing research was chosen because it provides a good representation of professional services and includes a wide continuum of marketing relationships from transactions to partnerships, therefore providing the desired variability of relationships (Tellefsen and Thomas 2005). Data were gathered from managers who are responsible for marketing research in each of the client firms. In order to ensure variability in the marketing relationships included in the survey the respondents evaluated their relationship with the agency that carried out their most recent research project, as in the Moorman et al. (1992) research. They were instructed to answer questions about the specific relationship and to keep in mind not only the last research but also the entire relationship they had experienced with that provider. The sample framework included 230 companies that were clients of marketing research agencies. Data collection started in March 2005, and by the end of July 2005, 150 telephone interviews had been completed so the response rate was 65.2% (Churchill and Iacobucci 2005).

DATA ANALYSIS

The set of items for each construct was initially examined using exploratory factor analysis (varimax rotation) to identify items not belonging to the specified domain. Items with a loading of less than 0.55 and/or cross-loadings greater than 0.35 were discarded. Exploratory factor analysis revealed four components (eight variables loaded on the trust component, four on affective commitment, three on normative commitment and two on calculative commitment). To present the re-

sults of clients' trust and commitment, univariate statistical analyses of variables (the calculation of arithmetic means and standard deviations) were performed (tables 1, 2, 3 and 4). Data were analysed using the SPSS 13.0 statistical package.

Further, to test the proposed hypotheses, confirmatory factor analysis was performed and a structural model (with trust as an exogenous variable and components of commitment as endogenous variables) was tested. The analysis was carried out using the LISREL 8.72 statistical package. During confirmatory factor analysis we trimmed the model by discarding items for each construct where necessary in order to ensure the best fitting model. In the final model there were four measurement variables for trust, four measurement variables for affective commitment, three measurement variables for normative commitment and one measuring variable for calculative commitment. The only problematic variable was calculative commitment, where we decided to use only one indicator that had the highest average value as a representative measure of this construct. The goodness-of-fit indices for the CFA were within an acceptable range. The model has a statistically significant value of chi-square ($\chi^2 = 69.38$, $df = 49$, $p = 0.029$), but the proportion between the chi-square value and degrees of freedom ($\chi^2/df = 1.42$) is within an acceptable range. Other measures of absolute fit (the root mean square of error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.053, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.065 and GFI = 0.928) indicated an acceptable fit, as well as incremental fit measures (NFI = 0.944, NNFI = 0.975, AGFI = 0.885) and parsimonious fit measures (CFI = 0.981) (Bollen 1989; Hoyle 1995). We then tested the item and construct reliability (table 5). All items were reliable and all values for composite reliability were above the critical limit. According to a complementary measure for construct reliability, average variance extracted, all constructs demonstrated good reliability. Further, both convergent and discriminant validity (assessed by the procedures proposed by Anderson and Gerbing 1988) were supported.

Results

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The majority of companies that responded to the questionnaire were providers of business services (24.7%), followed by manufacturing (23.3%) and trade companies (22%). The rest were providers of services for consumers (12.7%), services for both companies and consumers

(11.3%), while 6% came from other industries. Altogether, 40.7% of the companies had up to 50 employees; there were 24.7% of companies with 101–500 employees and 21.3% of companies with over 501 employees, while there were fewer companies with 51–100 employees (13.3%). Among the studied relationships (with the agency that performed the last research project) most relationships are two to four (42.2%) and five or more (42.2%) years old. There are 15.6% of relationships that had lasted up to two years. The average duration of a relationship is 4.4 years. We also examined what is the value share of projects done by this provider among all research projects carried out with outside suppliers of marketing research. The average value share of research projects conducted by the studied agency is 76.1%. This means that the majority of respondents had described their relationship with their most important provider of marketing research.

TRUST

Respondents on average indicated a high level of trust in the research agency (table 1). They more than agreed that they can trust that the research agency will execute research with methodological rigour (mean 6.35; standard deviation 0.93), that it will keep their data confidential (mean 6.32; standard deviation 0.88) and that it will plan research with expertise (mean 6.05; standard deviation 1.03). These results show that clients see their provider as credible. They also trust in the agency's honesty (mean 5.93; standard deviation 1.38), that it provides them with credible information (mean 5.85; standard deviation 1.03) and that it keeps its promises (mean 5.72; standard deviation 1.25). However, it seems that the high level of trust is partly a consequence of clients' involvement in the research process. Respondents indicated somewhat less agreement with the statements that they would be willing to let the researcher make important decisions without their involvement (mean 5.56; standard deviation 1.28) and that they trust the researcher would do the job correctly if not monitored (mean 5.61; standard deviation 1.24). One possible explanation here could be that the clients are not completely convinced of the providers' benevolence.

COMPONENTS OF COMMITMENT

The respondents on average rated the variables measuring affective commitment the highest of all the components (table 2). They expressed the greatest agreement with the statement that they continue to work with

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics for variables measuring trust

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.
If I or someone from my department could not be reached by our researcher, I would be willing to let my researcher make important research decisions without my involvement (trust1).	5.56	1.28
If I or someone from my department were unable to monitor my researcher's activities, I would be willing to trust my researcher to get the job done right (trust2).	5.61	1.24
I can trust that the agency will plan the research with expertise (trust3).	6.05	1.03
I cannot trust that the agency will execute research with methodological rigour (R) (trust4).	6.35	0.93
I can trust that the agency will keep our data confidential (trust5).	6.32	0.88
This agency keeps the promises it makes to our firm (trust6).	5.72	1.25
This agency is not always honest with us (R) (trust7).	5.93	1.38
We believe in the information that this agency provides us with (trust8).	5.85	1.03

NOTES Variables trust4 and trust8 were reversely coded. The results pertain to the reversely scored item.

the agency because it is pleasant working with them (mean 5.52; standard deviation 1.32), followed by staying with this agency because they genuinely enjoy their relationship (mean 4.83; standard deviation 1.56), because they are attracted to the things the agency stands for as a company (mean 4.77; standard deviation 1.54), and because they like working with the company (mean 4.63; standard deviation 1.58). For all the measured variables of affective commitment the mean scores are above 4, which means that the respondents have on average more than a neutral attitude to the statements.

On the other hand, the calculative commitment in the examined relationships was relatively low (table 3). Respondents on average rated statements expressing calculative commitment between 'not at all true' (1) and 'partly not true' (3). Of two calculative commitment variables that were retained in the analysis they on average indicated the greatest agreement with the statement that they stay with this research agency because it is too difficult to change it due to a lack of good alternatives (mean 3.02; standard deviation 1.93). To a lesser extent, they agreed that they continue the relationship due to necessity, since no feasible alternatives exist (mean 2.31; standard deviation 1.93).

The respondents indicated an even lower normative commitment to

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics for variables measuring affective commitment

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.
It is pleasant working with the agency, that's why we continue to work with them (acom1).	4.59	1.52
Our decision to remain a client of this company is based on our attraction to the things the agency stands for as a company (acom2).	3.82	1.60
We want to remain a client of this agency because we genuinely enjoy our relationship with the agency (acom3).	3.63	1.56
Because we like working with the agency we want to remain their client (acom4).	3.65	1.60

TABLE 3 Descriptive statistics for variables measuring calculative commitment

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.
Right now, staying with the agency is a matter of necessity since no feasible alternatives exist (ccom1).	3.28	2.24
It is too difficult to switch to another agency because of the lack of good alternatives; therefore we are staying with the agency; otherwise we'd consider leaving (ccom4).	3.10	2.21

TABLE 4 Descriptive statistics for variables measuring normative commitment

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.
Employees who work with the agency would feel guilty if we dropped them as a supplier (ncom1).	1.77	1.09
We feel a sense of duty to remain a client to this agency (ncom2).	2.05	1.24
Even if it were to our firm's advantage, we feel it would be dishonourable if we were to leave the agency (ncom4).	1.71	1.10

their research providers (table 4). On average, they did not agree that they continue to work with this provider because they feel a sense of duty to do so (mean 2.34; standard deviation 1.51) and that employees who work with this agency would feel guilty if they dropped them as a supplier (mean 2.28; standard deviation 1.54). The lowest level of agreement was expressed with the statement that it would be dishonourable if they were to leave the agency even if it were to their firm's advantage (mean 1.79; standard deviation 1.17).

HYPOTHESES TESTING

The final structural equation model includes the exogenous latent variable trust and endogenous latent variables affective, calculative and normative commitment. With the exogenous variable trust we can explain

45.0% of the variance in affective commitment, 5.83% of the variance in the normative commitment and only 1.15% of the variance in calculative commitment. Affective commitment is therefore relatively well explained by the independent variable, while calculative and normative commitment are not. The fit indices for the overall model are within an acceptable range. Like with the measurement model, the structural model also has a statistically significant value of the chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 79.96$, $df = 49$, $p = 0.008$), but the proportion between the chi-square value and degrees of freedom is within an acceptable range ($\chi^2/df = 1.63$). All other relevant fit indices are also within an acceptable range (RMSEA = 0.060; standardised RMR = 0.084; GFI = 0.918; AGFI = 0.877; NFI = 0.937; NNFI = 0.970; CFI = 0.976). The analysis with LISREL revealed, that among components of commitment, trust positively influences affective (standardised coefficient 0.67) and normative commitment (standardised coefficient 0.24), while it has no statistically significant effect on calculative commitment (standardised coefficient -0.11). H₁, H₂ and H₃ are therefore supported.

Results revealed a positive correlation between affective and normative commitment (standardised coefficient 0.35), while there was no statistically significant correlation between affective and calculative commitment (standardised coefficient -0.10) and normative and calculative commitment (standardised coefficient 0.11). H₄ and H₅ are therefore supported, while H₆ is not supported.

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this paper was to work towards establishing empirical generalisations by researching the relationship between trust and the components of commitment in professional services in business-to-business markets in a post-transitional economy. First, trust and commitment were examined and then relationships between trust and components of commitment and relationships among the components of commitment were tested. The results show that trust in research providers in the examined context of Slovenia is high. Clients on average believe their research providers are credible (have sufficient expertise to perform the job effectively and reliably) and benevolent (the provider's intentions and motives are beneficial to the client). These results are in line with findings from the in-depth interviews with clients. Since the results of marketing research projects are used as an input for decision-making, and due to the high degree of risk and uncertainty connected

TABLE 5 Overall CFA for the modified measurement model (*n* = 150)

Construct and indicators	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Trust (exogenous variable)</i>			
I can let my researcher make important research decisions without my involvement (trust1).	0.88 (12.91)	0.78	0.22
I would be willing to trust my researcher to get the job done right without monitoring (trust2).	0.81 (11.31)	0.65	0.35
I can trust that the agency will plan the research with expertise (trust3).	0.66 (8.65)	0.44	0.56
We believe in the information that this agency provides us with (trust8).	0.71 (9.56)	0.51	0.49
<i>Affective commitment (endogenous variable)</i>			
It is pleasant working with the agency, that's why we continue to work with them (acom1).	0.76 (10.30)	0.57	0.43
Our decision to remain a client of this company is based on our attraction to the things the agency stands for as a company (acom2).	0.72 (9.56)	0.51	0.49
We want to remain a client of this agency because we genuinely enjoy our relationship with the agency (acom3).	0.85 (12.18)	0.72	0.28
Because we like working with the agency we want to remain their client (acom4).	0.76 (10.30)	0.57	0.43
<i>Calculative commitment (endogenous variable)</i>			
It is too difficult to switch to another agency because of the lack of good alternatives; therefore we are staying with the agency; otherwise we'd consider leaving (ccom4).	1.00	1.00	0.00
<i>Normative commitment (endogenous variable)</i>			
Employees who work with this agency would feel guilty if we dropped them as a supplier (ncom1).	0.72 (8.66)	0.52	0.48
We feel a sense of duty to remain a client to this agency (ncom2).	0.90 (10.78)	0.80	0.19
Even if it were to our firm's advantage, we feel it would be dishonorable if we were to leave the agency (ncom4).	0.55 (6.54)	0.30	0.70

NOTES Table columns are as follows: (1) completely standardized loading (*t*-value); (2) construct and indicator reliability, (3) variance extracted and error variance.

to this kind of purchase, clients stressed trust as the key element of the relationship with the marketing research provider. They also named the absence of trust as one of the main reasons for discontinuing a relationship. Therefore, we can assume that clients continue to work only with the providers they trust. Moorman et al. (1992) similarly concluded

that trust is one of the most important factors influencing the use of marketing research because it decreases the perceived uncertainty and vulnerability connected to the use of marketing information.

Results on commitment revealed that the clients of marketing research agencies continue their relationship with their providers mostly for affective reasons (feeling good in the relationship), while calculative (seeing no alternatives) and normative (feeling obligation to stay) reasons do not play an important role. The research also shows that calculative and especially normative commitment levels are very low among the majority of companies. These results are in line with the findings from the in-depth interviews. The interviewed clients indicated that they continue relationships due to affective reasons; calculative reasons are less present, while they feel no normative/moral commitment to their research provider. These results also coincide with results from other developed Western contexts where the majority of researchers only studied affective and calculative commitment and did not even include normative commitment in their models. Meyer and Allen (1997) pointed out that normative commitment could be stronger than affective commitment in collectivistic cultures that stress strong social bonds and obligations and in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance and where loyalty is an important value. The majority of studies of the components of commitment were carried out in developed Western cultures that do not have these characteristics, which can explain why this construct does not appear in the majority of commitment models.

The findings concerning the relationships between the components of commitment are mostly in line with the results in other contexts. We supported the hypothesis about positive correlation between affective and normative commitment; however, in our case this correlation was weak, while other studies (Bansal et al. 2004; Kelly 2004; Kumar et al. 1994; Meyer et al. 2002) found a moderate to strong correlation between these two constructs. In line with the proposed hypothesis there was no correlation between affective and calculative commitment, which is in line with Kumar et al. (1994), but contrary to Kelly (2004). Lastly, in line with Kelly (2004) and Kumar et al. (1994) we proposed a positive correlation between normative and calculative commitment, while the results show this correlation is not statistically significant. Since we measured only motivation to continue the relationship due to lack of alternatives (variables measuring calculative commitment based on switching costs had to be discarded during exploratory factor analysis), our results per-

tain only to that part of calculative commitment and are therefore not directly comparable to results of those past studies that included both.

The findings concerning the relationships between trust and affective commitment are in line with the results of studies performed in the contexts of developed countries that discovered the positive influence of trust on affective commitment (Geyskens et al. 1996; Wetzels et al. 1998; de Ruyter et al. 2001; de Ruyter and Wetzels 1999; Wetzels et al. 2000; de Ruyter and Semeijn 2002; Gounaris 2005) and on commitment that was measured as a global construct implicitly tapping the affective dimension (Moorman et al. 1992; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Goodman and Dion 2001; Perry et al. 2002; Friman et al. 2002; Lohtia et al. 2005; Rodriguez and Wilson 2002; Tellefsen and Thomas 2005; Walter and Ritter 2003). The outcomes also confirm the proposed positive influence of trust on normative commitment (de Ruyter and Semeijn 2002). On the other hand, the results do not confirm the proposed negative influence of trust on calculative commitment that was found by researchers in the context of developed countries (Geyskens et al. 1996; Wetzels et al. 1998; Wetzels et al. 2000; de Ruyter et al. 2001; de Ruyter and Wetzels 1999; de Ruyter and Semeijn 2002; Gounaris 2005). In our research this influence was too weak to be statistically significant. The reason could again be in the earlier explained measuring of calculative commitment. The results of this study therefore add towards establishing empirical generalisations about trust and commitment by indicating that the relationship between trust and the components of commitment in professional services in the examined post-transitional economy is similar to that in the cultures of the developed Western economies. The only hypothesis that was not supported is about the relationship between trust and calculative commitment. Therefore, we cannot claim that a higher degree of trust in a relationship leads to a lower degree of motivation to continue relationship due to lack of alternatives.

Besides theoretical implications, this study also offers implications for marketing research providers. Since clients place a very high level of importance on the credibility, benevolence and honesty of the research providers they work with, we could say these factors can literally make or break a relationship. Marketing research firms should therefore continue to provide quality and reliable services that clients can trust; they should be sincere and fulfil promises. Providers should also convince clients of their benevolence so that clients would not feel they have to monitor the research process so closely. Regarding the components of commitment,

trust leads to a high level of affective commitment or, in other words, a strong desire to maintain a relationship. Researchers (Kumar et al. 1994; Gounaris 2005; Wetzels et al. 1998) found that the consequences of affective commitment are superior to the consequences of calculative and normative commitment. While affective commitment creates positive intentions that help to maintain and strengthen relationships, calculative commitment has just the opposite effects on behavioural intentions. Creating affective commitment is therefore the most important because it has the strongest effect on the customers' intentions to continue the relationship and consequently on the provider's revenues. Managers of marketing research providers should keep this in mind when crafting their firms' approach to marketing strategy.

This study shows only one part of the whole picture and many opportunities thus exist for future research. Since there are other factors that influence the development of relationship commitment (e. g. satisfaction, social ties, co-operation, communication etc.), future research should relate those factors within the framework and test their relationships with the components of commitment. Special attention should also be paid to examining the antecedents of calculative and normative commitment because trust, as one of the most important relationship factors in professional services, apparently does not play a major role in their development. In addition, scales for measuring these two constructs should be further refined. Last but not least, this framework could be tested in other contexts of professional services in the Slovenian market or in another post-transitional or transitional economy to see if differences exist compared to developed economies that have not undergone major changes in the past few years.

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