

Fostering Loyalty as Repurchase Intention: The Role of Relationship Marketing and Word-of-mouth

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Abstract: Thi Le Ha Nguyen. University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Vietnam National University, Hanoi City, Vietnam. She worked as a medical doctor in Vietnam for 21 years. She was awarded the Master of Primary Healthcare Management by Mahidol University, Thailand, and she holds a Ph. D. degree from the Graduate School of Medical Sciences, Kanazawa University, Japan in Healthcare Management. Fostering loyalty as repurchase intention: the role of relationship marketing and word-of-mouth Objective: Relationship marketing is a tool directed at word-of-mouth communication and customer loyalty and measured by repurchase intention. This study examines the effect of relationship marketing on word-of-mouth and repurchase intention. Method: The study instrument was a self-administered questionnaire distributed to inpatients who used health services at a tertiary-level hospital in Vietnam during June 2019. The data were analyzed using SPSS 25.0 for descriptive analyses and Amos 25.0 for the structural equation modeling to test the proposed hypotheses. Results: The findings showed that relationship marketing has a positive effect on word-of-mouth and repurchase intention, while word-of-mouth plays a mediating role between relationship marketing and repurchase intention. Implications: Our findings have implications for managers and policymakers when crafting strategic plans that aim to improve relationship marketing. They should consider factors that directly influence repurchase intention by enhancing word-of-mouth to maintain loyalty.

Keywords: Relationship Marketing, Word-of-mouth, Repurchase Intention

1. Introduction

Baker [1] defined relationship marketing (RM) as commercial relationships between providers and clients established on trust developed through the keeping of promises in their commercial relationship to achieve their objectives. Its purpose is to move from transactional to RM that establishes, maintains, and improves customer relationships [2]. RM is an antecedent to maintaining loyalty towards organizations [3]. It attracts customers who relate to increased perceived quality [4], while creating satisfaction [5] and loyalty [6, 7].

In recent years, there has been an increase in studies related to RM [3, 4, 6, 7]. It is an approach that improves perceived quality and increases customer satisfaction and loyalty [8], based on trust [4, 8]. The dimensions of RM include commitment, trust, communication, empathy, and bonding [9]. In other studies, RM includes communication, trust, commitment, conflict handling, and competence which

have a direct influence on loyalty [6]. Our purpose is to examine the influence of RM, including trust, commitment, and communication related to WOM and RI.

Silverman [10] defined 'word-of-mouth is first and important'. WOM is a strong marketing tool [11] and is a necessary factor in product distribution [12]. WOM is a tool that presents positive WOM [11] or negative if related to customer complaints [13]. Marketers promote positive rather than negative WOM. Our study considers positive WOM related to RI; the positive WOM from satisfied users can increase repurchase [7, 14].

Wu et al. [15] defined RI as the degree of emotional thought of customers regarding the repeat purchase of a particular product or any other new product from the same organization. Other researchers contend that RI refers to the rebuy of customer [16]. In addition, the attitude of customer toward service quality is determined by user satisfaction, trust, and commitment which leads to purchase intention [4, 17].

Previous research has shown that perceived service quality (PSQ) positive effects on consumers' satisfaction [8], based on trust and a commitment to maintain loyalty [4]. In addition, PSQ has a positive effect on satisfaction, commitment, and trust in the relationship affecting buying behavior [18]. Moreover, RM is related to loyalty, WOM, and a willingness to purchase [7], while being a mediating factor between RM and loyalty [19]. The quality of relationship directly impacts WOM [20], while satisfaction plays a mediating role in RM and loyalty [21].

Our paper examined the impact of RM and WOM on RI. In particular, RM factors includes trust, commitment, and communication; WOM factors and RI were used to measure service quality.

2. Literature Review

In this part, the author reviews the literature regarding the scope of this study, including RM, WOM, and RI. Relationships refer to trust, commitment, and communication.

Relationship Marketing (RM)

RM establishes trust by demonstrating a commitment to service, communication with customers, customer satisfaction, WOM, and building customer loyalty. Its goal is to foster strong relationships and convert customers from indifference to loyalty [19, 22]. It is a tool to increase customer loyalty through WOM; satisfaction plays a mediating role [21, 22] or is an antecedent factor of loyalty [6].

Communication is a dimension of RM that can create a relationship of trust between the service organization and customers by meeting their expectations and enhancing satisfaction and behavioral intention [23]. RM includes competence, communication, trust, commitment, and conflict handling and has a noticeable influence on satisfaction, and loyalty has a direct influence on loyalty [21]. It is related directly to WOM and loyalty [19]. Moreover, PSQ positive influenced satisfaction, commitment, trust, and informs buying behavior [18]. The quality of relationships—including trust, commitment, and communication—had an effect on consumers' loyalty [6]. Other studies identify the quality of relationships as empathy, trust, communication, conflict handling, and personalization [24, 25]. Our study focuses on the aspects of RM—including trust, commitment, and communication—related to RI.

Word-of-mouth (WOM)

WOM indicated that as a source of informational impact on the decision-making of rebuying which a tool to measure satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the service quality [13, 23]. WOM can be positive in recommending services or goods to other people [14] and negative WOM if the user complains of the service quality to others [13]. Marketers aim to develop positive rather than negative WOM. Our study considers the effect of positive WOM on RI.

WOM is a mediating factor of RM and loyalty [19]. RM influenced positively consumers' satisfaction [5], which in turn has a direct influence on WOM [23]. In addition, PSQ

impacted positively trust, commitment, and satisfaction in influencing buying behavior [18]. Service quality indirectly influences WOM through satisfaction as a mediating factor [23]. Relationship marketing includes communication, trust, commitment, and conflict handling, which have a significant influence on loyalty, expressed as WOM [7].

Repurchase Intention (RI)

Rajaobelina and Bergeron [26] defined RI as the attitudes of customers regarding repurchasing a particular product or any new product from the same organization. The RI of the client is the key factor of behavioral intentions and is essential in interpreting buying behavior [27].

RM is directly affects WOM loyalty or indirectly through perceived satisfaction with quality as mediating factors [28]. Additionally, RM is indirectly related to loyalty through WOM as a mediator [19]. Moreover, loyalty is a mediator of RM and customer retention through WOM [7]. Perceived quality has a noticeable influence on satisfaction, commitment, and trust, related to purchase behavior [18].

Research Hypotheses

Relationship marketing aims to build customer loyalty and retention deemed as critical for companies in a competitive environment [7]. It is a factor that marketers include in strategy planning to improve perceived quality through WOM communication [28], or indirectly to WOM via satisfaction as a mediating factor [28]. Aspects of RM include trust, commitment, communication, and conflict handling which indirectly affect WOM via loyalty as a mediating factor [7]. These aspects have a direct influence on satisfaction [5] and are dominant factors of loyalty [3, 6]. Moreover, Consuela-Madalina et al. [29] showed that experiential marketing has a direct effect on WOM, and therefore we posit the research hypothesis:

H1: Relationship Marketing (RM) impacts on Word-of-mouth (WOM)

Customer loyalty has been created, reinforced, and maintained by marketing strategic plans with the goal of building trust, presenting a commitment to service, communicating with customers in a timely, trusted, and prompt manner, and handling conflict efficiently [3, 6]. Therefore, aspects of RM include trust, commitment, communication, and conflict handling, which are antecedent factors of loyalty [3]. These aspects influenced positively PSQ and loyalty [28]. They can directly [6, 7], or indirectly influence loyalty through satisfaction as a mediating factor [28]. Moreover, RM has an indirect influence on customer retention, as loyalty is a mediating role [7]. Thus, our second hypothesis is:

H2: Relationship Marketing (RM) has a positive influence on Repurchase Intention (RI)

The increase in electronic WOM through social media has become influential among users [11, 14]. Willingness to purchase is directly related to WOM, as supported by Consuela-Madalina et al. [29]. WOM also has a direct effect on repurchase [30] and is a tool influencing service quality and RM through commitment, trust [23], satisfaction [30], and loyalty [7]. Thus, we propose:

H3: Word-of-mouth (WOM) influences on Repurchase Intention (RI)

3. Research Method

The study was carried out at the National Cancer Hospital, Vietnam, in June 2019. This tertiary-level hospital has been supporting health services for about 2,500 inpatients per day in 39 departments of various clinical medical fields.

Before collecting data, the research staff were trained for one day. The assistant researcher was recruited who was trained for one day for the purpose of the study. Following the provided guidelines, and after the consent was obtained, information sheets and questionnaires were collected from the participants.

Following Wolf et al. [31], the sample size of our paper (N=300) was calculated based on the factors and indicators suitable for the SEM model. A simple random sampling method recruited 10 patients (aged 18 years and older) from the inpatient lists of those using health service at 39 departments – a total of 390 participants.

A self-administration questionnaire was used as the study instrument, which including 24 questions, including 6 questions of the socio-demographic and 18 questions related to RM, WOM, and RI. Of the eleven questions pertaining to the RM factors, five were on *trust* (RM1–RM5), three on *commitment* (RM6–RM8), and three on *communication* (RM9–RM11). The content of these questions was based on Ndubisi [6] and modified for fit with the research organization. The factor of WOM includes four questions (WOM12–WOM15) based on the prior research of Gu et al. [32], and modified to suit the context of the research hospital. Three questions concerned the RI factor (RI25–RI27). A 5-point Likert scale was used in answering the questions of the study.

The data analysis was used SPSS software version 25.0 and the AMOS 25.0 program. The process of analysis included 2 stages of test the measurement model

(confirmatory factor analysis) that provide evidence to model fit of the overall model and construct validity, then SEM model was used by the Amos 25.0, used to test proposed hypothesis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Reliability and Validity of the Scales

A Likert scale from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) was measured to questions of the study. The values of Cronbach's alpha, calculated using SPSS version 25.0, measure of reliability and internal consistency for each indicator of latent construct, the results of which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability statistics.

Constructs	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
<i>Relationship Marketing (RM)</i>		
Trust	4	0.90
Commitment	3	0.89
Communication	3	0.84
<i>Word of Mouth (WOM)</i>	4	0.93
<i>Repurchase Intention (RI)</i>	3	0.83

The value of Cronbach's alpha for the RM factor is from 0.84 to 0.90; the WOM factor was 0.93, and the RI factor was 0.83. All the alpha coefficient values of the latent variables over 0.70, indicating reliability and internal consistency for each indicator of the latent construct for the scales accepted.

4.2. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) measurement model was used for SEM model to test of proposed hypotheses. Our model was tested using the values of standardized regression weights, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). The findings showed in Table 2.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis results and goodness-of-fit model.

Construct measures	Standardized coefficients	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Composite reliability (CR)
<i>Relationship Marketing (RM)</i>		0.594	0.936
RM1<---RM	0.707		
RM2<---RM	0.798		
RM3<---RM	0.745		
RM4<---RM	0.779		
RM6<---RM	0.802		
RM7<---RM	0.811		
RM8<---RM	0.789		
RM9<---RM	0.774		
RM10<---RM	0.770		
RM11<---RM	0.728		
<i>Word of Mouth (WOM)</i>		0.759	0.926
WOM12<---WOM	0.879		
WOM13<---WOM	0.878		
WOM14<---WOM	0.869		
WOM15<---WOM	0.859		
<i>Repurchase Intention (RI)</i>		0.601	0.817
RI16<---RI	0.839		
RI17<---RI	0.650		

Construct measures	Standardized coefficients	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Composite reliability (CR)
RI18<---RI	0.823		

Chi-square=384.750; df=110; P=0.000; Chi-square/df=3.498
GFI=0.89; TLI=0.93; CFI=0.95; NFI=0.93; RMSEA=0.08; AGFI=0.85

All standardized coefficient values ranged from 0.65 to 0.88 (cut-off=0.5). The AVE values ranged from 0.59 to 0.76 (cut-off=0.5) and exceeded the squared correlations between any pair of constructs, indicating high discriminant validity. The CR values for constructs were between 0.82 and 0.94 [cut-off=0.7] which demonstrated adequate internal consistency [33].

4.3. Goodness-of-Fit Model

The goodness-of-fit model was measured based on the chi-square (χ^2), degrees of freedom (DF), statistical significance of χ^2 (P-value=0.000), and indices including goodness-of-fit index (GFI), root mean square of approximation (RMSEA), normed fit index (NFI), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), and adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) as presented in Table 2.

The ratio of χ^2 to the degrees of freedom was 3.498 (P=0.000), which is sensitive to sample size, indicating that the confirmatory factor model was a good fit to the data. In particular, [GFI]=0.89 (cut-off=0.80), [NFI]=0.93

(requirement=value of 0–1), [RMSEA]=0.08 (requirement=value from 0.05–0.08), [CFI]=0.95, [TLI]=0.93 (cut-off=0.9) [33]. This revealed that the overall model was accepted, and the scales were supported on the reliability and validity requirements.

4.4. Hypotheses Testing

4.4.1. Hypothesis H1: RM Effects on WOM

From table 3, the coefficient of the path RM--->WOM was statistically significant at 0.795 ($p < 0.001$). This finding revealed that RM is directly related to WOM. In agreement with previous research, RM had a direct effect on WOM [29]. Other studies support that satisfaction/loyalty is a mediating factor of RM and WOM [7, 28]. In addition, RM influences on PSQ [28], and satisfaction plays a mediating role in service quality and WOM [30]. Our findings assist managers and policymakers in developing strategies to improve RM that increases WOM by enhancing service quality, increasing satisfaction, and maintaining loyalty as mediating factors of RM and WOM.

Table 3. Hypothesis test results.

Hypothesis	Path	Standardized coefficients	Sig.	Results
H1	RM--->WOM	0.795	***	Accepted
H2	RM--->RI	0.196	0.001	Accepted
H3	WOM--->RI	0.802	***	Accepted

Hypotheses were evaluated by standardized coefficients and path coefficients with significance (sig.) less than 0.05. Symbol *** represents (sig. < 0.001). Acronyms are relationship marketing (RM), word-of-mouth (WOM), and repurchase intention (RI).

4.4.2. Hypothesis H2: RM influences on RI

It indicated by the path (RM--->RI) at a statistically significant value of 0.196 with $p=0.001$ (Table 3), indicating that RM has a positive relation to RI. Also, Halimi et al. [18] agree that commitment and trust, as aspects of RM, have a direct impact on behavioral intentions. Other studies have indicated that the retention effects of RM play a mediating role on loyalty [7]. RM has a significant influence on loyalty [3, 6, 7] or indirectly affects loyalty via satisfaction [28]. Our study assists service providers in considering aspects of RM—including communication, trust, and commitment—as factors that directly affect loyalty. Moreover, when considering the impact of MR on RI, focus should fall on the mediating factors of this relationship, such as service quality and satisfaction.

4.4.3. Hypothesis H3: WOM Has a Positive Effect on RI

This is represented by the path coefficient (WOM--->RI) at a statistically significant value of 0.802 with $p < 0.001$ (Table 3). Similarly, as proposed by Kitapci et al. [30], WOM has a significant influence on the RI – supporting Consuela-Madalina et al. [29] who found that the willingness to purchase is directly related to WOM. In addition, RM

influenced positively PSQ [28], and PSQ influenced customers' satisfaction, WOM, and RI [30]. Our findings show that RM aims to improve service quality to meet customers' needs and increase satisfaction and WOM, thereby building customer loyalty.

4.5. Implications for Practice

Our study has practical implications because RM facilitates a close relationship between service providers and customers by fostering trust, commitment, and communication in meeting customer needs, and encouraging positive WOM in building loyalty evidenced by RI. Thus, managers and policymakers should focus on factors of RM in their strategic plans to acquire and retain loyal customers. Moreover, our study has shown that RM management can impact customer loyalty through WOM playing a mediating role.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The paper investigated the impact of factors including RM and WOM related to customers' RI. The study instrument used a self-administered questionnaire distributed to

inpatients who used health services at the highest level hospital in June 2019, Vietnam. A total of 353 returned questionnaires that were used to the statistic, 390 questionnaires were distributed.

A Likert scale was measured to questions of the study with strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The scale was tested for internal consistency in the reliability of the variables. Next, CFA was used to confirm convergent validity and discriminant validity of scales, and the SEM model was used to test the proposed hypotheses.

Results indicate that all the hypotheses were accepted. RM has a direct effect on WOM and RI, and WOM on RI. These results suggest that RM and WOM are factors that directly affect RI, while WOM plays a mediating role in RM and RI.

Findings show a positive effect among RM, which includes trust, communication, and commitment to WOM, and customers' loyalty, which agreement with prior studies. The study also found a positive influence on WOM and customer loyalty. The service organization should consider relationship encounters that build commitment and focus on the development of communication channels that build positive WOM communication

Our study supports service managers and policymakers in considering how the factors of RM and WOM impact on

client loyalty when conducting strategic planning.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Notes on Contributor

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Fostering loyalty as repurchase intention: the role of relationship marketing and word-of-mouth

Your responses will be used solely for research purposes. The information that you provide will help to improve the quality of healthcare services.

Serial No.:

Date of completion.....

Please write your response in the blank column or mark the box provided.

1. What is your age?years

2. What is your sex?

1. Male ☐

2. Female ☐

3. What is your marital status?

1. Single ☐

3. Divorced ☐

2. Married ☐

4. Widowed ☐

4. What is your educational level?

1. No school ☐

4. High school ☐

2. Primary school ☐

5. Bachelor's degree ☐

3. Secondary school ☐

6. Postgraduate degree ☐

5. What is your occupation?

1. Student ☐

4. Agriculture ☐

2. Employee ☐

5. Unemployed ☐

3. General labor ☐

6. Retired ☐

6. Method of paying hospital fees

1. Insurance ☐2. Personal payment ☐

Please place a cross in the box corresponding to the level of your agreement/disagreement with each of the following statements:

1. Very strongly disagree, 2. Strongly disagree, 3. Agree, 4. Strongly agree, 5. Very strongly agree

Relationship marketing (RM)

Statement/Items	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Trust</i>					
RM1 The provider is very concerned with customer safety.					
RM2 The provider delivers quality service.					
RM3 The provider fulfills customers' needs.					
RM4 I have confidence in the providers' services.					
RM5 I will share the current product- or service-quality issue with staff.					
<i>Commitment</i>					
RM6 The provider makes changes to reflect customers' needs.					
RM7 The provider provides personal services to meet customers' needs.					
RM8 The provider is flexible in servicing customers' needs.					
<i>Communication</i>					
RM9 The provider provides information in a timely and exact fashion.					
RM10 The provider always provides information when there is a new service.					
RM11 The provider makes information available and fulfills promises.					
<i>Word-of-mouth (WOM)</i>					
WOM12 I am proud to tell friends that I used the service provider.					
WOM13 I am willing to encourage friends to use the provider.					
WOM14 I am willing to tell friends about the good aspects of the provider.					
WOM15 I will frequently recommend the provider to friends.					
<i>Repurchase intention (RI)</i>					
RI16 I will keep this provider in mind when repurchasing healthcare.					
RI17 I will always use this provider although other firms are better known.					
RI18 I will always use this provider in the future.					

The English in this document has been checked by at least two professional editors, both native speakers of English. For a certificate, please see: Editage (www.editage.com)

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Biography

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