

Ending exchange relationships: What do we know about them?

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Abstract

This paper reviews and assesses previous research concerning the ending of exchange relationships. In recent years, distinguished scholars have emphasised the importance of this topic and, consequently, it has begun to attract more research interest. We welcome this development, and wish to take part in it by providing an analytical overview of the state of this research. The domain of the research review covers studies on switching relationships, on exiting a relationship, and on the dissolution or termination of a relationship. With regard to these studies, we will examine five major issues: the focus of research, its disciplinary background, key concepts, methodological approach, and key findings. Avenues for future research are suggested on the basis of the analysis.

Introduction

This paper reviews and assesses previous research concerning the ending of exchange relationships. During the past decade the Interaction and Network Approach together with Relationship Marketing thinking, have shifted the interest in marketing discipline from distinct transactions to enduring exchange relationships. One of the key issues that has been brought into discussion is the development of exchange relationship, particularly the different phases buyer-seller relationships may go through. Different models have been put forward, but most of them share a view that a relationship has a beginning, a life between, and an ending. Research has focused on the phases of “the life between” while the ending of relationships has received far less attention. Yet, we all know that relationships do not last forever. Some end and some are put into end. In the era of relationships and networks both academics and managers should understand how exchange relationships come to an end.

In recent years, distinguished scholars have emphasised the importance of this topic (e.g. Dwyer, Shurr and Oh 1987; Gadde and Mattsson 1987; Håkansson and Snehota 1995). During the late 1990's, the number of published research addressing the phenomenon of relationship ending has rapidly increased. Simultaneously several streams of research on the topic have emerged, each from its own disciplinary background. This is all very positive, but has also led into a situation where researchers from different approaches hardly know about each others' work, and even if they knew they feel it difficult to refer to studies that start from very different premises than their own. In this situation we see that an analytical overview of existing research is needed. An analysis of “the state of the art” would be helpful in making different research approaches, their findings and the avenues for future research visible for the scientific community. The aim of our research review is thus to show what we know about the ending of exchange relationships so far and thereby to open eyes for new research opportunities in this field.

The domain of the review is the ending of exchange relationships. We restrict the analysis to studies that fall into the marketing discipline, but within marketing, no selection is done on the basis of the type of relationship. Studies on both consumer relationships and business-to-business relationships are included in the review.

As to the key concepts used, we acknowledge all studies that deal with relationship switching, exit from a relationship, relationship dissolution or termination of a relationship. Also other expressions like fading away, disengagement and break-up are considered relevant for the purpose. In defining the domain we aim to be flexible, knowing that in a new research area concepts are not established. The use of various conceptual languages is also a reflection of the different disciplinary backgrounds of the studies. Researchers are approaching relationship endings from different theoretical perspectives and producing knowledge based on different assumptions (see e.g. Haugland 1999; Möller and Halinen 2000). By using the concept of relationship ending in this study, we want to disconnect ourselves from the orthodoxy of any school of thought and to use a concept that is neutral enough to remove the obstacles of knowledge transfer between various streams of research.

The review follows mainly the guidelines provided by Coviello and McAuley (1999) but also other research reviews are used as a source of ideas (e.g. Araujo and Easton 1996; Knight 1999; Möller and Halinen 2000). A content analysis of 45 studies on relationship endings is made. In order to make the review manageable, we first make a rough categorisation of existing research into four seemingly different approaches. They differ from each other on the basis of the type of relationship they investigate and the theoretical discussion they relate to. One approach deals with business relationships using the Interaction and Network Approach (e.g. Gadde and Mattsson 1987; Havila and Wilkinson 1997). The second deals with consumer relationships and draws on Services Marketing and Relationship Marketing thinking (e.g. Keaveney 1995; Roos 1999). The third is focused on channel relationships and relates to the Political Economy Framework (e.g. Ping 1995; Ping and Dwyer 1992), and the fourth, a predominantly empirical and industry-based approach focuses on gathering empirical information about relationship endings in the advertising industry (e.g. Henke 1995; Michell 1988). The three first categories are the very same as Möller and Halinen (2000) identifies as the most influential disciplinary roots of relationship marketing theory. This is expected as it is very probable that each research tradition that has contributed to relationship marketing thinking also has contributed to research on ending relationships.

In the next section a description of the reviewed literature is given. The review itself will advance according to the identified research approaches: business marketing, services marketing, marketing channels and advertising industry approach. Each approach is examined separately. After introducing the studies, key authors and their country of origin, the disciplinary background, the key concepts, the research focus, the methodological approach and the key findings of each approach are described. A comparison of the research approaches is presented to summarise the review. The paper concludes by providing an integrated discussion of the key issues and drafting some paths for future studies to pursue.

An overview to the reviewed literature

Several procedures were used to gather literature for this review. The main part of the literature originates from the authors' personal collections of articles and conference papers on the topic, gathered for previous research projects. This literature was used as a platform for a more thorough literature search. The reference list of each piece of work was looked through in order to move backwards in the literature search and the journals where articles had appeared were systematically studied.

Two searches from three representative electronic databases were concluded: ABI/INFORM (articles from 1986 onwards), EBSCO Host (articles from 1990 onwards) and Emerald Library (articles from 1989 onwards)²⁹¹. In the first database search the most common key words derived from the studies already available were used. These were switching, exit, dissolution, termination, fading, disengagement, and break-up. The second search was restricted to the journals that had published more than one of the articles already available when starting the searches. The time period covered was 1990-2000²⁹², and from this period the abstracts of all issues of the journal were systematically searched²⁹³. The search was restricted to the past ten years, because it seemed clear on the basis of existing material, that earlier literature had already been discovered through other procedures. The systematic search concerned scientific articles only. Articles in edited books and conference papers were found by more casual means, e.g. through attendance in particular conferences (mostly IMP).

All these procedures resulted in the discovery of 45 studies that focus on one way or another on the ending of exchange relationships. These include 37 refereed articles, one article in an edited book, and six conference papers. Figure 1 shows the chronological progression of the research on exchange relationship endings. The first published article dates back to 1980 and the latest was published in March 2000. Three articles that were accepted for publication later during the year 2000 were also included into the analysis.

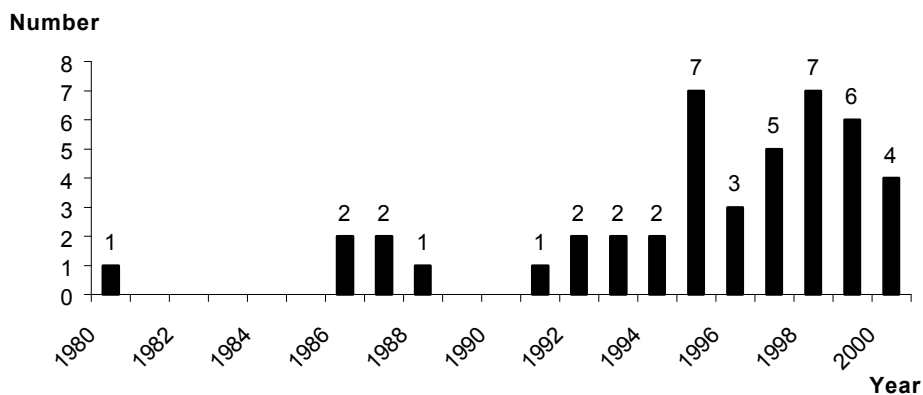


Figure 1. Number of studies on exchange relationship endings per year, 1980 – March 2000

The journals and publications in which the reviewed articles have been published are listed in Table 1. So far, no journal has dedicated itself to the subject area, but a wide variety of journals

²⁹¹ The time period in brackets applies for most journals included in the database.

²⁹² Including the first issues of the year 2000, if already published at the beginning of April 2000.

²⁹³ One exception is Journal of Service Research, from which the years 1999-2000 were the only volumes available.

publish contributions to theory development in the area. Also the most appreciated journals figure out in the list. Five journals have published more than two articles on the topic, showing that the issue is of interest for the journal. However, only Journal of Advertising Research and Journal of Retailing have published a series of studies, where continuous development and discussion on one theme can be identified.

Table 1. The journals in which articles on relationship endings have been published, 1980 – 2000

Journal / Publication	Number of articles
Journal of Advertising Research*	6
Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*	3
Journal of Business Research*	3
Journal of Marketing*	3
Journal of Retailing*	3
International Journal of Bank Marketing*	2
Journal of Service Research*	2
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*	2
European Journal of Marketing	1
Industrial Marketing and Purchasing	1
Industrial Marketing Management	1
International Business Review	1
International Journal of Advertising	1
International Journal of Research in Marketing	1
International Journal of Service Industry Management	1
Journal of Marketing Management	1
Journal of Professional Services Marketing	1
Journal of Strategic Marketing	1
Marketing Letters	1
Marketing Science	1
The Journal of Services Marketing	1
Conference proceedings, articles in edited books	8
TOTAL	45
* the journal was among the second data-base search	

The empirical contexts in which the studies on relationship ending have been executed are numerous. 39 out of the 45 articles report empirical work, while 6 concentrate on theoretical analysis. Advertising industry is the most explored (9 studies). Although banking (7 studies), hardware distribution (6), and international channels (5) have also attracted research interest, the advertising industry seems to be the only candidate to offer any reliable industry-specific knowledge on relationship ending. In the other industries research knowledge is still very scattered.

The above description has provided the reader an overview of the literature in focus. Next we will go deeper into the different research approaches that our review discovered. Each of the

approaches will be subject to equal investigation, and afterwards, they will be compared to reveal main differences.

Business marketing -approach

This approach includes 20 journal articles or conference papers on business relationship ending and has attracted more research effort than the rest of the approaches. Authors from Europe, from Nordic countries in particular, but also North-America and Austral-Asia have contributed in this area. Jaana Tähtinen appears as an author in more than two articles and papers, which is an indication of a personal research program in this theme. The first article on the ending of business relationships was published as early as 1986, but since 1993 the topic has appeared in journals and conferences every year.

Disciplinary background. The vast majority of the studies (14 pieces) derive from Interaction and Network Approach. In addition to that, three of the studies (Giller and Matear 2000; Perrien, Lalonde and Filatrault 1994; Perrien, Paradis and Banting 1995) apply relationship marketing literature. The remaining articles have theoretical foundations in transaction cost analysis, social exchange research, and distributive justice (Gassenheimer, Houston and Davis 1998); Haugland 1999), or in organisational decision making (Heide and Weiss 1995).

When focusing on the ending of business relationships, frameworks and theories from other disciplines such as social-psychology (e.g. Baxter 1985; Duck 1982), economics (e.g. Hirschman 1975) or sociology (e.g. Simmel 1950) have been applied. Two of the studies (Havila and Wilkinson 1997; Tähtinen and Halinen-Kaila 1997) make use of social psychology literature on ending of personal relationships and five (Alajoutsijärvi, Möller and Tähtinen 2000; Gassenheimer et al. 1998; Giller and Matear 2000; Tähtinen, 1998; Tähtinen and Halinen 1999) apply also economics. Simmel (1950) provides a starting point for Havila (1996), and also for the studies of Tähtinen and Halinen.

Most writers contend to refer to previous research on exchange relationship ending within marketing. The most referred study is the seminal work of Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987) which itself draws on social psychology in describing the dissolution phase of relationships. In addition, there is a group of studies that do not refer to any previous studies on relationship endings (Gadde and Mattsson 1987; Håkansson and Snehota 1995; Rosson 1986; Young and Denize 1995), but stick to the ideas of relationships shared within the Interaction and Network Approach.

Table 3. Concepts describing business relationship ending

Concept	Study
Dissolution	Alajoutsijärvi et al. 2000; Giller and Matear 2000; Havila and Wilkinson 1997; Hedaa 1993; Perrien et al. 1994; Perrien et al. 1995; Tähtinen and Halinen-Kaila 1997; Tähtinen 1998; Tähtinen and Halinen 1999
Termination	Gassenheimer et al. 1998; Giller and Matear 2000; Haugland 1999; Havila 1996; Havila and Wilkinson 1997; Rosson 1986; Tähtinen and Halinen-Kaila 1997
Exit	Alajoutsijärvi et al. 2000; Gadde and Mattsson 1987; Gassenheimer et al. 1998; Hedaa 1993; Håkansson and Snehota 1995
Switching behaviour	Heide and Weiss 1995; Nielson 1996; Perrien et al. 1994; Young and Denize 1997;
Divorce	Perrien et al. 1994; Perrien et al. 1995
Deteriorating relationship	Hedaa 1993
Ending	Tähtinen et al. 2000
Fading relationship	Gronhaug et al. 1999
Failure	Gassenheimer et al. 1998

Concepts used. This approach uses a large variety of terms to refer to business relationship ending as shown in Table 3. Several studies use more than one concept, but one as a main concept. Dissolution is the main concept in six studies, exit and switching in three respectively.

It is obvious that a certain kind of conceptual confusion exists among the researchers. This confusion is made even worse by the fact that explicit definitions of the concepts or even the main concept is seldom given in the studies. Exceptions to this are for instance Alajoutsijärvi et al. (2000), Giller and Matear (2000), Havila and Wilkinson (1997) and Tähtinen and Halinen-Kaila (1997), which all explicitly define an ex-business relationship. Other studies take a less academic approach to definitions and refer to exit e.g. as “there has been no commercial exchange during a specific time period” (Gadde and Mattsson 1987, p. 30) and dissolution as “disengagement from the relationship” (Perrien et al. 1995, p. 318).

Focus of research: reasons vs. process. Research is quite evenly distributed to the two “camps” of the research focus (Table 4.). The factors influencing business relationship dissolution or the reasons for customers to switch suppliers have interested researches (e.g. Perrien et al. 1995; Young and Denize 1997). In addition, the question of how different structural factors like the amount of relational investments (Haugland 1999) or the nature of the relationship (Tähtinen, Matear and Gray 2000) influence the duration of a relationship, has been studied.

Table 4. The focus of business relationship ending research

Focus	Study
Factors influencing business relationship ending	Gassenheimer et al. 1998; Haugland 1999; Hedaa 1993; Heide and Weiss 1995; Håkansson and Snehota 1995; Nielson 1996; Perrien et al. 1994; Perrien et al. 1995; Tähtinen et al. 2000; Young and Denize 1997
The process of business relationship ending	Alajoutsijärvi et al. 2000; Gadde and Mattsson 1987; Giller and Matear 2000; Gronhaug et al. 1999; Havila 1996; Havila and Wilkinson 1997; Rosson 1986; Tähtinen 1998; Tähtinen and Halinen-Kaila 1997; Tähtinen and Halinen 1999

Most of the research focusing on the process of relationship ending includes also factors that influence the process (e.g. Havila 1996; Rosson 1986; Tähtinen 1998). Some of the research suggests a process model, which aims at covering all kinds of endings and all stages of the ending process (e.g. Tähtinen and Halinen-Kaila 1997; Tähtinen and Halinen 1999), while others focus on specific stage or aspect of the process (e.g. Alajoutsijärvi et al. 2000; Havila and Wilkinson 1997).

Key findings. The very basic result of the studies is the acknowledgement of the ending phase *per se*. Rosson (1986) was the first to suggest that business relationship models should include a stage of termination as their last stage. In 1987, Gadde and Mattsson proposed that relationship ending is best described as a process where different exit patterns can be identified. Since then Tähtinen and Halinen (see e.g. Tähtinen and Halinen 1999) have suggested a comprehensive process model of the dissolution phase.

Tähtinen and Halinen classify the influencing factors into three classes: the predisposing factors, the precipitating events and the attenuating factors. All these factors are expected to influence the managers' decisions and actions in the relationship ending process. The empirical findings from other studies support this classification. For example a bank may consider some industrial sector as too risky (a predisposing factor) and because of that, refuses to give additional loan to its customer (Perrien et al. 1994). The customer may perceive the refusal of loan as a precipitating event (Perrien et al. 1994). If the exit costs – an attenuating factor (Young and Denize 1997) – are not too high, the customer may start to look for another financial service provider. Other examples of precipitating events are changes in the ownership of the company, rapid growth or the opposite, a company ceasing business (Perrien et al. 1994; Rosson 1986; Young and Denize 1997). Although the research has not specifically been looking for other attenuating factors than switching costs (Nielsen 1996), some empirical evidence from the context of company - accountant relationships is available. Young and Denize (1997) find out that, for instance, strong personal bonds and the customer's need for stability in their accountant relationship function as attenuating factors.

The nature of the relationship is also seen to influence relationship ending. Tähtinen and Halinen (1999) distinguish three different types of relationships: continuous, terminal and episodic. Depending on the reasons of the dissolution, the end of a continuous relationship can be decided by one or both actors, forced by other actors, or natural because of diminishing need for exchange. A number of studies (Tähtinen 1998; Tähtinen et al. 2000; Young and Denize 1997) provide examples of relationship endings where the nature of the relationship has played a role in the ending process.

The process of business relationship ending has been divided into seven stages; the assessment stage, the decision making stage, the dyadic communication stage, the network communication stage, the disengagement stage, the aftermath stage and, the restoring of relationship (Tähtinen 1988; Tähtinen and Halinen-Kaila 1999). Each stage describes the decisions and actions that managers perform in the stage, but the number and order of the stages vary from case to case. As to the other aspects of the ending process, Alajoutsijärvi et al. (2000) and Giller and Matear (2000) both suggest that by using other-oriented and direct communication strategies the disengager company can minimise the potential damage due to relationship ending. The studies of Havila (1996) and Havila and Wilkinson (1997) show that a relationship may not totally end, but that individuals may maintain actor bonds developed during the ex-relationship and even re-establish the relationship later on.

Methods used. Many of the papers focusing on business relationship ending are purely theoretical (Håkansson and Snehota 1995; Gassenheimer et al. 1998; Hedaa 1993; Tähtinen and Halinen-Kaila 1997) or use an illustrative or exploratory case study/studies (Alajoutsijärvi et al. 2000; Giller and Matear 2000; Gronhaug et al. 1999; Perrien et al. 1994; Tähtinen 1998; Tähtinen et al. 2000). Havila (1996), Havila and Wilkinson (1997), and Rosson (1986) all derive from an extensive multiple case study, and Gadde and Mattsson (1987) build on data acquired from three case studies performed earlier. The strong weight on qualitative and longitudinal case studies is obvious. Only three studies, Haugland (1999), Nielson (1996), and Young and Denize (1995), have used surveys and quantitative analysis methods. They all focus on the reasons for relationship ending and study it from only one partner's point of view.

Services marketing -approach

The research on exchange relationship ending within services marketing consists of 11 journal articles. This topic has interested many scholars, only Kate Stewart appears as an author in more than two articles (Colgate, Stewart and Kinsella 1996; Stewart 1998a; Stewart 1998b). The authors originate both from the USA and from Europe. The period of publication is rather short, the first did not appear until 1995.

Disciplinary background. The articles are quite homogenous as to their roots within the marketing discipline. The majority of them have emerged from the Services Marketing tradition and focus on consumers as customers. The only exception is Athanassopoulos (1999) in which both consumers and companies using financial services are researched.

The studies are often empirically driven. The stream of research starts from the exploratory empirical study by Keaveney (1995), and some of the subsequent research refer to it (e.g. Bansal and Taylor 1999; Roos 1999). Previous research on customer loyalty, customer retention, and

customer complaining behaviour is in some extent used to understand the empirical findings. A striking notion is that only two authors make use of the relationship ending models from other disciplines. Hocutt (1998) uses research on interpersonal relationship dissolution (e.g. Duck 1982) and Stewart (1998ab; 1998ba) applies also economics (e.g. Hirschman 1970).

Concepts used. The ending of service provider-consumer relationship is commonly conceptualised in terms of consumer switching behaviour (see Table 6). The use of this term obviously originates from the research on consumer brand switching (see also Stewart 1998a). The term refers to situations where the consumer not only ends a relationship but also starts a new one with an alternative service provider. Moreover, most of the research focuses on consumer's voluntary switching behaviour (e.g. Keaveney 1995; Roos 1999).

Table 6. Concepts describing consumer - service provider relationship ending

Concept	Study
Consumer switching behaviour	Athanassopoulos 2000; Bansal and Taylor 1999; Keaveney 1995; Mittal and Lassar 1998; Popkowski and Timmermans 1997; Roos 1999
Customer exit	Bolton 1998; Stewart 1998a; 1998b
Termination	Hocutt 1998; Roos 1999
Breakdown	Stewart 1998a
Customer defection	Colgate et al. 1996
Customer retention	Bolton 1998
Dissolution	Hocutt 1998
Ending	Stewart 1998a

Stewart (1998a, 1998b) departs from the mainstream as she uses customer exit and also carefully explains her choice relating to Hirschman's (1970) exit-voice-loyalty framework. The concept is used to "denote the focus on the customer's leaving rather than their taking in a new supplier" (Stewart 1998a, p. 236). Various concepts are also used in research interchangeably, which creates confusion, e.g. termination/switching in Roos (1999) and termination/dissolution in Hocutt (1998).

Focus of research: reasons vs. process. Similarly with the research on business relationship ending, the focus of services research is also twofold (Table 7). Five of the studies concentrate on finding out the reasons of consumers to switch their service providers. Their results report either the events that make the consumer decide to switch (e.g. Athanassopoulos 2000) or the antecedent conditions of switching (e.g. Hocutt 1988).

Table 7. The focus of the studies on service relationship ending

Focus	Study
Factors influencing switching behaviour	Athanassopoulos 2000; Bolton 1998; Colgate et al. 1996; Hocutt 1998; Mittal and Lassar 1998; Popkowski and Timmermans 1997
The process of customer exit / switching	Bansal and Taylor 1999; Keaveney 1995; Roos 1999; Stewart 1998a; Stewart 1998b

Four studies aim to describe the process of ending a relationship. Roos (1999) outlines consumers' different switching paths leading to total or partial switching decisions. Some models (e.g. Stewart 1998b) emphasise the evaluation of all the costs and benefits of the relationship, after which the consumer may choose to exit from the relationship. The models also include consumers' actions after the ending, e.g. negative word of mouth (Keaveney 1995).

Key findings. Roos (1999) classifies the factors that initiate consumer's switching process into three types: a pushing determinant, a pulling determinant and a swayer. A swayer, according to Roos (1999, p. 75) "either mitigates or prolongs the switching decision and also strengthens it". The following pushing determinants or reasons for switching have been reported in several studies: different service failures or failures in service recovery, pricing, inconvenient location, variation seeking and events in other relationships that influence the focal one (Athanassopoulos 2000; Colgate, Stewart and Kinsella 1996; Keaveney 1995; Popkowski and Timmermans 1997; Roos 1999). The first three reasons can be seen to contribute to low service quality and consumer dissatisfaction towards the service provider, which have been found to increase customer switching (see also Bolton 1998; Colgate, Stewart and Kinsella 1996; Mittal and Lassar 1998). Variation seeking and the actions of some third actor can be two of the reasons why also satisfied customers change their service providers as Mittal and Lassar (1998) and Stewart (1998a) are suggesting. The third actor can be e.g. a competitor making a better offer (Colgate et al. 1996). Of course, several reasons can influence buyer's switching behaviour at the same time (see e.g. Keaveney 1995).

A pulling determinant refers to reasons to come back to the original service provider after switching (Roos 1999). Indeed, as Roos (1999) suggests, variation seeking contributes to both leaving and coming back as it may be a reason to have more than one relationship with the same type of service provider (see Colgate et al. 1996; Popkowski and Timmermans 1997). In addition to the pulling determinants, the factors that keep the customers with their current service providers have also been studied. High level of satisfaction, the consumer perceived costs involved in changing a supplier and the attractiveness of alternative service providers are suggested in recent research to hinder consumer switching (e.g. Bansal and Taylor 1999; Hocutt 1998; Stewart 1998a).

As for the ending process, most of the models present it as a "black box" called switching or exit. However, some studies offer more. Bansal and Taylor (1999) suggest that switching behaviour has two determinants: attitude towards switching and intention to switch. The consumer can

during the switching process also complain, in other words use voice (Keaveney 1995; Stewart 1998b; Roos 1999). Complaining can bring even strong emotions into the surface, and if no recovery is achieved, consumer may exit and also involve herself into negative word of mouth (Keaveney 1995; Stewart 1998b; Roos 1999).

Methods used. Two of the studies in this approach are pure theoretical models of the switching behaviour (Hocutt 1999, Stewart 1998b). The empirical studies have used a Critical Incident Technique (Keaveney 1995) or a technique developed from it (Roos 1999), surveys (Athanasopoulos 2000; Bansal and Taylor 1999; Colgate et al. 1996; Mittal and Lassar 1998), panel data (Bolton 1998; Popkowski and Timmermans 1997), and a multiple case study (Stewart 1998a). Only three studies (Bansal and Taylor 1999; Bolton 1998; Popkowski and Timmermans 1997) use clearly longitudinal data. None of the studies were dyadic, thus only the customer’s switching behaviour was examined.

Marketing channels -approach

The marketing channels -approach consists of six studies, in each of which Robert A. Ping Jr. is the key author. In spite of the fact that the first research by Ping and Dwyer was published already in 1992, other researchers have not shared their interest in ending channel relationships.

Disciplinary background. The disciplinary origins of this approach are quite various but still homogenous, probably because of the single author. The approach contributes to the marketing channel research applying Political Economy Framework, but draws also ideas on economics, particularly on Hirschman’s (1970) exit-voice-loyalty framework, on employee turnover literature as well as the ending of intimate relationships described within social psychology.

Concepts used. Three different concepts are used to conceptualise channel relationship ending (see Table 8). This is striking as it is question of a single person’s work. The choice of concepts might well be a reflection of conscious variation of research perspective or a sign of the development of the researcher’s thinking. In this case, another explanation, however, seems more appropriate. Ping does not clearly define the concepts used. In developing the theoretical model of channel relationship termination, Ping and Dwyer (1992) use two concepts, termination and dissolution, interchangeably. In further studies Ping (1993; 1999) focuses on the study of exit intention, but explains exit sometimes to be the same as relationship termination, sometimes separate from dissolution. In 1995, Ping defines exit intention as “an intention to physically leave the exchange relationship” and operationalises it as “propensity to terminate the relationship”. It is thus very difficult to determine what he exactly means by termination or dissolution.

Table 8. Concepts describing channel relationship ending

Concept	Study
Termination	Ping and Dwyer 1992; Ping 1993; Ping 1994; Ping 1995
Dissolution	Ping and Dwyer 1992; Ping 1993; Ping 1999
Exit (or exit intention)	Ping 1993; Ping 1994; Ping 1995; Ping 1997; Ping 1999

Focus of research: reasons vs. process. Although the theoretical study suggests a tentative process model of channel relationship termination, the major focus of the empirical studies is to investigate either antecedents or structural constraints of retailer exit intention (Table 9.). In his 1999 article, Ping concludes that a stage of neglect precedes exit intention, and thus suggests that exit should be treated as a process.

Table 9. The focus of channel relationship ending research

Focus	Study
Factors influencing retailer exiting intentions	Ping 1993; Ping 1994; Ping 1995; Ping 1999
The process of channel relationship termination	Ping and Dwyer 1992

Key findings. The model of channel relationship termination (Ping and Dwyer 1992) suggests that relationship ending proceeds through two phases – committed and dissolution. The two phases are further divided into seven stages (positive, negative, intra-personal, intra-company, inter-company, public, and aftermath stages) and each is viewed to consist of different actions.

Interestingly, the following empirical research does not aim at testing the model. On the contrary, the focus of research moves into the antecedents to or the constraints on exit intention. The research shows that retailer satisfaction decreases their exit intention (Ping 1993; 1995; 1999) and increases the use of voice (Ping 1997). On the other hand, attractiveness of alternative partners increases exit intention (Ping 1993), but higher levels of customer satisfaction attenuate the association (Ping 1994). Ping (1995) also provides evidence for the proposition that the economic situation of the retailer influences its exit intention.

Methods used. The empirical research seems to be using one field survey among U.S. hardware retailers (the number of usable responses being between 185 and 288). In all of the studies Ping uses structural modelling to analyse the data.

Advertising industry -approach

This fourth research approach to ending exchange relationships includes eight studies. The key person is Paul N. C. Michell, who is the author or co-author in seven articles. Journal of Advertising Research has been the main forum of publication for these studies and the time period under which they have appeared is from 1980 to 1997.

Disciplinary background. This approach is empirically driven. The studies are not strongly linked to any theoretical background, neither in marketing nor in other disciplines.

Concepts used. Several concepts are used to describe the ending of advertising agency - client relationships (see Table 10). From these concepts, switching is the most commonly used, as the major focus is on customer's changing their ad agencies. When more than one concept is used in a single article, they are used interchangeably conveying the same meaning.

Table 10. Concepts describing endings of advertising agency – client relationships

Concept	Study
Switching	Buchanan and Michell 1991; Doyle et al.1980; Durden et al. 1997; Henke 1995;Michell 1986/7; Michell 1987/8; Michell 1988; Michell et al.1992;
Breakdown, break-up	Doyle et al.1980; Durden et al.1997; Michell 1986/7; Michell et al. 1992;
Termination	Michell et al. 1992

Focus of research: reasons vs. process. As Table 11 displays, the whole research approach focuses on either reasons for or factors related to agency/client switching. Doyle et al. (1980) discovers reasons that lead the U.K advertisers or their agencies to decide to break their relationship. The subsequent research replicates the study in the U.S. and in New Zealand from the marketer’s point of view. Another half of the research in this approach tries to discover structural or organisational factors that are related to or predict relationship switching. None of the studies focus on the process of relationship ending, although the idea of viewing relationship breakdown as a process is put forward already in the first article (Doyle et al. 1980) and has later been supported also by Henke (1995).

Table 11. The focus of advertising agency – client relationship ending research

Focus	Study
Reasons for agency switching	Doyle et al.1980 Michell 1986/7 Michell, Cataquet and Hague 1992 Durden, Orsman and Michell 1997
Factors related to agency switching	Michell 1987/8 Michell 1988 Buchanan and Michell 1991 Henke 1995
Process	-

Key findings. The key findings discussed here are related to the two focus areas of this approach: the reasons for and the factors related to advertising agency or client switching. Five major groups of reasons have been identified to cause switching: client dissatisfaction with the agency performance, changes in client policy, changes in client management, changes in agency management and changes in agency policy (Doyle, Corstjens and Michell 1980; Durden, Orsman and Michell 1997; Michell 1986/87; Michell, Cataquet and Hague 1992). This order of importance is derived from the clients’ viewpoint. In Doyle et al. (1980) the view of advertising agencies of the same issues is quite different. The agencies agree on the reasons, but place more weight to those related to changes in client companies. Moreover, Henke (1995) suggests that dissatisfaction with some aspects of agency performance (e.g. ability to produce results for the

client) can trigger the switching decision, although the customer, at the same time, would be satisfied with for instance the agency's creative skills.

The studies on the structural and organisational factors related to agency switching have come up with few replicated results. The size of the client and the account is related to switching, large clients and large accounts are more loyal than small ones (Buchanan and Michell 1991; Michell 1987/8; 1988). The product group that is advertised also has an effect: fast moving consumer goods accounts and accounts in mature consumer markets are seldom switched (Buchanan and Michell 1991; Michell 1987/8; 1988). The results on the age of the relationship are contradictory. Michell (1987/8) finds that new accounts are extremely disloyal, whereas Buchanan and Michell (1991) conclude that new accounts appear to be less prone to failure, i.e. agency switching.

Methods used. Data on the reasons for agency/client switching is collected through mail surveys. Doyle et al. (1980) use dyadic approach, i.e. studying the views of both the advertising agency and the client, but the three replication studies only investigate the views of the advertisers. In all the surveys, the data relates to previous and therefore actual switches. The factors related to or predicting agency switching are studied longitudinally using panel data (see Buchanan and Michell 1991; Michell 1987/88; Michell 1988) or a two-wave telephone survey (see Henke 1995). A variety of multivariate methods are applied in the data analysis.

Comparison of the four research approaches

In this review, four research traditions on exchange relationship ending have been identified. The analysis of studies within each approach reveals that the research focus, the concepts used and the methods applied are all strongly connected to the theoretical background of the study. Each approach produces knowledge based on its own disciplinary roots and describes this way only one side of the studied phenomenon. Table 12. summarises the results of the review. Reading the table column by column provides a profile of research within each approach. Reading by rows gives an idea of the major differences.

The business marketing -approach which has drawn ideas from social psychology, has been able to describe and classify not only the factors influencing the dissolution process but also the process itself. The choice of methods, collection of longitudinal and qualitative data, has supported this target. It is also important to note that this approach tends to use dyadic methods in longitudinal research, which is in line with the notion of the Interaction and Network approach that both parties of a relationship are active. Moreover, the influence of third actors to the ending of business relationships is acknowledged.

The services marketing -approach loans its main concept – switching – from consumer behaviour literature, where it has been used in the study of brand switching, in particular. Switching is seen more as a decision than a process and, therefore, the main focus of the approach is on the reasons for switching. Dissatisfaction, variation seeking and third party actions or attractiveness have been identified as important determinants of service provider change. Quantitative methods, that serve the purpose well, have been applied. The influence of social psychology and economics can be seen in studies that aim at building a process model of switching.

Table 12. A comparison of research approaches focusing on the ending of exchange relationships

	Business marketing -approach	Services marketing -approach	Marketing channels -approach	Advertising industry -approach
References to other disciplines	Not extensive; social psychology, economics and sociology	Very few; social psychology and economics	Mostly economics	None
Concepts used	Mainly dissolution and termination Also exit and switching behaviour	Mainly switching behaviour Also exit	Mainly exit intention Also dissolution and termination	Mainly switching Also break-down, break-up
Focus of research	Both the factors influencing the process and the ending process <i>per se</i>	Mainly the factors influencing switching, some attention to the process	The factors influencing the exit intention	The factors influencing the decision to switch
Methods applied	Mostly qualitative and longitudinal (case studies) Some dyadic	Mostly quantitative and cross-sectional (surveys) None dyadic	Mostly quantitative and cross-sectional (surveys) None dyadic	All quantitative (surveys, panel data) Both cross-sectional and longitudinal One dyadic

Marketing channels -approach has used economics as one important source of ideas and specifies the phenomenon under study in terms of exit and exit intention. Research has been able to reveal factors that influence exit intention, not the nature of the ending process. Quantitative survey data has been the main type of data used, which fits well the focus of research. One of the main results is that the availability of attractive alternative partners increases the exit intention, but the association is attenuated by high level of satisfaction. Since all the empirical studies seem to use the same set of data, replication studies in other channel contexts are needed to confirm the results.

Finally, the empirically driven advertising industry research has gathered quantitative data on one focal phenomenon, decision to switch the agency, which is of interest to the industry. Various analysis methods have been used to confirm that changes related to either one of the parties or in client perceived dissatisfaction are the most common reasons for agency switching. The results also suggest that the client satisfaction is a complex issue. A customer can be satisfied with some of the agency characteristics, but dissatisfied with others that ultimately lead to change of agency.

Implications for future research

The research into relationship ending is rapidly increasing in numbers. The aim of this review was to offer a 'state of the art' overview and also propose avenues for future research in the area. We see five areas, in particular, in which there is space for improvement.

Future research should pay much more attention to conceptual analysis and proper definition of the phenomenon under study. So far, diverse terms are being used, often interchangeably and without a clear meaning. We would welcome efforts of conceptual analysis that would lead us out from the prevailing jungle of concepts.

One possibility could be to use the term "ending" when referring to all kinds of ending, in all types of relationship, no matter what the reasons for their ending are. This would allow researchers to define such terms as termination, dissolution, and switching to specific types of relationship ending. Termination could refer to an ending where one of the parties, or an outside actor, deliberately ends a relationship. Dissolution could describe a situation, where the relationship ends naturally, without a deliberate ending decision. Switching would in turn refer to such endings where the supplier or the buyer is substituted for another alternative.

There is much to hope for in the use of existing literature from marketing as well as outside the marketing discipline. Many researchers have disregarded the existing research in social psychology, economics and sociology, and lost thereby an obvious means of creating innovation in marketing. Also other related research topics within marketing offer ideas for the study of relationship ending. These include research on customer loyalty (e.g. Bejou and Palmer 1998), complaining behaviour (e.g. Singh 1990), service quality (e.g. Boles, Barksdale and Johnson 1997), satisfaction (e.g. Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt 2000) and relational norms (e.g. Paulin et al. 1998). Moreover, studies focusing on interorganisational dynamics (e.g. Levinthal and Fichman 1988), organisational death (e.g. Sutton 1987), employee dissatisfaction (e.g. Withey and Cooper 1989), stress management (e.g. Goodwin, Mayo and Hill 1997), group termination (e.g. Keyton 1993), and success or failure of alliances or joint ventures (e.g. Serapio and Cascio 1996) could provide useful insights to understand the phenomenon. Some of these have already been used in the reviewed research, but their use has not been very systematic or extensive.

The reviewed literature clearly indicates that exchange relationship ending is best described as a process, not as a decision. In the future, research in all approaches should be geared more towards the study of process and thereby towards longitudinal investigations. Theoretical process models and frameworks are already available, which provides a firm basis for empirical research.

Another issue that needs attention is the interactive nature of exchange relationships, i.e. the fact that relationships always involve at least two parties as well as their actions and reactions towards each other. Research findings indicate that the parties of a relationship are likely to have different views on the reasons of relationship ending and that they may have poor knowledge of the other party's reasons. This suggests that many of the potential problems that lead to relationship ending are genuine to the relationship itself, to tendencies created within it and to potential weaknesses in interaction. To acknowledge this, future research should, more often than today, take a dyadic view on relationships and gather data from both parties of a relationship. The network effects of other actors and relationships with them should also be integrated in research.

We also urge researchers to focus more on actual endings and not only on ending intentions. There are two major reasons for this. First, intention refers to only those kinds of endings where an actor decides to end a relationship (either terminate it or switch the partner). Also other kinds of ending are common in practice and should therefore be studied. Second, research has already shown that intention and actual action are two different things. Even if we already had a good knowledge on intentions, we still need other studies to provide knowledge on actual endings. This knowledge is needed to understand the process of relationship ending and to support managers in ending relationships successfully.

As a final note, we would like to stress the potential the topic of relationship ending offers for creative researchers. So far, research has raised more questions than it has been able to answer, which means that several interesting issues are still waiting to be discovered. We particularly challenge researchers to look to the other side of the fence, to other research approaches and disciplines, to see whether the grass is greener even there.

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