

## **RESTRICTIONS OF THE LOYALTY OF BUSINESS CUSTOMERS – CUSTOMER AND SALES REPRESENTATIVES PERSPECTIVES**

**Dr. Maciej Mitreęa,  
mitregam@ae.katowice.pl**

*Faculty of Management  
Karol Adamiecki University of Economics  
14 Bogucicka St  
Katowice, 40-226  
Poland  
Tel: (+00 48) 257 75 80  
Mobile: (+00 48) 503 133 686*

**Keywords:** customer loyalty, B2B, relationship marketing, qualitative research

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the 70s. some marketing scholars suggested establishing other principles and other language of explanation in the context of industrial marketing reality (Håkansson and Östberg 1975). In the 80s. research projects with regard to characteristics of industrial marketing were continued, which is significantly connected with studies realized by representatives of Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (Ford 1980; 1997). Even if some IMP representatives treat their area of interest as independent terminologically, it is reasonable to connect most of works of IMP with the development of the so-called relationship marketing concept. Probably the relationship marketing term was for the first time used and popularized as a concept by Jackson in 1985. This concept is nowadays said to be a new paradigm of marketing scientific discipline (Kuhn 2001). The development of relationship marketing took place simultaneously with the development of other theoretical concepts, which influence relationship marketing in a significant way. There are clear interrelations not only between various management concepts, but also between some management concepts and concepts from other disciplines of social sciences (Eiriz and Wilson 2006).

Even if relationship marketing is more and more popular among scholars, it is difficult to define the extent of popularization of this concept in the Business to Business practice in the form of established marketing strategies and organizational culture. It is fully reasonable not to treat relationship marketing as sole or prevailing business philosophy, but rather as a strategic option available among other more short term, transactional approaches (Grönroos 1997; Palmer 1996). At the same time, it is argued that relationship marketing concept is most suitable for the characteristics of B2B market (De Wulf and Oderkerken-Schröder 2001; O'Malley, Tynan 2000).

Representatives of IMP group noticed that developing close or co-operative B2B relationships is not always the best managerial solution. It may well be in company's best interests to keep its distance when dealing with some counterparts. Nevertheless, whether they are close, distant, co-operative, conflictful, predictable or wildly fluctuating, relationships between companies exist. "Relationship" is not a dichotomous variable and a company cannot choose to have or not to have one with particular customer or supplier. Instead, the issue is what the nature of that relationship will be. When these relationships are good, they are major assets, when they are bad, they are liabilities, but whatever they are, they have to be managed (Ford, 1997).

### **TO FORCE OR TO INVOLVE THE CUSTOMER INTO THE RELATIONSHIP**

Empirical studies concerning conditions of business customer loyalty have a strong tradition in marketing. Many factors are used in the literature to explain the reasons of B2B relationships development (Iacobucci and Hibbard 1999). Various models of customer relationship development have been developed. (Heide and John 1990; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Sigauw, Simpson and Baker 1998; Hibbard, Kumar and Stern 2001). These models are different in both theoretical assumptions and in presented sets of direct determinants of some expected relationship outcomes. Among various

factors analysed in the literature two groups of factors may be identified. First group refers to those situations in which buyers remain in emotional connection with the providers and desire to continue the relationship (dedication-based relationship). The second group refers to various conditions which increase the dependency of buyer in the relationship (constraint-based relationship) (Bendapudi and Berry 1997). Dedication-based relationship is usually described by such phenomena as customer trust and commitment which are effects of long-term successful exchange episodes (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Constraint-based relationship occurs when one party to the relationship believes it cannot exit the relationship due to some costs. Switching costs refer to the buyer's perceived costs of switching from the existing supplier to a new one. Buyer switching costs arise as a result of prior partner-specific investments in physical assets, organizational procedures, and/or employee training (Wathne, Biong and Heide 2001). Within the channels literature, the dependence of a retailer on a vendor was found to have a positive effect on the retailer's long-term orientation towards the vendor (Ganesan 1994). Even if the dedication-based B2B relationship is usually treated by relationship marketing specialists as most expected, there is no consensus between researchers about the effectiveness of each group of relationship motivators (Cannon and Perreault 1999; Palmatier, Dant and Grewal 2007). This is why it seems reasonable to study constraints which make the business customer continue their cooperation with the provider.

### **MONOGAMOUS AND POLYGAMOUS CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS**

Since its introduction by Levitt in 1983, the marriage analogy has been widely, and somewhat uncritically, repeated in the relationship marketing literature (Levitt 1983). Levitt's original metaphor was set in the context of a Christian marriage. A viewpoint echoed by subsequent authors and therefore the one adopted here. This perspective on marriage comprises the status of monogamy (exclusiveness) which takes place within life-long partners (Tynan 1997). In the context of relationships between exchanging companies (B2B) this analogy of monogamous relationships may be questioned. In the business practice there are strong organizational barriers which make it difficult for some purchasing managers to cooperate with one supplier in the range of given category of products or services. Probably the most widely observed barrier refers to some principles of quality management systems (especially ISO) which encourage or even force diversification of sources of supply. Also auction buying procedures implemented by many institutional buyers from public sector make it difficult for such a exclusive relationship with business providers to remain. At the same time, high level of patronage concentration (potentially even 100%) is treated as objective or relationship marketing efforts. In the context of B2B areas patronage concentration may be defined as the share of business customer's expenditures in an industry that is spent at one company. It is the amount that a company spends on one provider divided by the amount that company spends on all providers in the industry (Storbacka 1994). From the results of researches conducted mostly in the context of B2C exchange it seems that extraordinary positive emotional tone of customer relationship may lead to high level of patronage concentration (Barnes 1997; Reynolds and Beatty 1999). Also researches conducted on the sample of business customers suggest that there is higher likelihood of high patronage concentration in dedication-based customer relationships (Mitrega 2007). On the basis of mostly qualitative research methods it is possible to get to know what kind of threats or possibly also opportunities business representatives associate with monogamous supplier relationship. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find some research results about attitudes of business representatives towards exclusive cooperation with one supplier.

### **ROLE OF SALES REPRESENTATIVES IN RELATIONSHIP BUILDING**

Attributes and attitudes of sales personnel are treated as crucial diagnostic features by scholars interested in relationship marketing concept. There were studies conducted about relationships between the effectiveness of marketing and such as: personnel attributes as: sellers' similarity in relations to customer features, sellers' expertise, sellers' customer orientation vs. selling orientation or even sellers' ethics. The individual performance of representatives of selling firm plays the crucial role in inter-organizational communication which, in turn, is identified as "fundamental" to business relationships development (Palmatier et al 2006). From qualitative empirical results it

seems that business customers place more emphasis on” personal communication”, “personal interaction” and “personal understanding” than on formal information sharing which is sometimes treated as cornerstone of B2B communication. Thus there is probably need for theoretical differentiation between formal and informal communication (Newman, Lings and Lee 2005). Also from quantitative research results it may be noticed that overall competency of sales representatives is determinant of business customer trust and this is how it affects the effectiveness of relationship marketing programmes (Doney, Cannon 1997). Despite that some researches do not confirm the domination of inter-firm interpersonal performance among determinants of business customers’ decision-making (Wathne Biong and Heide 2001), it seems fully reasonable to treat the attitudes of personnel of selling firm as crucial for implementation of relationship marketing on industrial market. Thereby it may be surprising when we take into consideration that it is difficult to find in the literature some empirical studies with regard to approaches of sales representatives towards relationship marketing efforts. Most of published researches about B2B relationships were based on the information acquired from representatives of buying firms, not from the representatives of the selling firm. As a result, we do not have enough knowledge about ways in which sales representatives perceive customer relationships processes. Actually, we do not know whether they treat that processes as worth to be initiated. The knowledge about that may be very helpful in understanding of the organizational issues which may help managers to implement relational marketing strategies in the B2B area.

### **RESEARCH DESCRIPTION**

In 2006 the author of this paper invited B2B suppliers in Poland to participate in research project. Research project was realized in accordance with the methodology of interactive research (Gummesson 2001), consulting every stage with managers of 10 involved firms. The research team obtained formal references from enterprises - partners of the project.

The overall research results were presented in the book (Mitreęa 2007) and some selected parts in other articles (Mitreęa 2007). This paper is focused on this part of the research results which were qualitative in nature and refers to:

- barriers of changing supplier perceived by business customers (switching barriers);
- attitudes of business customers towards exclusive cooperation with one supplier;
- barriers of creating strong customer relationships perceived by sales representatives;
- threats connected with getting closer to the customer perceived by sales representatives.

The main research technique for empirical results discussed in this paper was unstructured personal interview. Interviews were carried out by the team of research workers among representatives of 189 business customers which maintained business contacts with companies partnering in the project. Intentional selection of companies participating in the research was conducted. The selection was aimed at creating a set of sectors that were strongly diversified with regard to frequency of company-customer contacts and customers’ freedom within the choice of a service provider (the most frequently connected with a level of sector concentration). It is necessary to mention that in the research participated both firms which stuck out for customers with many competitors (the subgroup: the free competition) as such which operated in conditions of the oligopoly or the monopoly. The highest concentration of the market appeared in case of suppliers of the earth gas and the coal and the lowest – in case of hotel industry and providers of financial services.

In addition to 189 interviews accomplished among business customers, focus group technique was used to identify opinions of business practitioners involved directly in sales processes. In 2006 they were sales representatives from 9 different companies which agreed to participate in the discussion. The focus group was repeated two years later with 20 sales representatives of companies operating on institutional market. The composition of focus participants in 2006 and 2008 was significantly different, nevertheless it does not have to be treated as disadvantage if we consider that there was not a comparison made of results in time (longitudinal study) but the research aim was to enrich existing results.

## CUSTOMER INTERVIEWS RESULTS

From realized interviews it appears that most of representatives of firms perceive essential limitations in the freedom of the choice of provider. Declarations of respondents indicate that switching barriers takes place always when there is concentrated sector of providers. It is probably more surprising that significant switching barriers were also frequently declared (in almost 40% cases) by business customers when the sector of providers is highly diffused.

Most frequently declared switching barriers referred to limitations of productive powers experienced among competitive providers. Purchasing managers identify usually only few alternative providers which fulfil some necessary technological requirements. If there are no legal restrictions of running a business in particular suppliers' sector, the monopoly may still take place if one company has an exclusive access to some resources. Such a monopolistic position may be build not only by the manufacturing company but also by retailing company which gained an access to various international sources of supply. For example, representatives of manufacturing company which needs specific types of raw materials argue that: *"There is a problem according to deliveries of such a materials like iron ores, bauxites or fluorspars. Practically the only one company which is able to deliver these material is company X"*. The respondents declared that choice is strongly limited because many providers are overworked and can offer only long-term delivery. Paradoxically for some purchasing specialists closer integration of Polish economy with European economy takes form of a threat. Nowadays more industrial providers located in Poland can sell their products and services abroad and domestic customers are treated as less profitable. Limited productive powers are observed not only in case of typical industrial (focused on manufacturing) sectors but also in services context when theoretically competition between providers is very intensive. For example, representatives of travel agencies complained about the limited choice of hotels in most popular tourist destinations, especially during the summer season.

More or less one per five interviewed business practitioners described switching barriers which were entitled later as: "requirements of the third party". This requirements usually come from the final buyers of companies. If the company constitutes the part of larger, especially transnational capital group then it is likely that there are some companies treated widely as favoured suppliers. For example, one of respondents has to buy for the company steelworks but in his opinion: *"...even in 70% percent the choice of steelworks provider is limited by the politics of key customer – American consortium "A". This customer cooperates closely with British company "B" providing steelworks, this is why it is expected to buy products based on this source of supply. As the result I have free choice only with regard to remaining 30% supply of steelworks"*.

In comparison with limitations of productive powers and requirements of the third party all other types of switching barriers were less frequently mentioned during the interviews. Among these remaining were legal bonds and risk of starting cooperation with new supplier. The first factor refers mostly to periodic contracts of supply established by some business customers. During the period of contract the choice of supplier is restricted because of obligation of purchasing certain amount from a given contractor. The latter factor refers to opinion shared by some purchasing specialists that there is high level of performance uncertainty associated with switching to new supplier. This factor was most frequently mentioned during interviews in manufacturing companies. The representative of the manufacturing company which is supplied by other companies with steel tooling services describes that risk with the following words: *"Each potential provider is precisely verified before first delivery is ordered. This initial process takes usually few months and contains direct visits in the supplying company, monitoring of information about the company in the professional press and getting in touch with representatives of companies from the reference list. To decrease the risk of failure we check also the financial guarantee and liquidity of the potential contractor"*.

During the interviews there were investigated the attitudes of purchasing managers towards exclusive cooperation with one supplier. From the results it seems that this type of supplier relationships are seldom experienced in practice. If the supply sector is not monopoly type, it is most probable that the business customer tends to cooperate with few reliable suppliers. Many respondents identified some threats connected with monogamous relationships in the area of supply management.

Almost one per three interviewed business practitioners argued that there is high risk of taking advantage of the privileged position by the seller in the monogamous relationship. In opinions of purchasing specialists such situations are very likely and usually take form of forcing some changes in conditions of cooperation without negotiating with customer and without regard to competitors proposal. One of practitioners working for the IT company and responsible for choice of ISO certification provider was perfectly sure that exclusive cooperation is not a good idea: *“The lack of competition between certification providers will probably lead to lower quality of services. This “monopolistic” provider usually thinks that I am his property. As a result this provider becomes less oriented at my individual situation and more at procedures and documentation”*. Respondents stressed also other limitations of cooperation with one provider which are not connected to bad will of the provider. They referred mostly to some unexpected events of fate which make the provider to decrease the level of performance for a space. For the local Internet provider that needs supply of fiber-optic cables services *“there is real threat of lighting strike which can turn off fiber-optic transmission. If I do not have alternative Internet provider our customers will have to wait for fiber-optic cables. They are more and more demanding so this situation may mean a real loss of money for us”*. Some respondents pointed at different sources of risky, independent events like temporary financial questions, strikes, casualties in production plants. Except events of fate respondents were aware of limitations of the assortment that only one company can provide. In the opinion of owner of small manufacturing company which was interviewed it is actually to cooperate only with one provider of leasing services, because *“there is no single company which would give you all necessary things in the leasing”*. Almost every purchasing specialist representing public sector companies called attention to legal limitations of exclusive cooperation. Act about public finance and public orders is essential formal obstacles for relational strategies in the area of supply of public sector entities. Basic procedure of more valuable ordering in case municipal subjects are auctions (unrestricted or limited).

### **SALES REPRESENTATIVES FOCUS RESULTS**

One of issues discussed by sales representatives during focus group were the organizational factors which make it more difficult or even impossible to build close customer relationships on B2B market. This theme aroused large excitement among research participants. As a first factor the intra-organizational communication problems were discussed. In the opinion of sales representatives the most important communication barriers appear in the downright dimension of organizational structure. The personnel responsible for realization of marketing processes is almost always not involved in the marketing planning process and then there are often problems with implementation of these top ideas: *“...established sales promotion projects and other marketing programmes oriented at middleman are not consulted with people that work daily with middleman. Executing scheduled promotional activities in the full range is unreal, because if somebody asked sales representative, then it would appear impossible in that form. The lack of the consultation with the sales manager (...) leads sometimes to misunderstandings between the company, the middleman and the private customer”*. The disputants agreed that many times they do not understand the strategy of their companies and they are not sure which were the motives or objectives of established marketing projects. During the discussion it appeared that the companies usually do not use the information gathered by the front-line employees and as a result they loose precious knowledge about new tendencies on the market. Sales representatives feel that they among all other departments of the company the are closest to the customer and this is why their knowledge is priceless. They meet customers daily and the newest information gathered by that should be treated as a basis for planning processes. Most of the disputants confirmed that their companies established various sales reporting systems but in the opinion of them, information gathered in this way is not used in planning but mostly to control sales representatives. Established reporting procedures are very time-consuming for sales personnel. They are perceived as a the sign of the bureaucracy which does not bring to the firm measurable advantages.

During the focus interview also the limitation of the authority of front-line employees was treated as a disadvantage. The most difficult for sales representatives is that during the negotiations

with customer they have to consult many things with the superior or with the president of the firm. One of the disputants used following words to express that issue: *“I perfectly know that I will be able to offer the given discount to customer, but to make it real, obligatory I have to get the signature of the member of the management board. It is simple waste of time. Of course this problem may appear at every stage of contacts with customer and sometimes this may make customer feel that I am not a reliable person”*. The disputants argued that the customer usually wants to solve his/her problems only with one person in the company. If the customer has to confirm many things with various persons it is usually treated as the bureaucratic waste of time.

The moderator asked the focus participants whether they could identify some significant threats for the company resulted from getting closer to customers. Most of the disputants confirmed that they experienced real disadvantages connected with their efforts to create long-term, loyal customer relationships. In their opinions, it is quite typical for some customers that the expectations toward them personally and towards the company increase in life-cycle of the relationship. Some customers manifest even more transactional approach than at the beginning of the cooperation: *“When I come to them again they wait continuously for more and more. This can be very difficult because my possibilities are limited”*. Some sales representatives, pointed at the problem that getting closer to the customer may mean also inconvenient familiarizing: *“If we get to know each other better, sometimes there is an expectation that I do not have my own private life and always if he/she wants to drink vodka with me I have to be ready. It may sound funny but in practice it may be hard thing to manage, if you have a family”*. Disputants argue that getting closer to the customer may make the customer more resistant to persuasion so it may be more difficult to negotiate with this customer some crucial issues if there is time for that. The strong interpersonal relationship between the sales representative and the purchasing specialist from other company may also become disadvantage when some strategic changes in organizational structures of cooperating companies take place. *“If the cooperation between companies is fully based on personal ties it may be really risky for the business. If my friend in the company X is transferred to other position in the company or simply leaves from work(...), that would be very difficult”*.

It should be mentioned that in spite of the fact that sales representatives discussed some important limitations of loyalty marketing projects they also admitted that creating close customer relationships is necessary because the balance of profits and losses for these activities is definitely positive.

### **RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS**

Realized qualitative study draws attention to some limitations with regard to implementation of relational marketing strategies. Research results may encourage marketing specialists to realistic attitude toward creating closer relationships with customers. First of all, it seems that aside from loyalty programmes that company has established, many customers may continue shopping because of high switching barriers. Most of purchasing specialists perceive essential limitations in the freedom of the choice of the supplier. In these sectors when there are not many alternatives between potential suppliers business customers may be strongly dependent on existing supplier and the supplier strategy oriented at constraint-based customer relationships may be very successful. Taking into consideration research results which refer to “requirements of the third party” as switching barrier, so called network approach to marketing applied by many IMP representatives is justified. Especially for those companies that operate on international market the knowledge about relationships that particular foreign customer has with other entities may be very useful. Nowadays the industrial markets become more and more transnational and the challenge for industrial suppliers is not only to define the resources which may be effectively used by the network of industrial companies but also to identify the way in which these resources should be provided. The research results confirm also the significant meaning of transaction costs as a switching barrier. These costs are associated especially with amount of time that have to be spent on finding appropriate new supplier.

It should be agreed that exclusive relationship between industrial company and one supplier is not very likely as a marketing result. It does not question the applicability of such marketing

measures like patronage concentration but it suggests that the marriage analogy (and especially the monogamy) should not be referred to B2B relationships. Thus, the realistic task for marketing managers is to build the position of major (but not exclusive) supplier among chosen business customers. The value of relationships with selected customers should be systematically monitored because there is high probability that some customers will become more demanding (potentially less valuable) when the cooperation is more mature. Thereby, relationship approach should be implemented selectively. Probably for some customers which can generate high incomes but expect never-ending trade-offs for continuity of purchasing classical transaction marketing is more relevant.

One of the greatest challenges for relationship marketing implementation – popularization of marketing culture through whole organizational structure remains still unsolved. It seems that for front-line and back-office employees it is very difficult to understand each other and to work compatibly to achieve market objectives. If there is no trust within organization it may be very difficult to win and keep trust of customers. To break organizational barriers of relationship marketing implementation, marketing and sales specialists should create effective manners of communication. It may sound paradoxically, but it is probable that some marketing specialists are found mentally far from the everyday market and they separated themselves with the bureaucratic curtain from persons which directly stay in touch with customers. In that context companies may follow observed practices of forcing workers from different divisions to observe systematically communication with customers performed daily by contact-centre operators. On the other hand, sales personnel should be invited to some meetings organized by marketing department where some strategic marketing assumptions and plans should be discussed. This is how the sales representatives may acquire wider organizational perspective and, simultaneously, share their experiences with regard to their customers contacts.

#### REFERENCES

- Barnes J. (1997), “Closeness, Strength, and Satisfaction: Examining the Nature of Relationships between Providers of Financial Services and Their Retail Customers”, **Psychology & Marketing**, vol. 14 (8), december, pp. 765-790.
- Bendapudi N., Berry L. L. (1997), “Customers’ motivations for maintaining relationships with service providers”, **Journal of Retailing**, vol. 73 (1), p. 17.
- Cannon J. P., Perreault Jr. W. D. (1999), “Buyer-Seller Relationships in Business Markets”, **Journal of Marketing Research**, Vol. 36, November, pp. 439-460
- De Wulf K., Oderkerken-Schröder G. (2001), “A Critical Review of Theories Underlying Relationship Marketing in the Context of Explaining Consumer Relationships”, **Journal of the Theory of Social Behaviour**, pp. 73-101.
- Doney P.M., Cannon J.P. (1997), “An Examination of Nature Trust in Buyer-Seller Relationships”, **Journal of Marketing**, Vol. 61, April, pp. 35-51.
- Eiriz V., Wilson D. (2006), “Research in relationship marketing: antecedents, traditions and integration”, **European Journal of Marketing**, Vol. 40, No. 3/4, pp. 275-291.
- Ford D. (1980), “The development of buyer-seller relationships in industrial markets”, **European Journal of Marketing**, Vol. 14, No. 5/6, pp. 339-354.
- Ford D. (1997), “Introduction: The Interaction Approach”, in Ford D. (Ed.) **Understanding Business Markets: Interaction, Relationships and Networks**, The Dryden Press, pp. xiii-xv
- Ganesan S. (1994), “Determinants of Long Term in Buyer-seller relationships”, **Journal of Marketing**, vol. 58, pp. 1-19.
- Grönroos C. (1997), “From marketing mix to relationship marketing – towards a paradigm shift in marketing”, **Management Decision**, No. 4.
- Gummesson E. (2001), “Are current research approaches in marketing leading as astray?”, **Marketing theory. Articles**, Vol. 1(1), Sage, pp. 27-48.
- Håkansson H., Östberg C. (1975), “Industrial Marketing: An Organizational Problem”, **Industrial Marketing Management**, Vol. 4, pp. 113-123.

- Iacobucci D., Hibbard J. D. (1999), "Toward an encompassing theory of business marketing relationships (BMRS) and interpersonal commercial relationships (ICRS): an empirical generalization", **Journal of Interactive Marketing**, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 18-25.
- Jackson B. B. (1985), **Winning and Keeping Industrial Customers**, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Kuhn T. S. (2001), **Struktura rewolucji naukowych**, Aletheia, Warszawa.
- Levitt, T. (1983), **The Marketing Imagination**, New York, The Free Press.
- Mitreǵa M. (2005), **Marketing relacji. Teoria i praktyka**, CeDeWU, Warszawa.
- Mitreǵa M. (2007), "Measurement of customer loyalty as an element of building B2B relationships – perspective of field research realized in Poland", in **The electronic proceedings of The 23rd IMP Conference**, Manchester.
- Mitreǵa M. (Ed.) (2007), **Marketing relacji na rynku B2B**, Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej, Katowice 2007.
- Morgan R. M., Hunt S. D. (1994), "The commitment - Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing", **Journal of Marketing**, Vol. 58, July, pp. 20-38.
- Newman A., Lings I., Lee N. (2005), "What's in a Handshake? Exploring Business-to-Business Relational Exchange", **The Marketing Review**, No. 5, pp. 129-144.
- O'Malley L., Tynan C. (2000), "Relationship marketing in consumer markets. Rhetoric or reality?", **European Journal of Marketing**, No. 7, pp. 797-815.
- Palmatier R. W., Dant R. P., Grewal D. (2007), "A Comparative Longitudinal Analysis of Theoretical Perspectives of Interorganizational Relationship Performance", **Journal of Marketing**, Vol. 71, pp. 172-194.
- Palmatier R. W., Dant R. P., Grewal D., Evans K. R. (2006), "Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Relationship Marketing: A Meta-Analysis", **Journal of Marketing**, Vol. 70, 2006, pp. 136-153.
- Palmer A. J. (1996), "Relationship marketing: a universal paradigm or management fad?", **The Learning Organization**, 3/3, pp. 18-25.
- Palmer A., Bejou D. (1994), "Buyer – Seller Relationships: A Conceptual Model and Empirical Investigation", **Journal of Marketing Management**, Vol. 10, pp. 495-512.
- Reynolds K. E., Beatty S. E. (1999), "Customer Benefits and Company Consequences of Customer-Salesperson Relationships in Retailing", **Journal of Retailing**, 75 (1).
- Storbacka K. (1994), **The nature of customer relationship profitability**, Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration, Helsingfors.
- Tynan C. (1997), "A review of the marriage analogy in relationship marketing", **Journal of Marketing Management**, Vol. 13, pp. 695-703.
- Wathne K. H., Biong H., Heide J. B. (2001), "Choice of supplier in embedded markets: relationship and marketing program effects", **Journal of Marketing**, Vol. 65, April, pp. 54-66.