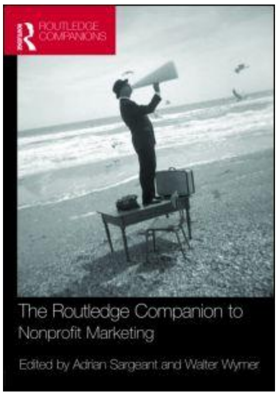

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The dynamics and implications of relationship quality in the charity–donor dyad

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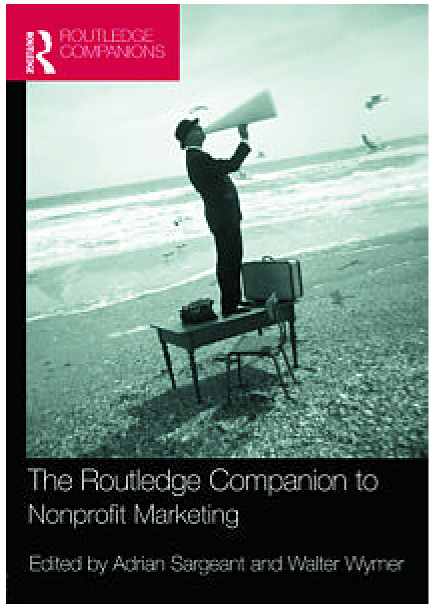

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The dynamics and implications of relationship quality in the charity–donor dyad

Haseeb A. Shabbir, Dayananda Palihawadana and Des Thwaites

Introduction

The notion that quality perceptions have driven the relationship-marketing paradigm is well documented (Gronroos 1990, 1994). Indeed, an understanding of the processes and the development of the 'relationship quality' between the buyer–seller dyad is considered central to implementing any relationship-marketing strategy (Storbacka *et al*. 1994; Bejou *et al*. 1996). Determining the quality of relationships has become a fundamental precursor to managing relationship marketing, for managerial and practical purposes but also from a conceptual and theoretical perspective (Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995). Furthermore, Gronroos (2002) considers a relationship quality orientation as a prerequisite to effective relationship marketing. Liljander and Strandvik (1996), for instance, propose that the relationship quality construct is critical in guiding relationship management and Storbacka *et al*. (1994) suggest that relationship quality and its understanding will guide the field of services management in general.

However, the absorption of the relationship quality metaphor has been characteristically much slower than the relationship marketing (Dwyer and Oh 1987) and the relationship fundraising metaphors (Shabbir *et al.* 2007). Nevertheless, relationship quality has emerged as an increasingly important construct central to implementing any relationship-marketing (Dwyer and Oh 1987; Gronroos 2002) or relationship-fundraising strategy (Bennett and Barkensjo 2005a; Bennett and Barkensjo 2005b; Shabbir *et al*. 2007).

In the context of charitable giving, Burnett (1992), Sargeant (2001), Bennett and Barkensjo (2005a) and Shabbir *et al.* (2007) equate the development of donor loyalty and the implementation of relationship fundraising with an emphasis on a relational approach to donor care. Therefore, this notion of relationship quality as central to developing quality-care programmes is not restricted to the commercial sector alone but considered instrumental to donor developmental activity. The aim of this research is to help to guide charities in today's increasingly competitive and sophisticated donor marketplace by focusing on sound and coherent theoretical approaches to understanding the quality of relationships that donors have with the charities they support. Highlighting the importance of determining the structural nature and processes inherent in donor-perceived relationship quality is the cornerstone of this review of relationship quality in the fundraising sector.

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Relationship quality

Smith (1998:78) defines relationship quality as 'an overall assessment of the strength of a relationship and the extent to which it meets the needs and expectations of the parties based on a history of successful or unsuccessful encounters or events'. Additionally, relationship quality refers to a 'customer's perceptions of how well the whole relationship fulfils the expectations, predictions, goals and desires the customer has concerning the whole relationship' (Jarvelin and Lehtinen 1996). Consequently, it forms the overall impression that a customer has concerning the whole relationship including different transactions (Gronroos 2002). Hennig-Thurau and Klee (1997:751) define relationship quality as the 'degree of appropriateness of a relationship to fulfil the needs of the customer associated with the relationship'. This definition entails a relational perspective to perceived service quality since Gronroos (2002:81) describes relationship quality as the 'dynamics of long-term quality formation in ongoing customer relation-ships' and furthermore 'is their (customers) continuously developing quality perception over time' (2002:82). The premise behind the relationship quality conceptualization, therefore, is that customers' quality perceptions develop and change over time as the relationship continues.

Despite the general consensus that relationship quality is 'perceived quality in a relationship framework' (Gronroos 2002:83), conceptual work to highlight this (Holmund 1997; Liljander-Strandvik 1995) and attempts, recently, to synthesize the literature on relationship quality (Roberts *et al.* 2003), there remains no consensus regarding the structural nature of relationship quality, i.e. the dimensionality of the relationship quality construct and its organization. It is evident that relationship quality is a complex multidimensional construct or one that is 'a higher-order construct consisting of several distinct, although related dimensions' (Dorsch *et al*. 1998:130); yet, there appears to be no agreement as to the nature or content of these dimensions. Furthermore, research into the development or evaluation of relationship quality perceptions is also lacking in the extant literature. This is especially pertinent within the fundraising sector (Shabbir *et al*. 2007).

Although early studies within the commercial sector focused predominantly on constructs, such as satisfaction and service quality, the relationship quality construct 'is (now) emerging as a central construct in the relationship marketing literature' (Smith 1998:4). Leuthesser (1997:246) states that 'in the area of relationship marketing, the primary emphasis of studies to date has been on understanding the factors that influence relationship quality'. Here, Leuthesser (1997) is asserting the fact that most studies in relationship marketing deal with constructs and empirical validation of constructs that have been posited more recently as comprising the relationship quality construct; such factors or constructs include satisfaction, commitment and trust, for instance (Roberts *et al.* 2003).

Within the commercial sector, the majority of authors view satisfaction and trust as the key underlying dimensions of relationship quality (Bejou *et al.* 1996; Crosby *et al.* 1990; Lagace *et al.* 1991; Roberts *et al.* 2003; Wray *et al.* 1994). Commitment is also cited as a potential dimension (Kumar *et al*. 1995; Hennig-Thurau and Klee 1997; Dorsch *et al*. 1998; Moorman *et al*. 1992; Roberts *et al*. 2003). Other key dimensions of relationship quality proposed in the literature include opportunism (Dwyer *et al*. 1987; Dorsch *et al*. 1998), involvement (Moorman *et al*. 1992), cooperative norms (Baker *et al*. 1999), customer orientation and ethical profile (Dorsch *et al.* 1998), conflict, willingness to invest and expectation of continuity (Kumar *et al*. 1995) and, finally, perceived benevolence (Roberts *et al*. 2003; Bennett and Barkensjo 2005a, 2005b). Although there is a growing consensus that satisfaction, trust and commitment are the central dimensions of relationship quality within the commercial sector (Crosby *et al*. 1990; Dorsch *et al*. 1998; Garbarino and Johnson 1999; Wray *et al*. 1994; Roberts *et al*. 2003), the dimensional-

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ity of relationship quality within the fundraising context remains completely unexplored. Only Bennett and Barkensjo (2005a, 2005b), adapting the work of Roberts, Varki and Brodie (2003), have modelled beneficiary and donor-perceived relationship quality as comprising trust, commitment and perceived benevolence.

Research context of relationship quality evaluation

Modelling relationship quality in the interpersonal literature, predominantly within the parent– sibling, marriage and general family studies, has focused predominately within nonprofit contexts, which is in stark contrast to work carried out in the marketing literature. These nonprofit contexts are wide ranging but some examples include: exploring the association between relationship quality and alcohol consumption as predictors of condom use (Woodrome *et al*. 2006), parent–child relationship quality's effect on alcohol use (Jordan and Lewis 2003), relationship quality's effect on social understanding of children (Cutting and Dunn 2006), differential parental treatments' effects on parent–child relationship quality (Richmond *et al*. 2005), the effect of relationship quality on bipolar symptoms (Yan *et al.* 2004) and the association between relationship quality and well-being in adolescent mothers (Stevenson *et al.* 1999). Indeed, all of the studies investigating relationship quality in the interpersonal literature could be classified as 'nonprofit contexts' had they been published in the managerial or organizational research literature. Indeed, only Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2001) and Bennett and Barkensjo (2005a, 2005b) have modelled relationship quality in nonprofit contexts within the marketing literature. Hennig-Thurau *et al*. (2001) model relationship quality in the education context, a classic nonprofit marketing context (Sargeant, 2001). Bennett and Barkensjo (2005a, 2005b) explore relationship quality of marketing activities and general relationship quality as perceived from the charity beneficiary and donor's perspective respectively. More recently, Shabbir *et al.* (2007) have explored relationship quality within the charity donor context. However, the majority of studies focusing on relationship quality in the management sciences clearly focus on commercial contexts.

Structure of relationship quality evaluation

A key finding which emerges from the extant literature is that both formative and indicative conceptualizations of relationship quality are used in the extant literature. These forms of measurement used for relationship quality have important implications for how it is conceptualized by managers in terms of its structure and consequently its management.

The entire debate about how relationship quality is evaluated, along a continuum of good- and bad-quality perceptions, or as a general judgement at global-level evaluation, or domain-specific evaluations based on several judgemental criteria, has at its roots the issue of how humans process information for decision-making purposes. The idea that several domain-specific constructs interact with each other to generate a state of cognitive satisfaction or equilibrium, which is reflective of relationship quality evaluations, is conducive to the connectionist approach (Smith 1996). The connectionist approach is derived from the field of exploring the philosophy of the mind with classical philosophers such as Bechtel and Abrahamsen (1991) advocating the potential role of connectionism in understanding decision-making. Each of the domain-specific judgemental criteria can therefore be considered to be simple units with their own unique inputs, but which converge to reflect an overall relationship quality evaluation. Connectionist or multidimensional conceptualizations of relationship

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quality have been proposed for commercial contexts (e.g. Hennig-Thurau *et al*. 2002; Hennig-Thurau and Klee 1999) and for the charity context (Shabbir *et al*. 2007). This approach infers that donors may evaluate relationship quality based on a number of underlying composite judgemental criteria but these are independently evaluated, although the degree and nature of one affects or could affect the other. Therefore, this would assume that a donor, for instance, might trust a charity but not be committed to it or may be committed to a charity but not trust it; however, both trust and commitment of the donor could affect each other. Classically, this has been proposed in the relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt 1994) and relationship fundraising literatures (Sargeant and Lee 2004; Sargeant *et al*. 2006). The individual effects and their codependent effect on the conjoint variable or construct becomes part of the evaluation of overall relationship quality. Relationship quality evaluations in turn involve such combinations of independent and dependent evaluations of constructs.

The alternative approach to modelling relationship quality is based on the computational approach or the classic social cognitive approach. This type of evaluation would imply that donors have a fixed and stable judgement concerning the quality of their relationships. In this case trust and commitment, for instance, would therefore share an equal amount of relationship-formation importance, and even if overall judgement takes into consideration importance weightings of each construct, then the effect of change from external sources on each construct cannot be modelled due to the assumption of stability across each underlying dimension (Rossitter 2002). Therefore, different developmental stages of relationships, personality variables and the nature of the relationship may generate their own unique effects on each underlying construct, negating any form of stability in evaluation; that is, this form of structure is not affected by the array of intervening variables that may or may not shape the donation exchange process from decision-making models.

Indeed this connectionist-versus-computational debate parallels closely the reflective-versus-formative construct measurement debate recently reinvigorated in marketing science (Rossiter 2002; Diamantopolous and Winkfhofer 2001; Jarvis *et al*. 2003). It appears that the formative construct approach to modelling lies firmly in computational or classic social cognitive psychology. The computational approach advocates that mental activity is computational, that mental processing does not vary with different goals, beliefs, perceptions or cognitive states. This would imply that a formative structure for relationship quality would remain fixed, stable and consistant with time, space and situation. Formative conceptualizations of relationship quality have been proposed by Roberts *et al.* (2000) for commercial contexts and by Bennett and Barkensjo (2005a, 2005b) for the charity context.

This debate not only has implications for marketing and fundraising but has become increasingly important in the wider interpersonal relationship quality literature. The exploration of different composites of relationship quality, for example, commitment, trust, passion and love (Fletcher *et al*. 2000) to determine the nature of overall relationship quality evaluation and its development has been a burgeoning one in the marriage literature. It is not difficult to imagine relationships with varying degrees of these variables, such that an individual may be committed to the relationship but not trust the partner, or may trust the partner and not show any commitment. The same argument applies within the charity–donor dyad. Clearly, to summate the two variables as convergent would mean declaring null the myriad relationship patterns that may exist in real life. This is so indeed, yet for others commitment may be seen as an outcome of relationship development and trust as a determinant or vice versa. The literature supports the view that myriad constructs have been put forward as underlying dimensions of relationship quality. This vast array of possibilities and combinations concerning the relationships between these constructs raises an important issue: how are these dimensions, with varying divergent and

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convergent elements, organized to evaluate relationship quality development? Clearly, two options exist: the summated route or a global-level evaluation judgement, such that individuals store one overall judgement about their partners or relationship along a good-versus-bad continuum (i.e. formative route), which then dictates specific evaluation judgements or alternatively a multidimensional structure (reflective route). The summated approach negates the existence of separate underlying constructs such as trust and commitment and instead 'parcels' these constructs as underlying isomorphic indicators or antecedents of relationship quality. Many scales have followed this presumption and the development of indexes or scales has this *modus operandi* as its core presumption.

Shabbir *et al*. (2007) developed a framework of relationship quality which assumes a multidimensional structure for relationship quality evaluation. The model was derived from thirty-four in-depth interviews with regular donors to charity and is presented as a generic model of relationship quality evaluation for relational donors. The sample size – thirty-four regular donors – used represents the number of respondents that were necessary to achieve a position whereby each of the emergent categories and relationships was saturated (Strauss and Corbin 2002). This form of theoretical sampling ensures that the emergent theory is not unevenly developed or lacking in density or precision (Strauss and Corbin 2002). The respondents, when approached in a city high street, volunteered to be contacted at a later date and subsequently interviews were arranged at the respondents' convenience. This ensured that respondents felt more relaxed by being able to select their own times and venues (McCracken 1988). Subsequently all interviews took place in the respondent's business, recreation or home environment. All interviews were recorded with the participant's permission. The interviews took place over an eight-month period, allowing for the theoretical sampling process to develop, a characteristic of the grounded theory method.

Interviews were only conducted with respondents who had made donations to charity on at least four occasions during the past year. Study participants comprised 20 females and 14 males, with an age range from 21 to 76. The respondents contributed to a wide range of charities but support for children, medical, animal, international relief and social welfare proved most popular. The diversity of respondents used is reflective of theoretical sampling in that it assumes the sample characteristics are not developed a priori, but in conjunction with the coding and analysis of the data as it proceeds. The data from each interview transcript were entered into the qualitative analysis software package QSR*NUDIST. The model is presented in Figure 3.1.

The model shows that perceived relationship benefits, service quality, trust, commitment and satisfaction are the key antecedents of donors' perceptions of the quality of the relationship they have with the charity they support. The dimensions found in the model are consistent with those found in the extant relationship fundraising literature. Indeed, among the constructs discussed in the context of relationship fundraising those which have been found to be the important underlying dimensions of relationship fundraising outcomes include: donor perceived service quality (Sargeant 2001; Sargeant *et al*. 2002; Peltier *et al*. 2002), exchange benefits (Sargeant 2001; Peltier *et al*. 2002; Cermack *et al.* 1996) and trust and commitment (Peltier *et al.* 2002; Sargeant and Lee 2002; Sargeant and Lee 2004). More recently Bennett and Barkensjo (2005a) have also found service quality and satisfaction to have a positive impact on relationship fundraising outcomes. The model also depicts relationship benefits, service quality and trust as cognitive or knowledge based in nature, satisfaction and commitment as affective in nature and finally loyalty and word-of-mouth communications as behavioural in nature. The antecedent dimensions are now briefly discussed.

The antecedent and outcome properties of individual constructs and subsequent hypotheses development are discussed in detail in Shabbir *et al*. (2007). This study therefore does not seek

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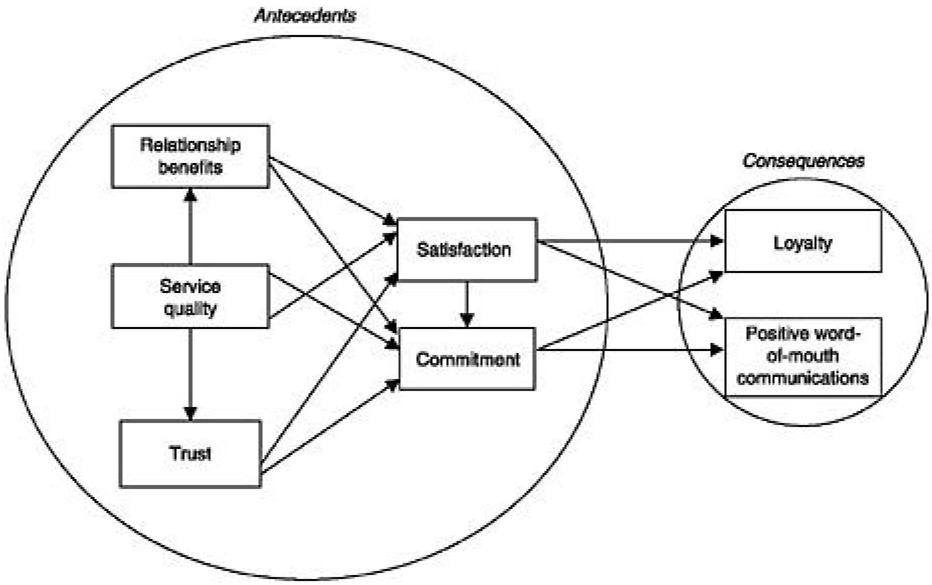

Figure 3.1 Antecedents and consequences of donor-perceived relationship quality

to focus on the development of the framework or on the nature of individual components but rather the implications of relationship quality research most pertinent for fundraising managers. This is not to say that the actual interrelationships are not important; indeed they form the central aspect of the model, but rather the implications for general relationship quality research that emanate for fundraisers are considered more of value for the purpose of this discussion.

The key implication for fundraisers arising from the model is that the aforementioned dimensions of donor-perceived relationship quality are closely interrelated, at the conceptual level, with each other and with relationship fundraising outcomes; loyalty and word-of-mouth communications. In the existing relationship fundraising literature, these dimensions have been, in the main, modelled as separate variables interacting in a wider relationship marketing or fundraising framework. This model depicts them as reflective of overall perceived relationship quality. This has important implications for fundraising managers. For instance, the interactions between service quality and satisfaction would previously have been considered as a relationship between two related but distinct variables. This study shows that the two, service quality and satisfaction, are part of one overarching construct: relationship quality. Therefore, the proposed model shows that in order to manage relationships with donors and implement the type of donor care programmes recommended by Burnett (1992), it is inappropriate to consider focusing on satisfaction or trust or improving service quality alone. Rather, it is paramount to consider all of the interacting relationships that constitute relationship quality evaluation and adopt an integrated approach to managing relationships. The implementation of programmes that integrate each of the interacting dimensions serves to facilitate the overall development of relationship quality.

Two further key implications arising from the model include the structural evaluation of relationship quality that has already been discussed and the decision-making perspective of donors' evaluation of relationship quality which are explained further. These implications have not been discussed in the existing literature (see e.g. Shabbir *et al*. 2007) and therefore form the remainder of this discussion.

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Relationship quality evaluation

Although this model supports the notion that relationship quality evaluation for relational, or regular, donors follows the 'classic connectionist' approach which proposed that a state of 'stability or equilibrium is reached through the simultaneous interactions of all the elements in a cognitive system' (Smith 1996), that is, a multidimensional evaluation, this may not always be the case (Bennett and Barkenjso 2005a).

Figure 3.1 supports the position that relational donors may constantly, albeit unconsciously, be assessing the relationship's nature, or 'quality', by evaluating a number of interrelated but distinct constructs, without realizing their overall individual impact along the cognitive– affective–behavioural pathway or how these individual evaluations are reflective of the overall nature, degree or 'quality' of the relationship. Relational donors evaluate their relationships with the charity that they support using a combination of constructs and this evaluation does not take place along a negative–positive continuum but rather is 'multidimensional' and thus individual indicators may fluctuate in levels from other indicators. This results not in one global quality assessment but a more diffused and abstract generalization concerning the nature of the relationship.

The interactions between the individual composites often involve the satisfaction concept itself which is able to shape the degree and nature of the mental equilibrium or stable state reached. It is not surprising therefore to find that satisfaction acts as a potential mediator between the cognitive and behavioural states. Such an evaluation would not require the formulation of a second-order or higher-order 'global'-level relationship quality construct. Therefore, in such cases where the classic connectionist approach is adopted an index or summated scale would not accurately represent the underlying processes that are involved in the evaluation of relationship quality, simply because its development is far more complex than the presumption of a unitary higher-order node. Therefore, given that domain-specific or composite-level judgements may differ, this reflects the arbitrary nature of relational donors' relationship evaluation. Hypothetical cases of such relationship interactions have been discussed earlier, but such examples include where relationships exist with high degrees of commitment but low degrees of trust, or high trust and commitment but low satisfaction levels. It is not necessary for people to make consistent assessments of relationship quality composites. Often these composites do not exist in a tangible form and cannot be captured as exclusive domains of one order, such as that of relationship quality. Rather, they may operate at multiple levels and orders, such that commitment and trust may belong as outcomes and antecedents of unrelated concepts in human decision-making, which converge when assessing the quality or 'degree and nature' of relationships. Trust and commitment may therefore be used to assess a number of concepts, and not only relationship quality, and as such belong to much wider strata of interpersonal and impersonal situations faced by conscious and unconscious decision-making and processing. It would be unrealistic for charities, government or regulatory bodies to assume that one single indicator such as 'efficiency in terms of percentage donation given to cause' or 'administration costs' would suffice in indicating which charities are 'better or worse'. The situation is far more complex. Some charities require a greater degree of complexity and may well have greater administration costs; in such and indeed in general cases evaluation of the degree of relationship quality is based on 'all-important' variables and not only one or two selected through popular discontent from media scandals, for instance. Any quality mark, therefore, or register or directory of 'quality charities' would simply not work as it would not be in tune with how donors may potentially be evaluating their existing relationships.

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Bennett and Barkensjo (2005a, 2005b) however have positioned relationship quality as a unitary order measurement for the charity beneficiary (2005a) and for the charity donor (2005b) and therefore support the standard social cognitive processing for evaluation; that is, the existence of a stored higher-order attitude exerting top-down pressure on individual evaluations; that is, a causal or formative structure. This approach would assume that donors constantly store a higher-order or global evaluation which can be tapped into and recalled when appropriate triggers act as cues. This 'global-level evaluation' generates a standard or consistent level of evaluation across underlying domains such that it generates the same or relatively consistent evaluations across trust, commitment, satisfaction and service quality perceptions, for instance. These domains then inversely or retroactively confirm the global-level evaluation and therefore form further stability in the stored higher-order function. Usually, such higher-order attitudes are manifested in situations where biological or high cognitive interaction or involvement characterize the interaction form, classically within the parent– infant relationship, where unlike the charity–donor relationship, it is more important to evaluate the immediate value of any interactions. Examples of giving behaviour whereby such a form may exist include volunteering behaviour or physical interaction with the charity or its work. Here, levels of credence are less and evaluation therefore can operate using a simple rule-of-thumb criteria or a heuristic unlike direct-debit situations where less active involvement with the charity or its work may lead to higher credence properties and therefore a more complex form of evaluation such as that proposed in Figure 3.1. Thus, face-to-face givers, for instance, should not be neglected on the basis that they have 'formed stable judge-ments' and therefore probably having displaying greater resistance to change. Such high interaction or involvement levels, in volunteering, for instance, also automatically cue a cognitive system designed to minimize resources and time in evaluation and use instead pre-existing attitudes towards such behaviour that act as a form of heuristics and therefore bypass domain-specific evaluations. Bennett and Barkensjo (2005a) presume that such a system may operate for evaluating relationship quality by charity beneficiaries and this presumption would make sense, since the interactions by a beneficiary, whether conscious or unconscious, physical or non-physical, involve greater risk, interaction and involvement itself than interactions between charities and their direct-debit donors, for instance. Bennett and Barkensjo (2005b) also model this formative judgement for relationship quality of marketing activities by donors and again marketing activities are more visible, have thus less credence, high in experience properties and thus more susceptible to a preformed attitude rather than this constantly fluctuating multidimensional form of evaluation for direct-debit donors towards their supported charity, not the marketing activities of the supported charity. A paid fundraiser's level of relationship quality with a charity would, for instance, also be expected to involve a higher-order attitude motivated primarily by the wage whereas an unpaid fundraiser's attitude may not be developed as such and involve a more complex interaction of processes or domain-specific evaluations.

A second key implication arising from Figure 3.1, aside from the actual relationship between components, is the interplay at different decision-making levels. This is briefly discussed below before practical implications for fundraising managers are discussed.

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The cognitive–affective interface

Another important implication of the model is the decision-making perspective that it adopts. It can be summarized that the underlying antecedent dimensions of evaluation can be classified as cognitive or affective and outcomes as behavioural. This supports the view that development of relationship quality follows the classic 'cognitive–affective–behavioural' pathway common to many decision-making contexts both within marketing and in general decision-making contexts (Tsal 1985).

Perceived service quality (or perceived impact) and trust are modelled as cognitive constructs preceding the effects of the affective constructs; satisfaction and commitment, that is, affective emotional pleasure from giving, mediates the knowledge that one is helping another. Inversely the knowledge that one is helping another strengthens the emotional bonds with relational behaviour. This mediating role of affect between cognition and behaviour has been documented extensively in the consumer behaviour literature (Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999). This positive cognitive appraisal will lead directly to positive affect which drives donor loyalty. The 'winning hearts and then minds' (Burnett 2006) strategy of relationship fundraising therefore holds through the mediating effects of the heart on the mind; both are intrinsically linked and cannot be separated in the loyalty path. Therefore, focusing on hearts, without providing evidence that can augment affective appraisal with a cognitive one, is like telling donors 'we need help' but not telling them how to and why this may be the case. Inversely, focusing on cognitive appraisal without appreciating that the natural evolution of this is positive emotional appraisal which drives giving and loyalty behaviour, is like telling donors 'we need help' but not providing mechanisms of channelling the positive emotional drive to give and support.

The implications of this conjoint cognitive and affective appraisal are that fundraising managers should focus on designing communication campaigns for relational-level givers, using a combination of both elaboration-cognitive and peripheral-affective elicitation cues. A combination of cognitive and affective elicitation allows both forms of evaluation to ensue simultaneously and therefore the cognitive–affective–behavioural path can take course on its own. If only affective cues are presented, this may 'win hearts but not minds'. Conversely, if presenting cognitive cues is the focus, then 'minds may be won at the expense of hearts'. However, the latter would assume that the natural progression of donors' cognitive appraisal would lead to emotive responses consequent to the cognitive appraisal but not strengthening this progression would be one shortcoming of such an approach. It appears that for relational donors, informational and emotional appeals should be conjoint and not separate since both complement each other. Presenting both simultaneously harnesses the complicity of decision-making and evaluation and offers the cognitive–affective and indeed the reversed affective– cognitive pathway to operate simultaneously and therefore 'pushing' and 'pulling' respectively the donor towards relationship development. It may be that initial support may be stimulated by emotional and affective triggers but it appears that as the donor becomes more relational, he or she requires more cognitive maintainers. If these cognitive factors are not provided the affective factors may not be maintained or strengthened. Even low levels of cognitive appraisal may be adequate to strengthen the affective modalities in the donor's decision to develop their relationship with the charity. Note that for new or prospective donors this would be a contrary approach since new or prospective donors need to know the degree of need, and informing them that the charity is already making headway in helping beneficiaries may preclude that charity as deserving of the new donors' commitment (Smith and Berger 1996). Relational donors, however, have already internalized their decision to support their charity and only seek maintaining factors to strengthen support and act as inertial barriers to competing charities.

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Therefore, for relational donors, ideally a combination of cognitive and affective cues should exist as this would preclude the assumption that relationships should develop at the pace set by the charity rather than the key partner within the charity–donor dyad, the donor. How long it takes a donor to feel or become relational is unknown, but what is clear is that it may be spontaneous and be a matter of seconds before a donor is stimulated to feel they are within a relationship with the charity or inversely it may be considered and evaluated over time and may thus take longer (Hill 2003). This is further elaborated using the case of direct-debit donors.

Hill (2003) pointed to the lack of appreciation of understanding how the direct-mail recipient processes the creative content of the direct-mail content. Hill (2003) explains that although psychographics and demographics act as external signposts for targeting, the element of persuasion in direct marketing can only be thoroughly achieved through understanding that the end result or desired goal is an emotionally affiliated or triggered response to behaviour. His model of sense–feel–(think)–do is expanded here to sense–feel–think–(feel)–do. Passing through the initial sensory stages of dealing with the direct mail therefore needs to be a sensory–emotional attachment that takes the recipient a step further to engage with the content of the direct-mail shot. It is at this stage where the model of this investigation has its most implications. At this point the direct mail has three options based on the prospective recipient's decision-making route: either to make the content emotional or rational and informative or use a combination approach. This investigation proposes the dual use of emotive and informative content in synchrony so that the recipient can simultaneously shift between one decision-making phase to another, since given the myriad uncontrollable factors at the point of decision-making it is impossible to state at what stage of the decision-making process the donor actually is or headed towards or using which particular pathways. If the recipient is for instance cognitively inclined, then the informational cues are present to shift the decision-making from cognitive to affective phases. However, if the recipient is affectively orientated – and much of charity communications is based on appealing to prospective donors' emotional or inner drives – then cognitive cues can be presented to buffer or supplement the emotional content.

Focusing on either of emotional or cognitive elements on the assumption that one of either the peripheral or central routes will be elected by relational donors, does not take into consideration a myriad intervening and often uncontrollable variables such as mood. This set of intervening variables can affect the donors' mood, orientation, proneness and so on, towards the charity, the mail shot and recipients. A highly emotional appeal to one donor may appear like the charity is 'shouting signals' of 'junk mail' (Hill 2003) whereas an informational appeal may not reach the attention threshold of the donor and therefore be considered as 'trash' mail (Hill 2003). A combination of both, it is envisaged, would seek to criss-cross both peripheral and central paths when and where the inner psychology of the donor requires.

The results provide support for the strong affiliation that relational donors have with usually one charity by means of brand name recognition. The brand signals a degree of trust and perceived impact or benevolence which automatically shifts the donor towards the emotional attachment stage. For not-so-well-known charities to reach this group of relational donors, a more effective informational phase of content may be required to 'convince' the donor that they are a credible charity and worthy of emotional-level consideration. Such charities are not advised therefore to cold-target with emotionally laden appeals to relational donors, since for this group of donors cognitive processing serves to screen the mailshot on the basis of credibility inferred through an already established name or experience. Given the intense levels of competition and the high costs of attrition even more-established charities are advised to supplement emotional material with cognitive cues so that the elements of trust and perceived benevolence are affirmed and strengthened. For instance, if a new mailshot from a charity

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signals a cognitive cue that they are number one in helping the cause and not provide evidence purporting towards this, this could easily switch loyal donors or engender low cognitive appraisal. Sargeant (2001) found that 16 per cent of donors stop supporting a charity because they feel another deserves their support and almost 60 per cent based on some failing of perceived delivered service quality. Failing signals of trust and service quality also make switching to competition more likely and this is among the key issues facing fundraisers in attempting to reverse attrition today (Sargeant and Jay 2004; Burnett 2002). A strategic communications plan based on the cognitive–affective–behavioural pathway would go some way to alleviate attrition. It must be said however that charities should conduct context-based research and decide in terms of cost–benefit analysis the benefits for a segmented approach.

This research therefore demonstrates that emotional attachment should be the desired goal for charities but this emotional attachment can be strengthened through cognitive reassurance of trust and service quality. Furthermore, there exist clear pathways from cognitive to emotive phases and this should be developed into the creative content of mailings. The cognitive material should seek to reassure the donor that the charity is credible and provide evidence of this through perceived benevolence of the charity towards the cause and recipients of the support. This is despite established charities being in the heart of relational donors since the competitive environment of fundraising is increasingly turbulent and as Hill (2003) points out the psychology of direct-mail givers is more prone to switching behaviour than previously thought.

Implications for fundraising managers

In managing donor developmental programmes, fundraising managers are advised to determine how their segments process information, or evaluate the degree and nature of relationships, or quality, for instance. By knowing whether different donor groups use multidimensional or formative-processing structures, charities are better placed to design the delivery of their communication media for maximum efficiency. Providing a benchmark to beneficiaries of the successful outcome of the charity’s work towards them, that is, a formative cue, may work better than a multidimensional approach in some contexts (Bennett and Barkensjo 2005b). However, this study shows that for relational donors, a combination of related but distinct constructs such as trust, service quality, satisfaction and commitment and the pathways between each of these constructs may need to be organized to move the donor along a decision-making path towards behavioural outcomes. Although the costs of such research would involve some form of complex statistical analysis, to map the structural paths (Bennett and Barkensjo 2005a; 2005b), these costs are no doubt offset by the increased efficiency and effectiveness of communication programmes designed to engender donor support.

Second, a greater understanding and refocus on the decision-making perspective adopted by donor or general supporter segments would also certainly assist charities to offset the costs of what are becoming increasingly more expensive donor recruitment and retention programmes. Indeed, where donors use a multidimensional evaluation structure to assess relationship quality, for instance, such an understanding becomes necessary in the design and development of communication media content. By emphasizing relationship benefits, service quality and trust prior to satisfaction and commitment is a reflection of fundraisers having to recognize that donor care is about what the donor wants, and not what fundraisers feel donors should receive. Fundraisers must implement a strategy to leverage donors based on the development of relationship quality needs. Central to this need for relationship evaluation is the processing

of cognitive modalities prior to affective-based ones. This would imply that the first step to donor care is in fact an informational or rational stage, where the donor's knowledge base is developed, and the second is an emotional-based stage, designed at facilitating positive feelings to eventually positive behavioural relational outcomes. Ultimately, the behavioural outcomes are convergent as common goals for both charity and donor, with each seeking loyalty and preferably the empowerment of advocacy throughout positive word-of-mouth communications. If, for instance, fundraisers attempt to 'load' emotional appeals and communications on first-time donors, without first engendering a sense of understanding and purpose, then donors will not feel positive but rather negative given the lack of essential preceding informational cues. These informational cues may be suggestive of building trust, of recognizing donor efforts, or rewarding the donor, rather than seeking to achieve the aforementioned through emotional-based imagery or cues.

Therefore, it is important to have fundraisers who are knowledgeable about the development of relationship quality, its components and different levels expected by donors. While it has long been acknowledged in the literature that being trustworthy can improve donor confidence, it is also important to know that donors seek trust as part of an integral chain of relationship quality development. This suggests that training should focus on teaching fundraisers how to learn what standard of affective care they seek, in addition to supplying them with cognitive stimulation in the form of service quality, trust and relationship benefits. Clearly, fundraisers need to be apt in communicating benefits, service quality, trust, satisfaction and commitment-engendering messages. Fundraisers should, therefore, spend time developing their communication skills in relation to managing each of the components of relationship quality.

In summary, a donor-oriented integrated approach is therefore more suited to managing relationships. The benefit of formulating relationship fundraising communications based on service quality, relationship benefits and trust recognizes that these elements of relationship quality are more central to making even small donors feel like major donors; that is, moving donors up the loyalty ladder. A central aspect of this approach, however, is the longer timeframe required for implementation; therefore rather than a one-year time-frame and for achievement of goals, a three- or five-year time-frame and achievement of goals should be established. This would ensure sufficient time for donors to move up the loyalty ladder and appropriate transformation based on communications. The generation of 'affective stage' donors from 'cognitive-based' ones must not be seen as a 'quick-fix' solution but rather as an approach that needs relationship development itself within the time and resources of the charity.

Donor care is dependent on making the donor aware of certain 'relationship essentials' which should in themselves lead to the generation of positive feelings and attitude formation. Just as the adage 'relationships take time', similarly, donor relationships need nurturing. Tim Hunter, the head of the direct marketing department at the NSPCC (National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children), in the UK, recognizes explicitly the danger of overpowering a donor relationship: 'We don't want donors to feel they are part of some big marketing machine and that once they have responded they will be bombarded with mailings for the rest of their lives' (Burnett 2002:17). Allowing the relationship to develop along time recognizes the need for donors to move along a path at their own choosing, and avoids upsetting them from the onset, when they are most vulnerable to leaving the charity.

Implications for future research

This chapter focused on the issues relating to relationships from the donor's perspective only. However, because relationships involve more than one party, it is also important to look at the issues studied here from the charities' or the fundraisers' perspective. What do fundraisers think makes a good relationship, or how do they determine when a relationship is of good quality? Looking at the fundraisers' side of the story might provide further insight into why relationships between charities and donors are not always good and may suggest additional ways to improve them. Many of the same variables might be relevant from a fundraising perspective, but other factors such as accountability and inter-team communication might also be important to consider.

To investigate other possible antecedents of relationship quality, future research should examine the impact of other independent variables that are potentially important. For example, variables such as value can also have an effect on overall relationship quality. In addition, due to the dynamic nature of relationships, it is unlikely that relationship quality follows a process of sequential development but rather of constant flux with each component multidirecting each other in a complex multicausal multidirectional manner not reflected in this chapter. Donors in their interactions may react differently depending on the different phases in the relationship formation and development process and are constantly open to myriad intervening variables, often unique for each individual.

It is important to consider the total relationship quality paradigm and its potential for advancing further the research proposed in this chapter. The intervening extrinsic, intrinsic and processing determinants should be incorporated with donor-perceived relationship quality, as reflecting the donor's potential judgemental criteria for processing giving behaviour, within a total relationship quality (TRQ) framework. This TRQ framework could incorporate certain organizational-level variables, such as staff motivation and relationship orientation. Important organizational-level variables, such as donor orientation (Bennett 1996) and relationship quality of marketing activities (Bennett and Barkensjo 2005), could shed important insights surrounding the optimal organization-wide effects.

Indeed, Burnett (2002:15) identifies vertical and horizontal barriers as the 'Dependency on other departments, who won't cooperate … and lack of commitment, particularly from senior managers' as central barriers to relationship fundraising success. This chapter advocates that, given the role of relationship quality in developing donor loyalty and positive word-of-mouth communications, donor-perceived relationship quality is ideally suited to act as a foundation or basis for integrating relationship fundraising skills and knowledge.

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