

T.R.
ISTANBUL SABAHATTIN ZAIM UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE EDUCATION INSTITUTE
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

**EXPLORING SERVICE INNOVATION OF SUPPLIERS
WITH DIFFERENT RELATIONAL AND
PERFORMANCE VARIABLES WITHIN THE
CONTEXT OF EMERGING ECONOMIES**

Ph.D. DISSERTATION

Rıfı Buğra BAĞCI

Istanbul

May-2024

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Istanbul
May-2024

This study has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ph.D.
Degree in Business Administration

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DECLARATION OF SCIENTIFIC ETHICS AND ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that this PhD dissertation titled “Exploring Service Innovation of Suppliers with Different Relational and Performance Variables within the Context of Emerging Economies” is my own work and I have acted according to scientific ethics and academic rules while producing it. I have collected and used all information and data according to scientific ethics and guidelines on thesis writing of Sabahattin Zaim University. I have fully referenced, in both the text and bibliography, all direct and indirect quotations and all sources I have used in this work.

Rıfı Buğra BAĞCI

Istanbul, May 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to the following individuals and organizations who have played significant roles in the completion of this thesis. First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Mertcan TAŞÇIOĞLU, whose guidance, unwavering support, and invaluable insights have been instrumental in shaping the direction of my research and encouraging me to excel in my academic pursuits.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the head of my department, Özgür KÖKALAN, for his encouragement and the opportunities provided throughout my academic journey. Special thanks go out to my dear friends from the department - Eren YILDIRIM, Cemil Faruk DURMAZ, Ömer GİZLİER, and Mahmut DEMİRKIRAN - for their companionship, encouragement, and willingness to engage in countless discussions that have enriched my understanding of the subject matter. My heartfelt appreciation also goes to TÜBİTAK for granting me a scholarship through the 2211-A and 2214-A programs, which provided essential financial support during my studies. I appreciate support of Jawwad RAJA, İsmail GÖLGEÇİ, and Mehmet CHAKKOL during my project in Copenhagen, Denmark.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my wife, İlknur NURTEN BAĞCI, and my son, Deniz Bilge BAĞCI, for their unwavering love, patience, and understanding throughout this journey. Their constant encouragement and support have been a constant source of strength for me. I wish to acknowledge the love and support of my mother, Yasemin BAĞCI, my sister, Dilara BAĞCI ZEKİ, and my brother-in-law, Hüseyin ZEKİ. Their belief in me and their encouragement have been truly motivating. Finally, I would like to thank my dear friends Umut ÜNAL and Sibel ÜNAL, along with their daughter Ayla ÜNAL, for their friendship and encouragement. Their positive energy and support have been a great source of inspiration for me. To all the mentioned individuals and organizations, I extend my heartfelt thanks for their invaluable contributions, which have made this thesis possible.

Rıfı Buğra BAĞCI

Istanbul, May 2024

ABSTRACT

EXPLORING SERVICE INNOVATION OF SUPPLIERS WITH DIFFERENT RELATIONAL AND PERFORMANCE VARIABLES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF EMERGING ECONOMIES

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Ph.D., Department of Business Administration

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mertcan TAŞÇIOĞLU

May, 2024 – 109 + xii Pages

This integrated research examines supplier-customer relationships, industrial purchases, and online grocery shopping consumer behavior within the concept of servitization, service innovation and customer experience. Study 1 analyzes service innovation's impact on relational performance using social exchange theory. Trust dimensions (competence, contractual, goodwill) and relationship anxiety are studied as moderating and mediating factors. Results show a significant and positive link between service innovation and trust, with contractual and goodwill trust mediating the relationship. Study 2 uses attribution theory to explore product type, standardization, and customization in initial purchases. Customized solutions supporting customer actions increase customer attitude and willingness to pay more. Standardized service contracts suit less critical equipment. Study 3 focuses on proactive customer orientation in online grocery shopping. Proactivity and value co-creation significantly impact the customer experience (CE) and customer-brand engagement (CBE), leading to a higher willingness to pay more (WTP). Moreover, CBE mediates the relationship between CE and WTP. These findings offer insights for businesses aiming to enhance customer engagement and command premium prices.

Key terms: Supplier-Customer Relationships, Service Innovation, Servitization, Customer Experience, Proactivity

ÖZET

GELİŞMEKTE OLAN ÜLKELER BAĞLAMINDA TEDARİKÇİLERİN HİZMET İNOVASYONUNUN FARKLI İLİŞKİSEL VE PERFORMANS DEĞİŞKENLERİ İLE İNCELENMESİ

Rıfı Buğra BAĞCI

Doktora, İşletme

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Mertcan TAŞÇIOĞLU

Mayıs, 2024 - 109 + xii Sayfa

Bu bütünsel araştırma, tedarikçi-müşteri ilişkilerini, endüstriyel satın alımları ve online market alışverişindeki tüketici davranışlarını hizmetleştirme, hizmet inovasyonu ve müşteri deneyimi kavramları çerçevesinde incelemektedir. 1. çalışma, sosyal mübadele kuramını kullanarak hizmet inovasyonunun ilişkisel performans üzerindeki etkisini analiz etmektedir. Güven boyutları (uzmanlık, sözleşmesel, iyi niyet) ve ilişki kaygısı düzenleyici ve aracı faktörler olarak incelenmiştir. Sonuçlar, hizmet inovasyonu ile güven arasında olumlu yönde anlamlı bir ilişki olduğunu ve sözleşmeye dayalı ve iyi niyet güvenin hizmet inovasyonu ile ilişkisel performans arasındaki ilişkide aracılık rolü olduğunu göstermektedir. 2. çalışma, ilk satın almalarda ürün tipi, standardizasyon ve özelleştirme konularını atfetme kuramı çerçevesinde araştırmaktadır. Müşteri eylemlerini destekleyen özelleştirilmiş çözümler, müşteri tutumunu ve ekstra ödeme yapma isteğini artırmaktadır. Standartlaştırılmış hizmet sözleşmeleri üretim hattı için daha az kritik ekipmanlara uygundur. 3. çalışma, online market alışverişinde proaktif müşteri yönelimine odaklanmaktadır. Proaktivite ve birlikte değer yaratma, müşteri deneyimini ve müşteri-marka bağlılığını önemli ölçüde etkileyerek ekstra ödeme isteğini artırmaktadır. Bu bulgular, müşteri bağlılığını artırmayı ve premium fiyat talep etmeyi amaçlayan işletmeler için içgörüler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Tedarikçi-Müşteri İlişkileri, Hizmet İnovasyonu, Hizmetleştirme, Müşteri Deneyimi, Proaktivite

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMOS:	Analysis of Moment Structures
ANOVA:	Analysis of Variance
AVE:	Average Variance Extracted
CFI:	Comparative Fit Index
CR:	Composite Reliability
GFI:	Goodness of Fit Index
ISSN:	International Standard Serial Number
MANOVA:	Multivariate Analysis of Variance
NFI:	Normed Fit Index
RMSEA:	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SPSS:	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, a significant transformation has taken place within numerous organizations, leading them to shift their focus from a product-centric approach to a service-oriented business model (Kastalli et al., 2013; Paiola et al., 2012; Raddats & Kowalkowski, 2014; Reinartz & Ulaga, 2008). This paradigm shift, known as "servitization," has not only revolutionized their operational landscape but has also empowered them to stand out in an increasingly crowded marketplace, build stronger customer relationships, and generate enhanced value for their customers.

Servitization is the process by which organizations transition from traditional product-focused offerings to a more customer-centric approach, wherein services play a pivotal role alongside their core products. This strategic shift allows companies to offer a broader array of services that complement their products, creating a more holistic and integrated customer experience.

In this pursuit of competitiveness, firms are continuously expanding their service offerings (Kowalkowski et al., 2017; Williams & Naumann, 2011). Service innovation, a critical aspect of this transformation, refers to the creation and implementation of novel services or significant improvements to existing services. It entails the introduction of innovative ideas, processes, technologies, or business models to better address customer needs and preferences, thereby enhancing the overall service quality and customer experience.

Recognizing the significance of service innovation in shaping the customer relationship, organizations strive to adapt and evolve their services to align with the dynamic demands and preferences of their customers (Deshpandé et al., 2018; Gebauer et al., 2011; Marín-García et al., 2021). A positive customer experience, in turn, is a crucial outcome of successful service innovation and servitization efforts. Customer experience encompasses the perceptions, emotions, and interactions a customer has with a company throughout their entire journey, from initial engagement to post-

purchase support. It is shaped by every touchpoint and interaction with the brand, influencing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy.

Service innovation, servitization, and customer experiences have emerged as focal areas of research within the domain of service marketing. These concepts hold the potential to redefine business models and revolutionize the way organizations interact with customers, but the exploration of these themes in emerging economies remains limited. The importance of studying developing countries lies in their role in generating new ideas and embracing new technologies, making it essential to consider their unique perspectives when shaping service innovations.

In light of these research gaps, the present study endeavors to investigate these concepts within different contexts in emerging countries. Drawing upon the framework of social exchange theory, the first study aims to explore the relationship between service innovation and relational performance in supplier-customer interactions. Moreover, this study explores the moderating effects of relational anxiety in this relationship and the mediating role of different types of trust, including competence, contractual, and goodwill. The second study, viewed through the lens of attribution theory, delves into the trade-offs between product types and the decision-making process surrounding standardization and customization in initial purchases. By shedding light on the interplay between product type, service type, and approach, this study provides valuable insights for designing service contracts that align seamlessly with customer preferences. Finally, leveraging the complexity approach, the third study explores the relationship between proactive customer orientation, value co-creation, customer experience, customer-brand engagement, and willingness to pay more. By investigating the connections between these variables, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of customer behavior and decision-making processes.

CHAPTER II

ENSURING LONG-STANDING SUPPLIER-CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS BY SERVICE INNOVATION VIA DIFFERENT TYPES OF TRUST¹

2.1. Introduction

Service innovation empowers organizations as a core competency to adapt, differentiate, and excel in a competitive market (Pai et al., 2022; Rabetino et al., 2023; Raddats et al., 2022). As firms strive to expand their service offerings (Kohtamaki et al., 2015; Kowalkowski et al., 2017), service innovation is crucial for the customer-provider relationship because it allows the supplier to continually enhance and change the service they provide to better match the customer's demands and preferences (Deshpandé et al., 2018; Gebauer et al., 2011; Marín-García et al., 2021). As the client perceives that their needs are being actively met, this can help to establish trust and long-term relationships between the two sides. However, comparatively, little is known about how service innovation affects relational performance via different dimensions of trust (Huang et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2020; Witell et al., 2016).

Building long-term supplier-customer partnerships requires trust (Gaur et al., 2019; Stuart et al., 2012), making it possible for the provider to rely on the client for high-quality goods or services and for the client to rely on the client for consistent business (Ball et al., 2004). As a result, they can formulate long-term goals, collaborate more successfully, and are more eager to share information, all of which contribute to a more fruitful and effective partnership. Relations with suppliers, especially managers and technical personnel who have an active role in decisions, have an essential role in purchasing (Brown et al., 2012; Ganguly & Roy, 2021; Pellegrino et al., 2020). Accordingly, studies on service innovation have also focused on the structure of supplier-customer relationships (Leckie et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2020). In these relationships, trust is one of the most important factors, which ensures the participation of the parties in the process, minimizes the perception of risk and

¹ This part of thesis is under review in European Journal of Marketing (ISSN: 0309-0566)

ensures the establishment of an innovative ecosystem (Mayer et al., 1995; Moorman et al., 1993; Steinbruch et al., 2021). Traditionally, trust has been studied as a unified construct (Gounaris, 2005; Isaeva et al., 2020; Ramaseshan et al., 2013), acting as a vital mediator in a variety of relationships (Choi & La, 2013; Liljander & Roos, 2002; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Recent research, on the other hand, has proposed a three-factor trust model, implying that each dimension has a distinct effect on the outcomes (Fatima et al., 2018; Kayaser Fatima & Abdur Razzaque, 2014; Zhang & Li, 2019). Nonetheless, there has been little research into the specific roles and impacts of these three dimensions in supplier-customer relationships (Casidy et al., 2020; Dias Sant'Ana et al., 2020). As a result, additional research is required to better understand how these trust dimensions operate in the context of supplier-customer relationships and influence the overall dynamics and outcomes.

The nature of supplier-customer relationships varies depending on the development level of countries which implies development of different business development strategies (Nand et al., 2023). Developing countries are of great importance in developing business models and integrating new technologies (Rachman, 2014). Kavadias et al. (2016) put forwards that for new technologies to turn into the industry, they should be designed to meet the needs of developing countries. Given that developing countries are often at the forefront of generating new ideas and utilizing new technologies, it is imperative that they be taken into account when developing service innovations. As stated by several authors (Alkire & Hammedi, 2021; Ernst et al., 2015; Paschou et al., 2020; Subramaniam et al., 2015; Xin et al., 2021), studies on emerging service innovation are mostly limited to countries such as the USA and the Nordic Countries. However, comparatively, little is known about how service innovation affects relational performance via dimensions of trust in developing countries (Huang et al., 2022; Paschou et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2020; Witell et al., 2016). Incorporating perspectives from developing countries into service innovation research can lead to more inclusive and impactful innovations, as well as a better understanding of the global service context.

Taking into consideration of the mentioned gaps, this study aims to examine the relationship among service innovation, trust, and relational performance among a sample of managers from the top 500 companies in Turkey. Specifically, the present study will explore the effect of service innovation on relational performance and the

three dimensions of trust (competence, contractual, and goodwill trust) within the lens of Social Exchange Theory (SET). SET is relevant to supplier-customer relationships because it explains how these ties originate and persist over time (Lambe et al., 2001). The present study will also examine how these trust dimensions intervene in the relationship between service innovation and relational performance. Furthermore, dampening effect of relationship anxiety on the relationship between trust dimensions and relational performance will be investigated.

2.2. Theoretical Background

2.2.1. Social Exchange Theory

In the realm of service innovation, previous studies have predominantly relied upon theoretical frameworks to explicate the drivers and outcomes of this phenomenon (Hult et al., 2004). These frameworks, deeply rooted in the domain of strategic management, such as the resource-based view (Chen et al., 2011) and dynamic capabilities view (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2010), have indeed shed light on various aspects of service innovation. However, a notable development in recent empirical research has brought forth the notion that investigating innovation necessitates a behavioral perspective (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015; Snyder et al., 2016).

The social exchange theory is one such behavioral perspective that has gained traction in the context of supplier-customer relationships (SET). SET recognizes the incorporation of social elements within these relationships, as opposed to traditional approaches that solely emphasize economic elements encapsulated in contractual agreements (Davis-Sramek et al., 2020; Griffith et al., 2006; Johnston et al., 2004). In exchange dynamics, SET emphasizes interdependence. In contrast to economic exchange theory, SET emphasizes internal benefits and symbolic values such as trust and prestige (Gefen & Ridings, 2014; Homans, 1958; Lambe et al., 2001). SET explains why people form and sustain exchange relationships based on their reward expectations (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958). According to SET, reciprocal obligations can foster trust, loyalty, and commitment (Molm, 2003). SET is a strategic marketing tool for business-to-business interactions that creates a mutual action cycle based on rewards (Das & Teng, 2002). Because these relationships are based on relational contracts, SET recognizes that returns cannot be guaranteed (Lambe et al., 2001).

The present study utilized SET to study the relationship between service innovation and relational performance, the mediating role of trust (competence, contractual, and goodwill), and the moderating effects of relationship anxiety. Reciprocity can lead to long-term supplier-customer relationships (Blau, 1964). Exchange partners may prioritize long-term benefits over short-term risks. Competence, contractual, and goodwill trust can develop with reciprocity. Trust in relationships and exchanges can increase cooperation, create a "reservoir of goodwill," and reduce fear and greed, leading to long-term relationships (Kingshott, 2006). Trust may weaken if one party has relationship anxiety (Mende & Bolton, 2011). SET can explain how different types of trust built through the supplier's voluntary innovative efforts can motivate long-term supplier-customer relationships.

2.3. Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Development

2.3.1. Service Innovation and Relational Performance

Service innovation, encompassing new services or innovative improvements in existing services, holds paramount importance in the realm of customer value (Salunke et al., 2013). Relational performance, on the other hand, is operationalized as the level of customer satisfaction with the supplier and their willingness to maintain the relationship.

Research in this domain, as classified by Coombs and Miles (2000), can be categorized into three perspectives: assimilation, demarcation, and synthesis. The assimilation perspective posits that service innovation evolves parallel to technological advancements and employs theories and methodologies akin to those utilized in product innovation. In contrast, the demarcation perspective asserts that service innovation is distinct and diverges from product innovation. It emphasizes the intangible nature of services, the involvement of customers in the process, and the significance of customer relations (Witell et al., 2016). The synthesis perspective seeks to bridge these two approaches, recognizing that service innovation encompasses both product and service dimensions.

In this study, the interactive and supportive dimensions of service innovation, as defined by (Salunke et al., 2013). The interactive dimension pertains to innovations occurring outside the company, directly adding value for customers. On the other hand, the supportive dimension refers to internal innovations that indirectly enhance

customer value. Consequently, service innovation establishes enduring relationships between suppliers and customers through the provision of these value-additions. Prior research has indicated that service innovation enhances service quality (Lee et al., 2022), fosters customer engagement (Kim et al., 2021), and drives purchasing behavior (Casidy et al., 2020).

According to the service-dominant view, cultivating long-term customer relationships is of paramount importance. As collaboration with customers deepens, the quality of the supplier-customer relationship flourishes (Mohr & Nevin, 1990). Consequently, service innovation, as a collaborative process involving customers (Gallouj et al., 2008; Kowalkowski, 2011), exerts a positive influence on relational performance. In this study, relational performance is defined as the degree to which customers are satisfied with and maintain their relationship with the supplier (Chang et al., 2021).

Scholarly investigations in the field of service innovation have discovered that it elicits favorable behavioral intentions from customers. When exposed to innovative approaches from service providers, customers are more inclined to exhibit loyalty (Truong et al., 2020), intention to repurchase (Wang et al., 2018), and propensity to recommend to others (Ordanini et al., 2014). Moreover, in the context of business-to-business (B2B) interactions, supplier innovativeness is intricately linked to customer performance. Engaging with customers facilitates a comprehensive understanding of their needs, enabling businesses to offer optimal solutions.

Thus, the present study aims to explore how service innovation enhances relational performance through various forms of trust and based upon the discussion as mentioned above, we hypothesize:

H1: Suppliers' service innovation is positively related to relational performance.

2.3.2. Service Innovation, Three Types of Trust and Relational Performance

Establishing long-term relationships based solely on technical superiority is difficult in emerging economies (Rungsithong & Meyer, 2020). As a result, trust is absolutely critical in the relationships between suppliers and customers (Gounaris & Venetis, 2002; Isaeva et al., 2020). Building and maintaining trusting relationships with customers is a key determinant of success for service firms in particular (Casidy & Nyadzayo, 2019; Gounaris, 2005; Paparoidamis et al., 2019). Within sharing networks, where individuals exchange information, trust has emerged as a new form

of currency (Chua et al., 2020). However, there is a gap between academic definitions of trust and how firms operationalize it as practitioners define trust in the context of supply chains as consisting of credibility and relationship commitment (Fawcett et al., 2017). It can be defined as the parties' belief (Kumar et al., 1995), perceived helpfulness, and reputation within a relationship (Ganesan, 1994).

Fatima et al. (2018) investigated the impact of trust on relationship benefits and performance by examining it across three dimensions: competence, contractual, and goodwill. Competence trust refers to the other party's expectations of one's expertise in a specific field (Sako, 1992; Schoorman et al., 2007). Contractual trust is the expectation that the other party will follow through on agreements (Davenport et al., 1998). Finally, goodwill trust denotes the expectation that a partner will assist customer beyond the scope of the agreement (Kayser Fatima & Abdur Razzaque, 2014; Sako, 1992). Using this approach, the concept of trust is examined in three dimensions: as a variable influenced by service innovation, as a factor influencing relational performance, and as a factor influencing relational performance. Reciprocal exchanges, according to social exchange theory, foster trust, commitment, and satisfaction within a relationship (Blau, 1964). As a result, improved interaction quality as a result of service innovation is likely to facilitate interpersonal and social bonding, increasing trust.

Based on empirical findings, service innovation has been demonstrated to yield heightened levels of trust (Biswas et al., 2022; Ruan et al., 2020). Customer trust epitomizes a robust emotional connection established with the service provider, influencing their perception of the brand's image and their attitude towards its quality (Yim et al., 2008). Customers' psychological endorsement and affinity frequently manifest as a sense of trust when they recognize and value the worth of products and services (Chang et al., 2014). Consequently, we posit the following hypotheses:

H2a: Suppliers' service innovation is positively related to the customer's competence trust

H2b: Suppliers' service innovation is positively related to the customer's contractual trust

H2c: Suppliers' service innovation is positively related to the customer's goodwill trust

H3a: Customers' competence trust is positively related to relational performance

H3b: Customers' contractual trust is positively related to relational performance

H3c: Customers' goodwill trust is positively related to relational performance

2.3.3. Mediating Role of Three Types of Trust

We propose trust as a parameter as a mediating role within the conceptual framework. Trust is especially important in-service contexts because the inherent characteristics of services, such as intangibility and heterogeneity, make it difficult to select and evaluate suppliers (Choi & La, 2013; Liljander & Roos, 2002; Paparoidamis et al., 2019; Shainesh, 2012). Trust has been identified as a critical mediator in the context of B2B marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Indeed, as evidenced by studies conducted across various disciplines, trust has been established as an essential aspect of improving relationships within the supply chain (Blomqvist, 1997; Hsiao, 2019; Ramaseshan et al., 2013).

Several studies have shown that trust plays a mediating role in shaping customer behaviour (Chang et al., 2014; Chua et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2022). Trust is reinforced when exchange partners engage in interactions that demonstrate their attentiveness to the needs and benefits of others, such as ensuring safety and security in a service environment (Rahman et al., 2022). However, there is a knowledge gap in the relationship marketing and service marketing literature about whether and how different types of trust mediate the relationship between service innovation and relational performance. We propose the following hypothesis based on the aforementioned literature:

H4a: Customers' competence trust mediates the positive relationship between service innovation and relational performance

H4b: Customers' contractual trust mediates the positive relationship between service innovation and relational performance

H4c: Customers' goodwill trust mediates the positive relationship between service innovation and relational performance

2.3.4. Moderating Role of Relationship Anxiety

Relationship anxiety is a common issue in personal and professional relationships, including B2B environments (Vlachos et al., 2010). High levels of anxiety can lead to distrust, communication breakdowns, and other challenges, making it difficult for

companies to innovate and provide new or improved services. On the other hand, low levels of anxiety can help to form strong supplier-customer relationships through increased trust, communication, and collaboration, creating a more favorable climate for service innovation and better meeting client needs and preferences (Thomson, 2006). Mende and Bolton (2011) are among the first marketing academics to look into firm-specific, relationship-focused attachment styles. Customers with low levels of relational anxiety have higher levels of contentment, trust, and affective commitment toward a service business and service personnel than customers with high levels of relational anxiety.

H5a: Relationship anxiety weakens the positive relationship between competence trust and relational performance

H5b: Relationship anxiety weakens the positive relationship between contractual trust and relational performance

H5c: Relationship anxiety weakens the positive relationship between goodwill trust and relational performance

The conceptual model is shown in the Figure 2.1.

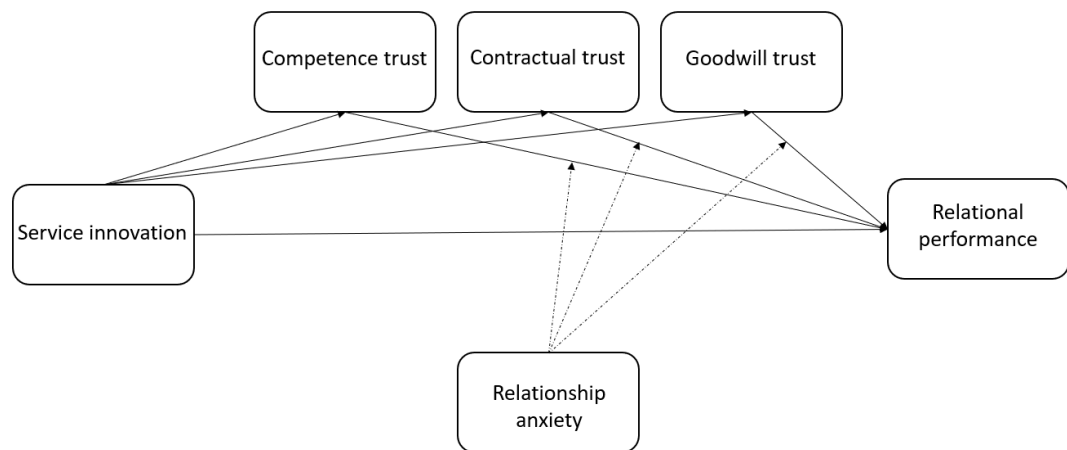


Figure 2.1: Structural Model

Note:

———— Direct and mediating effects

----- Moderating effects

2.4. Research Method

2.4.1. Data Collection and Sample

In the present study, the data were collected through online five-point Likert surveys distributed to the people working in ISO 500 companies (Turkey's top 500 companies) via LinkedIn. It is one of the most social media platforms focused on business and employment issues, making it suitable for us to collect data. The survey participants were chosen based on the criteria of working in departments requiring supplier-customer relationships. This data collection approach has been used effectively in a variety of studies from diverse (e.g. Bruhn et al., 2014; De Luca et al., 2021; Høgevold et al., 2020; Manchanda & Deb, 2022; Mbama & Ezepue, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

Initially, there were 248 replies in the sample. However, due to missing info and poor responses, 16 replies were discarded, while 232 were kept. The age groups of the present study are mostly concentrated on the 30-50 (n=170), the most common age group for the executives involved in supplier-customer relationships. In terms of the department, the present study's sample has a balanced distribution among upper management, maintenance/technic/energy, purchasing and production/operation departments, even if production/operation department has a slightly higher number of respondents. For the level of education, the sample includes mostly people who graduated from undergraduate or postgraduate level institutions. Table 2.1 shows the details about the demographic information of the participants.

Table 2.1: Demographic Information of The Participants (n = 232)

Department		Level of education		Age	
Upper management	39	Postgraduate	76	Over 50	12
Maintenance/Technic/Energy	44	Undergraduate	142	30-50	170
Purchasing	54	Others	14	25-30	50
Production/Operation	68				
Others	27				
Industry					
Textile					31
Energy					21
Food					39
Chemicals					21
Machinery					37
Health & medical product					15
Automotive					17
Woodworks & packaging					20
Software & telecommunications					10
Others					21

The present study utilized well-established scales in the literature. Service innovation was measured by an eight-item measure taken from Casidy et. al. (2020) who adapted items from Salunke et. al. (2013). The dimensions of trust included eight items (two items for competence trust, three items for contractual trust, and three items for goodwill trust) based on the studies of Ganesan (1994) and Kumar et. al. (1995). Relational performance was adopted from Chen et al. (2013) with three items, while the relational anxiety scale was taken from Mende and Bolton (2011) with four items. The participants assessed statements in the measures using a five-point Likert scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Participants were asked to think about the closest supplier they work with for the service innovation scale. Then they were asked to evaluate each item by a five-point Likert scale varying from 1 (remain unchanged) to 5 (have changed completely).

Following a sequence of factor analyses, it was determined that certain items exhibited low factor loadings, resulting in the removal of one item from each of the service innovation (SI6), relationship anxiety (RA1), and relational performance (RP3) constructs. This refinement procedure led to an enhancement in the model fit indices, aligning them with the criteria recommended by Doll et al. (1994) and Hair et al. (2009). The measures employed in the current study are presented in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2. Hata! Belgede belirtilen stilde metne rastlanmadı. 2: Measures

Construct	Item	Factor loading	CR	AVE
Service Innovation	The areas of expertise that supplier offers	0.701	0.876	0.503
	The speed in which supplier delivers its products/services	0.716		
	The flexibility of supplier products or services (e.g., customization)	0.744		
	The ways in which the services supplier provide are delivered	0.622		
	The ways in which the products/services supplier provide are produced	0.712		
	The ways by which supplier evaluates the quality of the products/services offered	0.746		
	The nature of technology that is used to produce or deliver products/services	0.717		
	I can trust supplier's competency	0.828		
Competence trust	Supplier is technically dependable	0.857	0.831	0.710
Contractual trust	There is no need to be cautious against the supplier	0.538		
	The supplier is sincere	0.855		
	The supplier keeps their promises	0.841	0.797	0.576
Goodwill trust	The supplier is like a friend to us	0.687		
	The supplier offers assistance even in changing circumstances	0.721		

	The supplier "looks at customers' interests in the relationship	0.730		
Relational performance	We are willing to consider this supplier when making a purchase decision in the future	0.881	0.831	0.711
	We want to maintain a long-term relationship with this supplier	0.803		
Relationship anxiety	The supplier changes how they treat me for no apparent reason.	0.686		
	I worry that the supplier does not really like me as a customer.	0.737	0.756	0.509
	I worry that the supplier does not care about me as much as I care about the supplier	0.715		

2.5. Data Analysis

The present study utilised structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the conceptual model and research hypotheses. The data analysis of the present study was implemented via IBM's SPSS (25th version) and AMOS software (24th version).

2.5.1. Reliability, Validity and Common Method Bias

First reliability and validity test were implemented. Reliability refers to the situation that items constituting a measure reflect the same construct with high intercorrelation. According to the results, the values of composite reliability are higher than the suggested threshold value. For the validity, the AVE values are higher than the suggested 0.5 threshold, which means that there is no concern about convergent validity. For the discriminant validity, the square roots of each AVE values are compared to their correlation with other constructs and HTMT analysis was used. The results show that there is not any concern regarding discriminant validity. The Table 2.3. and Table 2.4. show the values in detail.

Table 2.3: Discriminant Validity Analysis

	(I)	(II)	(III)	(IV)	(V)	(VI)
(I) Service innovation	0.709					
(II) Competence trust	0.224	0.843				
(III) Contractual trust	0.166	0.685	0.759			
(IV) Goodwill trust	0.210	0.609	0.677	0.713		
(V) Relational performance	0.183	0.713	0.531	0.549	0.843	
(VI) Relationship anxiety	0.080	-0.420	0.321	0.438	0.615	0.713

Table 2.4: HTMT Analysis

	(I)	(II)	(III)	(IV)	(V)	(VI)
(I) Service innovation						
(II) Competence trust	0.215					
(III) Contractual trust	0.110	0.683				
(IV) Goodwill trust	0.207	0.603	0.694			
(V) Relational performance	0.180	0.790	0.658	0.639		
(VI) Relationship anxiety	0.092	0.427	0.336	0.441	0.663	

Moreover, we tested whether the present study's dataset has a common method bias. One effective measure against this is ensuring the participants' privacy. In addition to confirming the anonymousness of the answers, we employed Harman's single-factor test. The results showed that the cumulative variance extracted by one factor is 28.29%, which is less than the suggested threshold value. Last, we implemented a confirmatory factor analysis to test the measurement model. The goodness of fit indices demonstrated that the structural model perfectly fit the data ($\chi^2 = 209.373$, $df = 155$, $\chi^2/df = 1.351$, CFI = 0.972, NFI = 0.902, RMSEA = 0.039, $p = 0.002$).

2.5.2. Structural Model Results

After completing reliability and validity analyses, path analysis was done to test causal relationships in the structural model. The results demonstrated that service innovation is positively and significantly related to the dimensions of trust, namely competence trust ($\beta = 0.156$, $p < 0.01$), contractual trust ($\beta = 0.126$, $p < 0.05$), and goodwill trust ($\beta = 0.144$, $p < 0.01$). However, the relationship is stronger in competence trust. Therefore, the present study's hypothesis 2a, 2b and 2c were supported. Moreover, findings also show that competence trust ($\beta = 0.571$, $p < 0.01$) and goodwill trust ($\beta = 0.252$, $p < 0.01$) significantly affect relational performance. Nevertheless, there was no significant relationship between contractual trust and relational performance ($\beta = -0.016$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, while hypotheses h3a and h3c were supported, hypothesis h3b was not supported. Finally, competence trust's beta coefficient was higher than the one of goodwill trust. Table 2.5 shows the main effect results in detail.

Table 2.5: Main Effect Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t
H1	Service innovation $\rightarrow$ Relational performance	-0.007	-0.172
H2a	Service innovation $\rightarrow$ Competence trust	0.156**	3.059
H2b	Service innovation $\rightarrow$ Contractual trust	0.126*	2.383
H2c	Service innovation $\rightarrow$ Goodwill trust	0.144**	2.747
H3a	Competence trust $\rightarrow$ Relational performance	0.571**	6.194
H3b	Contractual trust $\rightarrow$ Relational performance	-0.016	-0.163
H3c	Goodwill trust $\rightarrow$ Relational performance	0.252**	2,839
$\chi^2 = 201.501$, $df = 110$, $\chi^2/df = 1.832$, CFI = 0.946, NFI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.06, $p < 0.001$			

Next, mediation and moderation test were implemented. For the mediation analysis, we implemented the specific indirect effect analysis method by using the "My Indirect Effects" plugin suggested by Gaskin (2019). Results showed a significant positive mediating role of competence trust ($\beta = 0.036$, $p < 0.05$) and goodwill trust ($\beta = 0.089$, $p < 0.05$) in the relationship between service innovation and relational performance. However, this was not the case in the case of contractual trust ($\beta = -0.004$, $p > 0.05$).

For the moderation analysis, the present study followed the Johnson-Neyman (J-N) plot analysis, which is an effective way of moderation testing (Gaskin & James, 2019; Hayes & Matthes, 2009). First, the moderating role of relationship anxiety between service innovation and service innovation was tested. The results showed that there is a significant moderation effect. Then, the moderating role of relationship anxiety between the dimensions of trust and relational performance was tested. Although there is no significant interaction effect, moderation can still be considered present because trust dimensions do not equal zero for any moderator variable value inside the confidence intervals within a relevant range of moderator variable values.

Last, moderating role of relationship anxiety is tested on the relationship between service innovation and dimensions of trust. According to the findings, there are significant moderating effects. Table 2.6, Table 2.7, and Figure 2.2, Figure 2.3, Figure 2.4 show the results in detail.

Table 2.6: Mediation Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	p	LLCI	ULCI	Mediation
H4 _a	Service innovation → Competence trust → Relational performance	0.036	0.028	0.008	0.100	Yes
H4 _b	Service innovation → Contractual trust → Relational performance	-0.004	0.611	-0.056	0.018	No
H4 _c	Service innovation → Goodwill trust → Relational performance	0.089	0.024	0.021	0.181	Yes

Table 2.7: Moderation Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	Moderation
H5 _a	Relational anxiety x Competence trust → Relational performance	-0.004	-0.103	0.917	-0.073	0.066	See explanation*1
H5 _b	Relational anxiety x Contractual trust → Relational performance	0,070	1.626	0.105	-0.015	0.155	See explanation*2
H5 _c	Relational anxiety x goodwill trust → Relational performance	-0.018	-0.320	0.749	-0.109	0.078	See explanation*3

***1.** Although the interaction effect was non-significant (P-Value = 0,917), we can still assume moderation to be present because Y does not equal zero for any value of X inside the confidence intervals within a relevant range of X values.

***2** Although the interaction effect was non-significant (P-Value = 0,105), we can still consider moderation to exist for all values of X where Y = 0 does not fall within the confidence intervals. In this case, Y = 0 does not fall within the confidence zone for all X values less than 0.302

***3** Although the interaction effect was non-significant (P-Value = 0,749), we can still consider moderation to exist for all values of X where Y = 0 does not fall within the confidence intervals. In this case, Y = 0 does not fall within the confidence zone for all X values less than 0.085

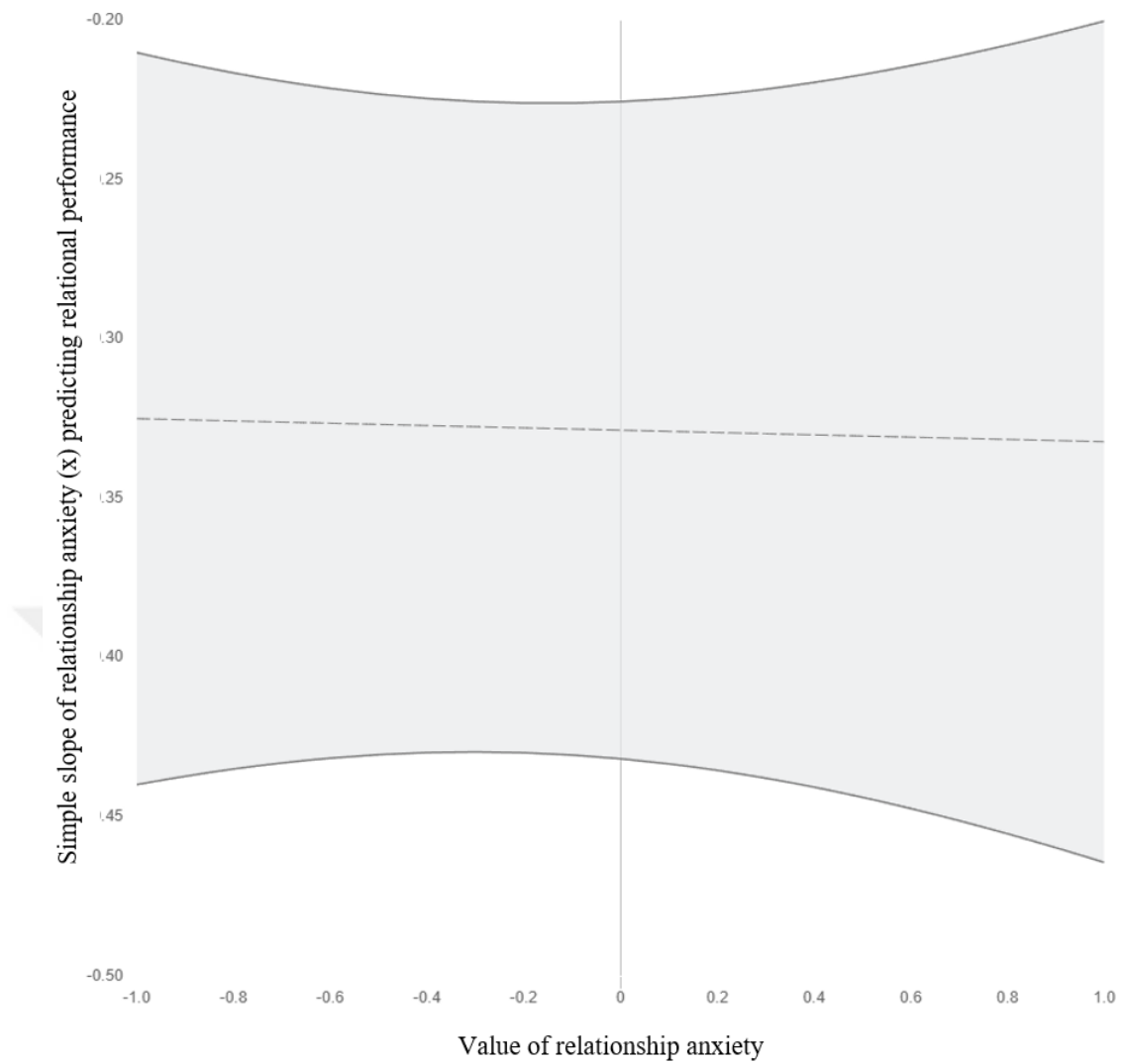


Figure 2.2 : J-N Plots for Relational Anxiety as A Moderator Between Competence Trust and Relational Performance

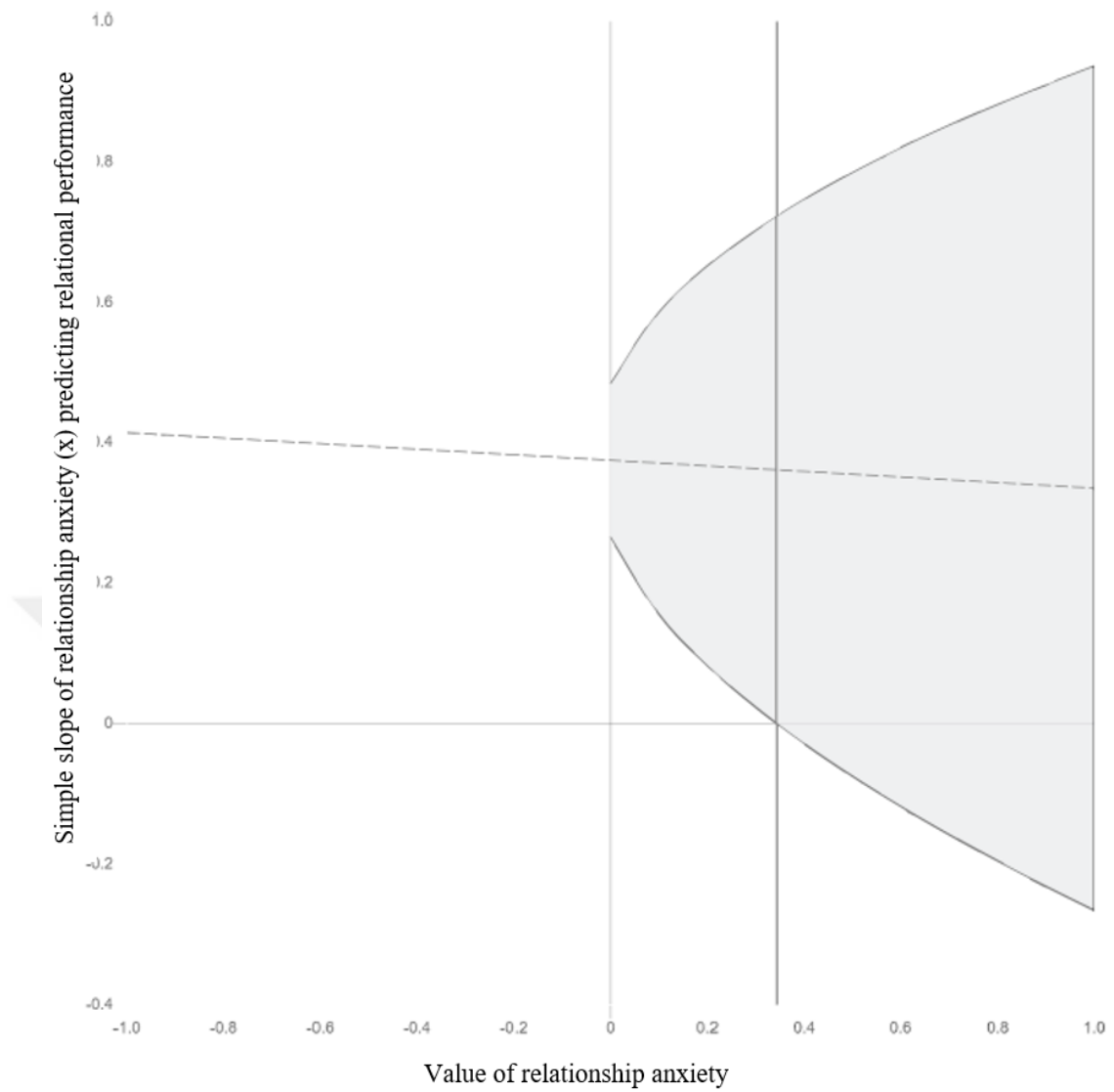


Figure 2.3: J-N Plots for Relational Anxiety as A Moderator Between Contractual Trust and Relational Performance

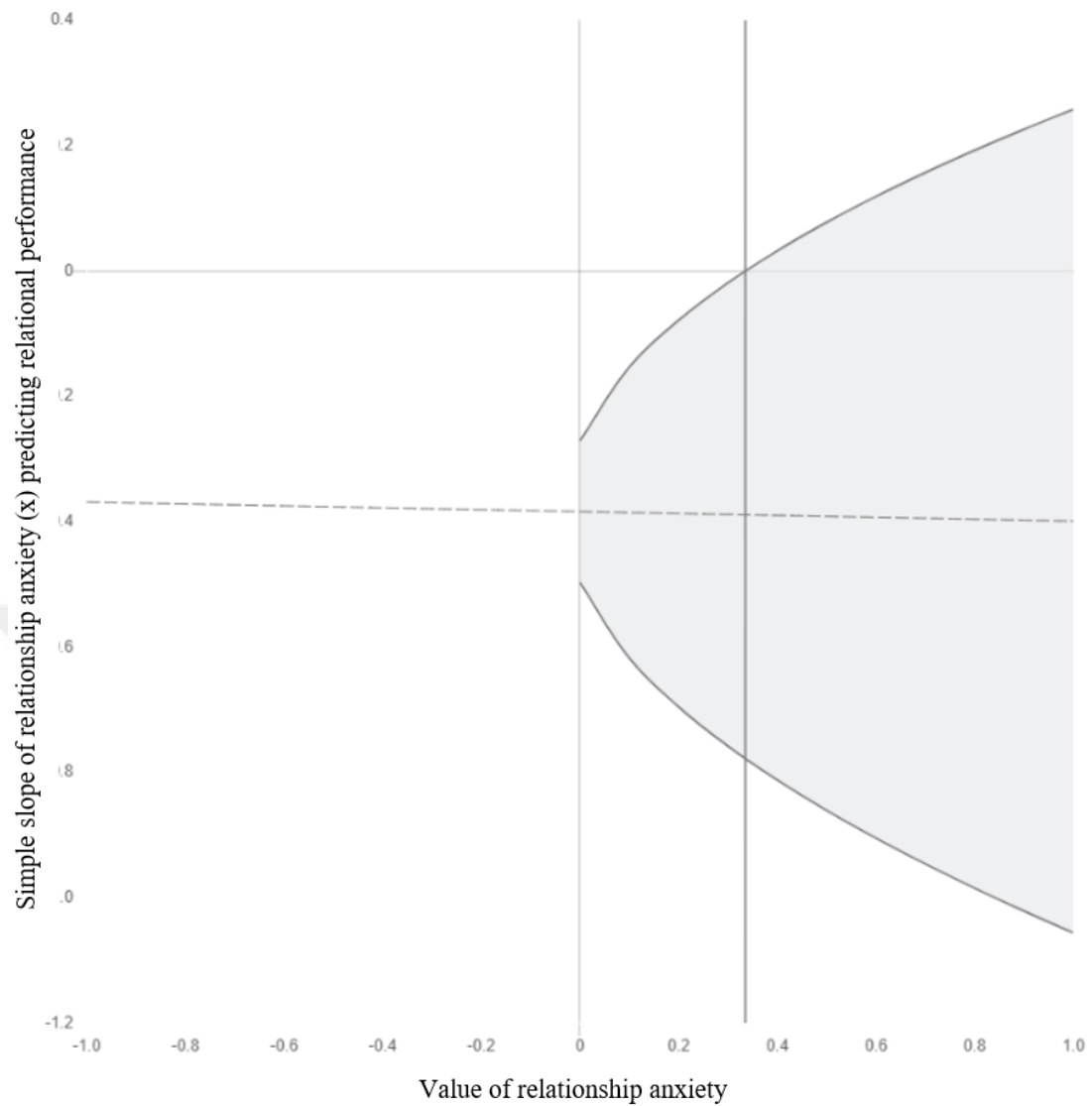


Figure 2.4: J-N Plots for Relational Anxiety as A Moderator Between Goodwill Trust and Relational Performance

2.6. Discussion

2.6.1. Theoretical Implications

Utilizing the tenets of Social Exchange Theory (SET), the present study aimed at investigating the relationship between service innovation and relational performance, mediating role of different dimensions of trust, and moderating role of relationship anxiety. The findings of the study supported the hypothesized relationships between service innovation and trust dimensions. Specifically, service innovation was found to be significantly related to competence trust (H2a), contractual trust (H2b), and goodwill trust (H2c). These findings are consistent with previous studies that have

examined the relationship between service innovation and relational variables (e.g. Biswas et al., 2022; Casidy et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2022). The present study contributed to their findings by incorporating trust with its different dimensions in the emerging economies context.

However, contrary to the initial hypothesis, service innovation was found to have no direct effects on relational performance. This suggests that the relationship between service innovation and relational performance is mediated by trust, rejecting the hypothesis H1. This finding is consistent with Casidy et al. (2020), who examined service innovation with adoption intention, but differs from Samuelsson (2023), who found a significant direct relationship between technological innovation and customer participation. The present study further advances these findings by examining the relationship between service innovation and relational performance.

Another significant finding of the study pertains to the different effects of trust dimensions. While competence and contractual trust were found to significantly affect relational performance, contractual trust did not have a significant effect. This finding is consistent with Kayeser Fatima and Abdur Razzaque (2014), but challenges the finding that goodwill trust has a stronger effect than competence trust. In this study, competence trust was found to have a stronger effect on relational performance. This difference in findings can be attributed to the different contexts in which the studies were conducted, with Kayeser Fatima and Abdur Razzaque (2014) examining trust dimensions in a bank marketing context, while the present study focused on a B2B supplier-customer relationship context.

Additionally, the present study made a significant contribution by examining the use of different trust dimensions as mediators in the relationship between service innovation and relational performance in a B2B context. The findings revealed that while competence trust (H4a) and goodwill trust (H4c) played a mediating role, contractual trust did not (H4b). This expands upon previous research (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Rahman et al., 2022) that found trust to be a mediator in B2B relationships by examining the different dimensions of trust. The study also builds upon the work of Kayeser Fatima and Abdur Razzaque (2014) and Fatima et al. (2018) by applying these findings in a B2B context.

Lastly, the study uncovered that relationship anxiety assumes a moderating role in the relationship between trust dimensions and relational performance. This finding aligns with prior research (e.g. Kim et al., 2018; Kivlighan et al., 2017; Vlachos et al., 2010) that has introduced the concept of relationship anxiety into the domain of marketing studies. The integration and implementation of relationship anxiety within a B2B study further contributes to our understanding of the complex dynamics between trust, relational performance, and relationship anxiety.

The present study makes significant theoretical contributions to the recent literature in multiple ways. Firstly, it addresses the call made by Samuelsson (2023) and Rabetino et. al. (2023) by linking the service innovation of suppliers with relational performance. By analyzing service innovation from a different perspective and considering different outcome variables, this study enhances our understanding of the relationship between service innovation and relational performance. Secondly, the study confirms the findings of Kayeser Fatima and Abdur Razzaque (2014) by demonstrating that different dimensions of trust lead to different results in the relationships between service innovation and relational performance in a B2B context. This further expands our knowledge of the complex dynamics between trust and performance in supplier-customer relationships. Additionally, the study responds to the call made by Huang et al. (2022) by incorporating different mediators in supplier-customer relationships, providing valuable insights into the underlying mechanisms that drive these relationships. Lastly, the study introduces the concept of relationship anxiety as a moderator in B2B interactions, shedding light on its role in shaping the outcomes of these interactions.

2.6.2. Managerial Implications

The present study has several distinct implications for managers and executives based on the findings. It demonstrates that suppliers could gain customer trust in three ways via service innovations. According to the social exchange theory, the relationship between the parties develops with trust when there is reciprocity in exchanges (Blau, 1964). Service innovations enable these reciprocal exchanges and increase customers' contractual, goodwill, and competence trust. This is crucial in the fast-changing business environment that hinders customers from trusting their business partners because of uncertainties (Bunduchi, 2008).

Second, this study reveals that customers are paying more attention to their suppliers' competence in their relationships, and fulfilment of the contractual obligations does not affect their relationship. Therefore, suppliers should do more than just satisfy the requirements of their business contracts to establish long-term relationships (Bonoma & Johnston, 1978). They may ensure that they are competent and benevolent in the eyes of their customers.

Third, suppliers may increase their long-term relationships by innovating new services with the help of increasing their Competence and benevolence. Increasing competition led suppliers to explore a distinctive way to combat their competitors. As a way to accomplish this, service innovation has gained focal attention from product and service providers. This study's findings illuminated that suppliers should fine-tune their service innovation strategy to avoid heavily focusing on contractual obligations by ignoring their customer's perception of competence and benevolence.

Ultimately, it is crucial for suppliers to alleviate customers' apprehension pertaining to their customer-supplier relationship. Drawing on insights from psychological research, it has become increasingly evident that individuals experience anxiety within their interpersonal connections. Significantly, the present study underscores that even B2B customers harbor anxiety within their own business relationships.

2.6.3. Limitations and Future Directions

Contributing to the service, innovation and supply chain literature, this study is not without its limitations. First, the present study draws conclusions from cross-sectional data which impedes its ability to explain causal relationships between variables. However, relations and trust can be obtained as time passes and they change through the process of exchanges between the customers and suppliers. For example, the present study did not show significant mediating role of contractual trust in contrast with competence trust and goodwill trust, which the lack of data may cause. Presenting how customer-supplier relationships are developed over time, longitudinal studies may further validate the findings of the present study.

Second, the results showed that contractual trust did not lead to relational performance, which implies cultural factors may play an important role in the process. As such, future studies may address this issue by incorporating cultural factors and related variables in their model. The service literature has studied culture as an antecedent and

dependent variable of relationship models. The present study has furthered the need for incorporating cultural factors in service innovation and customer relationship models. For example, Griffis et al. (2014) and Thornton et al. (2013) regarded cultural factors as moderators in customer-supplier relationships. Potential variables include Hofstede's cultural dimensions and culture-specific terms such as Guanxi in China (Huang et al., 2022).

Third, even if the present study contributed to the literature by incorporating the impacts of service innovation, it did not include antecedents of service innovation due to the need to keep the questionnaire as short as possible to reach B2B customers. Future studies may include a comprehensive model including both antecedents and relational impacts of service innovation.

CHAPTER III

ORGANIZING MAINTENANCE SERVICE CONTRACTS FOR INITIAL PURCHASES: THE INTERPLAY AMONG PRODUCT TYPE, SERVICE TYPE, AND SERVICE APPROACH²

3.1. Introduction

Numerous organizations have undergone a paradigm shift, transitioning from a product-centric focus to a service-oriented business model, thereby revolutionizing their operational landscape in recent decades (Kastalli et al., 2013; Paiola et al., 2012; Raddats & Kowalkowski, 2014; Reinartz & Ulaga, 2008). This transformative process, known as servitization, has been instigated by a multitude of influential factors, including intensified global market competition, evolving customer needs and preferences, and the advent of cutting-edge technologies enabling advanced and tailored service offerings (Johnson et al., 2021; Kowalkowski, et al., 2017; Paschou et al., 2020; Vandermerwe & Rada, 1988). Embracing a service-oriented approach empowers organizations to distinguish themselves amidst a crowded marketplace, foster stronger customer relationships, and generate enhanced value for their clientele. The pervasive embrace of servitization has exerted a profound impact on the economy, ushering in a paradigm shift in how businesses operate.

These efforts of the manufacturers have been conceptualized differently following their strategies (e.g., hybrid offerings, integrated solutions, product-service systems, product service bundles, etc.) (Kowalkowski et al., 2017; Paschou et al., 2020; Raddats et al., 2019; Rapaccini & Visintin, 2014). However, the application of servitization has

² This part of thesis was published in Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing (ISSN: 1547-0628) with the below information.

Bağcı, R. B., & Taşcıoğlu, M. (2023). Organizing Maintenance Service Contracts for Initial Purchases: The Interplay Among Product Type, Service Type, and Service Approach. *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, 30(3), 311-332.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1051712X.2023.2252424>

become an issue for the manufacturers to ensure their profitability while being attractive to the customers. Industrial equipment and products have become more complex (Chavan et al., 2019; Yücesan, 2007), since purchasing and making services for them have become a difficult task for the people in the decision-making process. For example, customers may not be willing to spend extra money on the instruments they use. Sometimes customers only need a standard, reasonable purchasing for the equipment that does not affect their production.

On the other hand, there is a shift from traditional marketing to functional marketing, which proposes that customers do not purchase the product; they rather buy functionality (Frydinger et al., 2019). This shift may explain why customers are willing to spend more money on equipment they cannot afford to have an abrupt stoppage. Customers also try to find ways of risk aversion to use their equipment efficiently and maintain them for a more extended period than by handling it on their own. Service contracts play a crucial role here, considering that manufacturers increasingly put services in their arsenal to compete with other manufacturers (Spring & Araujo, 2009). Nevertheless, it may become a disadvantage if they do not offer proper service to their customers.

In light of this, it is of utmost importance to thoroughly examine the expectations of consumers to gain a comprehensive understanding of how to structure initial service contracts for products. Chung (2021) highlights the crucial role of manufacturers in addressing customers' pain points and offering effective solutions to alleviate their concerns. Consequently, establishing enduring relationships and adopting innovative strategies to enhance technical expertise become imperative. Moreover, the necessity for precise adjustments in maintenance contracts becomes evident during the initial procurement of equipment for system implementation.

Despite the growing emphasis on servitization, there remains a notable dearth of empirical research investigating optimal approaches to integrating products and services within a business model. Furthermore, a significant portion of existing research overlooks the distinct characteristics of various industries and products (Feng et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2021; Raddats et al., 2019). Consequently, there is a need for further research to comprehensively comprehend the successful integration of products and services, including the influence of industry and product attributes (Khanra et al., 2021; Paschou et al., 2020). Such research can offer valuable guidance

to firms in formulating effective servitization strategies while advancing the broader field of service research. In line with these objectives, the present study seeks to provide insights into designing service contracts tailored to diverse customer needs, incorporating product characteristics, service characteristics, and strategic considerations through a scenario-based experiment.

The main research questions of the present study are as follows:

RQ 1: What service-related factors influence the initial purchasing decision?

RQ 2: What is the optimal service offering strategy for manufacturers to minimize risk and make their offerings attractive to customers?

Based on in-depth interviews with ten managers from diverse sectors and a scenario-based experiment involving 157 managers influencing initial purchases, this study investigates the circumstances under which customers exhibit a positive attitude and a willingness to pay a price premium. The study offers significant contributions as follows: Firstly, it explores the combined impact of product type (production equipment vs. auxiliary equipment), service type (service supporting the product vs. service supporting the customer's action), and service approach (standardization vs. customization). Secondly, attribution theory provides a novel perspective by treating these three independent variables as attributes influencing attitudes towards the company and the willingness to pay a price premium. Thirdly, the study presents insights from decision-making unit members regarding product-service offerings in initial equipment purchases. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: a concise literature review on organizational and industrial purchases is provided, followed by the application of attribution theory as the theoretical lens. The methodology section outlines the qualitative and experimental stages. Finally, the findings are discussed, and the paper concludes.

3.2. Theoretical background

3.2.1. Attribution theory

The formation of a positive attitude towards a brand hinges upon consumers' beliefs about its unique attributes and the significance they attach to each of these characteristics (Bass & Talarzyk, 2018). This phenomenon finds its roots in attribution theory, a framework extensively employed in marketing and management research to

unravel individuals' thoughts and behaviors (Heider, 1958; Reisenzein & Rudolph, 2008). Despite its application in consumer behaviors, attribution theory's reach in understanding organizational buying behaviors remains relatively constrained (Johnson et al., 2021). Recent research by Saab and Botelho (2020) emphasizes the distinct influence of product types on organizational buying behaviors, which in turn, shape the attributed attributes.

Building on the principles of attribution theory, the present study adopts this theoretical framework to delve into the impact of product type, service type, and service approach on initial purchasing decisions concerning machinery with maintenance contracts. In particular, service contracts emerge as a pivotal factor in nurturing enduring customer relationships (Sharma et al., 2022). Suppliers can play a vital role by coordinating customer activity sets - warranty services, support, system extensions, and consulting (Helander & Moller, 2008).

3.2.2. Product type (Production equipment vs Auxiliary equipment)

The significance of product type in buyer behaviors are highlighted by several studies (Bellizzi & McVey, 1983; Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2021; Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012), underscoring the pivotal role of product type in buyer behaviors. To make well-informed decisions regarding service offering strategies, manufacturers benefit from clearly defining product types and specifications (Kemp et al., 2018). Furthermore, testing the impact of product type with different service types holds significant value (Lee & Yi, 2022).

A core strategic objective of service contracts is to proactively prevent breakdowns (Gebauer, 2008), enabling a departure from equipment commoditization (Chao & Andersen, 2013). The assessment of purchase importance, encompassing diverse buyer concepts, assumes a pivotal role in the procurement decision-making process (Moon & Tikoo, 2002). Moreover, specific studies uncover the noteworthy impacts of product type on both financial and market performance (Sharma et al., 2019). In line with this aim, the present study integrates the significance of equipment within the production line.

3.2.3. Service Offering Type (SSP vs. SSC)

In business-to-business (B2B) marketing, a notable trend is moving away from the manufacturing-based model of value exchange. Manufacturing companies are now

striving to become service or solution providers (Gebauer et al., 2010). Services are viewed as complements to products (Cusumano et al., 2015), categorized into Services Supporting the Supplier's Product (SSP) and Services Supporting the Customer's Action (SSC) (Mathieu, 2001).

SSP encompasses services provided solely to ensure smooth product usage, such as regular maintenance services. On the other hand, SSC includes services aimed at improving not only the product itself but also enhancing customer actions. Examples of SSC encompass remote maintenance support, technical consultancy and educational offerings provided by the manufacturing company (Angelopoulos & Mourtzis, 2022; Homburg et al., 2008). Although various taxonomies regarding servitization exist, many of them are founded on the SSP vs. SSC dichotomy, including transactional vs. traditional (Penttinen & Palmer, 2007), ownership of equipment and product vs. process-oriented offerings (Windahl & Lakemond, 2010), individually offered vs. integrated bundles (Matthyssens & Vandenbempt, 2008), and base, intermediate, and advanced services (Baines & Lightfoot, 2014).

Empirical research on service contracts with product-service systems, specifically pricing, exists in engineering journals (Iskandar et al., 2022). However, there is limited research on SSP or SSC development for offering service contracts during initial purchases (Raddats et al., 2019). To address this gap in the literature, the present study adopts the SSP vs. SSC dichotomy in service contracts for initial purchases, aiming to provide valuable insights into this domain.

3.3.4. Service Approach (Standardization vs. Customization)

Within the service-dominant literature, scholars have examined customization as a variable that confers a competitive advantage over competitors, encompassing the adjustment of product or service characteristics and even the creation of bespoke offerings (Fontana et al., 2019). Through customization, manufacturers are able to effectively understand and address their customers' needs, offering tailored solutions promptly (Frank et al., 2022) especially with the help of digital technologies (Papakostas & Ramasubramanian, 2022). The concept of customization can also be linked to the notion of solutions (Davies et al., 2007), system selling (Hannaford, 1976; Mattsson, 1973), and hybrid offerings (Ulaga & Reinartz, 2011).

Services and products are offered in standard packages or customized to satisfy the specific requirements of customers (Helander & Möller, 2007; Tukker, 2004). Some initial studies found that customization is essential to customer satisfaction (Coelho & Henseler, 2012; Fornell et al., 1996). However, all the customers may not need this adjustment, and sometimes there should be a balance between customization and standardization (Matthyssens & Vandenbempt, 2010; Rust & Chung, 2006; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Nguyen et al. (2014) stated that service customization might have adverse effects if manufacturers do not ensure they are trusted. Otherwise, it may lead to the perception of unfairness and decrease loyalty.

3.3.5. Attitude Toward the Company

As a predictor of behaviors, the concept of attitude has gained attention from social sciences scholars and is defined as the predisposition to react favorably or unfavorably toward a product, person, or behavior after considering the influencing factors (Burton et al., 1998). It is recognized that a company's positive attitude significantly impacts customers' intentions to make purchases and, eventually, their behavior (Ajzen, 1980, 2001).

3.3.6. Willingness to Pay Price Premium

Defined as customer preference for a given brand of products above competing brands' equivalent items in terms of price, willingness to pay a price premium substantially influences companies' revenue and profits (Marn et al., 2004; Pandey et al., 2016). It has been originated as a combination of willingness to pay (Breidert et al., 2006) and price premium (Rao & Bergen, 1992). The first one is a predictor of buyers' purchasing behavior and helps companies devise pricing strategies (de Pelsmacker et al., 2005). Several scholars proposed methods to increase customers' willingness to pay. The latter is defined as (a) is more than the standard price and (b) signifies enhancements to a product's or service's quality (Rao & Bergen, 1992).

3.4. Research Design

In order to bridge the research gap highlighted in the existing literature, the present study adopted a design consisting of a scenario-based experiment that was preceded by qualitative research involving industry decision-makers (Anderson et al., 1987). This approach is advantageous in addressing the research inquiries by utilizing multiple tools (Viglia et al., 2021). Experiments are particularly well-suited for

establishing causal attributions (Benedetti-Cecchi et al., 2018) and enable us to comprehend the anticipated impact of an independent variable on the dependent variable within a specific context (Anderson & Bushman, 1997; East & Ang, 2017; Little & Singh, 2015). Hence, employing this methodology is a suitable choice.

The main objective of conducting the qualitative study initially is to obtain more detailed insights into the attitudes of decision-makers towards maintenance service contracts and, more specifically, to determine the manipulations for the subsequent experimental phase in a more concrete manner. Figure 3.1 shows the overview of the procedures applied in the research.

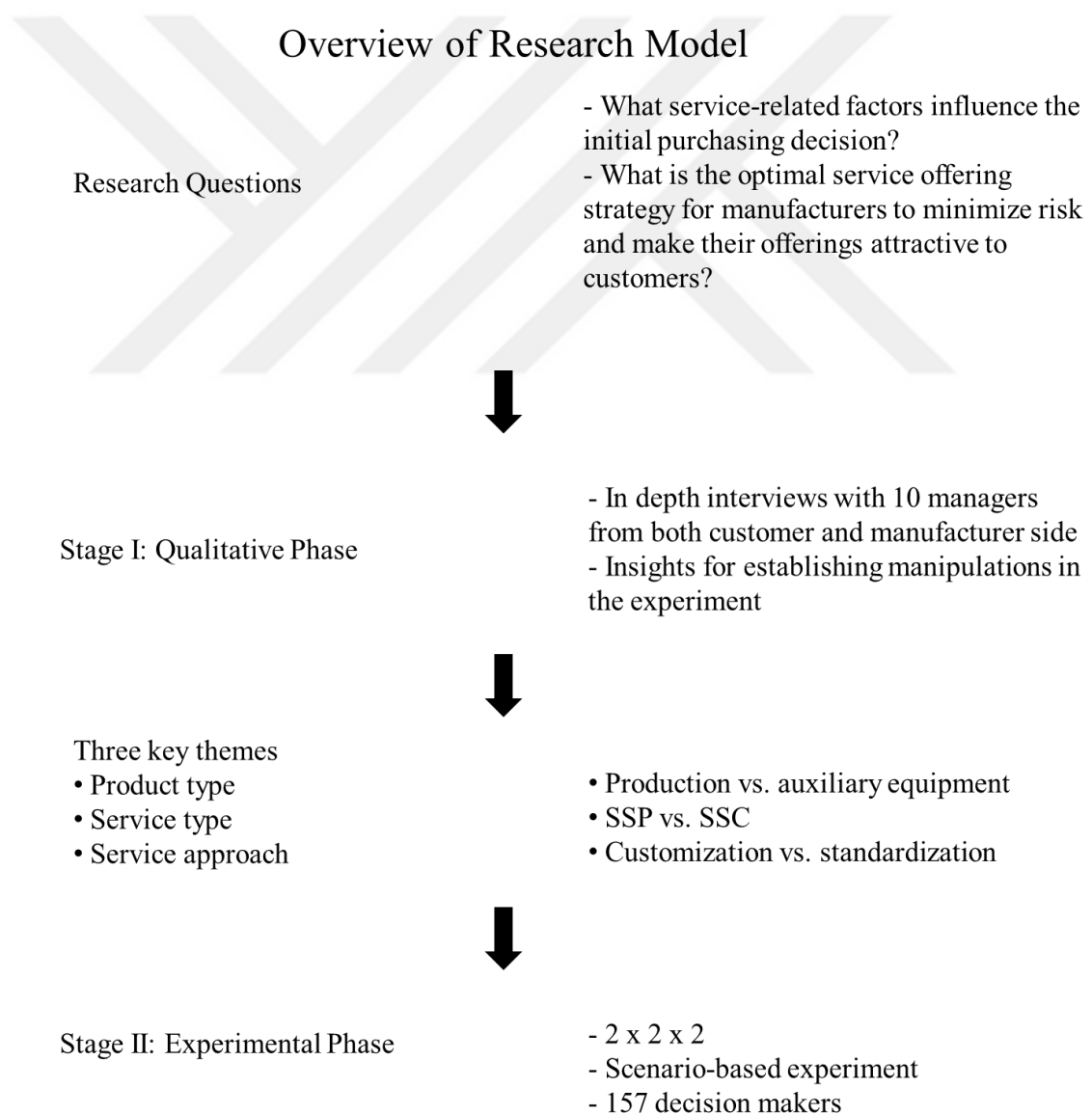


Figure 3.1: Overview of Research Model

3.4.1. Stage I – Qualitative Phase

To refine and establish the specific manipulations utilized in the scenarios, the present study incorporated qualitative research. This stage involved the participation of ten managers from various sectors associated with production in their respective factories. The first author, who possessed five years of experience in the heating industry, recruited these participants through personal networks. In order to qualify as customers, individuals were required to hold managerial positions within departments that were part of the buying center responsible for equipment procurement (specifically maintenance, machinery, and energy purchasing) for a minimum of five years. On the other hand, suppliers were required to have actively operated in the field for at least five years. The sampling procedure adhered to the guidelines proposed by Campbell (1955).

3.4.1.1. Interviews

The qualitative part encompassed in-depth interviews conducted with a total of five managers from diverse equipment manufacturing companies and five managers responsible for purchasing products from those same companies in Turkey. The participants were selected based on their ability to influence decision-making within their respective organizations. Furthermore, their companies operated within sectors that involved production processes necessitating the procurement of machinery, maintenance services, and contracts. By including representatives from both the manufacturing and customer sides, the authors sought to gather comprehensive insights during this stage. An overview of the participants involved in the qualitative phase is presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: List of Participants in The Qualitative Stage

Participant name	Department	Working in	Sector	Company size
Participant 1	Sales	Manufacturer A	Heating systems	Large
Participant 2	Maintenance			
Participant 3	Sales	Manufacturer B	Valves and parts	Medium
Participant 4	Maintenance			
Participant 5	Maintenance	Customer A of Manufacturer A	Textile	Large

Participant 6	Machinery and Energy	Customer B of Manufacturer A	Tobacco	Large
Participant 7	Purchasing	Customer C of Manufacturer A	Textile	Medium
Participant 8	Maintenance	Customer D of Manufacturer B	Food	Medium
Participant 9	Machinery and Energy	Customer E of Manufacturer B	Beverage	Large
Participant 10	Purchasing	Customer F of Manufacturer B	Food	Medium

The illustrative presentation of the participants is provided in Figure 3.2.

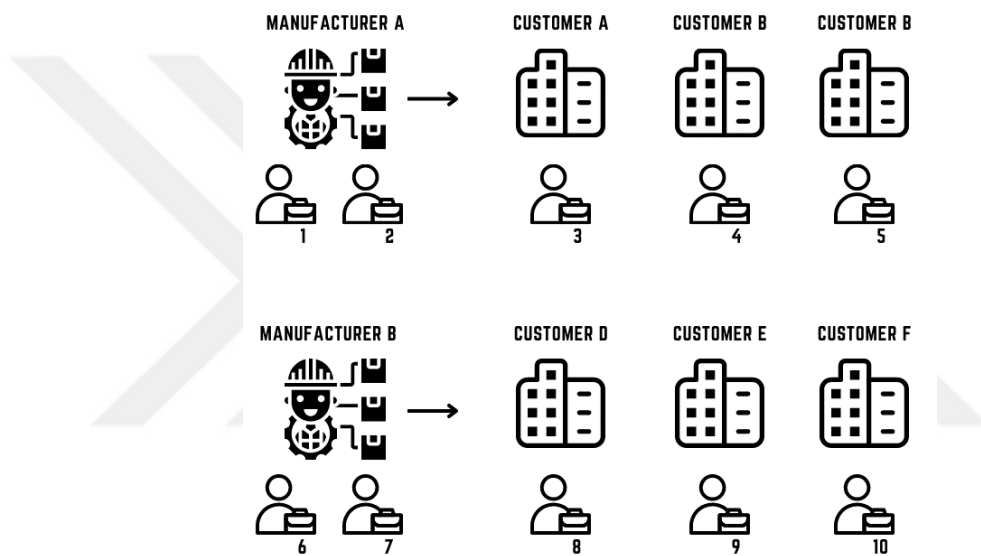


Figure 3.2: Participants in the Qualitative Stage

The interview protocol was based on the research question of the present study and the literature mentioned above (Gremier, 2016). Interviews lasted around 40 minutes, all recorded by informing the participants. The sample interview protocol is provided in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. Sample Interview Protocol

No.	Question
1	Could you provide a concise overview of your current position and background within the organization?
2	Can you share insights into the business model employed by your company?
3	How would you characterize the strategic positioning of your company in relation to customer-supplier relationships?
4	What factors influence your company's decision-making process for the initial purchase of machinery?
5	Could you elaborate on how your company assesses services during the initial purchase of machinery?
6	Is there anything that we may have overlooked?

The authors coded transcribed interviews following the open coding procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman & Burgess, 1994). Figure 3.3. presents the coding schema of the present study.

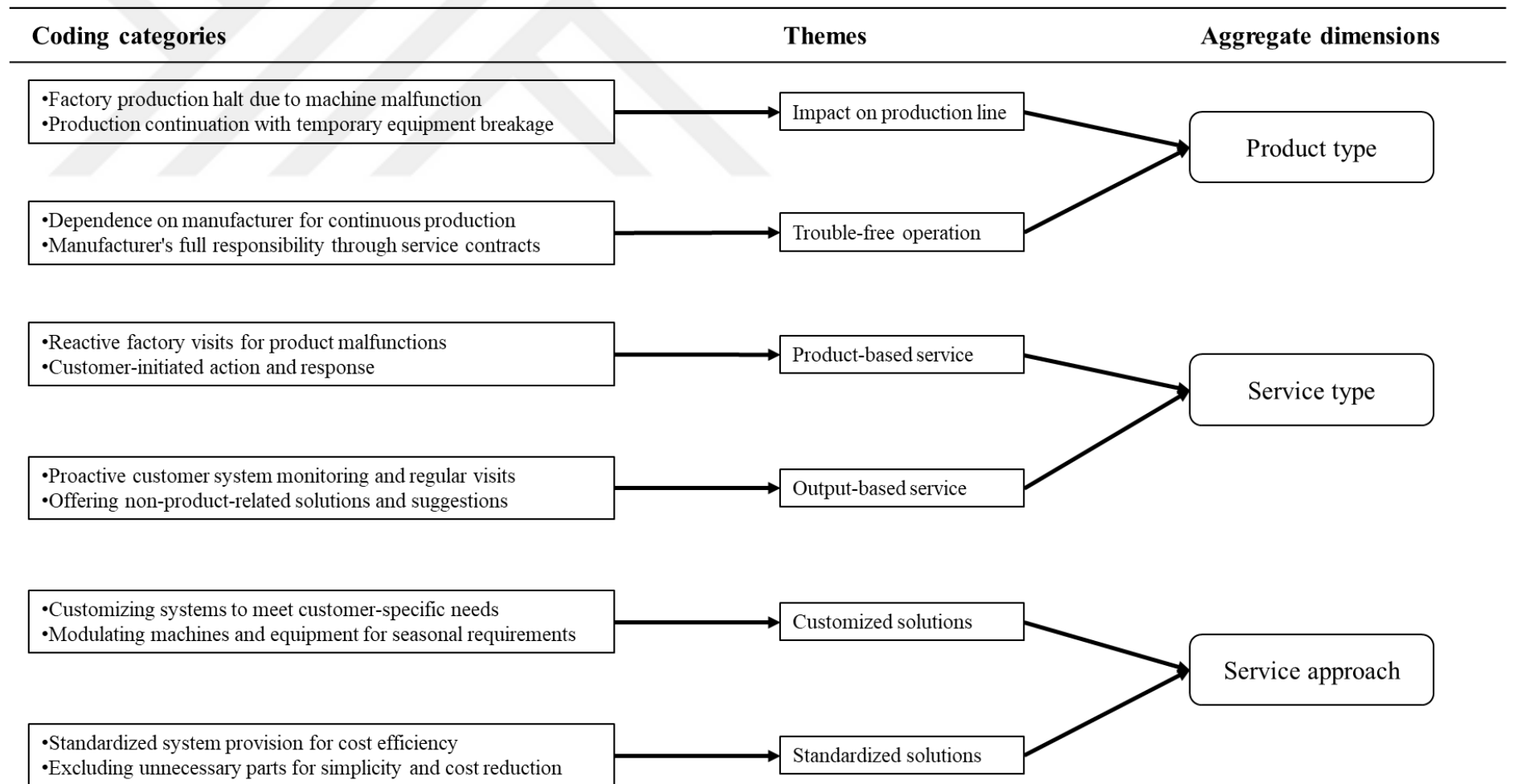


Figure 3.3. Coding Schema

3.4.2. Stage I Results and Hypothesis Formation

As a result of the interview with the managers of the manufacturer firms and their customer, three themes emerged in the qualitative stage. First, customers pay attention to the production type while making a service contract. If it is crucial to the production system, they certainly make maintenance contract: *“Type of product is very important when we make decision on maintenance contracts. For example, if it affects our production line or not.”*

Accordingly, production equipment is defined as those crucial to the production system. If these products suddenly stop due to malfunction, production stops, and customers suffer gravely. Customers care much about this equipment in the system and ensure their non-stop operation. Steam boilers in a textile factory or pasteurization equipment in a milk factory are good examples. On the other hand, auxiliary equipment is defined as the type of equipment not at the center of production. When this type of equipment stops abruptly, production does not stop immediately. Production can continue while the equipment is repaired. One good example is the water softening device used in the production system. The factory operation can continue even if broken because the soft water supply can still be made from the water output tank. Therefore, the present study hypothesizes:

H1: Production equipment (vs. auxiliary equipment) purchasing leads to a higher level of customer's a) attitude toward the company and b) willingness to pay a price premium

Customers also consider whether manufacturers are closely interested in consultancy, training, and taking responsibility for the smooth operation of the equipment:

“Some companies treat us like a dr. in the production systems. They do not only sell the product and say goodbye, they also give offers that improve our efficiency and outputs in or production. We like them.”

In light of this, the present study proposes a promising approach to the presentation of maintenance contracts by incorporating SSP vs. SSC in a scenario-based experiment format that considers product type and customization factors. Consequently, the present study posits the following hypotheses:

H2: Services supporting customer's action (vs. services supporting product) leads to a higher level of customer's a) attitude towards the company and b) willingness to pay a price premium

Finally, customers expressed their inclination to include necessary components while removing any superfluous elements from the equipment and service offerings. As one participant stated: *"I do not want to pay money for something I do not use. So, companies should revise their offer by paying attention to our needs."*

Merging servitization literature with customization, the present study explores customization in the context of the initial purchasing of products with maintenance contracts. Moreover, the present study conjures up the interaction effect of customization with the product type to be purchased by the customer and the service type provided by the manufacturer. Therefore, the present study hypothesizes:

H3: Customized (vs. standardized) service offerings lead to a higher level of customer's a) attitude towards the company and b) willingness to pay a price premium

In addition, the present study examines the joint impact of the three independent variables on both attitude toward the company and willingness to pay a price premium. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are posited by the present study:

H4: There exist significant two-way interaction effects between product type and service type on customer's a) attitude towards the company and b) willingness to pay a price premium

H5: There exist significant two-way interaction effects between product type and service approach on customer's a) attitude towards the company and b) willingness to pay a price premium

H6: There exist significant two-way interaction effects between service type and service approach on customer's a) attitude towards the company and b) willingness to pay a price premium

H7: There exist three-way significant interaction effects among product type, service type, and service approach on customer's a) attitude towards the company and b) willingness to pay a price premium

Table 3.4 provides a concise overview of the central themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews.

Table 3.4 Themes and Evidence Quotes

Key themes	Evidence quotes
Product type (Production equipment vs. auxiliary equipment)	<i>“If our production stops because of any problem in this machine, we would like to make sure that this product does not stop and prefer the manufacturer take all the responsibility.”</i>
	<i>“When our product is crucial to the production system of our customers, they pay more to ensure problem-free operation.”</i>
	<i>“If you can run and do the maintenance by yourself, you do not need to be dependent on the manufacturer via a contract.”</i>
	<i>“When customers do not know much about the product, they want us to take all the responsibility.”</i>
Service offering type (SSP vs. SSC)	<i>“We do not prefer companies come to our factory when there is a problem. They should visit us even before the problem comes out.”</i>
	<i>“We do more than selling a product, we also visit our customers even if there is no problem.”</i>
	<i>“We prefer the manufacturer listen our problem and suggest solutions for them. If they just sell the product do the regular maintenance, there is no value-added service in this.”</i>
	<i>“Even if it is not related to our product, we give advice to our customers for their factory.”</i>
Customisation vs. standardisation	<i>“We do not want unnecessary parts or procedures for the product while we purchase it and make a service contract for it.”</i>
	<i>“We regulate our products and maintenance contracts by deliberating it with our customers. We exclude unnecessary parts.”</i>
	<i>“We want to make sure that the product and service offering fits our system as a whole. So, the manufacturer should improvise a way to change or modulate their product and service into our production system.”</i>
	<i>“We do our best to make sure that our product and maintenance system exactly fits into what our customer needs.”</i>

3.4.3. Stage II – Experimental Phase- Sampling and Procedures

The present study utilized a 2 x 2 x 2 experimental design to test the above-mentioned hypotheses. Manipulations of the experiments are product type (production vs. auxiliary equipment), service type (service supporting product vs service supporting customer action) and service approach (standardized vs. customized).

After determining the dependent variables as attitude towards the company and willingness to pay a price premium, questionnaires were prepared in Google Forms

and paper form. Answerers of the questionnaires were targeted as the people working in the decision-making unit of their company for the equipment purchases.

3.4.3.1. Measures and Stimuli Development

The study employed two primary measures: attitude towards the company, which was adapted from Mathwick and Rigdon (2004) and willingness to pay a price premium, which was modified from Hultman et al. (2015) and Biswas and Roy (2015). Attitude towards the company was assessed using a four-item scale, while willingness to pay a price premium was measured through three items. The main scenario presented within the study describes a decision-making context used to create experimental stimuli. The design of the experimental stimuli was developed based on insights derived from the literature and the evaluation of key themes that emerged during the qualitative phase.

The scenario describes a situation where the company plans to extend its product line and asks the answerer their opinion about one of the machines to be bought. After describing the main scene, manipulations were inserted into the main scenario. The first manipulation is if the production would be seriously disrupted in the factory if the equipment stops because of malfunctioning. The second manipulation is if the manufacturer provides service only for the smooth operation of the equipment or provides service not only for the trouble-free operation of the machine but also for improving the production line and giving advice about it. The third manipulation is whether the manufacturer can customize the product and service following the customer's needs or sells them in a standard package.

3.4.3.2. Experimental Procedures

In order to conduct scenario-based experiments, the participants were randomly assigned questionnaires. These questionnaires consisted of one of the eight scenarios that were created by incorporating three manipulations and two dependent variables. Each participant was exposed to the specific stimulus generated by the scenario they received. They were then requested to complete the questionnaire and provide basic demographic information. The questionnaires were distributed to a total of 957 individuals working in various capacities such as purchasing, machinery-energy, maintenance, or upper management within the ISO 500 firms of Türkiye (Türkiye's Top 500 Industrial Enterprises) via both LinkedIn and in-person distribution. Out of the initial pool, 163 individuals responded to the questionnaires, resulting in a response

rate of approximately 17.03%. However, the final sample included 157 participants who accurately responded to the manipulation checks. The demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 3.3.

Table 3.2: Demographic Information of the Participants (n = 157)

Department		Level of education		Age	
Upper management	28	Postgraduate	45	Over 50	34
Maintenance/Technic/Energy	33	Undergraduate	95	30-50	96
Purchasing	45	Others	17	25-30	27
Production/Operation	26				
Others	25				
Role in the company					
Upper management					22
Manager					135
Industry					
Textile					19
Energy					23
Food					24
Chemicals					18
Machinery					18
Health & medical product					9
Automotive					8
Woodworks & packaging					6
Software & telecommunications					9
Others					23

Manipulation checks were done for three independent variables to make sure that the manipulations in the scenarios were perceived in an intended way. Participants were asked whether the equipment to be purchased is directly used in the production, whether the manufacturer is offering the service only for smooth operation, and

whether the manufacturer can customize the equipment to be sold in accordance with the customer needs. Manipulations were successful according to the results ($M_{\text{Production}} = 4.321 > M_{\text{Auxiliary}} = 1.709$; $M_{\text{SSP}} = 4.114 > M_{\text{SSC}} = 2.179$; $M_{\text{Customization}} = 4.325 > M_{\text{Standardization}} = 1.714$).

Composite reliability values were analyzed to assess the reliability of the scales. The values are higher than the recommended 0.8 value (Nunnally, 1978). After that, validity analysis was done by using AMOS 24 software. The model was a good and acceptable fit according to the results: RMSEA = 0.066; CFI = 0.991; TLI = .0986. There also exists convergent validity with the factor loadings ranging from 0.851 to 0.955. Table 3.4 shows these values in summary.

Table 3.3 Scale Items and Loadings

Construct	Item	Factor loading	CR	AVE
Attitude towards company	I say positive things about this product and service offering to other people.	.901	.931	.772
	I have a favorable attitude toward doing business with product and service offering over the next few years.	.904		
	To me, this is clearly the best company of its kind with which to do business.	.856		
	I believe this is a good company	.851		
Willingness to pay a price premium	I am willing to pay more money to this purchase product and service offering as opposed to regular one	.898	.944	.849
	To me, it deserves to this product and service offering despite their premium pricing	.955		
	I am willing to purchase this product and service offering at a high price	.910		

3.4.3.3. Stage II Results

To test the hypotheses, MANOVA and ANOVA procedures were employed. The objective of the MANOVA test was to determine the significance of the independent variables. The main effects of the present study yielded statistically significant results for product type (Wilk's lambda = 0.910, $F = 7.331$, $p = 0.001$), service type (Wilk's

lambda = 0.848, $F = 13.240$, $p = 0.000$), and service approach (Wilk's lambda = 0.665, $F = 37.267$, $p = 0.000$) concerning both Attitude Towards Company (ATC) and Willingness to Pay (WTP). Additionally, pairwise interaction effects were found to be significant for product type x service type (Wilk's lambda = 0.947, $F = 4.128$, $p = 0.018$) in relation to ATC and WTP, as well as service type x service approach (Wilk's lambda = 0.940, $F = 4.695$, $p = 0.011$) specifically for WTP. Moreover, significant interaction effects (Wilk's lambda = 0.927, $F = 5.850$, $p = 0.004$) were observed among all three variables for both ATC and WTP.

This means that hypothesis 4 is supported, and hypothesis 6 is partially supported. Hypothesis 5 is rejected. The significance of main and interaction effects can be seen in Table 3.5, and the dependent variable cell means can be seen in Table 3.6.

Table 3.4: ANOVA Results for The Main and Interaction Effects

Effects	Attitude towards company F- statistic	Willingness to pay a price premium F-statistic
PT	6.659 (**)	12.625 (***)
ST	16.804 (***)	18.870 (***)
SA	50.377 (***)	50.120 (***)
PT x ST	5.078 (**)	6.032 (**)
PT x SA	.018	.139
ST x SA	3.135	8.794 (***)
PT x ST x SA	9.147 (***)	6.514 (**)

Notes: *** significant at 0.01 level, ** significant at 0.05 level

PT: Product type, ST: Service type, SA: Service approach

Table 3.5 Dependent Variable Cell Means

Product Type	Service Type	Service Approach	Attitude	Willingness to Pay
Auxiliary	SSP	Standardized	2.7125	2.45
		Customized	3.7875	3.3167
		Total	3.25	2.8833
	SSC	Standardized	3.1053	2.6316
		Customized	3.8625	3.6
		Total	3.4936	3.1282
	Total	Standardized	2.9038	2.5385
		Customized	3.825	3.4583
		Total	3.3703	3.0042
Production	SSP	Standardized	2.5	2.0702
		Customized	2.775	2.2167
		Total	2.641	2.1453
	SSC	Standardized	2.6974	2.2281
		Customized	4.1875	3.7333
		Total	3.4615	3
	Total	Standardized	2.5987	2.1491
		Customized	3.4813	2.975
		Total	3.0513	2.5726
Total	SSP	Standardized	2.609	2.265
		Customized	3.2813	2.7667
		Total	2.9494	2.519
	SSC	Standardized	2.9013	2.4298
		Customized	4.025	3.6667
		Total	3.4776	3.0641
	Total	Standardized	2.7532	2.3463
		Customized	3.6531	3.2167
		Total	3.2118	2.7898

ANOVA procedures were applied to test the impact of the independent variables closely. While SSC leads a higher level of ATC ($M_{SSP}=2.9494$, $M_{SSC}= 3.4776$; $F= 16.804$; $p=0.000$) and WTP ($M_{SSP}= 2.519$, $M_{SSC}= 3.0641$; $F= 18.870$; $p=0.000$) as supported by hypothesis 2. Moreover, customization also leads a higher level of ATC ($M_{Standard}= 2.7532$, $M_{Customized}= 3.6531$; $F= 50.377$; $p= 0.000$) and WTP ($M_{Standard}= 2.3463$, $M_{Customized}= 3.2167$; $F= 50.120$; $p= 0.000$) as supported by hypothesis 3. However, auxiliary equipment leads a higher level of ATC ($M_{Auxiliary}= 3.3703$, $M_{Production}= 3.0513$; $F= 6.659$; $p= 0.011$) and WTP ($M_{Auxiliary}= 3.0042$, $M_{Production}= 2.5726$; $F= 12.625$; $p= 0.001$) as opposed to hypothesis 1. In all three cases, ATC level is higher than WTP. The main effects can be scrutinized closely in Figure 3.1 for product type, Figure 3.2 for service type, and Figure 3.3 for service approach.

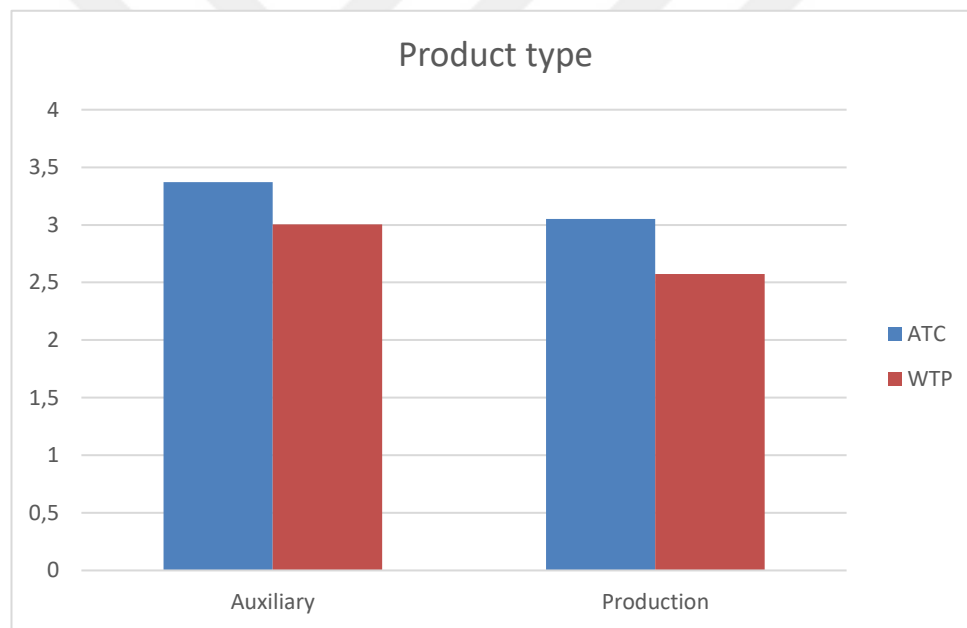


Figure 3.1: Main Effects of Product Type

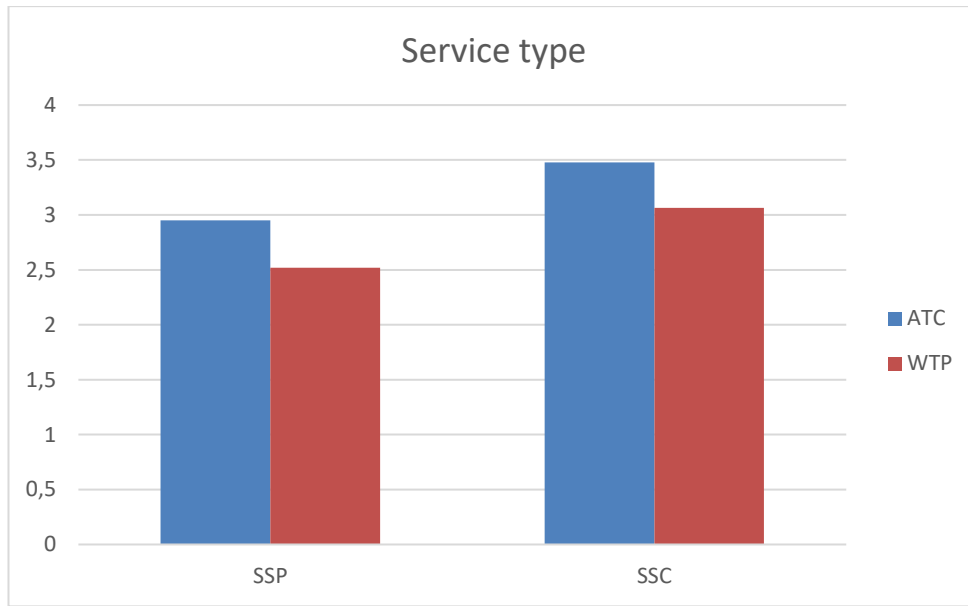


Figure 3.2: Main Effects of Service Type



Figure 3.3: Main Effects of Service Approach

Results also show that the interaction of product type and service type significantly affects ATC and WTP. While ATC ($M_{SSP} = 3.25$, $M_{SSC} = 3.4936$; $F = 5.078$; $p = 0.026$) and WTP ($M_{SSP} = 2.8833$, $M_{SSC} = 3.1282$; $F = 6.032$; $p = 0.015$) slightly increase from SSP to SSC for auxiliary equipment, this increase is greater for ATC ($M_{SSP} = 2.641$, $M_{SSC} = 3.4615$; $F = 5.078$; $p = 0.026$) and WTP ($M_{SSP} = 2.1453$, $M_{SSC} = 3$; $F = 6.032$; $p = 0.015$) in case of production equipment. Figure 3.4 shows this effect more clearly.

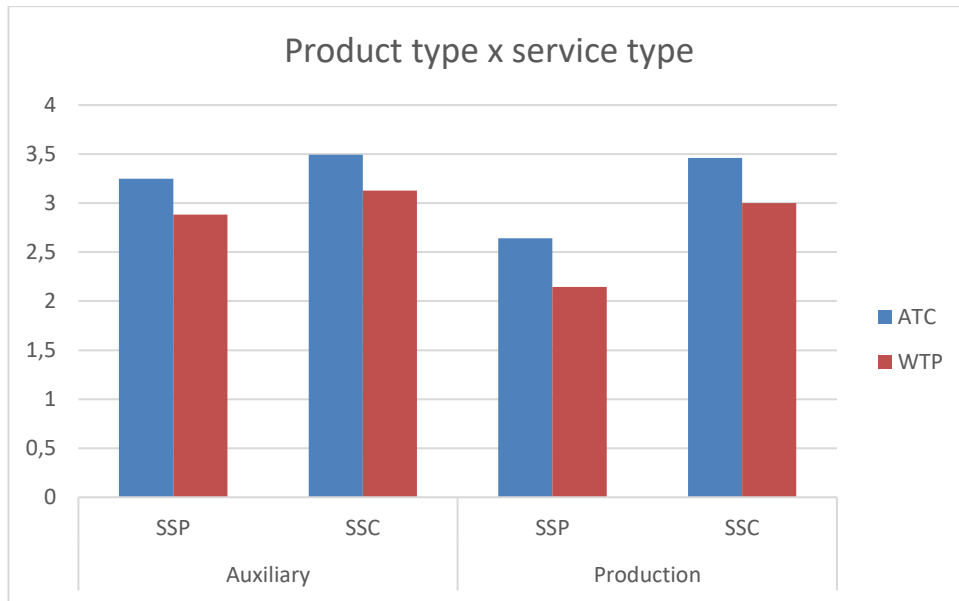


Figure 3.4: Interaction Effects of Product Type and Service Type

While there is no significant interaction effect of service type and service approach for ATC, this interaction becomes significant for WTP. It shows that customization increases WTP more in the case of SSC than in the case of SSP ($M_{SSP} = 2.519$, $M_{SSC} =$; $F = 8.794$; $p = 0.004$). This situation can be seen elaborately in Figure 3.5.

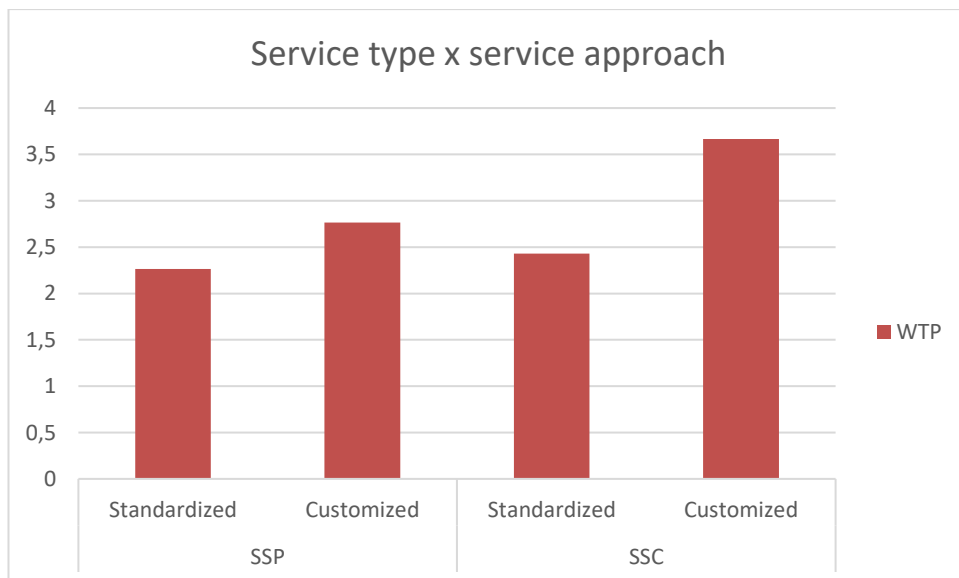


Figure 3.5: Interaction Effects of Service Type and Service Approach

For the interaction effects of product type, service type and service approach, ATC ($M_{\text{Standardized} \times \text{SSP}} = 2.7125$, $M_{\text{Customized} \times \text{SSP}} = 3.7875$; $F = 9.147$; $p = 0.003$) ($M_{\text{Standardized} \times \text{SSC}} = 3.1053$, $M_{\text{Customized} \times \text{SSC}} = 3.8625$; $F = 9.147$; $p = 0.003$) and WTP ($M_{\text{Standardized} \times \text{SSP}}$

= 2.45, $M_{\text{Customized} \times \text{SSP}} = 3.3167$; $F = 6.514$; $p = 0.012$) ($M_{\text{Standardized} \times \text{SSC}} = 2.6316$, $M_{\text{Customized} \times \text{SSC}} = 3.6$; $F = 6.514$; $p = 0.012$) increases when the product-service offering is customized in comparison with standardized one for the auxiliary products. However, this increase is sharp in production equipment's service supporting customer's action in comparison with the auxiliary equipment for both ATC ($M_{\text{Standardized} \times \text{SSP}} = 2.5$, $M_{\text{Customized} \times \text{SSP}} = 2.775$; $F = 9.147$; $p = 0.003$) ($M_{\text{Standardized} \times \text{SSC}} = 2.6974$, $M_{\text{Customized} \times \text{SSC}} = 4.1875$; $F = 9.147$; $p = 0.003$) and WTP ($M_{\text{Standardized} \times \text{SSP}} = 2.0702$, $M_{\text{Customized} \times \text{SSP}} = 2.2167$; $F = 9.147$; $p = 0.003$) ($M_{\text{Standardized} \times \text{SSC}} = 2.2281$, $M_{\text{Customized} \times \text{SSC}} = 3.7333$; $F = 9.147$; $p = 0.003$). Moreover, the difference between ATC and WTP for SSC becomes smaller when the offering is customized. The situation can be seen in detail in Figure 3.6.

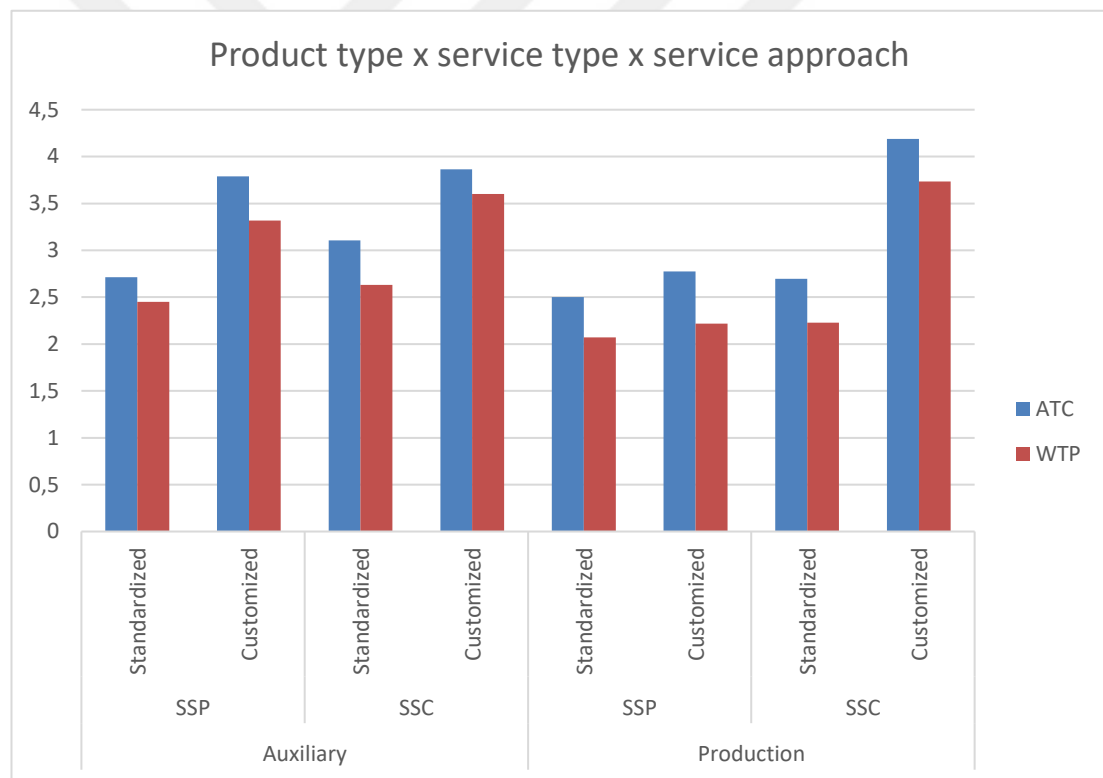


Figure 3.6 Interaction Effects of Product Type, Service Type and Service Approach

3.5. Discussion of Key Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the interrelationship between the type of product, type of service, and approach to service during the initial purchase of equipment used by industries. This investigation employed the theoretical framework of attribution theory, which posits that attributes influence attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Johnson et al., 2021; Mugge et al., 2018; Saab & Botelho, 2020). Service contracts assume a significant role in the initial acquisition of industrial equipment, as they guarantee the provision of meticulous maintenance and timely repairs throughout the equipment's lifespan (Kumar et al., 2004). This holds particular significance in industries where equipment downtime can precipitate high costs, such as manufacturing or logistics (Stremersch et al., 2001). Moreover, service contracts offer purchasers a sense of reassurance, secure in the knowledge that they have a dependable source for upholding the optimal functionality and condition of their equipment (Frambach et al., 1997).

As the intricacy of industrial products and services has advanced, the mere provision of a product or service has proven insufficient. Manufacturers are increasingly compelled to integrate supplementary services into their customer offerings. Scholars have classified these services in various ways, with the most common dichotomy being between services that support the product and services that support customer actions. Despite numerous studies that have attempted to determine which of these approaches is superior, there are still limited context-specific solutions to this question (Nussipova, 2022; Raddats et al., 2019).

To provide insights from actual decision makers and product-service providers, the present study conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews with customers and manufacturers to develop servitization strategies. In-depth interviews are a common technique in qualitative research designs for obtaining in-depth and nuanced data on a specific topic or phenomenon. In an experimental design, in-depth interviews can be used to refine the manipulation of experimental conditions by providing a different perspective on the relevant factors and aiding the researcher in designing manipulations that align with the research objectives.

The results of the interviews revealed three themes: product type (production equipment versus auxiliary equipment), service type (services supporting the product

versus services supporting customer actions), and service approach (standardization versus customization). Drawing upon the identified themes and pertinent literature concerning product type, servitization, and customization, the researchers formulated hypotheses to be empirically examined in a 2 x 2 x 2 experimental study. The findings revealed a consistent pattern across all cases, with the attitude towards the company (ATC) consistently surpassing the willingness to pay more (WTP), thereby implying that ATC does not consistently translate into WTP. These results align with the observations made by Anderson and Wynstra (2010), Ha-Brookshire and Norum (2011), and King and Bruner (2000), who all identified a discrepancy between customers' attitudes towards products and their subsequent purchase behavior.

Regarding main effects, unexpectedly, auxiliary equipment demonstrated notably higher levels of both attitude towards the company (ATC) and willingness to pay more (WTP) in comparison to production equipment. This peculiarity can be rationalized by the fact that auxiliary equipment tends to enjoy more frequent utilization in various industries when contrasted with production equipment. The utilization frequency of auxiliary equipment surpasses that of production equipment due to its vital role in supporting the primary equipment's operations. Auxiliary equipment encompasses tools, supplies, or machinery deployed for material preparation, maintenance of main equipment, or control of the production process (Rosato et al., 2000). Such equipment categories are typically employed on a more regular basis than main production equipment, which may be necessitated solely during specific stages of the production process.

Moreover, the attitude towards the company (ATC) and willingness to pay more (WTP) exhibited higher levels for service offerings characterized by customization and support for customer actions (SSC). Customization of service contracts empowers companies to adapt the contractual terms to align with their unique needs and requirements (Frank et al., 2022). This holds particular relevance in industries where equipment or machinery deployed is distinct or specialized, as a standardized service contract may fall short in providing comprehensive coverage. Intriguingly, the interaction effects between product type (auxiliary versus production) and service approach (standardized versus customized) did not yield any significant differences. This finding implies that these factors alone may not adequately address the diverse needs and preferences of all customers. Consequently, implementing additional

strategies becomes imperative to cater to the varying requirements of distinct customer segments, such as developing targeted marketing and sales approaches tailored to specific customer cohorts.

The absence of a significant difference in ATC was observed when examining the interaction between service type and service approach. To ensure the continued relevance and value of the provided services, it is advisable to consider the specific needs and aims of the customer when devising an appropriate service strategy (Fornell et al., 1996; Oliva et al., 2012). However, it is noteworthy that the utilization of a customized service approach elicited higher levels of WTP compared to customized services supporting customer actions and services supporting the product. This finding can be attributed to the perception that a customized service approach excels in addressing the unique challenges and requirements of the customer, thereby prompting a willingness among customers to pay a premium for such tailor-made services (Persson, 2010).

The most surprising result surfaced in the context of the three-way interaction effects. When examining the attitude towards the company (ATC) and willingness to pay more (WTP), no noteworthy differences emerged between services supporting customer's actions (SSC) versus services supporting the product (SSP) and between customized versus standardized services when assessing auxiliary equipment. However, a substantial augmentation in ATC and WTP was observed for production equipment when employing SSC and customized solutions. This may suggest that it is important to provide customized solutions and organize services to support customer actions rather than simply ensuring the smooth operation of the equipment when the equipment is crucial to the production process. A customized service approach that supports the customer's actions can be particularly valuable in these cases. This service approach involves working closely with the customer to identify and address any issues or challenges that may arise and can help minimize equipment downtime and ensure that the production process runs smoothly. Providing a customized service that supports the customer's actions can be an important factor in maximizing the value of the equipment for the customer, as it helps to increase efficiency and profitability while also building trust and strengthening the customer-provider relationship.

3.6. Conclusions

3.6.1. Theoretical Contributions

The current study represents a significant advancement in the field of service, servitization, and marketing literature by offering valuable insights into the realm of maintenance contracts during initial purchases. Specifically, the study addresses the question of how to effectively structure service contracts by fine tuning product type (production equipment vs. auxiliary equipment), service type (SSP vs. SSC) and service approach (standardization vs. customization). The findings highlight that service contracts garner greater attractiveness and command a price premium when manufacturers combine services that support customer actions with customized offerings tailored to products that hold central importance within the production line.

Furthermore, this study introduced a unique theoretical lens by incorporating product type, service type, and service approaches as attributions that influence organizational purchasing decisions. By applying attribution theory to industrial purchasing, we gain a different perspective on how individuals attribute specific characteristics or attributes to products and services, subsequently shaping their decision-making process. By comprehending how individuals assign meaning to the products and services under consideration, we can devise more effective marketing and sales strategies that align with the needs and preferences of our target customers. Attribution theory also aids in identifying potential biases or heuristics that may impact industrial purchasing decisions, thus enabling the development of strategies to mitigate their influence.

The current study also contributed to the servitization literature by focusing on the selection of services supporting product (SSP) or services supporting customer's action (SSC) (Mathieu, 2001). Accordingly, service offers should be personalized to support client actions and fulfill individual demands, especially when the equipment being acquired is crucial to the production line. If the production process continues even if the equipment stops, there may not be a significant difference between services supporting customer actions (SSC) versus services supporting the product (SSP) and customized versus standardized solutions. Therefore, a customized service approach that supports customer actions is valuable for maximizing the value of production equipment by increasing efficiency and profitability, building trust, and strengthening the customer-provider relationship. This approach involves working closely with the

customer to identify and address any issues or challenges that may arise and can help to minimize equipment downtime and ensure that the production process runs smoothly.

3.6.2. Managerial Implications

This study holds several significant implications for managers tasked with designing service contracts. Even for products that do not directly impact production stability, industrial purchases have become increasingly intricate. Customers are actively seeking methods to alleviate uncertainties surrounding product usage and maintenance. It becomes imperative, particularly when the equipment plays a pivotal role in the production line, to assuage customers' concerns regarding equipment functionality and maintenance.

Gaining a positive attitude does not always mean gaining a price premium. Manufacturers' marketing activities may not end up selling their products for a higher price even if they gain positive feedback from the customers. Companies should do more than this to convert this positive feedback to increase customers' intention to pay more money than other brands. Manufacturers should first inquire whether their product is critical to the customers' production line. If their product is not central to the customers' production, it would be better to provide a standard service contract to give freedom to the customers for the solutions when the equipment break. SSP can be preferred for minimizing costs by providing services only for efficient equipment usage.

Accordingly, if the equipment holds vital significance for the customers' production line, it becomes imperative to deliver a tailored solution that supports their actions. By doing so, manufacturers can foster a positive attitude from customers, ultimately prompting them to pay a premium compared to rival manufacturers. While implementing such a customized approach may entail additional costs for manufacturers, it serves as a strategic investment that confers a competitive edge in the long term.

3.6.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions to the service, servitization, and marketing literature, the present study still has some limitations that present valuable avenues for future research directions. First, this study mainly focuses on the initial purchasing of

product-service offerings with a limited sample and within the limits of manipulations employed. However, it is important to acknowledge that this approach may not fully capture all latent values and demands of the customers. As a result, conducting more comprehensive and detailed analyses becomes imperative. Moreover, it is as important to retain customers as to acquire initial purchasing. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate how to organize product-service models to renew maintenance or other service contracts.

In addition, the present study took the decision-making unit of buying center as a whole. This study may be further developed to analyze how different buying center members affect buying decisions across product types. The study by Jackson et al. (2018) indicates that the proportionate effect of the buying center's members is constant, but it varies among product categories and decision types. Our study, from a statistical perspective, offers a snapshot of customer decision-making. Nonetheless, to develop a deeper understanding, further exploration and in-depth analyses of the customer decision-making process are warranted. By delving into these finer details, we can unravel a more comprehensive understanding of customer behavior and refine our strategies to better serve their needs and preferences.

Last but not least, future studies may incorporate relational factors in the model. In service-dominant logic, the supplier-customer relationship plays a crucial role in the initial purchasing and repurchasing intentions. Hence it would be worth taking this study forward by including relational variables in the model. The current study only provides a different perspective over the decision-making process for service contracts while purchasing equipment for the first time.

CHAPTER IV

PROACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES TO BOOST CUSTOMER-BRAND ENGAGEMENT AND EXPERIENCE: A COMPLEXITY THEORY APPROACH³

4.1. Introduction

The rise of online grocery shopping has transformed the way people obtain essential items, offering unprecedented convenience and flexibility (Clarke, 2017; Scholdra et al., 2022). This transformation has led to rapid growth (Magableh, 2021) and increased competition (Gatta et al., 2021; IGD, 2021). A McKinsey report states that the online grocery market was valued at USD 285.70 billion in 2021 (Aull et al., 2021) and is expected to grow at a 25.3% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) from 2022 to 2030 due to changing consumer habits and e-commerce advancements (Puthiyamadam, 2018). Despite the convenience of online grocery shopping, sustainability is a significant concern in the digital landscape (Suryawanshi et al., 2021). While traditional stores remain prominent, the operational complexities of maintaining online grocery platforms, including website maintenance, inventory management, and delivery logistics, incur substantial costs (Bonnet & Etcheverry, 2021; Rigby, 2014). This raises the argument for applying a price premium to ensure the viability and continued growth of these online ventures.

In the competitive sector of online grocery shopping, companies are increasingly seeking ways to distinguish themselves, with a particular emphasis on enhancing the customer experience (CX) (Homburg et al., 2017) and fostering greater customer-brand engagement (Algharabat et al., 2018). Substantial empirical evidence suggests

³ This part of thesis was published in Journal of Internet Commerce (ISSN: 1533-287X) with the below information.

Bağcı, R. B., & Taşcıoğlu, M. (2024). Proactive and collaborative strategies to boost customer-brand engagement and experience: a complexity theory approach. *Journal of Internet Commerce*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332861.2024.2350324>

that these efforts yield positive consequences, including heightened customer loyalty (Tsao et al., 2016), improved brand preference (Duh & Pwaka, 2023), and, ultimately, enhanced revenue growth (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). However, it is essential to acknowledge that these relationships are inherently multifaceted and complex, in contrast with the linear models of analysis (Bhattacharya et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2012; Singh & Söderlund, 2020). In this case, changes to a system's input do not result in proportional changes in its output, which infers that small inputs can lead to large outputs or vice versa (Sammot-Bonnici 2015). Hence, a critical area of inquiry is an exploration of how companies can effectively command a price premium by strategically leveraging customer experience via customer-brand engagement within the online shopping environment.

Among the strategies that influence customers' willingness to pay more, proactive and collaborative approaches stand as pivotal factors (Blocker et al., 2011; Brodie et al., 2011; Homburg et al., 2017). Proactive strategy, exemplified by proactive customer orientation, places high importance on anticipating and fulfilling customer needs, effectively conferring a competitive edge and fostering enduring customer relationships (Blocker et al., 2011; Raub & Liao, 2012). On the other hand, collaborative strategy, represented by value co-creation, involves active engagement with customers, harnessing their unique perspectives, knowledge, and expertise to conjure innovative solutions that closely align with their expectations (Andreu et al., 2010; Grönroos, 2012).

Despite the growing interest in enhancing the profitability of online grocery shopping and the ramifications of proactive and collaborative strategies, several research gaps demand attention. While existing research has examined their individual effects on customer outcomes, there is a lack of systematic exploration of how they jointly impact customer experience, customer-brand engagement, and the willingness to pay more (Blocker et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2020). Additionally, while customer experience is recognized as a significant driver of customer intentions (Ma et al., 2022; Tsao et al., 2016), there is a noticeable scarcity of empirical studies investigating the complex relationship between collaborative strategies and customer experience (Bhattacharya et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2020).

Additionally, while prior investigations have scrutinized how customer-brand engagement bears influence on business outcomes such as brand loyalty and word-of-

mouth recommendations, the nexus between collaborative strategies and customer-brand engagement remains an intriguing terrain ripe for exploration (Rasool et al., 2020). Lastly, there exists a dearth of research elucidating how customer experience in the online shopping environment paves the way for a willingness to pay more, mediated by customer-brand engagement (Ferreira & Zambaldi, 2019; Jami Pour et al., 2021). These research gaps underscore the need for further examination and empirical validation of the interplay between proactive and collaborative strategies and their comprehensive impact on customer behavior and organizational outcomes.

Utilizing a complexity theory approach, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of relationships among proactive customer orientation, value co-creation, customer experience, customer-brand engagement, and willingness to pay more. We examine how proactive customer orientation and value co-creation synergize to improve customer experience and engagement. Furthermore, it explores how enhanced customer experiences drive customers' willingness to pay more, with brand engagement playing a mediating role. The primary aim is to provide valuable insights for businesses on effectively utilizing proactive and collaborative strategies to enhance customer experiences, foster engagement, and command premium prices.

4.2. Literature Review

4.2.1. Online Grocery Shopping and Complexity Theory

The rise of e-commerce has altered consumers' buying habits, including online grocery shopping, which has been further propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ecola et al., 2020). One of the significant advantages of online grocery shopping is avoiding the drawbacks of traditional supermarket visits, which allows busy individuals time-saving potential (Scholdra et al. 2022). Online shopping offers greater variety, attractive deals, and the avoidance of impulse buying and pushy salespeople (Clarke 2017). Prior research primarily focuses on the adoption of online grocery shopping and reveals that ease of use (Driediger & Bhatiasavi, 2019), trust (Asti et al., 2021), and positive emotions (Ma et al. 2022) enhance purchase intentions. However, companies must consider a price premium due to the technical and delivery expenses associated with grocery shopping (Bonnet & Etcheverry, 2021; Rigby, 2014), which makes a thorough investigation of this phenomenon crucial.

To achieve premium pricing in online grocery shopping, understanding the complex and multifaceted process of customer experience in online grocery shopping is crucial (Bhattacharya et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2012; Singh & Söderlund, 2020). Complexity theory provides a framework to navigate this field, highlighting dynamic and interconnected elements (Anderson 1999; Urry 2005), allowing identification of crucial touchpoints and pain points during the customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Varnali, 2018; Zimmermann & Auinger, 2020).

Applying a complexity theory lens necessitates recognizing reality as a multifaceted system, comprising numerous interacting components (Varnali 2018). Concepts such as increasing returns elucidate how investments yield disproportionately higher returns as inputs escalate (Anderson 1999). Similarly, self-organizing systems exhibit spontaneous pattern formation and adaptive capabilities, supporting the emergence of novel properties (Sammut-Bonnici 2015). Continuous adaptation underscores the system's ability to evolve in response to environmental changes, a vital attribute facilitating survival and growth (Urry 2005). Sensitivity to initial conditions, epitomized by the "butterfly effect," highlights the significance of minute variations in system states (Sammut-Bonnici 2015). Complex systems, characterized by their autopoietic nature and path-dependent behaviors (Sammut-Bonnici 2015; Urry 2005; Varnali 2018), emphasize the interplay between proactivity, collaboration, and the dynamic nature of customer journeys. Drawing from this theoretical framework, complexity theory finds application in understanding and enhancing customer experiences (Butt et al., 2023; Holz et al., 2024; Wilson-Nash et al., 2020).

When we apply the tenets of complexity theory to the concept of customer experience (Wu et al. 2014), effectively interacting with customers necessitates engagement across multiple touchpoints throughout the journey, typically encompassing four stages: first contact, familiarization, interaction, and retention/advocacy (Halvorsrud et al., 2016). These stages and touchpoints are interconnected and susceptible to minor fluctuations, thereby demanding a holistic approach (Grewal & Roggeveen, 2020; Hoyer et al., 2020). This research employs complexity theory to examine the customer experience journey in the context of online grocery shopping, where proactive services and value creation foster engagement and positive experiences, ultimately leading to a willingness to pay a premium.

4.2.2. Proactive and Collaborative Strategies

Proactive Customer Orientation (PCO) is a strategic approach that anticipates and meets customer needs, going beyond explicit requests by identifying latent needs from customer behavior and past interactions (Raub & Liao, 2012). PCO enhances communication by tailoring solutions and gaining deeper insights into customer preferences (Bergami et al., 2021; Delana et al., 2020). Similarly, value co-creation (VC) involves collaborative value generation between consumers and businesses through engagement in product and service creation or delivery. In online grocery shopping, this strategy involves activities like consumer feedback, loyalty programs, and sharing recipes (Andreu et al., 2010; Ebbers et al., 2021). VC positively impacts consumer-brand relationships, enhancing satisfaction (Hsieh & Chang 2016). Together, these strategic approaches, PCO and VC, play a crucial role in enhancing customer experience and engagement, fostering fruitful relationships in the online grocery shopping landscape.

4.2.3. Customer Experience, Proactive Customer Orientation and Value Co-Creation

Customer experience encompasses how customers react to a company's products and services during dynamic interactions across various interfaces (Shin et al., 2017), making it vital in competitive markets (Homburg et al., 2017; Izogo & Jayawardhena, 2018). Previous research has linked online shopping experiences to outcomes such as customer satisfaction, loyalty, and repurchase intention (Bernard 2011; Tsao et al. 2016), generally evoking positive emotions (Ma et al. 2022). However, individuals with limited experience may perceive online shopping as risky due to privacy and credit card concerns, emphasizing the importance of building trust and implementing security measures (Duh & Pwaka 2023).

The present study explores customer experience constructs in two key dimensions: hedonic and novelty (Jami Pour et al., 2021). The hedonic dimension focuses on sensory, emotional, and fantastical aspects, providing pleasure and emotional connection during the shopping process (Bilro et al., 2018). The novelty dimension involves the psychological sensation of newness, creating excitement and curiosity during novel shopping experiences (Kim et al., 2010). Accordingly, interaction and participative experiences enhance customer experience, fostering enduring

relationships (Wu et al., 2022). Furthermore, embracing a proactive customer-oriented approach allows businesses to deliver personalized and effective services, enhancing satisfaction and fostering loyalty (Al-Nabhani et al., 2022). Based on the above, we hypothesize:

H1_a: Proactive customer orientation is positively related to customer experience

H1_b: Value co-creation is positively related to customer experience

4.2.4. Customer-Brand Engagement Proactive Customer Orientation and Value Co-Creation

Customer Brand Engagement (CBE) encompasses consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to brand interactions, influencing consumer behavior (Algharabat et al., 2018; Hepola et al., 2017). In the context of online grocery shopping, CBE represents the level of interaction and emotional connection between customers and the grocery brand, which is vital for cultivating a loyal customer base in competitive e-commerce. CBE has three dimensions: emotional, cognitive, and social (Xi & Hamari, 2020). The emotional dimension relates to positive affective states and experiences derived from customer interactions with the brand. The cognitive dimension involves brand-related thoughts and active processing during interactions. The social dimension emphasizes the importance of social interactions and community formation around the brand.

By understanding and nurturing these dimensions, online grocery retailers can establish deep connections with customers, driving loyalty and enhancing business performance in the competitive online marketplace. The study of CBE antecedents, including consumers' co-creation activities, further contributes to this understanding (Hollebeek, 2018; Leckie et al., 2016). Consequently, proactive customer orientation is expected to have a positive impact on customer-brand engagement (Verhoef et al. 2009). When companies anticipate and provide proactive services, customers are more likely to engage with the brand, leading to stronger relationships. Moreover, co-creation activities lead to higher levels of customer-brand engagement (CBE), as customers feel immersed in the brand and exhibit commitment (Carlson et al. 2018; Hsieh & Chang 2016). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2_a: Proactive customer orientation is positively related to customer-brand engagement

H2_b: Value co-creation is positively related to customer-brand engagement

4.2.5. Customer-Brand Engagement and Customer Experience

Customer experience (CE) encompasses customer perceptions and responses to brand, product, or service interactions (Kumar & Kaushik, 2020), serving as a means for customers to engage physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally with products or services (Prentice et al., 2019). Accordingly, customer-brand engagement arises from interactive experiences with a brand, a perspective supported by Disse and Olsson (2023), emphasizing interactive experiences as value determinants in relationship marketing. Empirical research, such as Mohd- Mohd-Ramly and Omar (2017), has linked CE to customer-brand engagement in an online shopping context. Based on this, we propose:

H3: Customer experience is positively related to customer engagement

4.2.6. Willingness to Pay More, Customer-Brand Engagement and Customer Experience

The ability of sellers to charge premium prices for high-quality products, deviating from competitive pricing norms, signifies their value proposition (Hwang et al., 2021). Compared to material acquisitions, experiential purchases are associated with increased satisfaction and overall well-being (Zhang et al. 2018). Research consistently shows a positive relationship between customer-brand engagement and the willingness to pay higher prices; individuals with higher engagement in online grocery shopping are more likely to invest in premium offerings, recognizing the value of superior products and services (Loketkrawee & Bhatiasavi, 2018).

Moreover, customers who have had positive online shopping experiences tend to allocate more spending to the retailer (Saha et al., 2020), and those who encountered superior online grocery shopping experiences show a greater inclination to accept higher prices (Dwivedi et al., 2018). Fulfilling experiences with a brand lead to a willingness to pay a premium in future transactions (Clarkson et al., 2013; Hwang & Kim 2019), but further investigation is needed to fully understand the impact of customer-brand engagement and customer experience on the willingness to pay more in online grocery shopping. Based on the literature as mentioned above, we posit:

H4_a: Customer experience is positively related to willingness to pay more

H4_b: Customer-brand engagement is positively related to willingness to pay more

4.2.7. Mediating role of customer-brand engagement

Expanding our investigation beyond direct effects, this study also delves into the mediating role of customer-brand engagement—a construct that has garnered attention in prior literature across various contexts. The concept of customer-brand engagement as a mediating factor has been examined in diverse settings, ranging from social media (Ferreira & Zambaldi, 2019) to the sphere of green brands (Leckie et al., 2021). Notably, Jami Pour et al. (2021) discerned that customer-brand engagement acts as a mediating force between gamification and customer experience in the online shopping domain, elucidating its intermediary role in shaping customer perceptions and interactions. Additionally, Khan et al. (2016) have shed light on the intricate web of relationships, where customer-brand engagement partially mediates the effects on brand satisfaction and brand loyalty, with the online brand experience serving as a bridge in this connection. Drawing from these comprehensive insights, our hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H5: Customer-brand engagement mediates the relationship between customer experience and willingness to pay more

The present study's research model is shown in the Figure 4.1.

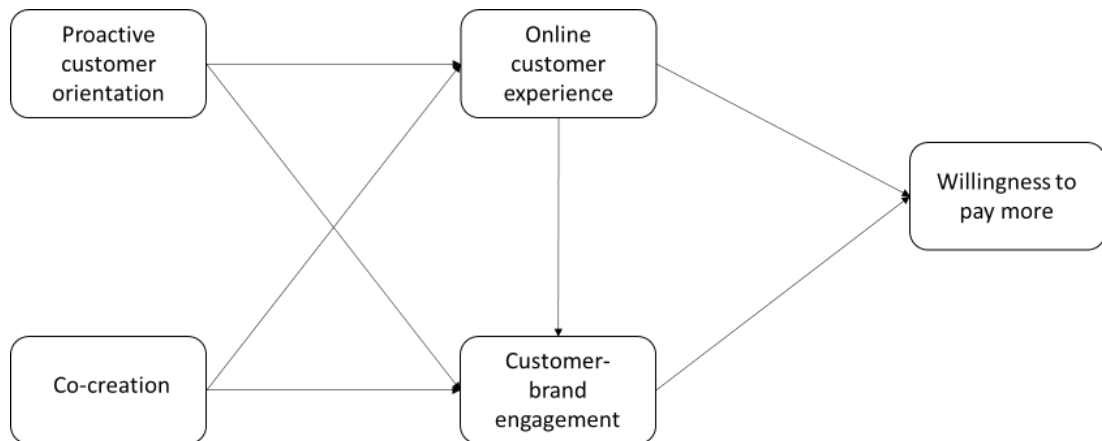


Figure 4.1: Conceptual Model of The Present Study

4.3. Research Methods

4.3.1. Data Collection and Sample

Data collection for this study was facilitated through an online survey, distributed by students employed as data collectors in exchange for extra credit (Boyle & Schmierbach 2003). This method has demonstrated efficacy in consumer research contexts (e.g. Persaud & Schillo 2017; Ünal et al., 2024; Unal & Tascioglu, 2022). These student collaborators were instructed to circulate the survey among non-student adults within their vicinity, such as family members or relatives, thereby ensuring a sample that extends beyond the conventional student-only demographic (e.g. Shobeiri et al., 2018), and consequently providing a more comprehensive demographic profile.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics (n=406)

Household income		Level of education		Age		Gender	
0-7500 TL	63	Primary school	15	18-29	188	Male	233
7501-13500 TL	106	High school	62	30-49	195	Female	173
13501 TL-20000 TL	116	Associate degree	41	Over 50	23		
20001 TL-30000 TL	55	Bachelor's degree	218				
Over 30000 TL	66	Graduate degree	70				

4.3.2. Measurements

The questionnaire used in this study was divided into two sections. The first section was the survey's focal point, measuring the key variables under investigation. The subsequent section included demographic questions, specifically addressing age, gender, education, and household income. All the items of the questionnaire were sourced from prior research within the existing literature to ensure the reliability and validity of our measurements. All items in this study were graded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." Table 4.2 provides a detailed breakdown of the items, their respective sources, and the corresponding loadings.

Table 4.2 Measurement Items

Construct	Item	λ
Proactive service orientation (Blocker et al., 2011)	This retail brand excels at anticipating changes in what we need before we even ask.	0.747
	This retail brand seems to spend time studying changes in the business environment so they can exercise better foresight about our future needs.	0.785
	This retail brand successfully anticipates changes in our needs	0.760
	This retail brand presents new solutions to us that we actually need but did not think to ask about.	0.680
	This retail brand is always looking for clues that might reveal changes in what we value beyond what we currently ask of them.	0.680
	This retail brand presents new ideas to us that help us keep pace with the changing environment.	0.740
Value co-creation (Cheung et al., 2021)	I often suggest how this retail brand can improve its products and services.	0.738
	I often express my personal needs to this retail brand.	0.766
	I often find solutions to my problems together with this retail brand.	0.756
	I can be actively involved when this retail brand develops new products	0.775
	This retail brand encourages consumers to create solutions together.	0.772
Customer-brand engagement (Cheung et al., 2021)	Using this retail brand get me to think about it.	0.599
	I think about this retail brand a lot when I am using it.	0.613
	Using this retail brand stimulates my interest to learn more about this retail brand.	0.648
	I feel very positive when I use this retail brand.	0.822
	Using this retail brand makes me happy.	0.845
	I feel good when I use this retail brand.	0.805
	I am proud to use this retail brand.	0.774
	I spend a lot of time using this retail brand compared with other brands.	0.692
	Whenever I am using smartphones, I usually use this retail brand.	0.704
Customer experience (Bilro et al., 2018)	I use this retail brand the most.	0.700
	I feel enjoyment when purchasing from online grocery retail products.	0.745
	I excite about having a new experience.	0.780

	I feel trouble-free experience when purchasing from online grocery retailers.	0.712
	I feel cheerful purchase experience when using online grocery retailers.	0.804
	I feel related when purchasing from online grocery retailers.	0.736
	Purchasing from online grocery retailers is something different from the offline purchasing experience.	0.683
	Purchasing from online grocery retailers is a unique experience.	0.719
	I experience something new when purchasing from online grocery retailers.	0.738
	Purchasing from online grocery retailers increases my knowledge.	0.701
	Online grocery retailers offer a variety of products.	0.729
Willingness to pay more (Sarkar et al., 2021)	I am willing to pay a higher price for this retail brand than for other retail brands.	0.839
	I am willing to pay a premium over competing brands to be able to visit this retail brand again.	0.870
	I am willing to pay a lot more to shop at this retail brand than shopping at other retail brands.	0.852

4.3.3. Data Analysis

Structural Equation Modeling is the primary analytical tool used in this study (SEM). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was initially used to assess the degree of agreement between the collected data and our theoretically proposed model. (Hair et al., 2021). The model fit indices provided compelling evidence, indicating a perfect fit between the data and our proposed model ($\chi^2 = 1234.203$, $df = 517$, $\chi^2/df = 2.388$, CFI = 0.915, IFI = 0.916, RMSEA = 0.059, $p < 0.000$). Following that, we tested the constructs' reliability and validity. Composite reliability (CR) values for each construct surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2021). We calculated the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for convergent validity, which exceeded the cut-off value of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). To assess discriminant validity, we employed HTMT analysis (Heterotrait-Monotrait), with all values comfortably below the 0.85 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015). Finally, we checked for common method bias via Harman's single factor test. We confirmed that single factor accounts for only 39.2 percent of the total variance explained, which is much less than the 50 percent

threshold (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012).The comprehensive validity of the measurement model was thus assured, as presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.2: Reliability and Validity Analysis

Construct	CR	AVE	HTMT				
			I	II	III	IV	V
(I) Proactive customer orientation	.87	.53					
(II) Value co-creation	.87	.58	.62				
(III) Customer-brand engagement	.91	.52	.73	.69			
(IV) Customer experience	.92	.54	.60	.60	.77		
(V) Willingness to pay more	.89	.72	.50	.52	.54	.51	

4.4. Results

4.4.1. Structural Model Results

The structural model in this study was analyzed by employing the maximum likelihood estimation method, facilitating the examination of its constituent components. Concurrently, path analysis was conducted in conjunction with an assessment of fit indices, in accordance with established best practices (Doll et al., 1994; Hair et al., 2021) The resulting fit indices collectively indicate that the structural model demonstrates a commendable fit with the observed data. Notably, the values stand as follows: $\chi^2 = 1117.618$, $df = 516$, $\chi^2/df = 2.166$, $GFI = 0.854$, $CFI = 0.929$, $IFI = 0.929$, $TLI = 0.923$, $RMSEA = 0.054$, and $p < 0.000$. The results underscore the fit of the model's structure and its aptitude for explaining the relationships under investigation.

Delving into the specific hypotheses, the results reveal several significant associations within the structural model. Proactive customer orientation exerts a statistically significant and positive impact on customer experience (H1a: $\beta = 0.384$, $p < 0.001$), while value co-creation similarly exhibits a substantial influence on customer experience (H1b: $\beta = 0.306$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, proactive customer orientation significantly and positively impacts customer-brand engagement (H2a: $\beta = 0.290$, $p < 0.001$), as does value co-creation (H2b: $\beta = 0.155$, $p < 0.001$). Customer experience, in turn, wields a notable and positive influence on customer-brand engagement (H1b: $\beta = 0.343$, $p < 0.001$).

Furthermore, the analysis unearths the substantial impact of customer experience on customers' willingness to pay more, lending robust support to H4a ($\beta = 0.217$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, customer-brand engagement emerges as a potent determinant of customers' willingness to pay more, firmly corroborating H4b ($\beta = 0.700$, $p < 0.001$). Table 4.4 provides comprehensive details on the structural model results and fit indices.

Table 4.4: Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t	Support
H1 _a	PCO $\rightarrow$ CE	0.384***	5.725	Yes
H1 _b	VC $\rightarrow$ CE	0.306***	5.701	Yes
H2 _a	PCO $\rightarrow$ CBE	0.290***	6.075	Yes
H2 _b	VC $\rightarrow$ CBE	0.155***	4.371	Yes
H3	CE $\rightarrow$ CBE	0.343***	7.273	Yes
H4 _a	CE $\rightarrow$ WTP	0.217**	2.053	Yes
H4 _b	CBE $\rightarrow$ WTP	0.700***	4.992	Yes
$\chi^2 = 1117.618$, $df = 516$, $\chi^2/df = 2.166$, GFI = 0.854, CFI = 0.929, IFI = 0.929, TLI = 0.923, RMSEA = 0.054, $p < 0.000$				

*** $p < 0.001$

** $p < 0.05$

PCO: Proactive service orientation

VC: Value co-creation

CE: Customer experience

CBE: Customer-brand engagement

WTP: Willingness to pay more

Beyond investigating direct effects, this study delved into the analysis of indirect effects, specifically examining the mediating role of customer-brand engagement in the relationship between customer experience and customers' willingness to pay more. The findings illuminate a significant and positive mediating effect of customer-brand engagement, providing robust affirmation of hypothesis 5 (H5: $\beta = 0.240$, $p < 0.001$). These results signify that customer-brand engagement serves as an intermediary link

in the chain connecting customer experience to the propensity of customers to invest more in a given product or service, contributing valuable insights into the underlying mechanisms at play. Table 4.5 shows the mediation analysis in detail.

Table 4.5 Mediation Analysis

Hypothesis	Path	β	LLCI	ULCI	Mediation
H5	CE $\rightarrow$ CBE $\rightarrow$ WTP	.240***	.156	.359	Yes

*** $p < 0.001$

CE: Customer experience

CBE: Customer-brand engagement

WTP: Willingness to pay more

4.5. Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate how proactive service orientation and value co-creation affect customer experience and customer-brand engagement, revealing how to obtain a price premium from customers. We adopted a complexity theory perspective to examine the intricate nature of the customer journey, recognizing that it involves collaboration and the management of customer pain points (Anderson 1999; Urry 2005; Varnali 2018). The results showed that proactive service orientation and value co-creation foster a better customer experience and higher customer-brand engagement (Blocker et al., 2011; Delana et al., 2020), which leads to a higher willingness to pay more. Furthermore, it demonstrated that customer-brand engagement mediates customer experience and willingness to pay more. In line with the prior research (Blocker et al., 2011; Delana et al., 2020), companies anticipating and responding to customer needs create a virtuous cycle that results in a price premium. Furthermore, the present study investigates the complexities of value co-creation within the framework of complexity theory. It demonstrates that value co-creation not only improves customer experiences but also fosters engagement consistently with the prior research (Cheung et al. 2021; Chua et al. 2022). This finding underscores the role of value co-creation as a catalyst within the complex system, yielding positive outcomes for both customers and organizations.

4.5.1. Theoretical Implications

The present study represents a significant theoretical progress on online grocery shopping and customer experience literature by employing a complexity lens. In the

online grocery shopping context, this theory serves as a practical framework to interpret the dynamic and interactive nature of customer experience (Anderson 1999; Urry 2005; Varnali 2018). This study contributes to complexity theory by emphasizing the significance of proactive service orientation in shaping customer experiences and encouraging engagement. Complexity theory provides a valuable framework that enables us to pinpoint critical touchpoints and pain points within the customer journey (Anderson 1999; Urry 2005; Varnali 2018). Researchers gain a better understanding of the mechanisms that drive customer willingness to pay premiums as a result of the findings, while practitioners can use the insights from this study to develop strategies for commanding premium prices in the marketplace.

Moreover, this research contributes to complexity theory by elucidating the downstream effects of customer experience and customer-brand engagement on customers' willingness to pay more, which can be viewed as emergent properties of a complex system (Clarkson et al., 2013; Dwivedi et al., 2018). Organizations gain invaluable insights into the underlying dynamics of customer behavior by comprehensively understanding the interconnectedness of customer experience, customer-brand engagement, and willingness to pay more, allowing them to make strategic decisions that align harmoniously within the complex ecosystem in which they operate. Lastly, this study advances our understanding of the mediating mechanisms in the context of online grocery shopping. The role of customer-brand engagement in mediating the relationship between customer experience and willingness to pay more is especially noteworthy, as it reveals the pathways by which positive customer experiences translate into greater acceptance of premium pricing (Ferreira & Zambaldi, 2019; Jami Pour et al., 2021; Leckie et al., 2021).

4.5.2. Managerial Implications

The results derived from the present study provide useful insights for practitioners who want to strengthen customer strategies, such as company executives, marketing managers, and policymakers. This study suggests that managers adopt a proactive service orientation, consistently anticipating customer needs, addressing issues before they escalate, and exceeding expectations. This approach enhances customer experiences, fosters brand engagement, and ensures long-lasting relationships (Carlson et al., 2018; Duh & Pwaka, 2023). Marketing managers should prioritize value co-creation with customers, involving them in product or service development,

seeking feedback, and offering customization options. This approach increases the level of customer experience, leads to stronger brand engagement, and enables premium pricing (Al-Nabhani et al., 2022; Verhoef et al., 2009). Nurturing customer engagement through personalized interactions, responsive service, and loyalty programs can yield substantial returns in terms of customer loyalty and willingness to pay a premium.

Establishing robust feedback mechanisms, including tools such as surveys, focus groups, and online reviews, is essential to facilitate these strategies effectively. Actively soliciting and promptly responding to customer feedback not only demonstrates a commitment to proactive service but also underscores the value placed on customer opinions in the co-creation process. Additionally, investments in training and development programs for employees, particularly those in customer-facing roles, are recommended. Equipping them with the skills to anticipate customer needs, address issues effectively, and provide personalized service can be a game-changer.

Managers and policymakers should understand the complexity of customer relationships and the complexities of customer experiences and engagement. This understanding allows for more informed decision-making and strategy formulation. Companies should invest in customer journey mapping to understand various touchpoints and interactions, identify pain points, and identify opportunities for proactive service, leading to tailored enhancements in customer experience. In summary, the research emphasizes the importance of investing in enhancing customer experiences for company managers, as positive experiences boost customer satisfaction and drive premium pricing, especially in competitive industries with changing customer preferences. The findings aim to guide managers and policymakers in creating customer-centric strategies to improve customer experiences, brand engagement, and customer willingness to pay more.

4.6. Future Research Avenues

The current study provides valuable insights into the complex relationships among proactive service orientation, value co-creation, customer experience, customer-brand engagement, and willingness to pay more. However, future research offers promising opportunities to deepen our understanding further. One possible avenue for future research involves investigating moderating factors that may influence these

relationships. Depending on factors such as industry, culture, and customer segmentation, proactive service orientation and value co-creation may have varying effects on customer experience and brand engagement. Examining these moderating factors can help us gain a better understanding.

The current research examined the role of customer-brand engagement in mediating the relationship between customer experience and willingness to pay more. Alternative mediators such as customer empowerment, digitalization, brand trust, or brand equity could be studied in future studies to see how they affect customer outcomes and causal relationships. In addition, the current study used cross-sectional data to capture relationships at a specific point in time. Longitudinal studies could be carried out to gain a better understanding of these relationships. A longitudinal perspective would provide valuable insights into the dynamic and sustainable nature of these relationships by tracking the evolution of proactive service orientation and value co-creation in relation to customer experience, customer-brand engagement, and willingness to pay more over time.

Last but not least, employing a mixed-method research approach can aid in improving our findings. For example, in-depth interviews and focus groups can reveal subjective perspectives and lived experiences about proactive service orientation, value co-creation, and customer outcomes, revealing the depth and nuances of customer experiences. Multilevel studies and experiments, for example, can provide statistical evidence for the relationships under investigation, allowing us to better understand these dynamics. To summarize, while the current study offers valuable insights, future research has the potential to unravel the complexities of proactive service orientation, value co-creation, customer experience, customer-brand engagement, and willingness to pay more. Scholars can further our understanding of customer-centric strategies by looking into moderating factors and alternative mediating mechanisms, adopting longitudinal perspectives, and embracing mixed-method research.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

The present theoretical implications bring together insights from three studies that explore different aspects of customer behavior and business strategies. Study 1 delves into the relationship between service innovation, trust, and customer loyalty in emerging economies, providing a nuanced understanding of the mediating and moderating roles of trust dimensions and relationship anxiety. Study 2 investigates the impact of product type, service type, and service approach on customers' attitudes towards the company and willingness to pay more, applying attribution theory to industrial purchasing decisions. Study 3 explores the interplay of proactive service orientation, value co-creation, self-congruity, and their effects on customer experience, customer-brand engagement, and customers' propensity to pay a premium price.

These studies collectively enhance our comprehension of customer behavior and inform strategic decision-making for businesses operating in diverse contexts. Study 1 contributes to existing research by examining the role of trust in the relationship between service innovation and relational performance. Understanding the mediating and moderating effects of trust dimensions and relationship anxiety can aid firms in devising effective complaint handling and loyalty-building strategies, particularly in emerging economies.

Study 2 advances the servitization literature by investigating the impact of product type, service type, and service approach on customers' attitudes and willingness to pay more. The findings emphasize the importance of customized service approaches, particularly when supporting customer actions in industries reliant on crucial production equipment. Attribution theory offers valuable insights into the attributions customers make during industrial purchasing decisions, enabling businesses to develop targeted marketing and sales approaches aligned with customers' needs and preferences.

Study 3 expands complexity theory by unveiling the roles of proactive service orientation, value co-creation, and self-congruity in shaping customer experiences and engagement. Organizations that prioritize proactive customer service, involve customers in co-creating value, and establish a sense of self-congruity between customers and the brand foster positive outcomes, such as increased customer-brand engagement and willingness to pay a premium price. Understanding the dynamic interactions within the complex system of customer-brand interactions can aid businesses in crafting customer-centric strategies that resonate with their target audience.

In conclusion, the theoretical implications derived from merging these three studies provide valuable insights into customer behavior, trust dynamics, industrial purchasing decisions, and customer-brand interactions. The findings equip businesses with the knowledge needed to enhance customer experiences, foster engagement, and develop effective strategies that cater to customers' evolving needs and preferences, ultimately leading to improved organizational performance and customer satisfaction.

5.2. Managerial Implications

The three studies offer valuable managerial implications for businesses seeking to improve customer relationships, design service contracts, and enhance customer experiences. Managers should focus on building customer trust through service innovation, as this can lead to stronger relationships with customers. By understanding the reciprocity principle, managers can leverage service innovations to increase customers' contractual, goodwill, and competence trust. In fast-changing business environments, where uncertainties can hinder trust, fostering these forms of trust becomes crucial.

Furthermore, the findings from Study 1 highlight the importance of demonstrating competence and benevolence to customers. Simply fulfilling contractual obligations may not be enough to establish long-term relationships. Managers should go beyond the basics and ensure their organizations are perceived as competent and benevolent in the eyes of their customers. This approach can lead to stronger and more sustainable customer relationships.

Study 2 provides valuable insights for managers designing service contracts, especially in industries where equipment downtime can be costly. If the equipment is central to

customers' production lines, offering tailored service contracts that support customer actions is essential. By providing customized solutions, businesses can foster positive attitudes towards their brand, which may lead to customers being willing to pay a premium for their products or services. On the other hand, if the equipment does not significantly impact production stability, providing standard service contracts may offer customers more freedom in seeking solutions when issues arise.

Moving on to Study 3, managers should prioritize proactive service and invest in training programs to anticipate customer needs and deliver exceptional service. By cultivating a proactive mindset among employees, organizations can consistently exceed customer expectations and create positive experiences that enhance customer-brand engagement.

Value co-creation is another essential strategy for improving customer experiences and fostering deeper engagement. Actively involving customers in the co-creation process allows businesses to gain unique perspectives and feedback, leading to more customized and personalized products and services. This collaborative approach strengthens the bond between customers and the brand, ultimately enhancing the overall customer experience.

Lastly, businesses should aim to align their brand image with customers' self-concepts through self-congruity. By communicating and reinforcing consistency across various touchpoints, including branding and messaging, organizations can foster a strong emotional connection with customers. This alignment contributes to higher levels of engagement and loyalty, positively impacting customers' willingness to pay a premium for the brand's offerings.

In conclusion, these three studies provide practical and actionable insights for managers to improve customer relationships, design effective service contracts, and enhance customer experiences. By understanding the importance of trust, competence, benevolence, proactive service, value co-creation, and self-congruity, businesses can build stronger customer connections, increase customer loyalty, and achieve greater market success.

5.3. Future Research Avenues

The three studies have provided valuable insights into service innovation, customer relationships, and customer experiences. However, they also open up several exciting

avenues for future research. Firstly, there is a need for longitudinal studies to examine the development of customer-supplier relationships over time. By understanding how trust evolves through reciprocal exchanges, longitudinal studies can shed light on the causal relationships between variables and validate the present study's findings.

Secondly, cultural factors should be incorporated into future research to explore their influence on contractual trust and relational performance. Considering cultural dimensions and specific cultural terms, such as Guanxi in China, can help unravel the role of culture in customer-supplier relationships.

Study 2 suggests further research into customer retention and renewal of maintenance or service contracts. Understanding how to retain customers and encourage repurchasing intentions can be crucial for businesses seeking long-term success.

Additionally, exploring the impact of different members of the buying center on purchasing decisions across various product types can provide valuable insights. Investigating how these decision-makers influence product-service offerings' adoption and utilization can lead to more targeted marketing strategies.

Furthermore, future research should consider including relational variables in the model to understand their role in the initial purchasing process. Analyzing the supplier-customer relationship in the context of service contracts and equipment purchases can deepen our understanding of customer decision-making.

In Study 3, future research could investigate moderating factors that may influence the relationships between proactive service orientation, value co-creation, self-congruity, customer experience, customer-brand engagement, and willingness to pay more. Exploring how these factors interact with industry, culture, and customer segments can provide valuable insights into boundary conditions and the complex dynamics at play.

Additionally, researchers should delve into potential mediating mechanisms such as customer satisfaction, perceived value, brand trust, or emotional attachment to understand the sequential impact of proactive service orientation, value co-creation, and self-congruity on customer outcomes.

A longitudinal perspective can also be valuable in studying the evolving nature of these relationships over time. By tracking customer experience, engagement, and willingness to pay more, researchers can gain insights into how proactive service

orientation, value co-creation, and self-congruity impact customer behavior and loyalty in the long run.

Finally, employing mixed-method research can enhance and broaden the findings of these studies. Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches can provide a comprehensive understanding of customer experiences and perceptions, enriching our knowledge of proactive service orientation, value co-creation, and self-congruity's effects on customer outcomes.



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CV

Rıfğı Buğra BAĞCI

A. EDUCATION

PhD: Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, Business Administration, 2024, Istanbul

PhD Exchange: Copenhagen Business School, Operations Management, 2024, Copenhagen, Denmark

Master: Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, Business Administration, 2020, Istanbul

Undergraduate: Anadolu University, International Relations, 2017, Eskişehir

Undergraduate: Boğaziçi University, Translation and Interpreting Studies, 2016, Istanbul

Exchange: Shimonoseki City University, Economics, 2015, Yamaguchi, Japan

B. OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE

2010-2016 Various part-time, freelance and voluntary works

2016-2020 Miura Turkey Isıtma Sistemleri San. Ltd. Şti. – Sales and Marketing Specialist

2020-Present Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University – Research Assistant

2021-Present Journal of Islamic Finance and Economics (e-ISSN: 2651-5342) - Publication Committee Member

2022-Present Sage Open (e-ISSN: 2158-2440) - Article Editor and Peer Reviewer

2023-Present Journal of Knowledge Economy and Management (e-ISSN: 1308-3937) - Language Editor

C. PROJECTS

1-Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, BAP Project, 2021

2-Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, BAP Project, 2021

3-ISTKA Project, 2023

4-TUBITAK-STAR BIGG Project

5- TUBITAK 2214-A Project

D. PUBLICATIONS

- Ünal, U., Bağcı, R. B., & Taşcıoğlu, M. (2024). The perfect combination to win the competition: Bringing sustainability and customer experience together. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.3728>
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- Bağcı, R. B., & Taşcıoğlu, M. (In review). Ensuring long-standing supplier-customer relationships by service innovation via different types of trust. *European Journal of Marketing*.
- Bağcı, R. B. (In review). Green, premium, and profitable: unveiling the synergistic dynamics of sustainable product-service systems. *Industrial Marketing Management*.
- Ünal, U., Bağcı, R. B., & Taşcıoğlu, M. (In review). Multidimensional customer experience in the sustainability context: a Stimulus-Organism-Response perspective. *Management Decision*