ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR TOWARD MARKETING RELATIONSHIPS: COMPARISON OF CANADIAN AND CHINESE MANAGERS

The benefits of marketing relationships between buyers and suppliers have been confirmed in different settings (Berry 1983; Gronroos 1990; Liker and Choi, 2004; Reichheld 1996). As international trade among nations increases, buyers and sellers are increasingly located in different countries. This means buyer-seller relationships have to be studied in a cross-cultural context. There has been scant attention paid to the cross-cultural dimension in the relationship marketing literature. Our study attempts to fill the void in this area.

We chose to study the impact of culture on attitude toward business relationships and relationship behaviour in Canada and China, given the increasing trade between these two nations. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck’s (1961) value-orientation model was used to measure cultural values relevant to relationships, which included measures of human nature (i.e., willingness to trust), time sense (future vs. past vs. present orientation) and social relations (authoritarian vs. individualism vs. collectivism). Rather than focus on a specific buyer-seller relationship, our study focused on managers’ overall attitude toward business relationships, which included the following constructs: Attitude-toward-Trust (alpha=0.71), Attitude-toward-Commitment (alpha=0.65), and Attitude-toward-Cooperation (alpha=0.68). Based on the literature in culture and Guanxi (e.g., Lee, Pae and Wong 2001), we hypothesized as follows:

(H1) Chinese and Canadian Managers will differ in value orientations most relevant to marketing relationships (Human Nature, Time Orientation and Social Relations). (H2) Chinese managers will exhibit more favourable attitudes toward marketing relationship compared to Canadian managers. (H3) Chinese managers will exhibit greater relationship oriented behaviour compared to Canadian managers.

We conducted surveys in both Canada (N=59) and China (N=68). Cultural value orientation (human nature, time sense and social relations), attitude toward business relationships (three sub-scales mentioned above) and business relationship behaviour (three sub-scales – Open Communication (alpha=0.71), Relationalism (alpha=0.78) and Relationship Investment (alpha=0.68)) were measured, in addition to demographics. The respondents were all in managerial positions, attending EMBA or part-time MBA programs China or Canada. Appropriate back-translation procedure was adopted for the Chinese version of the questionnaire.

Canadians are more willing to trust (t=6.2, p<0.001) and Chinese are more likely to accept lines of authority in a relationship (t=2.2, p<0.05). Chinese are more likely to openly communicate with their partners (t=2.39, p<0.05), purposefully manage their business relationships (t=1.9, p<0.057) and make greater investments in relationships (t=4.18, p<0.001). A series of regressions were conducted in each sample. In the Canadian case that Relationalism and Investment are influenced by Attitudinal-toward-Trust and Open Communication. In the Chinese case, the pattern of results was different with Attitude-toward-Cooperation and Open Communication turning out to be stronger predictors of Relationalism and Investment, although Attitude-toward-Trust was a predictor of Open Communication. The results support the hypotheses. The small sample size and marginal reliability of some scales are limitations of this study. The results do point to country differences, based on cultural values, in both relationship attitude and relationship behaviour, which has significant managerial implications.