The Influence of **Power, Commitment, and Relationship Quality** on Objective Performance

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Abstract | This research aims at testing a model of the influence of non-coercive power (NCP), commitment, and relationship quality (RQ) on tourism organizations' objective performance. Two mail surveys provide the perceptions of 688 hotel representatives about their business relationships with tour operators, and 1,002 corporate client representatives about their business relationships with hotels. Results suggest that commitment is the most important construct in the 'tour operator-hotel dyad', while in the 'hotel-corporate client dyad' NCP is the strongest determinant of commitment, RQ and share of business. The comparison of two samples characterized by different levels of power asymmetry provides new and relevant insights

Keywords | Commitment, hotel performance, power, relationship quality, tour operator performance

Resumo | O presente trabalho visa testar um modelo da influência do poder não coercivo (NCP), empenho, e qualidade da relação (RQ) no desempenho objetivo de organizações de turismo. Dois inquéritos postais proporcionam perceções de 688 representantes de hotéis sobre as suas relações de negócio com operadores turísticos, 1002 representantes de clientes empresa sobre as suas relações de negócio com hotéis. Os resultados sugerem que o empenho é o constructo mais importante na 'díade operador turístico-hotel', ao passo que na 'díade hotel-cliente empresa' o NCP é o determinante mais forte do empenho, da RQ e da quota de cliente. A comparação das duas amostras, caracterizadas por níveis diferentes de assimetria de poder, proporciona perspetivas novas e relevantes.

Palavras-chave | Desempenho do hotel, desempenho do operador turístico, empenho, poder, qualidade da relação

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1. Introduction

The quality of the interactions among business partners in a network of relationships (commonly referred to as relationship quality – RQ) has been a concern of both tourism and relationship marketing (RM) streams of research. The RM literature is implicitly predicated on the expectation that improvements in commitment and RQ will lead to better performance. Indeed, according to the literature (e.g., Beck, Chapman & Palmatier 2015; Maggon & Chaudhry 2015; Palmatier et al. 2013), the 'hit-and-run' marketing approach is no longer effective, and the future of marketing is inexorably linked to relationship marketing. This is in line with what Gümmesson (2014) refers to as 'Paradigm 3' which, in turn, revolves around the service dominant logic, recently revisited by Lusch and Vargo (2014).

In parallel, tourism authors, particularly in the destination competitiveness area, have been increasingly aware of the crucial role of the quality of business relationships within the tourism system, especially since Otto and Ritchie (1995) defended a total quality experience approach. In a similar vein, Crouch and Ritchie (1999) suggested a sense of enterprise as a competitiveness factor, and Dwyer and Kim (2003) included destination management (DM) as an element of destination competitiveness. Despite recent attempts to broadly conceptualize and integrate both DM and RM approaches in the tourism literature (e.g., Shirazi & Som 2013), the work produced so far seems to regard RM as a 'one-size-fits-all' solution, by not considering the suggested ideal 'habitat' for a relational approach. Indeed, it has been shown that RM is most effective in business-to-business (B2B) services contexts characterized by person-to-person interactions between key individuals representing organizations (Palmatier et al. 2006), and may not be effective when applied to certain contexts, for example in business-to-consumer relationships. Building on the notion that buyers derive utility from social capital (Granovetter 1985; Hughes, Le Bon & Rapp, 2013), relational efforts are viewed as important determinants of objective performance (Palmatier et al. 2006; Palmatier, Jarvis, Bechkoff & Kardes, 2009). However, in spite of the overall acknowledgement of the benefits of a relational approach, both managers and scholars have been increasingly reporting their disappointment, because RM yields unclear results (Palmatier et al., 2009), and may not meet expectations (Henderson et al. 2011). In addition, a macroeconomic recession business environment, where price wars and decreased demand put even more pressure on margins, will jeopardize repeat business and organizational performance, as buyers tend to look for the best cost-benefit deals (LaPlaca, 2009). One of the options for organizations that are not able or willing to compete via promotions or price is to maintain and enhance commitment and RQ with key clients, in order to achieve product perceived differentiation and sustainable competitive advantage.

The issues around power, which are unassailably embedded in networks of business relationships (Beritelli & Laesser 2011), have also increasingly become a concern for authors in both streams of research. Indeed, although similar, mutual power and dependence are crucial to successful business relationships, the conflicts and power asymmetry between organizations within the tourism system are well documented in the tourism literature (e.g., Bastakis, Buhalis & Butler, 2004; Buhalis 2000; Medina & Garcia 2000). Similarly, several authors in the RM area have been emphasizing the influence of power asymmetry and alerting for the need to integrate it in the study of RQ. Business relationships that are characterized by power asymmetry tend to exhibit a higher degree of conflict between parties (Van Bruggen, Kacker & Nieuwlaat, 2005). A conflict atmosphere, in turn, is not conducive to RQ because the less dependent party may be tempted to use its partner's dependence to use coercive

power and force cooperation, instead of working for the development of mutual trust, satisfaction, and commitment on a long-term basis (Lusch & Brown 1996). The literature also suggests that power asymmetry is likely to have counterproductive effects on the performance of all parties (Van Bruggen et al. 2005; Nyaga et al. 2013). This is in line with Palmatier et al. (2006), whose meta-analysis revealed customer's dependence as a relevant, direct determinant of objective performance. In the tourism area, Beritelli and Laesser (2011)'s empirical research on the under-researched field of power in business relationships provided a valuable contribution by showing that coercive power does not play a relevant role. This is in line with the RM literature, which has been increasingly highlighting the greater role of non-coercive power (NCP) (Benton & Maloni 2005; Goodman & Dion, 2001; Van Bruggen et al. 2005). It seems pertinent to explore the impacts of NCP alongside key relational constructs on tourism organizations' objective performance. Against this background, the present research adopts a RM, interpersonal approach aiming at i) testing the effects of NCP, commitment, and RQ on tourism organizations' objective performance (i.e., share of business); and ii) comparing two 'dyads' in the tourism system characterized by different levels of power asymmetry.

Following the background presented in the next section, section 3 will detail the model and hypotheses incorporating the impacts of NCP, commitment, and RQ on share of business. The adopted methodology will be presented in section 4. The paper will then proceed by systematizing the main results, and will finalize with the main contributions, as well as the study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Background

2.1. Interpersonal Relationships in a B2B Exchange Environment

Along with the introduction of the concept of RQ, Gümmesson (1987, p. 17) also explained that all elements of an organization are 'part-time marketers', contributing to the formation of the customer's perception of commitment and RQ: 'The work to create and maintain market relationships is divided between the full-time professional marketers in the marketing department and the omnipresent (non-professional) part-time marketers'. If relations to customers are the distinctive competence of the marketing department, then salespeople are relationship managers, or, in Gümmesson's (1987, p. 17) words, 'the professional 'contact persons' who build relationships'. Client managers are a special kind of professional contact person because they have the responsibility of being the 'face' of the organisation and engage in dyadic person-to-person interactions with their counterparts in firms. Moreover, in service environments, the frequent lack of tangible measures of performance, due to absence of a physical object of transaction, renders person-to-person contact increasingly critical, for it acts as a surrogate for a more objective measure (Berry 2002). Furthermore, the importance of interpersonal relationships in a firm-to-firm exchange environment is emphasized by the fact that personal relationships between boundary-spanning individuals in each firm - 'very specific and nonimitable human capital', to quote Haytko (2004, p. 313) – serve to shape and define the partnership and drive the processes and outcomes of the interfirm interaction (Hutt et al. 2000).

Iacobucci and Ostrom (1996) found that people use expressions related to interpersonal relationships to describe firm-firm dyads. This interesting finding reflects the importance of interper-

sonal relationships in B2B relationships in the marketing area. However, the interest in interpersonal relationships in inter-organizational exchanges is not an exclusive of the field of marketing. For example, in the field of economic sociology, Granovetter (1985) explains the concept of embeddedness of economic action in person-to-person relationships, according to which, embeddedness exists when consumers derive utility from both the attributes of the product, and the social capital found in pre-existing links between business partners. Still building on Granovetter's notion of embeddedness, it has been argued that social patterns 'take on a rulelike status' that shape economic outcomes, and that, in organizational dyadic alliances, the initial interactions become embedded in a 'rich and active network of social relations that couple the two organizations strategically and administratively' (Larson 1992, p. 98). This seems to contribute to reinforce the importance of the social level of business relationships. Larson (1992) further suggested that the formal contractual aspects of exchange are relatively unimportant, and that personal relationships provide a conducive frame for economic change, which takes place and is shaped by social controls. In line with the interpersonal focus of the present study, it has been argued that direct selling approaches, which are characterized by one-to-one relationships between the boundary personnel in the buying and selling organizations, are expected to exhibit the highest levels of interpersonal relationships, which are considered a requirement for these markets (Iyer, Sharma & Evanschitzky, 2006).

2.2. Research context - under what circumstances do relationships matter?

The marketing literature (Vargo & Lusch 2004; Lusch & Vargo 2014) argues more and more against the traditional distinction between goods and services. Indeed, increasingly many goods have a service element and many services have tangible components. This renders traditional arguments about RM being relevant for services rather than goods questionable to a greater extent. The question is under what circumstances relationships matter – because where relationships matter, so will power, commitment, and RQ. These circumstances include aspects such as information asymmetries (which are also associated with vulnerability to opportunistic behavior), asset specificity (e.g. contracts; systems links), relatively significant levels of uncertainty, frequency of interactions, expenditure, need for some degree of customization/personalization, and potential/need for co-creation (Crosby, Evans & Cowles, 1990). The present study was carried out in the particular context of Portugal, an important European destination, where no investigation of this nature had been conducted before, in a research setting that includes the characteristics of an appropriate habitat for power, commitment, and RQ. That is, a B2B marketing environment, where services are predominant and the relationship between firms is mainly characterized by an ongoing interpersonal interaction between individuals representing organizations. This is consistent with the notion of a service-, customer-centric, and relational view of marketing, i.e. as a continuous social and economic process in which value is co-created with the consumer (Vargo & Lusch 2004). Indeed, the characteristics of the tourism business relationships – i.e., between hotels and their corporate clients; and between tour operators and hotels –, that serve as the basis for this study's research setting render RQ particularly vital for organizational success.

Thinking ahead to the comparison of business relationships in the tourism system characterized by different levels of power asymmetry, in addition to the business relationships between actors of the producers' block and the clients' block, i.e., hotels and corporate clients, respectively, the present study also considers the relationships be-

tween hotels and actors of the intermediaries block, i.e., tour operators. While the latter relationships also match the above-mentioned ideal 'habitat' for RM, they are expected to be more asymmetrical in terms of power than those between hotels and corporate clients, as suggested earlier. Indeed, the hotel assumes the role of a seller in both 'dyads', but faces different levels of power asymmetry. This will be of significant added value in terms of the study's contributions.

3. Model and Hypotheses

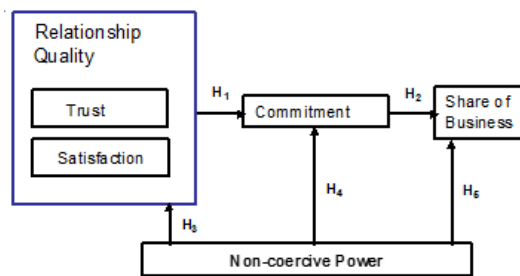The hypotheses under analysis are depicted in Figure 1.

Figura 1 | Model of the effects of RQ, commitment and NCP on share of business

The selection of the constructs integrating the model and their connections build on relevant conceptual and empirical literature on the topic (e.g., Athanasopoulou 2009; Palmatier et al. 2006). The proposed model extends existing models by considering the effects of NCP, while continuing to recognize the crucial role of commitment and RQ as relational drivers and share of business as a measure of objective performance. The adopted cross-sectional approach on a limited selection of concepts draws heavily on both the idea that strong contributions usually start with a small theoretical network (Bagozzi, 1984), and the vital importance of assessing absolute levels of

relational constructs (Palmatier et al. 2013).

RQ is the overall assessment of a relationship as reflected by the levels of trust and satisfaction (Crosby et al. 1990). Palmatier et al. (2006) found that instead of focusing on individual RM constructs, a composite measure (i.e., RQ) had the greatest impact on objective performance. RQ's conceptualization as a higher-order latent construct with trust and satisfaction as first-order dimensions is based on the classic, seminal paper that first empirically assessed the concept of RQ, i.e., Crosby et al., 1990. *Trust* is defined as the ability and willingness to rely on the relationship manager's integrity and behavior so that the long-term expectations of the buyer will be met (Crosby et al., 1990; Morgan & Hunt, 1994); and *satisfaction* is defined as the assurance, perceived by the buyer, regarding the supplier's future performance, given that past performance has been consistently satisfactory (Crosby et al., 1990). *Commitment* captures the parties' firm and consistent motivation to maintain a relationship that is valued by them (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The literature suggests that commitment plays a particularly important role in improving share of business (e.g., Palmatier et al. 2006; Roberts et al. 2003), which is in line with recent work reiterating that commitment 'is perhaps the most critical factor predicting performance' (Palmatier et al. 2013, p. 14).

The adopted model is influenced by the well-known 'commitment-trust theory' of RM by Morgan and Hunt (1994), a consensual milestone in the RM area, which established commitment as a mediator of the positive effects of satisfaction and trust (i.e., the RQ dimensions) on performance (see also Ramaseshan, Yip & Pae, 2006). Consistent with previous conceptual and empirical work (Crosby et al. 1990; Vieira, Winklhofer & Ennew, 2014), RQ is viewed as precursor of commitment, working as an overarching construct reflecting the joint variation in satisfaction and trust, whose effect on share of business is mediated by commitment. Hence, the following hypotheses are

posited:

H1: The higher the level of RQ, the higher the level of commitment.

H2: The higher the level of commitment, the higher the level of share of business.

NCP can be defined as the actions taken by the less dependent party towards the development of a constructive, mutually beneficial relationship atmosphere, which include technical and relational assistance (Goodman & Dion 2001; Ramaseshan et al. 2006). Instead of fear, force, and the achievement of short-term goals, which characterize coercive power (Goodman & Dion, 2001; Ramaseshan et al. 2006), the dyad leader's use of NCP is viewed as a much more effective alternative for increasing the levels of commitment, trust, and satisfaction on a long-term, relational perspective (Goodman & Dion, 2001; Van Bruggen et al. 2005). If the dyad's leader chooses not to use coercion, the more dependent party will tend to be more open to comply and adapt which, in turn, will lead to higher levels of RQ (Van Bruggen et al. 2005). In this context, a NCP perspective seems to be the most effective one, not only because a coercive approach may put at risk a power superiority scenario, but also given that non-coercive techniques have been found to reinforce a power advantage (Benton & Maloni 2005). Moreover, a consistent attitude will be strongly valued by business partners and contribute to maximize the performance of all parties. On the contrary, sudden and/or opportunistic changes of attitude — for example, a hotel's switch to a coercive approach after the signature of a contract - would be perceived as highly detrimental for the RQ and performance. It is, therefore, hypothesized that:

H3: The higher the level of NCP, the higher the level of RQ.

H4: The higher the level of NCP, the higher the level of commitment.

H5: The higher the level of NCP, the higher the level of share of business.

4. Methodology

4.1. Procedure

The present research is based on two cross-sectional field surveys, employing a self-administered, pen-and-paper questionnaire. The unit of analysis is the long-term relationship of the 'dyad', as perceived by the respondent. The Hotel-Corporate Client 'dyad' (HCC) is formed by the client manager of the hotel, and the hotel corporate client; the Tour Operator-Hotel 'dyad' (TOH) is formed by the representatives of the tour operator, and the hotel.

Consistent with the above described research setting that corresponds to the suggested ideal habitat for RQ, i.e., a business-to-business (B2B) services context where relationship managers engage in person-to-person interactions with their counterparts in business partners (Palmatier et al. 2006), a key informant single respondent approach was adopted, in line with previous research practice (e.g., Anderson & Narus, 1990). To contribute to improve the response rate, the questionnaires were distributed by the representatives the service provider in each dyad (i.e., the hotel representatives in the HCC sample; and the tour operator representatives in the TOH sample) to the respondents (i.e., the hotel corporate clients in the HCC sample; and the hotels in the TOH sample). The service provider representatives were thoroughly briefed and instructed to hand out sealed envelopes containing the questionnaire, a cover letter and a prepaid reply envelope to each key contact repre-

senting each counterpart. To contribute to mini-mize selection bias, the data collection proceeded in the HCC 'dyad' until all corporate clients with a signed contract (2,529 out of a total of 3,155 clients – an approximate 81% signed contract rate) had received a questionnaire. Corporate clients' representatives completed the questionnaire with-out the presence of the hotel representatives, and returned it directly to the researchers. Following an analogous procedure, 1,917 questionnaires were distributed by the tour operator. In the HCC sur-vey, 1,002 (around 39.6 percent response rate) ho-tel corporate client representatives provided their perceptions of their relationships with their coun-terparts, i.e., client managers in hotels; in the TOH survey, 688 (around 20.8 percent response rate), hotel representatives provided their perceptions of their relationships with their privileged interlocu-tors, i.e., the tour operators' representatives.

4.2. Sampling

As implied earlier, the business relationships between tour operators and hotels are expected to be more asymmetrical in terms of power than those between hotels and corporate clients. For example, a hotel will tend to be the weaker party when interacting with a 'large/mass' tour opera-tor, given the latter's control of markets (Buhalis 2000, p. 118). While tour operators typically as-sume the role of the dyad's leader (Bastakis et al. 2004; Guo & He 2012), power superiority between hotels and corporate clients tend to be much more context dependent. Previous research and profes-sional experience suggest that the existence of a contract between a hotel and a corporate client will strongly contribute to balance the relation-ship, given the inherent mutual benefits and obli-gations. To allow for the comparison of a rela-tively high power asymmetry business relationship (i.e., the 'tour operator-hotel dyad') to a relatively low power asymmetry business relationship (i.e.,

the 'hotel-corporate client dyad'), the HCC sam-ple includes exclusively corporate clients who have signed a contract with the hotel, and the TOH sample only includes representatives of hotels that were not vertically integrated with the tour oper-ator.

The HCC sample comprised corporate clients of a hotel chain operating in Portugal, with selling points spread through virtually the whole coun-try. It includes representatives of corporate clients whose distribution by sectors broadly matches the official numbers of the Portuguese economy: transforming industry – 31%; construction – 23%; commerce – 33%; and other sectors (mainly ser-vices) – 14%. Small to medium sized firms repre-sent approximately 98% of the sample, which also reflects the overall reality of Portuguese firms. Ac-cording to the information provided by the tour operator (who did not agree to reveal its list of contacts, despite the researchers' assurance of anonymity and confidentiality), the final sample is mainly comprised of three- and four-star hotels (around 35% and 27%, respectively). Five star-hotels account for approximately 7% of the TOH sample, while the remaining observations refer to hotel units under a three-star classification, but still representing relevant business in the tour op-erator perspective. Taking into account the above mentioned percentages, which are broadly coher-ent with the profile of hoteliers operating in Portu-gal, the representativeness of the TOH final sample does not seem to constitute a serious concern.

4.3. Measurement

All measures were based on established mea-surement scales selected from previous empirical works in the RM area, with slight adaptations to fit the context of the present study (see Appendix). The NCP scale was adapted from Goodman and Dion (2001), whose measures demonstrated con-sistent reliability in the channels of distribution lit-

erature (Gaski 1984; Hunt & Nevin 1974). The items measuring RQ's dimensions, trust and satisfaction, were based on the original scales developed by Crosby et al. (1990). *Commitment* was measured with a scale adapted from Bansal, Irving and Taylor (2004), one of the first studies to look more explicitly beyond transactional-type measures and considered the relational characteristics of buyer–seller interactions. Consistent with the present focus on social relationships, the scale developed by Bansal, Irving and Taylor (2004) was deemed appropriated for this study's context and goals because it accurately captures the emotional, socio-psychological aspects of commitment. *Share of business*, defined as the 'proportion of potential sales to a specific customer captured by a seller' (Palmatier et al. 2007a, p. 213), was measured by a single item, which was specifically adapted for each sample asking the representatives of corporate clients (in the HCC questionnaire)/hotels (in the TOH questionnaire) to indicate 'out of all the hotel services your company buys/sells, what percentage is represented by this hotel chain/tour operator?'

4.4. - Data Analysis

The model was tested on both the HCC and TOH samples with structural equations modeling, in which the two-step approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was adopted. The evaluation of the measurement model was carried out using factor analysis, both exploratory (EFA) and confirmatory (CFA). In a first instance, EFA was used as a procedure of measure purification, from a traditional (i.e., non-confirmatory) perspective,

which was subsequently complemented with a confirmatory assessment of unidimensionality, convergent validity, reliability, and discriminant validity. The testing of the structural model then served, not only as a confirmatory assessment of nomological validity, but also as a basis for cross-validation (on the TOH sample) and comparison purposes (i.e., HCC vs. TOH).

5. Results

SPSS and LISREL results suggest that the measurement model fulfils all standard requirements (see Appendix for a measurement summary). Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability values provide support for reliability. All of the items loaded highly and significantly onto the respective factor and correlated significantly with the other items pertaining to the same factor. This suggests support for convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Steenkamp & van Trijp, 1991). The correlations between the factors did not exceed 0.70, a sign of measure distinctness (Ping, 2004), thereby suggesting support for discriminant validity (Steenkamp and van Trijp, 1991). Residual analysis suggested no major threats to unidimensionality, given the nonsignificant number of absolute values above 2.58, and modification indices above 5.0 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

As illustrated by Table 1, LISREL goodness of fit indices regarding the structural model when tested on both samples meet or are in the close vicinity of thresholds indicating overall good fit.

Table 1 | Standardized coefficients and model fit: HCC vs. TOH.

Hypotheses	HCC (N=1002)	TOH (N=688)
Commitment	$R^2 = 0.297$	$R^2 = 0.158$
H$_1$: Relationship Quality → Commitment	0.321	0.163
H$_4$: Non-Coercive Power → Commitment	0.339	0.215
Relationship Quality	$R^2 = 0.157$	$R^2 = 0.054$
H$_3$: Non-Coercive Power → Relationship Quality	0.342	0.045 (NS)
Performance (Share of business)	$R^2 = 0.227$	$R^2 = 0.119$
H$_2$: Commitment → Performance	0.271	0.227
H$_5$: NCP → Performance	0.361	0.051
Fit Indices		
χ^2 (chi-square statistic)	789.3	806.4
RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation)	0.045	0.063
GFI (goodness of fit index)	0.97	0.95
AGFI (adjusted goodness of fit index)	0.96	0.94
CFI (comparative fit index)	0.97	0.95
NNFI (non-normed fit index)	0.97	0.95

Source: Author

The results indicate that in HCC all of the parameter estimates are significant at $p<.05$ or better, and the squared multiple correlations for the structural equations range from .157 to .297. In the TOH sample the association between NCP and RQ revealed to be nonsignificant, and the association between NCP and share of business is rather weak. The squared multiple correlations for the TOH structural equations are substantially lower. The majority of the TOH results also worse than those of the HCC sample, which suggests that relational efforts and NCP are relatively ineffective in enhancing the tour operator's share of the hotel's business. This should be a motive for further reflection of both researchers and practitioners.

In the HCC sample NCP stands out as the main driver of RQ and share of business (see the direct and indirect effects in Table 2). These results highlight the crucial role of NCP, at least in business relationships characterized by lower levels of power asymmetry in the suggested ideal habitat for RM and RQ. Indeed, NCP contributes strongly to the explanatory power of the model, through direct impacts on RQ, and both direct and indirect effects on commitment and share of business. Commitment, in turn, works not only as the mediator of the effects of RQ (comprised of satisfaction and trust) and NCP on share of business but also as an important, direct driver of share of business, right after NCP. This corroborates the relevant role of commitment, in line with previous works adopting a similar approach to modeling the impacts of RM on objective performance (e.g., Palmatier et al., 2009; Vieira et al. 2014).

Table 2 | Decomposition of structural effects: HCC vs. TOH.

	Direct		Indirect		Total	
Effect on SHARE OF BUSINESS	HCC	TOH	HCC	TOH	HCC	TOH
Commitment	.271	.227			.271	.227
Non-Coercive Power	.361	.051	.120	.063	.481	.114
Relationship Quality			.086	.041	.086	.041
Effect on RELATIONSHIP QUALITY						
Non-Coercive Power	.342				.342	
Effect on COMMITMENT						
Non-Coercive Power	.339	.215	.106		.445	.215
Relationship Quality	.321	.163			.321	.163

Source: Author.

The TOH sample results reveal relatively weaker associations among all of the constructs, and poorer results both in terms of the significance of the parameters and predictive power. A possible explanation might be that, in the perspective of the respondents, NCP and the relational constructs are not compatible with the profile of their counterpart (i.e., the tour operator) in a business relationship characterised by relatively high levels of power asymmetry. Indeed, considering the tour operators well documented history of power use (Buhalis 2000; Guo & He 2012), and looking at the questionnaire items themselves (see Appendix), it seems plausible that respondents would tend to attribute lower scores to a considerable number of questions, such as, for example, "Our client manager provides us with emotional support" (NCP), or "Our client manager puts our interests before his/her own" (RQ – Trust). The researchers also note - given its direct, relevant effects on the research - the relatively more difficult data collection process and the considerable lower response rate in the TOH survey. There is, however, an exception: the significant, non-negligible, direct impact of NCP on commitment. This might be explained by how important the relationship is in the respon-

dents' perspective. Indeed, notwithstanding the other party's use of coercive power, a high degree of relationship dependence may explain the maintenance of relevant commitment levels.

6. Conclusions

The aim of this research is, firstly, to test the effects of NCP, commitment, and RQ on objective performance in a B2B hospitality and tourism services from an interpersonal perspective; and, secondly, to compare two 'dyads' in the tourism system characterized by different levels of power asymmetry.

The model fits the data well, both when tested on the HCC and cross-validated on the TOH sample, which suggests that the selected constructs and the associations among them are appropriate to explain the phenomena under analysis. The paper examines issues which are important but not commonly investigated by hospitality researchers and provides interesting *theoretical contributions* through new insights, not only on the structural relationships amongst the constructs integrating the

model, but also on the relatively unexplored role of NCP. In line with the RM and RQ literature, our study corroborates the role of commitment and RQ as key relational constructs affecting objective performance. In addition, the analysis reveals NCP as the most influential construct in the HCC sample, while commitment is highlighted as the strongest driver of performance in the TOH sample. Results suggest that in a relatively power balanced business relationship (i.e., HCC in the present study) NCP assumes the role of the strongest determinant of commitment, RQ and share of business. Our results are also encouraging in terms of advances in empirical generalization given that in the HCC sample the percentage of the explained variance of share of business (22.7%) is considerable higher than in comparable studies, for example, 16.4% in Vieira et al. (2014), and 11% in Palmatier et al. (2009). On the contrary, the TOH sample exhibits poorer results in all of the comparison criteria, i.e., strength of associations, predictive power, percentage of significant parameters, and goodness of fit indices. This is a word of caution regarding the use of a relational approach as 'one-size-fits-all' tool. Previous research had suggested that RM and RQ may not be effective when business interactions are mainly based on tangible products, in direct exchanges, and consumer markets (e.g., Palmatier et al. 2006). The results of the present study add to the discussion by alerting that the use of NCP might be more effective in business relationships characterized by lower levels of power asymmetry. Or, in other words, the use of coercive power might not be compatible with RM and RQ efforts to improve performance in certain contexts. Another interesting finding was also the direct, relevant impact of NCP on commitment in the relatively unbalanced business relationship (i.e., the TOH 'dyad'), which may be attributable to what is referred to as *de facto* commitment (e.g., Goodman and Dion, 2001), as opposed to 'positive' commitment (referred to as commitment in this research). The subsistence of relevant commitment levels in

spite of the other party's coercive power attitude, may be explained by a high degree of relationship dependence (Goodman & Dion 2001), and seems to be coherent with the definition of power, which "refers to the ability of one individual or group to control or influence the behavior of another" or get someone else to do "something that it would not otherwise have done" (Hunt & Nevin 1974, p. 186). It is believed that, by devising and rigorously testing a model in an adequate context for RM, this investigation represents a valuable contribution to better understanding the effects of relational efforts on performance, with a particular focus on the role of non-coercive power. It is thus expected that these results will spark researchers interested in replicating and testing the model in other research settings, namely on different cultural environments.

This paper also provides important contributions as far as *managerial implications* are concerned. Relational efforts are viewed as crucial to performance given that 'most firms must leverage other organizations' capabilities and resources to compete effectively' (Palmatier et al., 2007b, p. 172). The role of commitment and RQ is widely acknowledged as pivotal in channeling the impact of RM efforts on performance, viewed as a means to achieving meaningful differentiation and competitive advantage. Managers need to bear in mind that the delivery of high quality goods and services is increasingly considered a mere minimum requirement for competitiveness rather than being the source of superior performance. This is particularly true in times of crisis, in which the issues around negotiation power may play a decisive role. In this context, managers need to identify the adequate tools to increase a firm's share of each customer's wallet, in order to achieve economies of scale and better financial performances. A better understanding of how commitment, RQ, power, and performance are interrelated might improve marketing managers' decisions on practical aspects. According to these findings, in a business rela-

tionship characterized by relatively high levels of power asymmetry, managers should regard commitment as the most influential factor in enhancing objective performance. The results suggest that, in such a case, commitment acts simultaneously as the mediator of the other impacts exerted on share of business, i.e., not only by RQ comprising of trust and satisfaction, but also by NCP. Results also suggest that, in a context of relatively low power asymmetry levels, the influence of relational constructs is still crucial, and NCP provides the strongest contribution to objective performance. It is useful to note that, according to theory and business practice, the producer/seller typically assumes the role of the power leader. However, as implied earlier, in the particular case of the business relationships between tour operators and hotels it is the distributor/buyer that takes the lead in terms of negotiation power and tries to capture the highest possible share of the hotel's sales. The hotel assumes the role of a seller in both 'dyads', but faces different levels of power asymmetry – and will need to act accordingly. Managers representing power leader organizations need to bear in mind that, even in a position of power superiority, a power misuse could be highly detrimental. Indeed, power is earned, as perceived by business partners, not imposed by fear and force (Hunt & Nevin 1974; Goodman & Dion 2001). If the less dependent party assumes a constructive leadership role, the more dependent is likely to be more willing to comply, adapt and cooperate, and the levels of mutual satisfaction and performance are likely to increase (Van Bruggen et al. 2005). Managers must also be aware that coercion may risk a power superiority scenario; and, on the contrary, a non-coercive approach may enhance a power advantage that has been legitimized by business partners (Benton & Maloni 2005). Indeed, in a healthy business relationship atmosphere, in which business partners establish, maintain, and enhance good quality interactions, the relatively less dependent party will tend to feel a lower need to adopt a coercive approach (Van Bruggen et al. 2005). The relational perspective implies, therefore, that organizations and their representatives evolve from a mere transactional approach to a counseling, committed approach. This, in turn, draws the attention to issues as much obvious and important as often neglected, such as carefully selecting, training, empowering, motivating and compensating relationship managers - the 'face' of the organization - so that they can perform effectively, particularly in terms of the influence of commitment, RQ and NCP on performance.

6.1. - Limitations and Suggestions for Future Investigation

While it is believed that this paper provides relevant insights on how RM key concepts and power affect objective performance, some limitations inherent to the research approach are acknowledged. Although this study considers the perspective of buyers (i.e., corporate clients in the HCC survey) and sellers (i.e., hotels in the TOH survey), it does it separately. The ideal scenario would be to collect and simultaneously analyze data from both sides of each dyad. This is strongly suggested for future works. Another important avenue for future research would be to explore additional determinants of objective performance, ideally reflecting other levels at which relationships seem to develop (e.g., structural and economical). Given that relationships are intrinsically dynamic, replicating this study from a longitudinal approach also constitutes an important opportunity for future investigation.

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Appendix: Questionnaire Items and Measurement Summary.

Constructs and their dimensions (Cronbach's alpha/Composite reliability)	Questionnaire items (1 - Strongly disagree; … ; 7 – Strongly agree)	Factor Loadings (t-value)	
Non-Coercive Power	*Adapted from Goodman and Dion (2001)*	**HCC**	**TOH**
(**HCC**: .89/.88)	Our client manager provides us with technical assistance	.89*	.87*
(**TOH**: .87/.85)	Our client manager provides us with emotional support	.85 (21.9)	.83 (23.4)
	Our client manager provides us with advertising support	.86 (22.3)	.85 (22.1)
	Our client manager provides us with training to our personal	.79 (21.5)	.80 (24.1)
Commitment	*Adapted from Bansal et al. (2004)*		
(**HCC**: .91/.89)	Even if it were to our advantage, it wouldn't feel right to leave our client manager now	.85*	.86*
(**TOH**: .92/.87)	RC We do not feel 'emotionally attached' to our client manager	.84 (21.9)	.81 (23.4)
	This client manager deserves our loyalty	.87 (22.3)	.85 (22.1)
	We wouldn't leave this client manager now because we have a sense of obligation to him	.81 (27.3)	.82 (28.5)
	RC We do not feel like 'part of the family' with our client manager	.84 (28.1)	.83 (29.3)
	RC We do not feel a strong sense of 'belonging' to our client manager	.78 (32.3)	.76 (34.3)
Relationship Quality - Trust	*Adapted from Crosby et al. (1990)*		
(**HCC**: .95/.91)	Our client manager can be relied upon to keep	.83*	.81*

	his/her promises		
(**TOH**: .93/.89)	RC There are times when we find our client manager to be a bit insincere	.83 (23.9)	.80 (33.1)
	RC We find it necessary to be cautious in dealing with our client manager	.88 (22.7)	.85 (29.1)
	Our client manager is trustworthy	.79 (29.3)	.77 (32.4)
	Our client manager puts our interests before his/her own	.83 (28.1)	.81 (29.3)
	RC Our client manager is capable of bending facts to create the impression he/she wants.	.78 (29.7)	.76 (31.3)
	RC We suspect that our client manager has withheld pieces of information that might have affected our decision-making	.89 (37.1)	.82 (39.2)
Relationship Quality - Satisfaction	*Adapted from Crosby et al. (1990)*		
(**HCC**: .82/.78)	We are satisfied with the performance of our client manager	.88*	.85*
(**TOH**: .81/.79)	We are pleased with the performance of our client manager	.83 (23.8)	.81 (27.3)
	We have a favorable opinion on our client manager's performance	.84 (25.2)	.83 (24.1)

Source: Author; HCC: Hotel-Corporate Client sample; TOH: Tour Operator-Hotel sample; RC: Reverse coded; *: Initial loading was fixed.