
RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF ORGANIZATION-PUBLIC RELATIONSHIP MEASUREMENT AND LINKAGES AMONG RELATIONSHIP INDICATORS ON A MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION

By Eyun-Jung Ki and Linda Childers Hon

This research was designed to develop reliable and valid measures of the outcomes of quality relationships. Hon and J. E. Grunig's extended scales for four relationship dimensions were tested using multiple-item measurement procedures as suggested. The constructed measures were refined further using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Causal linkages among relationship quality indicators were also tested. The developed measures and the model can be used to better understand a public's perceptions of its relationship with an organization, thus helping organizations better understand how to cultivate and sustain these relationships.



The concept of organization-public relationships (OPR) has been a primary focus of research in public relations, and numerous scholars have devoted their studies to the topic.¹ During the last decade, relationship theory has been the second most frequently used perspective in public relations scholarship.² Ledingham suggested that relationship management is a general theory for public relations based on Littlejohn's criteria—usefulness, parsimony, elegance, and empirical support—and has offered a useful framework for the study, teaching, and practice of public relations.³

Due to the importance of the OPR perspective, scholars have made an effort to develop measures or dimensions of OPR.⁴ Yet scales differ from study to study, and only a handful of studies has attempted to measure the reliability and validity of the proposed scales.⁵ The extant studies on organization-public relationship measurement are insufficient to standardize scales that will prove useful to scholars and practitioners. To develop standardized measurement scales that are reliable and valid, additional replication is needed.

In this study, Hon and J. E. Grunig's OPR measures are applied in the context of a membership organization.⁶ This is one of the first stud-

Eyun-Jung Ki is an assistant professor, Department of Advertising and Public Relations, University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, and Linda Childers Hon is senior associate dean and professor, College of Journalism and Communications, University of Florida. The authors would like to thank Florida Farm Bureau for the mail survey funding for this research.

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ies to employ the extended version of their relationship outcome scales and the first study to do so in a member relations setting.⁷ J.E. Grunig noted the importance of studying OPRs in a trade or professional association, stating that this is one of the organizational types yet to be examined by relationship research in public relations.⁸

Although many scholars and practitioners agree on the importance of key relationship quality outcomes, relevant questions about the links between these indicators have not been addressed extensively. After examining relationship theory in other disciplines, some scholars in public relations have suggested that some of the relationship indicators actually precede others.⁹ For instance, these researchers have proposed that satisfaction might be an antecedent of trust and trust a predictor of commitment. Thus, this study also explores the links among different relationship quality outcomes.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to (1) explicate and measure the important concept of outcomes of quality organization-public relationships and (2) test linkages among relationship quality indicators. This research will contribute to the field of public relations in several ways. Although this study's primary intent is to refine measurement, it is important to note that theory in public relations can only develop through the collection of empirical data that allows for robust measurement. So, in effect, every study that improves measurement of theoretically important concepts contributes to theory development implicitly.

Broom made this point well when discussing the rigorous process of concept explication and theory development that characterized his lifetime program of research on practitioner roles.¹⁰ He provided a convincing case for the value of theory refinement in public relations through data-based research replicated over time as opposed to a body of knowledge characterized by one-shot studies and conceptual pieces bereft of empirical data.

As previously suggested by scholars and several relational marketing studies,¹¹ this study also empirically determines the sequential order among relationship quality dimensions—satisfaction, trust, and commitment.¹² Identifying connections among relationship indicators can provide a more sophisticated framework for measuring organization-public relationships and provide public relations professionals with more practical information about the process of relationship building and cultivation over time.

Literature Review

To develop measures for assessing the organization-public relationship, public relations scholars have adopted perspectives from other disciplines. Researchers have drawn from studies of interpersonal and interorganizational relationships, psychology, psychotherapy, and relationship marketing.¹³

Literature in interpersonal communication has suggested there are five attributes of a relationship: (1) dynamic versus static; (2) open versus closed; (3) the degree to which both the organization and the public are satisfied with the relationship; (4) power distribution in the relationship; and (5) mutual understanding, agreement, and consensus.¹⁴ Openness,

trust, involvement, investment, and commitment have been suggested as the dimensions of an organization-public relationship.¹⁵ In a later study, Ledingham and Bruning researched the relationship dimensions upon which positive organization-public relationships are initiated, developed, and maintained. They discovered that there were five relationship dimensions—trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment—different among three types of publics—stayers, leavers, and undecideds. The results of the study determined that relationship dimensions impact a public's perceptions of overall satisfaction with the organization, and they can be more influential in predicting customer behavior than price or product features.¹⁶

Measurement indices were developed to evaluate the success of relationship building efforts after reviewing literature on interpersonal relationships and psychology.¹⁷ It was concluded that the organization's long-term relationships with its key publics could be evaluated by the following four indicators of relationship quality: control mutuality, satisfaction, trust, and commitment.¹⁸ Several scholars have used Hon and J. E. Grunig's measurement scales and confirmed their reliability and validity.¹⁹ The indices also have been applied to other countries' organization-public relationships including Taiwan²⁰ and South Korea²¹ and were found to be reliable and valid.

Relationship Quality Outcome Indicators. Hon and J.E. Grunig's relationship indicators were chosen for this study for several reasons. First, these variables have been considered key relational features and have appeared as important measures for diverse disciplines including interpersonal communication, interorganizational relationships, and relationship marketing: control mutuality,²² satisfaction,²³ trust,²⁴ and commitment.²⁵ Additionally, three of the indicators—satisfaction, trust, and commitment—have been shown to be critical relationship indicators even in cross-cultural settings. These three key relational dimensions have been termed a global measure for organization-public relationships.²⁶ Lastly, many public relations scholars have argued that these four relational features typically represent the essence of organization-public relationships.²⁷ A growing body of empirical data has shored up that assertion.²⁸

Control Mutuality. Control mutuality is related to the decision making process and the extent to which the opinion of each party is reflected in the final decision. The sense of control mutuality between the parties involved in a relationship is significant to interdependence and relational stability.²⁹ Therefore, control mutuality could constructively lead the opposing public to search for creative and mutually beneficial solutions or to seek assistance from a third party to resolve a conflict. For a stable and positive relationship, control mutuality among the parties should exist to some degree.

The concept of control mutuality is similar to other concepts proposed as being essential to positive relationships: mutual legitimacy,³⁰ reciprocity,³¹ empowerment,³² and power distribution.³³ Control mutuality was found to be one of the two major variables mediating the effects of public relations strategies on conflict resolution (the

other is trust).³⁴ It was proposed that symmetrical, or two-way, communication is an antecedent of control mutuality in the relationship.³⁵ Thus, the concept of control mutuality is pertinent to excellent public relations practices.

This study adopts the conceptualization of Hon and J. E. Grunig.³⁶ They defined control mutuality as "the degree to which parties agree on who has the rightful power to influence one another."³⁷ They acknowledged that some degree of power imbalance might naturally exist. However, in a stable relationship between publics and an organization, both parties need some extent of control over the other.³⁸

Satisfaction. Although researchers in relationship studies have acknowledged that satisfaction is a complex concept to measure, it is a commonly accepted indicator for evaluating relationships.³⁹ Satisfaction occurs when one party perceives that the other behaves consistent with expectations for maintaining a positive relationship.⁴⁰ From a social exchange perspective, satisfaction often increases with rewards received and decreases with costs incurred by the relationship.⁴¹ Satisfaction is typically calculated by the extent to which the benefits of the relationship exceed the expectations that both parties have and a satisfying relationship produces more benefits than costs. In sum, satisfaction is based on the extent of the discrepancy between the expectations in a relationship and what is actually experienced. Adopting Hon and J. E. Grunig's conceptualization, this study defines satisfaction as "the extent to which each party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced."⁴²

Trust. During the last few decades, several disciplines, including interpersonal communication, organizational communication, and relational marketing, have emphasized that trust is one of the main constructs used to measure a successful relationship between parties. The classic view of trust espoused by Rotter is "a generalized expectancy held by an individual that the word of another can be relied on."⁴³ As a parallel with the classic view of trust, it was defined as "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence."⁴⁴ One of the commonly adopted definitions of trust in relational marketing is that it "exist(s) when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity."⁴⁵

Trust also has been revealed as one of the primary indicators of relationship quality in organization-public relationships.⁴⁶ In theories of economics and of strategic management, trust of publics such as employees, stockholders, customers, media, governments, and communities allows organizations to exist.⁴⁷ Without trust, employees may leave an organization, customers are unlikely to purchase products or services the organization provides, the media are more likely to frame stories about the organization in a negative light, and government regulatory oversight may increase. Trust was conceptualized as "one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party."⁴⁸ In summary, trust is a belief by publics that an organization is reliable, honest, and stands by its words as well as accomplishes its promised obligations. Using Hon and J. E. Grunig's definition of trust, this research defines trust

as “the willingness to rely on the other party in whom one has confidence.”⁴⁹

Commitment. Commitment has been a focal concept in social exchange literature,⁵⁰ organization and buyer behavior,⁵¹ and relational marketing.⁵² In the organizational behavioral literature, commitment has been shown to lead to such significant outcomes as decreased turnover,⁵³ higher motivation,⁵⁴ increased organizational citizenship behaviors,⁵⁵ and job equity.⁵⁶

In public relations scholarship, commitment is also a central concept for organization-public relationships and some scholars have proposed definitions. Commitment was conceptualized as “the extent to which each party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote.”⁵⁷ Commitment has two underlying dimensions—continuance and affective.⁵⁸ Continuance commitment is “commitment to continue a certain line of action.”⁵⁹ The other view of commitment, affective commitment, is “an emotional orientation,” which indicates a psychological attachment between people and organizations.⁶⁰ Stressing corporate social responsibility as evidence of commitment, commitment was defined as “the organization being committed to the welfare of the community.”⁶¹

This study defines commitment as “the belief that an ongoing relationship with the other party is important as to warrant efforts at maintaining it.” This means that the committed party believes the relationship is worth working on to ensure that it endures.

The previous explication of this study’s focal concepts leads to our first research question:

RQ1: How can the key dimensions of relationship quality be measured reliably and validly?

Linkages among the Relational Dimensions. Although the significance of the key relationship quality outcomes—control mutuality, satisfaction, trust, and commitment—has been well acknowledged in the organization-public relationship literature, important theoretical questions concerning the interrelationships among these outcomes have yet to be addressed extensively. Some scholars have argued that some of the relationship indicators are actually antecedents of others.⁶² Drawing from relationship theory in other disciplines, these scholars have suggested that satisfaction might be a predictor of trust and that trust is an antecedent of commitment. One of the objectives of this study is to explore the possible longitudinal sequence of the key relationship quality indicators in organization-public relationships. Therefore,

RQ2: How do relationship quality indicators affect each other?

Satisfaction and Trust. Relationship studies in marketing have found that satisfaction is an important predictor of trust.⁶³ The parties

gain a positive experience (satisfaction) about the relationship as time goes by and they learn to trust each other. If members of a public have already decided that an organization is able and willing to fulfill their needs and demands, and the organization is reliable and predictable, then the public is satisfied and will be likely to trust the organization.

Based on the literature, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H1: The degree of satisfaction will positively influence the degree of trust.

Trust and Commitment. Diverse disciplines investigating relationships have found that trust has a direct positive impact on commitment or is even a major determinant of commitment.⁶⁴ For example, the business-to-business relationship literature has shown that when a firm trusts its supplier, the firm is more committed to staying in the relationship.⁶⁵ International research on business relationships has discovered that trust significantly impacts commitment.⁶⁶ Also, scholarship on supply chain relationships found that trust is a critical factor for fostering commitment.⁶⁷ Trust has even been called an essential predictor of commitment.⁶⁸ People are less likely to be committed to a relationship if trust is not developed because commitment involves vulnerability and sacrifice. As Morgan and Hunt have suggested, parties tend to seek only trustworthy partners because commitment encompasses vulnerability.⁶⁹

If an organization is not perceived to be honest and trustworthy, a public cannot depend on the organization and thus will not commit to the relationship. Applying this logic to organization-public relationships:

H2: The degree of trust will positively influence the degree of commitment.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed hypotheses.

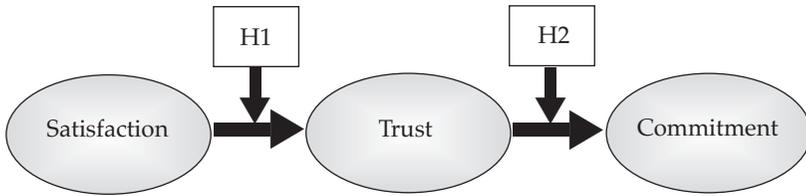
Method

The OPR between a State⁷⁰ Farm Bureau (SFB hereafter) and members of the organization was measured. The SFB is the largest agricultural organization in the state and an independent, non-governmental, and voluntary organization which is representative of its members, who are primarily farmers and ranch families.⁷¹ The relationship with members is vital to the organization because all of the organization's activities are based on its interactions with its members. More important, the life and power of the organization are dependent on its membership. The best way for this kind of organization to improve its power and influence is to increase its number of members, which in turn increases the sheer force of its membership.⁷² Therefore, building a quality relationship with its members is important to the organization.

The population of this study is composed of current members of SFB, which has a membership of over 140,000.⁷³ These members can provide meaningful evaluations about the quality of their relationships with SFB since it is obvious that the members are a key public and target for SFB's relationship building efforts.

FIGURE 1

Proposed Model for Linkages among Relationship Quality Outcomes



To ascertain the efficacy of the questionnaire items, a one-time pilot test was administered online from April 21 to April 29, 2006, with one e-mail reminder. An e-mail requesting feedback about the questionnaire was sent to 140 current members of SFB. Out of 124 valid addresses, 28 members responded to the pilot test for a response rate of 23%. Based on this feedback, several minor changes in wording were made.

To measure relationship quality outcomes and to test the proposed hypotheses, a statewide mail survey was conducted using three waves of mailing to increase response rates. A brief pre-notice postcard was sent to each respondent a few days prior to sending the main questionnaire. In the second mailing, each of the 2,100 randomly selected individuals received a package containing a cover letter, the survey questionnaire, and a return envelope with paid postage. As the last wave, a follow-up reminder was mailed one week after the mail package was sent. Among the 2,100 members, a total of 553 responded to the survey. Among these 553 surveys returned, 493 were completed, 9 were incomplete, 26 were refused and returned by the respondents, and 25 failed to deliver. Therefore, the response rate was 24.2%.⁷⁴

The study defines relationship quality as “factors that determine or characterize successful relationships between an organization and its strategic publics.” The relationship items were measured using a 9-point Likert scale. The responses of the scale ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Neutral (5) and Strongly Agree (9) with no verbal labels for scale points 2 through 4 and 6 through 8. The items were presented in random order. Respondents were instructed to evaluate their view of the quality of members’ relationship with SFB.

Cronbach’s alpha for the initial measures was as follows: control mutuality .93, satisfaction .92, trust .90, and commitment .88. All of the initial measures met the acceptable criteria.⁷⁵ The first three indicators—control mutuality, satisfaction, and trust—were considered to have “excellent” reliability and the other—commitment—to have “very good” reliability.⁷⁶

Several demographic questions including gender, age, level of education, ethnicity, and the number of years as a member were included. Among the 429 respondents, 68% are male and 32% are female. When compared to the population, according to the 2002 *Census of*

TABLE 1
Goodness-of-Fit Indices: Measurement Model

| Models Fit | Criteria | Measurement Model |
|--|----------|-------------------|
| Chi-square/(df) | ≤5 | 11.23 |
| Comparative Fit Index (CFI) | ≥.90 | .99 |
| Normed Fit Index (NFI) | ≥.90 | .99 |
| Root Mean Squared Error Residual (RMSEA) | ≤.08 | .17 |

Agriculture State Profile,⁷⁷ the sample skewed toward male individuals. The average age is 64, which is older than the average age in the population ($M=57$). Level of respondent education is as follows: some schooling (7%), a high school diploma (29%), some college (27%), college degree (19%), and a graduate degree (18%).⁷⁸ The sample's ethnicity is white/Caucasian (97%), Native Americans (2%), Latino/Hispanic and African American (2%). These figures are accurate reflections of the distribution of ethnicity in the population. The average number of years that participants had been a member of the organization was twenty-five years. This long timeframe suggests that respondents can give meaningful evaluations about the quality of the relationship they have with the organization.

To refine the measures of relationship quality, both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis were employed. EFA was used to establish a preliminary version of measures by identifying items with low factor loadings and checking whether each measurement item loaded on its intended factor. The major goal of this step was to evaluate the dimensionality and the appropriateness of the measurement variables for each latent variable. Measurement items were deleted if they met any of the following three conditions: (1) loading most highly on a factor other than the one it was intended to tap, (2) containing opposite signs of factor loading coefficients among other items in the intended factor, or (3) having a loading of less than .65 on the latent variable which an item was designed to help measure. After deleting those measurement items, CFA was used to confirm the theoretical factor structure. CFA helps to identify which variables define which factor by testing for construct validity (reliability between items) and discriminant validity (difference between factors).

In order to test if the proposed causal linkages fit the data, this study used structural equation modeling (SEM), a multivariate technique combining aspects of multiple regression and factor analysis, to simultaneously estimate a series of interrelated relationships. Kaplan has described SEM as "a melding of factor analysis and path analysis into one comprehensive statistical methodology."⁷⁹

To evaluate the degree to which the proposed models, including the measurement model and causal linkages among relationship quality indicators, fit the observed data, this study used the criteria shown in Table 1. One of the most widely used model estimators is maximum likelihood (ML).⁸⁰ ML is appropriate to use for large samples because it assumes

TABLE 2
Summary Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

| <i>Dimension</i> | <i># of items</i> | <i>Reliability (Cronbach α)</i> | <i>Items</i> | <i>Factor Loadings</i> |
|-------------------|-------------------|---|--------------|------------------------|
| Control Mutuality | 8 | .93 | Q. 4 | .89 |
| | | | Q. 5 | .84 |
| | | | Q. 9 | .84 |
| | | | Q.12 | .82 |
| | | | Q.16 | .81 |
| | | | Q.21 | .78 |
| | | | Q.24 | .77 |
| | | | Q.28 | .76 |
| Satisfaction | 8 | .92 | Q. 7 | .84 |
| | | | Q. 11 | .83 |
| | | | Q. 13 | .83 |
| | | | Q. 15 | .82 |
| | | | Q. 19 | .78 |
| | | | Q. 26 | .76 |
| | | | Q. 27 | .75 |
| | | | Q. 31 | .73 |
| Trust | 7 | .93 | Q. 2 | .86 |
| | | | Q. 6 | .86 |
| | | | Q. 10 | .86 |
| | | | Q. 14 | .85 |
| | | | Q. 17 | .85 |
| | | | Q. 25 | .79 |
| | | | Q. 29 | .77 |
| Commitment | 5 | .90 | Q. 1 | .85 |
| | | | Q. 3 | .83 |
| | | | Q. 18 | .78 |
| | | | Q. 20 | .83 |
| | | | Q. 30 | .77 |

normality of distribution, which leads to normal error distribution. In other words, with a large sample size, ML is robust to deviation from normal distribution.⁸¹

First, the χ^2 goodness of fit statistic is used as an index of model adequacy with a nonsignificant value indicating a good fit to the data. Although this may seem counterintuitive, the nonsignificant value means that the patterns in the observed data do not differ significantly from the relationships proposed by the theoretical model. Instead of using the value of χ^2 itself, however, this study used the ratio of χ^2 to the degree of freedom because χ^2 is quite sensitive to sample size.⁸² A value less than five of the ratio generally indicates a good fit.⁸³ Other common fit indices indicating how well the specified model explains the observed data are as follows: comparative fit index (CFI), goodness of fit index (GFI), normed fit index (NFI), root mean squared residual approximation (RMSEA), and root mean squared residual (RMR). For CFI, GFI, and NFI, values range from 0 to 1.00, with higher values indicating

TABLE 3

Path Model of the Relationship among Relationship Quality Outcome Indicators

| Path | Standardized Coefficient | Standardized Error | Conclusion |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| H1: Satisfaction → Trust | .93*** | .02 | Supported |
| H2: Trust → Commitment | .90*** | .02 | Supported |

Note: *** $p < .001$

better fit; .90 and above is commonly regarded as a good fit. RMSEA values close to .08 or less typically indicate good fit.⁸⁴ RMR should be equal to or smaller than .05. Also, regression coefficients for the hypothesized structural relations also were reported with their statistical significance. Significant alpha levels for all tests are .05.

Results

Exploratory Factor Analysis. The four latent variables with multiple items (eight items for control mutuality, eight items for satisfaction, eight items for trust, and seven items for commitment) were analyzed. EFA reduced thirty-one items into twenty-eight items, consisting of eight items for control mutuality, eight items for satisfaction, seven items for trust, and five items for commitment. The results illustrated that all four dimensions are viable constructs for measuring relationship quality outcomes. Cronbach's alpha after deleting the items with low factor loadings were as follows: .93 for the eight-item control mutuality, .92 for the eight-item satisfaction, .93 for the seven-item trust, and .90 for the five-item commitment. All of these meet the criterion of "excellent" internal consistency.⁸⁵ Table 2 shows factor loadings of each item on the intended factor and reliability.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis. As the next step, CFA was performed to evaluate the adequacy of the factor structure for the relationship quality dimensions that had been constructed using AMOS 6.0. CFA confirms if the measurement model fits the given data and is appropriate to use for two main reasons. First, CFA is appropriate for analyzing structural validity, which is determined by identifying questions such as: (1) the number of factors (i.e., latent variables) that underlie responses to items on a test, (2) the associations among those factors, and (3) the contribution of the factors to the items of the test.⁸⁶ Results of this analysis help answer the primary research question for this study. Second, CFA offers a statistical test of the extent to which a proposed measurement model fits observed, empirically collected data.⁸⁷ More important, CFA is more appropriate for the goal of this study than EFA because the hypothesized factor structure was deductively established. In other words, the structure was developed based on existing theories and research literature.

The CFA measurement model, a four-factor model with twenty-eight items, shows that all of the indicators in the relationship quality measurement model had higher than .70 standardized loadings. As

TABLE 4

Fit Measures of the Relationship among Relationship Quality Outcome Indicators

| Fit Index | Criteria | Fit Statistics |
|--|----------|-------------------------------|
| Chi-square | >.05 | 26.97 ($p < .001$; $df=1$) |
| Chi-square/df | <5 | 26.97 |
| Comparative Fit Index (CFI) | >.90 | .98 |
| Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) | >.90 | .95 |
| Normed Fit Index (NFI) | >.90 | .98 |
| Root Mean Squared Error Residual (RMSEA) | <.08 | .27 |
| Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) | <.05 | .02 |

shown in Table 1, the measurement model generally indicated appropriate model fits with the exception of RMSEA. Although chi-square and the ratio of chi-square/degree of freedom, which are sensitive to sample size, were not satisfactory, other more important fit indices demonstrated the measurement model to be desirable (GFI=.95, CFI=.99 and NFI =.99). Therefore, it can be said that the measures of the relationship quality displayed adequate construct reliability and validity.

Path Analysis. The causal relationship among relationship quality outcome indicators was tested using path analysis with maximum likelihood estimation. In this model testing, satisfaction is an exogenous variable, and trust and commitment are endogenous variables. Table 3 shows the results of a path analysis with maximum likelihood estimation for the linkages among the three relationship indicators—satisfaction, trust, and commitment. Both of the hypotheses were supported. For **H1**, satisfaction was found to be a significant predictor of trust ($\beta = .92, p < .001$). Also, trust significantly affected commitment ($\beta = .90, p < .001$), as predicted by **H2**. Table 4 shows that the important fit indices such as CFI, GFI, NFI, and RMR are at levels that indicate an adequate model fit. Although a couple of fit indices (e.g., ratio of chi-square/degrees of freedom, RMSEA) were not satisfactory, it can be said that the proposed model overall fits the data adequately according to the other fit indices.

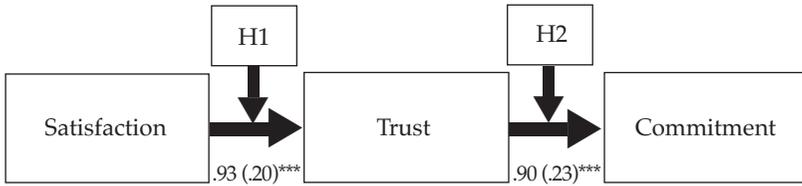
After the path analysis, a partial correlation between satisfaction and commitment with trust controlled and a zero-order correlation were computed. The value of the partial correlation between satisfaction and commitment is .30 and the zero-order correlation between satisfaction and commitment was .88.

Measures of Relationship Quality Outcomes. A primary purpose of this research was to develop reliable and valid measures of the outcomes of quality relationships. Hon and J. E. Grunig’s extended version of four relationship dimensions was tested using multiple-item measurement procedures suggested by Spector.⁸⁸ The constructed measures were refined further using factor analysis—EFA and CFA. Factor analysis suggested including twenty-eight items in the final relationship quality scales, consisting of eight items for control mutuality, eight

**Discussion
and
Conclusion**

FIGURE 2

Path Model of the Relationship among Relationship Quality Indicators



Note: The solid lines indicate significant paths. The numbers outside the parentheses indicate standardized coefficients and those in parentheses indicate standardized errors. *** $p < .001$

items for satisfaction, seven items for trust, and five items for commitment. Confirmatory factor analyses were used to evaluate the hypothesized factor structure and showed that the dimensions of relationship quality had reliable and valid factor structures. The final measurement items are provided in Table 5.

This study also asked how relationship quality measures affect each other. The first hypothesis posited that degree of satisfaction among members of a public will positively affect the degree of members' trust about an organization, and the second asserted that the degree of trust will positively influence a public's commitment toward an organization. Both hypotheses were supported in this study, as satisfaction was demonstrated to be a strong and positive predictor of trust and trust predicted commitment. Additionally, the outcome of partial correlations with trust controlled showed that there is a significant but weak direct effect between satisfaction and commitment. This additional analysis provides further support for the model proposed in this study. Members' perception of commitment is more likely produced by trust rather than satisfaction. Therefore, the influential order of relationship indicators is as follows: satisfaction => trust => commitment (see Figure 2).

Theoretical and Managerial Implications. Like several previous studies, this study attempted to refine measures for assessing relationship quality.⁸⁹ These measures achieved desirable levels of reliability and validity and can be used to better understand a public's perceptions of its relationship with an organization, thus helping organizations better understand how to cultivate and sustain these relationships.

The instrument refined here can be used to improve program management in public relations. For example, if control mutuality is found to be an essential relationship dimension but scores for its measurement items are low, an organization would know to consider ways of improving its publics' involvement in the organizational decision making processes.

The empirically tested sequential order of satisfaction, trust, and commitment will aid organizations seeking to improve relationships with their target publics. The most effective and efficient way to ensure publics of an organization's honesty, competence, and benevolence during the initial stages of the relationship is to provide publics with positive experiences and a sense of satisfaction. If the members of a public know that an

TABLE 5*Final Measurement Items of Relationship Quality Outcomes***Control Mutuality**

- Q. 4. ____ believes the opinions of members are legitimate.
Q. 5. ____ neglects members. [R]
Q. 9. When dealing with members, ____ has a tendency to throw its weight around. [R]
Q. 12. ____ really listens to what members have to say.
Q. 16. ____ seems to ignore members' opinions in the decisions that affect members. [R]
Q. 21. When members interact with ____, members feel that they have some sense of control.
Q. 24. ____ cooperates with members.
Q. 28. Members have influence with the decision makers at ____.

Satisfaction

- Q. 7. Both ____ and members benefit from their relationship.
Q. 11. Members are dissatisfied with their interaction with _____. [R]
Q. 13. Members are happy with _____.
Q. 15. Generally speaking, members are unhappy with the relationship ____ has established with them. [R]
Q. 19. Members enjoy dealing with _____.
Q. 26. ____ fails to satisfy members' needs. [R]
Q. 27. Members feel they are important to _____.
Q. 31. In general, nothing of value has been accomplished by ____ for members. [R]

Trust

- Q. 2. ____ treats members fairly and justly.
Q. 6. Whenever ____ makes an important decision, members know ____ will consider the decision's impact on members.
Q. 10. ____ can be relied on to keep its promises to members.
Q. 14. ____ takes the opinions of members into account when making decisions.
Q. 17. Members feel very confident about ____ abilities.
Q. 25. Sound principles guide ____'s behavior.
Q. 29. ____ misleads members. [R]

Commitment

- Q. 1. ____ is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to members.
Q. 8. ____ wants to maintain a positive relationship with members.
Q. 18. Compared to other farm organizations, members value their relationship with ____ the most.
Q. 20. Members would rather work with ____ than without it.
Q. 30. Members feel a sense of loyalty to ____.

Note: The blanks replace the name of the organization. [R] indicates reverse-coding.

organization is able and willing to satisfy their needs and provide reliable and predictable service, publics are more likely to establish trust in organization-public relationships. Knowing the importance of satisfaction for establishing a relationship in the initial stages guides public relations practitioners toward communication strategies and tactics designed to ensure that publics feel favorably toward the organization and believe that the benefits of their relationship with the organization outweigh the costs.

As Hrebiniak claimed, trust is an essential factor in every relationship because the parties involved are more likely to commit themselves to such relationships.⁹⁰ Once trust is developed in the intermediate

stage of relationship building, organizations must devote their public relations programs to establishing public commitment in the relationship. Public relations programs that seek to establish commitment should encourage long-term relationships once public perceptions of trust are developed.⁹¹

Limitations and Future Research. Although this study is original and compelling in several ways, it has its limitations that nonetheless can help guide future research endeavors. First, this study collected data from a single organization. Although random sampling was used, the findings in this study must be cautiously applied to other types of organization-public relationships because each organization faces different situations. In order to improve external validity of the measures for organization-public relationship quality, independent studies must apply the measures and the model to diverse types of organizations such as for-profit, non-profit, and multinational companies. Secondly, the relationship perspective assumes a two-way model of public relations so that evaluating both sides' perceptions of the relationship and determining the effects of the relationship on both parties is essential.⁹² This study evaluated only one side of the relationship, the public side. Therefore, future research might assess the organization's perception of its relationship with various publics and evaluate whether and how perceptions among organizational staff are different from publics' perceptions. By doing this, an organization can evaluate gaps in the way management and publics perceive the relationship. As Lindenmann indicated, this kind of gap analysis can provide strategies for relationship improvement.⁹³ Doing so should be any organization's primary public relations goal. Last, this study did not consider the influence of demographic variables on the proposed model. Therefore, future research should test whether relationship quality varies by demographics and, if so, how these differences affect the theoretical models validated here.

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