

## Interpersonal Relationship Marketing: A Dyadic Study of Firm's Customer Orientation and Customer Commitment

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### Abstract

*This research evaluates relationship among firm's customer orientations, customer gratitude, customer intimacy, and customer commitment. Interpersonal relationship marketing model and theory of interpersonal attraction are applied to develop conceptual model. Data is collected from firm and customer dyads. The data is collected from four sectors i.e. food, financial, telecommunication, and apparel. Smart\_PLS is applied to test dyadic data set. The results provide support for proposed model and hypotheses are supported. Results show that firm's customer orientation positively impact customer gratitude and customer intimacy. Customer gratitude and customer intimacy also positively impact the customer commitment. Furthermore, customer gratitude and customer intimacy mediates between customer orientation and customer commitment. Results provide support for interpersonal relationship marketing philosophy which holds that firms make efforts to generate customers' emotions which are repaid in form of customer commitment.*

**Keywords:** customer orientation, customer gratitude, intimacy, commitment, dyadic data, interpersonal relationship

### Introduction

Customer relationships are essential to get competitive advantage (Grönroos, 2017). Therefore, organizations are striving hard to build and maintain successful customer relationships (Storbacka & Lehtinen 2001). Relationship marketing is marked as vital business strategy for customers' relationship construction. Successful customer relationship efforts facilitate organization to achieve their objective e.g., business growth, sales, and extend customer base (Buttle & Maklan, 2015; Debnath, Datta & Mukhopadhyay, 2016). Moreover, customers' relationships with organizations facilitate customers' decision making and reduce transaction cost (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006; Finch, O'Reilly, Hillenbrand, & Abeza, 2015).

Organization and customers are active participants in business to customer (B2C) relationship (Palmatier et al., 2006; Verma, Sharma, & Sheth, 2016). Both business and customer look for variant set of benefits in B2C relationship (Arlı, Bauerb, & Palmatier, 2018). Businesses look for close customer association and favorable decisions (Ogilvie, Agnihotri, Rapp, & Trainor, 2018). Customers seek value, easy decision making, customization and time saving (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Buttle & Maklan, 2015; Arlı, Bauerb, & Palmatier, 2018).

In this research, it is conceptualized that customer commitment is results of firm's customer orientation, customer gratitude and customer intimacy. Deshpandé, Farley and Webster (1993) define customer orientation as firm's philosophy and strategy to serve its customers. It is belief that puts customers first and safeguards their interests. Through this business philosophy firms can get successful customer relationships. Customer orientation builds customer gratitude and customer intimacy. Gratitude means being thankful (Tunney &

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Ferguson, 2017); **whereas**, customer gratitude means emotional realization by customers that the firm's make efforts to serve (Swickert, Bailey, Hittner, Spector, Benson-Townsend, & Silver, 2018). Customer having gratitude for firm creates emotional ties between firm and customer that foster sustainable B2C relationship. Therefore, Jin, Line, and Yoon (2018) highlighted the customer gratitude as key mediating variable in B2C relationship formation. Moreover, customer gratitude creates customer debt which is paid in form customer commitment to specific firm and endures long-term B2C relationship (Palmatier, 2008). Feelings of closeness and connectedness are marked as intimacy (Sternberg, 1986). Deduced from intimacy, customer intimacy refers to higher level of firm and customer understanding and attitudinal congruence between (buying and seller) partners. Customer intimacy play critical role to overcome early stage uncertainty of relationship formation between firm and customer. It is also crucial for successful B2C relationship and positively influences customer commitment and play significant mediating role (between firm's efforts and customer commitment). Finally, customer intimacy research is gaining popularity in interpersonal marketing literature (Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016).

Theoretically interpersonal relationship marketing model (Palmatier, 2008) and theory of interpersonal attraction (Perlman & Fehr, 1986) are applied to develop conceptual model of this research. Based on theoretical backdrop, it is contend that firm's customer orientation triggers customer affective state which includes customer gratitude and customer intimacy. These triggers also have customer perception of relational effect (Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016). The result of aforementioned customer states is customer commitment which is psychological motivation of customer relationship continuance. Furthermore, Interpersonal relationship marketing is also getting popularity in marketing research (Palmatier, Jarvis, Bechkoff, & Kardes, 2009; Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016; Hasan, Mortimer, Lings & Neale, 2017). Following objectives are formulated in this research:

- To analyze relationship between firm's customer orientation and customer gratitude
- To analyze relationship between firm's customer orientation and customer Intimacy
- To analyze relationship between customer gratitude and customer commitment
- To analyze relationship between customer intimacy and customer commitment
- To analyze mediating role of customer gratitude between firm's customer orientation and customer commitment
- To analyze mediating role of customer intimacy between firm's customer orientation and customer commitment

## **Literature Review**

### **Customer Orientation**

Deshpandé, Farley and Webster (1993) defined customer orientation as "set of beliefs that puts the customer's interest first, while not excluding those of all other stakeholders such as owners, managers, and employees, in order to develop a long-term profitable enterprise". Customer orientation is the business strategy to understand its customers (Zhang & Yang, 2018). Customer orientation solves customers' queries and provides better service (Babakus, Yavas,

& Karatepe, 2017). It is advocated that organizational customer orientation strategy affects customers (Sousa & Coelho, 2011).

Contemporary marketing research overwhelmingly accepts customer orientation as business strategy (Papaioannou, Kriemadis, Kapetaniou, Yfantidou, & Kourtesopoulou, 2018). Customer orientation improves the performance in buyers and sellers relationship (Leckie, Widing & Whitwell, 2017). Moreover, customer orientation allows the firms to design and execute such strategies that results positive customer outcomes (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Finally, interpersonal relationship marketing advocates that firms' efforts to maintain the relationship create customer gratitude (Hasan et al., 2017) and customer intimacy (Hasan et al., 2017; Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016).

### **Customer Gratitude**

Gratitude means being thankful (Ma, Tunney & Ferguson, 2017). It is conceptualized as emotion. It is result of benefits received (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). Most of relationship marketing research has studied trust and commitment (Palmatier et al., 2009). Contemporary relationship marketing research and specifically interpersonal relationship theory advocates gratitude (Palmatier, 2008; Jin, Line, & Yoon, 2018).

Customer gratitude is marked as core emotional construct in interpersonal relationship marketing (Palmatier, 2008). It unfold customers psychological ties with seller (Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, & Iacobucci, 2001; Hasan et al., 2017; Bridger & Wood, 2017; Peng, Nelissen, & Zeelenberg, 2017; Ma, Tunney, & Ferguson, 2017). Empirical research suggests sellers' efforts to serve customer create customer gratitude (Forster et al., 2017; Peng, Nelissen, & Zeelenberg, 2017). Finally research suggests that gratitude mediates between seller efforts and customer commitment (Palmatier, 2008; Bridger & Wood, 2017).

### **Customer Intimacy**

According to Yim, Tse, and Chan (2008), the term intimacy root is Latin word "intimatus" which means to familiarity or close connection. It is multifaceted phenomenon e.g. mutuality, caring, and interdependence (Ben-Ari & Lavee, 2007; Rokach & Philibert-Lignieres, 2015). The use of customer intimacy in relationship marketing and especially interpersonal relationship literature is common now a days (Bugel, Verhoef, & Buunk 2011; Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016; Ponder, Holloway, & Hansen, 2016; de Jager et al., 2017). Bugel, Verhoef, and Buunk (2011) noted that previous customer relationships research has ignored extant customer intimacy use in customer relationship research.

Customer intimacy is empirically distinct construct and services and hospitality businesses e.g., fast-food restaurants and hair salons may have strong implications of this construct. Emotions based intimacy confirmed relationship between sellers and buyers (Yim, Tse, & Chan, 2008). Moreover, customer intimacy is found important predictor of customer commitment in the multiple services sectors (Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016). According to Hansen (2003), employees of organization are important antecedent of customer intimacy.

## Customer Commitment

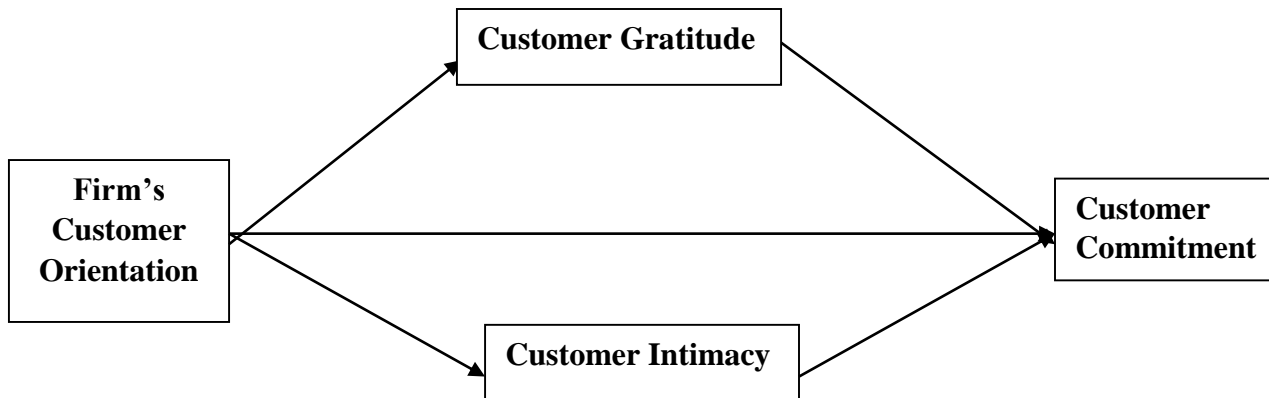
Customer desire to maintain relationship with seller is called customer commitment. It is outcome of previous satisfactory interaction with seller (Hsiao, Shen, & Chao, 2015). Customer commitment is marked as key construct in relationship marketing literature. It is given special attention (Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016). Commitment may be of affective, continuance or calculative, and normative commitment (Jones et al., 2010). Commitment contain the both attitudinal (Srivastava & Owens, 2010) and behavioral (Ashley & Leonard, 2009) meanings. It is willingness of parties to make short term sacrifices for long-term relationship (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987).

Customer commitment shows customers motivation to maintain relationship with seller. Therefore, commitment is marked as essential element of marketing relationship (Lacey, 2007). Customer commitment is outcome of customer orientation efforts of firm (Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010). Relationship marketing theory highlights that committed customers show positive behavior about the organization. They are slos likely to patronize their organization (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Finally, interpersonal relationship marketing theory applies that emotional bond i.e. customer gratitude (Palmatier, 2008) and customer intimacy (Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016) to create customer commitment.

## Theoretical Foundation

Theoretical foundation is based on interpersonal relationship marketing model (Palmatier, 2008) and interpersonal attraction to form close relationship (Perlman & Fehr, 1986). Interpersonal relationship marketing states that; sellers efforts i.e. customer orientation (Deshpandé, Farley & Webster, 1993) stimulate the customers emotions i.e. customer gratitude (Palmatier, 2008) and customer intimacy (Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016) which result customer commitment (Palmatier, 2008). The rationale behind this strong bond is customer feel intimate affection and love (Bugel, Verhoef, & Buunk, 2011). Moreover, applying interpersonal attraction (Perlman & Fehr, 1986) reinforcement (e.g., sellers' efforts to maintain relationship with customers) from one party in relationship (Perlman & Fehr, 1986) is fundamental preamble to create customer gratitude (Palmatier, 2008) intimate customer relationship (Bugel, Verhoef, & Buunk, 2011). The most of literature is slant towards trust (Bugel, Verhoef, & Buunk, 2011), and ignored the customer gratitude and customer intimacy. Therefore, this research studies the customer orientation, customer gratitude, customer intimacy, and customer commitment.

Fig-1 describes the conceptual model developed for this research. Figure highlights constructs and their relative relationship with other constructs. Arrows points the direction of relationship in the figure. There are four constructs namely, firm's customer orientation, customer gratitude, customer intimacy, and customer commitment. It is highlighted that firm's customer orientation activate customer gratitude and customer intimacy which drives customer commitment. Moreover, direct relationship between firm's customer orientation and customer commitment is highlighted



**Fig-1 Conceptual Model**

### **.Hypotheses**

1. There is positive relationship between firm's customer orientation and customer gratitude
2. There is positive relationship between firm's customer orientation and customer Intimacy
3. There is positive relationship between firm's customer orientation and customer commitment
4. There is positive relationship between customer gratitude and customer commitment
5. There is positive relationship between customer intimacy and customer commitment
6. Customer gratitude mediates between firm's customer orientation and customer commitment
7. Customer intimacy mediates between firm's customer orientation and customer commitment

### **Research Methodology**

Hypothetical testing methodology based on quantitative explanatory research design is adapted in this research. Hypotheses testing is based on data collected from four sector i.e. food, apparel, financial, and telecommunication of Pakistan. Self-administrated survey questionnaire is used to collect data. There are two sets i.e. A and B are used to collect data from sellers and buyers. **Set-A is used to collect data from the sellers side and Set-B is used to collect data from buyers' side.**

Adapted items are used to develop questionnaire. Customer orientation is measured with nine (9) items adapted from Deshpande, Farley, and Webster (1993). Customer gratitude (3) items are adapted from Palmatier et al (2009). Customer intimacy is measured with three (3) items adapted from Balaji, Roy and Wei (2016). Finally, customer commitment is measured with three (3) items adapted from Balaji, Roy and Wei (2016).

The nature of data is dyadic (Lussier & Hartmann, 2017). Dyadic data has characteristics of Distinguishability and Non-independence. According to Kenny, Kashi, and Cook (2006) there are three types of dyadic data designs which are standard dyadic design, Social Relations Model (SRM) design, and one-with-many design. This research has standardized dyadic data set which applies that both parties sellers and buyers have equal representation.

### **Sample**

Utmost care and systematic process is carried to collect data from the sellers and buyers. Sample represents four sectors i.e. food, apparel, financial and telecommunication sector of Pakistan. Equal presentation (25%) is given to each sector. From the seller side, representatives of sellers are targeted to collect data. Chief executive officers (CEO's), managers, Shift in-charges, customer service representatives, relationship managers and similar position are targeted to collect data from seller side. Similarly, customers filled the part-B (Buyers side) in which customer of four sectors are targeted.

Consistent with the objective of this research, the authors are interested to study the mature relationships between sellers and buyers. Following rules are determined to collect data from sellers and buyers. Sellers' representatives (working more than two years with same organization) are targeted to collect data. Customers must be the actual buyer of particular organization to whom data is collected.

For sellers' side and customer side sampling technique adapted is quota based convenient which means that all the four sectors are given equal representation (quota) and respondents are targeted on their willingness and availability. Data is collected from famous food restaurants, apparel brands, banks and insurance firms, and telecommunication companies operating in Gujranwala region of Pakistan. A final sample data set consists of one hundred (100) standardized dyads with 25 % representation of each of four targeted sectors.

### **Data analysis**

A variance based structural equation modeling is applied to test hypotheses. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) is a variance based SEM method (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012; Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014). For analysis, Smart\_PLS version 3.2.1 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015) is software package used. There are number rationales to apply PLS-SEM. The key rationale are given below:

1. PLS-SEM can deal non-normal data (Hair et al., 2012)
2. It can provide accurate results with small sample size (Hair et al., 2012)
3. This method can be applied to both reflective and formative measures (Hair et al., 2014)
4. It explain the maximum variance in the endogenous variables (Hair et al., 2014)
5. It is getting popularity in marketing research and premier marketing journals (Ahearne, MacKenzie, Podsakoff, Mathieu, & Lam, 2010; Hair et al., 2014; Bolander, Satornino, Hughes, & Ferris, 2015)
6. It can deal with dyadic data set (Lussier & Hartmann, 2017)
7. It can analyze the hierarchal regression in a dyadic data set (Lussier & Hartmann, 2017)



## Results

**Table-1**

### Sample Characteristics

Seller Side			Buyer Side		
Gender			Gender		
Category	Frequency	Percentage	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	60	60.00	Male	70	70.00
Female	40	40.00	Female	30	30.00
Education			Education		
Up to Intermediate	20	20.00	Up to Intermediate	15	15.00
Graduation	60	60.00	Graduation	72	72.00
Above Graduation	20	20.00	Above Graduation	13	13.00
			Age (years)		
			Below 20 Years	10	10.00
			21 – 30 Years	50	50.00
			31 – 40 Years	30	30.00
			Above 40 Years	10	10.00

Sample characteristics are given in table-1. It depicts the demographic profile dyadic respondents. The dyadic data set have the demographic characteristics of two sort of sample. One is seller side and second is buyer side. With respect to sellers characteristics are presented in terms of gender and education are presented in table-1. With respect to buyers sample characteristics i.e., gender, age, and education of respondents are given. From the seller perspective, representation with respect gender is 60 male and 40 females participated and filled the survey response. Finally, as for the as the education of sellers respondents is concerned, most of the respondents are graduates. Among the buyers sample, there are 70 male and 30 female respondents. Most of the buyers represent the age group between 21-30 years with 50 respondents. Moreover, most of the buyers' respondents are graduates with respect to their education.

Management scientists are quite familiar with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Table-2 highlights the outer loads of items of latent variables. This helps to create measurement model that theory driven. CFA is most commonly used method if reflective measures to determines the validity and reliability (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001).

**Table-2****Outer loadings**

	Customer Orientation	Customer Gratitude	Customer Intimacy	Customer Commitment
CO1	.803			
CO2	.733			
CO3	.622			
CO4	.798			
CO5	.768			
CO6	.735			
CO7	.709			
CO8	.704			
CO9	.695			
GRA1		.876		
GRA2		.925		
GRA3		.852		
INT1			.930	
INT2			.960	
INT3			.854	
COMIT1				.876
COMIT2				.869
COMIT3				.852

CO= Customer Orientation, GRA=Customer Gratitude, INT=Customer Intimacy, COMIT=Customer Commitment

Various statistical measures are used to test the discriminant validity and convergent validity of a measurement model. A factor loading is one of the measures to analyze the convergent validity of the measurement model (Hair et al., 2014). Outer measurement model loads are used to evaluate the measurement model. These outer loads help to determine the strength between items and latent variable (Hair et al., 2014; Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). There are various threshold are applied to hold or delete an item of a latent variable. The most suitable threshold value is 0.6 or higher a factor load of a latent variable to determine its convergent validity (Hair et al., 2014).



**Table-3****Validity and Reliability**

CONSTRUCT	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Customer Orientation	.912	.891	0.535
Gratitude	.908	.847	0.767
Intimacy	.939	.903	0.838
Commitment	.900	.834	0.749

Both validity and reliability are accessed (Hair et al., 2014). Composite reliability (CR), cronbach alpha, and average variance extracted (AVE) are evaluated. Structural equation modeling (SEM) carried with PLS provides more appropriate internal consistency measure namely CR (Hair et al., 2014). Additionally, Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955) is also accessed. The results of alpha values and CR are presented in table-3. It is recommended by Nunnally (1978) that alpha values should be higher than 0.7. AVE access the convergent validity and its values should be higher than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2014). Results presented in table-3 highlight that all the values of alpha, CR, and AVE are above the threshold values. Alpha values range from 0.900 to 0.939, CR values range from 0.839 to 0.903, and AVE values range from 0.535 to 0.838.

**Table-4****Correlations and Fornell-Larcker Criterion**

CONSTRUCT	Customer Orientation	Customer Gratitude	Customer Intimacy	Customer Commitment
<b>Customer Orientation</b>	(.732)			
<b>Customer Gratitude</b>	.610**	(.876)		
<b>Customer Intimacy</b>	.462**	.570**	(.916)	
<b>Customer Commitment</b>	.410**	.582**	.458**	(.866)

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01

Correlation and Fornell-Lacker criterion values are presented in table-3. The correlation values lies between -1 to +1. The positive and negative sign determine the nature of relation, either

negative or positive. The correlation values are less than .70, which means there is moderate positive relationship among the variables. The relationship between the variables is significant as the p values are less than 0.01. Moreover, discriminant validity is evaluated with Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. This criterion states that which states that, square AVE. Fornell-Lacker results are given in bold and italic against the correlation values of each construct. The values are higher than threshold values.

**Table-5****Direct Effect**

Path	Beta Value	T Statistics	P values
Customer Orientation → Gratitude	0.582	7.550	0.000
Customer orientation → Intimacy	0.458	4.792	0.000
Customer Orientation → Commitment	-0.042	0.323	0.746
Gratitude → Commitment	0.409	4.340	0.000
Intimacy → Commitment	0.467	5.569	0.000

**Table-6****Indirect Effect**

Path	Beta Value	T Statistics	P values
Customer Orientation → Gratitude → Commitment	0.238	3.568	0.000
Customer Orientation → Intimacy → Commitment	0.214	3.351	0.001

Table-5 and 6 presents the effect decomposition of predictor and outcome variables. Table-5 represents the direct effect of predictor variables on outcome variables; whereas, table-6 highlights the specific indirect effect of mediating paths conceptualized in this research. PLS-SEM output provides simultaneous examination of direct and indirect effects. These results are bootstrapping results. A 5000 sub-sample bootstrapping is recommended by Lussier and Hartmann (2017) in dyadic analysis. Results include the beta value, t values, and p values. The results are presented according to hypotheses.

First, the direct paths are all significant except customer orientation effect on customer commitment with  $\beta$  value -0.042 and p value higher than 0.05. Customer orientation insignificant effect on customer commitment caused rejection of H3 (“H” is used to denote hypothesis with number of specific hypothesis cited above in hypothesis section). All other direct path are significant and their respective p values are less than 0.001. This provides support for H1, H2, H4, and H5.

Table-7 highlights the indirect effects of proposed mediating hypotheses. The results show that indirect paths are found significant with p value less than 0.001. Therefore, H6 and H7 are accepted.

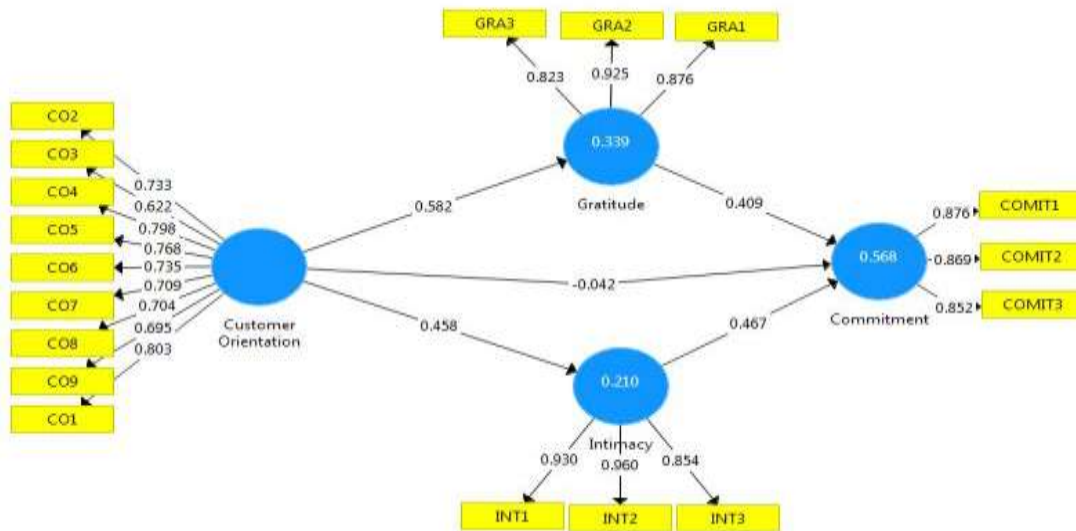


Fig2- (PLS-SEM Output)

Table -7  
Hypotheses Results

Hypothesized relationship	Results
H1 Customer Orientation → Customer Gratitude	Supported
H2 Customer Orientation → Customer Intimacy	Supported
H3 Customer Orientation → Customer Commitment	Not-Supported
H4 Customer Gratitude → Customer Commitment	Supported
H5 Customer Intimacy → Customer Commitment	Supported
H6 Customer Orientation → Customer Gratitude → Customer Commitment	Supported
H7 Customer Orientation → Customer Intimacy → Customer Commitment	Supported

Table-7 highlights the hypotheses results. The model proposed relationships of conceptual model are found supported. Overall, results provide support to the proposed conceptual model. The specific examination depicts that overall variance explained in customer commitment is

56.8%, customer gratitude is 33.9%, and customer intimacy is 21.0%. The explained variance is assessed with  $R^2$  values. These  $R^2$  values also meant how much predictors explain the outcome variable.

## Discussion

This study sought to examine influence of firm's customer orientation strategy on customer gratitude, customer intimacy, and customer commitment in targeted four sectors i.e. food, apparel, financial, and telecommunication sector of Pakistan. The conceptual model is based on interpersonal relationship marketing model and theory of interpersonal attraction. The results provide substantial support for proposed conceptual model. Firm's customer orientation is founded significant predictor of customer gratitude ( $\beta = 0.582$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and customer intimacy ( $\beta = 0.458$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Firm's customer orientation is founded insignificant direct predictor of customer commitment ( $\beta = -0.042$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Customer gratitude ( $\beta = 0.409$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and customer intimacy ( $\beta = 0.467$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) are found significant predictors of customer commitment. Furthermore, customer gratitude ( $\beta = 0.238$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and customer intimacy ( $\beta = 0.214$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) are founded significant mediators between firm's customer orientation and customer commitment. Furthermore, with respect to full and partial mediation, there is founded full mediation between firm's customer orientation and customer gratitude and firm's customer orientation and customer intimacy. The rationale of full mediation is insignificant direct relationship ( $\beta = -0.042$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) between firm's customer orientation and customer commitment and significant indirect relationship between ( $\beta = 0.238$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) firm's customer orientation and customer commitment via customer gratitude. Similarly, there is founded significant indirect relationship ( $\beta = 0.214$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between firm's customer orientation and customer commitment via customer intimacy.

Most of the customer orientation researches are focused on large and medium size firms' data. Additionally, the research is carried with respect to single sector (Herrero, Martín, & Collado, 2018). This research is carried regardless of size of the firm. The data from large, medium, and small size organizations of four sector i.e. food, apparel, financial, and telecommunication sector is collected. Theoretically, this research is based on interpersonal relationship marketing model. The additional theoretical support is taken from theory of interpersonal attraction by Perlman and Fehr (1986). The theory of this research states that seller efforts i.e. customer orientation strategy to serve the customers create customer gratitude and customer intimacy that result customer commitment. The results confirm the theoretical backdrop applied in this research. Results confirm the interpersonal relationship marketing model proposed by Palmatier (2008). Results confirm that customer orientation leads to positive customer outcomes (Sousa & Coelho, 2011; Bagozzi et al., 2012; Babakus, Yavas, & Karatepe, 2017). Customer gratitude and customer intimacy are important predictor of customer commitment (Palmatier et al., 2009; Bugel, Verhoef, & Buunk, 2011; Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016) and both customer gratitude and customer intimacy are important mediator in interpersonal relationship marketing model (Palmatier, 2008; Palmatier et al., 2009; Yim, Tse, & Chan, 2008; Bugel, Verhoef, & Buunk, 2011; Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016).

### 5.1. Theoretical Implications

This research is carried with multi-sectors data. It is an effort that focuses on customer orientation strategy of four sectors i.e. food, apparel, financial, and telecommunication (large, medium, and small firms). The research applied the both customer gratitude and customer

intimacy to create customer commitment (Herrero, Martín, & Collado, 2018). The results confirm the underlying theoretical underpinnings (Bharadwaj, Nevin, & Wallman, 2012; Papaioannou et al., 2018; Varghese, Edward, & George, 2017; Kantén et al., 2017). Theoretically following contribution are made in this research:

1. This research extends and contributes in interpersonal relationship marketing (Palmatier, 2008) by adding theory of interpersonal attraction (Perlman & Fehr, 1986).
2. Research contributes in limitation of customer gratitude (Jin, Line, & Yoon, 2018; Hasan et al., 2017; Palmatier et al., 2009; Palmatier, 2008) and customer intimacy (Bugel, Verhoef, & Buunk, 2011) in interpersonal relationship marketing research.
3. There is founded full mediation of both customer gratitude (Palmatier, 2008) and customer intimacy (Balaji, Roy & Wei, 2016) which is crucial to drive psychological and behavioral customer motivation in form of customer commitment.
4. This research collected data from both parties (sellers and buyers). This dyadic data set helps to avoid the biases (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Moreover, the dyadic data is standardized nature (equal number of sellers and buyers), which is consistent to the previous researches (Lussier & Hartmann, 2017). The most of the dyadic research in relationship marketing theory and practice is conducted between business to business (B2B) perspectives (Lussier & Hartmann, 2017). However, it is an effort to apply interpersonal relationship marketing model to sellers and buyers (B2C) dyads (Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1996).

### **Managerial Implications**

The results of this study confirm that firms' customer orientation business strategy is key predictor to create customer gratitude and intimate customer relationship and customer commitment. To build intimate relationship with customers and enhance customer commitment in four sectors, where customer are diverse with respect to gender, age, taste, choices and preferences, customer orientation strategy play vital role because it advocates to give priority to the customers (Bihamta et al., 2017). The research has following managerial implications:

1. Customer orientation strategy play key role to create psychological ties with customers.
2. It enhances the customer commitment which results sustainable B2C relationship.
3. With this business strategy customer can be better served and human like relationship can be translated between sellers and buyers.
4. Most importantly seller can cross sell and up sell to customer with gratitude and in intimate relationship. This is marked as key objective of relationship marketing.
5. Interpersonal relationship marketing creates friendship like personalized relationship which emotions based and difficult to replace. So, the sellers in all four selected sectors may create such friendship like situation which is difficult to replace.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Like the previous researches this research also has multiple limitations. First, the research data is based on responses collected from sellers and buyers which may create bias and memory based response to relationship and efforts of parties. Second, this research is carried without differentiating size of the firms in selected four sectors i.e., large, medium, and small. Third, the data is cross-sectional in nature and dyadic response may leads to over estimation of each

party. However, the future research may be carried on historical data and longitudinal design. Future research may also be carried with respect to specific sectors. This model may be applied to other context enhance the generalization of this proposed conceptual model.

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