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Opportunism and conflict as precursors of non-economic and economic satisfaction outcomes in seller–customer business relationships

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study explores a seller's perspective of the influence of opportunism and conflict, which are negatively loaded constructs, on non-economic satisfaction as a positively loaded construct. It further established the influence of non-economic satisfaction on economic satisfaction as a positively loaded construct from a sales perspective in a supplier–business relationship.

Design/methodology/approach: The study followed a quantitative and exploratory approach. Respondents (sales or marketing managers/directors or key account managers) were asked to identify one main business customer with whom they had interacted in the last year. In addition, respondents were further required to keep the selected customer in mind when answering the questionnaire. Consequently, all 213 but one (one non-response bias) surveys were used in the data analysis. A 5-point Likert-type scale was used to determine the degree to which respondents agreed or disagreed with the items provided in the questionnaire relating to opportunism, conflict, non-economic satisfaction and economic satisfaction in seller–business relationships. The SPSS/Amos 24.0 software was used to conduct the multivariate analysis in two phases. Phase one comprised a confirmatory factor analysis, while phase 2 comprised structural equation modeling. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to assess the measurement properties of each construct, while structural equation modeling was applied to evaluate the hypothesized relationships in the precursor and outcome research model.

Findings: The findings show that in seller–business relationships, sellers are of the opinion that buyer opportunism and the existence of conflict do affect a seller's non-economic satisfaction directly, which in turn affects the economic satisfaction of seller–business relationships. Sellers further indicated a positive seller–business relationship can stimulate a long-term partnership if both opportunism and conflict are negatively related to non-economic satisfaction and non-economic satisfaction relates positively to economic satisfaction.

Research implications: The study makes a practical contribution through an improved understanding of a seller's perspective on how opportunism relates to conflict, how these two precursors influence non-economic satisfaction and how the latter relates to economic satisfaction in a seller–business relationship environment. An improved understanding of a seller's perspective of the variables under study, can potentially stimulate a long-term partnership if both a seller and a buyer are in agreement that opportunism and conflict are negatively related to non-economic satisfaction and non-economic satisfaction relates positively to economic satisfaction.

In terms of the theoretical contribution this study explores a seller's perspective in business relationships to validate whether the findings reported in previous studies based on buyer business relationships applies to seller–business relationships. This study therefore contributes to broaden the relevance of existing theory and the findings reported in previous studies on business relationships, but from a seller's perspective. This is especially important considering the growing need in the B2B literature to also understand a seller's perspective when building long-term business-to-business relationships. Secondly it was established that sellers perceive

opportunism to be positively related to conflict in a seller–business relationship. Thirdly, it was established that sellers acknowledge that opportunism has a negative relationship to non-economic satisfaction in seller–business relationships. Seller's in supplier–business relationships therefore view opportunism as a strain on the non-economic relationship between two parties since one partner can perceive that unfair negotiation practices or other forms of opportunism can benefit the other partner. This outcome can then ultimately have a negative influence on the economic satisfaction experienced, limiting the long-term potential of the relationship.

In addition, seller's argue that the management of conflict becomes critically important in their relationship-building initiatives with buyers. They further argue that there has to be mutual understanding for the role of each partner in the relationship, that each partner wants to benefit economically from the relationship and that mutual exchange is founded on mutual agreement of

KEYWORDS

Business-to-business relationship; opportunism; conflict; economic satisfaction; non-economic satisfaction

what such exchange entails. Finally, it was validated that if both the seller and the buyer are content with the relationship and the benefits it has to offer, a long-term orientation can be secured.

Originality/value: A limited number of research studies explored the B2B relationship between opportunism, conflict and its influence on economic and non-economic satisfaction from the perspective of the seller. Opportunism and conflict as precursors to non-economic satisfaction, where economic satisfaction is an outcome, has not been previously researched from a seller–business relationship perspective. No previous study has focused on relationship marketing in B2B relationships from the perspective of a seller to establish the influence of opportunism and conflict on non-economic satisfaction, and its ultimate influence on economic satisfaction. This finding adds value as it indicates what constitutes non-economic satisfaction in seller–business relationships and how this has an influence economic satisfaction. The two precursors of non-economic satisfaction can be used in future to investigate the influence of non-economic satisfaction on different outcomes such as dependence, commitment, collaborative communication and environmental uncertainty. Considering this, the study contributes to Relationship Marketing theory by suggesting valuable measurement constructs.

Introduction

Marketing academics have been exploring for decades the importance of business-to-business relationship building from a buyer's perspective. Numerous researchers in the business-to-business domain (Grönroos and Helle 2012; Haas, Snehota, and Corsaro 2012; Nyaga, Whipple, and Lynch 2010; Ulaga, 2003; Ulaga and Eggert (2006) have established the need for closer collaboration between parties in a business relationship to enhance value creation in the relationship-building process. However, most of these studies contributing to B2B theory are from a buyers perspective, and not focused on the perspective of a seller in a business relationship. Furthermore, the B2B literature have also extensively tested numerous constructs and their inter-relationships from a buyers' perspective. Nevertheless, there are limited studies that have explored these relationships from the perspective of a seller.

This study explores a seller's perspective in business relationships to validate whether the findings reported in previous studies based on buyer business relationships applies to seller–business relationships. This study therefore contributes to broaden the relevance of existing theory and the findings reported in previous studies on business relationships, but from a seller's perspective. This is especially important considering the growing need in the B2B literature to also understand a sellers' perspective when building long-term business-to-business relationships. By understanding that 'relationship-specific adaptations are investments in adaptations to process, product, or procedures

specific to the needs or capabilities of an exchange partner', secures an improved understanding of the needs of both the supplier and the buyer (as a customer) and not just the latter in the relationship-building process.

Close working relationships between a seller and a buyer (business customer) in a business-to-business (B2B) environment are becoming increasingly important to securing a sustainable competitive advantage and therefore future business success (Nyaga, Whipple, and Lynch 2010). The positioning of this study is therefore unique as previous studies have investigated various nomological networks, but only from a buyer's perspective in B2B supply channel research. Furthermore, this study contributes to knowledge on business relationships from a sellers perspective in the Scandinavian business environment.

The importance of relationship building has been a critical focus of management thought since the early 1990s. It was during this time that the commitment–trust theory of Morgan and Hunt validated the necessity of securing the satisfaction of both parties before committing to a relationship can be secured (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Satisfaction has been widely researched as a critical factor in business relationships to secure a long-term orientation from a buyer's perspective (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Ruiz-Alba et al. 2019; Svensson, Mysen, and Payan 2010; Theron, Terblanche, and Boshoff 2012; Vieira, Monteiro, and Veiga 2011; Voldnes, Grønhaug, and Nilssen 2012; Walter, Cleff, and Chu 2013). In the context of supplier–business relationship building, the

exchange of benefits, the sharing of costs, and the securing of support between parties becomes vital to sustaining business relationships in the long term. However, the presence of opportunism, founded on self-interest and personal benefit, can cause conflict between partners in a supplier–business relationship, ultimately reducing the willingness of business partners to engage in a long-term relationship (Jeong and Oh 2017; Zhou et al. 2015). Wang and Yang Zhilin (2013) in their research study on ‘Inter-firm opportunism: a meta-analytic review and assessment of its antecedents and effect on performance’ argues that opportunism can be explored from an individual and an inter-firm perspective. This study explores, inter-firm opportunism, as one of the constructs, from a seller’s perspective to develop a greater understanding of the perceptions of sellers toward opportunism and its influence on conflict in B2B relationships.

Larentis, Antonello, and Slongo (2018) state that long-term relationship building between two parties is grounded on the principles of relationship marketing. Relationship marketing is especially relevant in B2B markets, where a long-term relationship orientation can benefit the economic (sales volume) and financial (profitability) objectives of the parties involved in the relationship (Chao, Chen, and Yeh 2015). Several previous studies in the relationship marketing domain have focused on the positive precursors of non-economic satisfaction, such as trust and commitment, in various contexts and settings from a buyer’s perspective only (Bansal, Irving, and Taylor 2004; Boateng and Narteh 2016; Hashim and Tan 2015; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Wahyudi 2014). However, a limited number of academic studies have investigated the direct and indirect relationships between opportunism and conflict (as precursors of non-economic satisfaction), on the one hand, and the outcomes of non-economic and economic satisfaction on the other, from a seller’s perspective. This paper aims to provide a quantitative meta-analytic analysis of opportunism and conflict, both of which are negatively loaded constructs, on non-economic satisfaction as a positively loaded construct. In addition, the study also intended to establish the influence of non-economic satisfaction on economic satisfaction as a positively loaded construct from the perspective of a seller in a B2B relationship. The

wordings of positively and negatively loaded constructs are used to distinguish between opportunism and conflict that can lead to negative outcome in business relationships, while economic and non-economic satisfaction refer to the degree of positive outcome.

In their meta-analytic study, Geyskens and Steenkamp (2000) argue that satisfaction can no longer be perceived as a single construct in marketing channel relationships. They argue that the measurement of satisfaction should be two-fold, pertaining to non-economic satisfaction and economic satisfaction, respectively. Non-economic satisfaction focuses on the psychological, non-economic aspects of the relationship (e.g., trust, commitment, and reliability). Economic aspects, on the other hand, encompass factors that could secure economic satisfaction in the relationship, such as sales turnover and profitability (Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar 1999). Considering this, numerous studies (Ertimur and Venkatesh 2010; Hsieh 2013; Karnani 2008; Tang, Fu, and Xie 2017; Varela-Neira, Vázquez-Casielles, and Iglesias 2010; Yu 2018) emphasize the negative role of opportunism and conflict in relationship building. However, there seems to be a lack of understanding of how opportunism and conflict contribute to supplier–business relationships from the perspective of a seller, and how they influence non-economic satisfaction in such a context. Limited research has also been conducted to establish the influence of non-economic satisfaction on economic satisfaction from the perspective of a seller in a B2B environment.

The study contributes to theory since it indicates that the previously identified relationships between satisfaction and its precursors and outcome are also evident between the non-economic satisfaction construct and its precursors and outcome from a seller’s perspective in B2B relationships. Previous studies have predominantly focused on non-economic satisfaction only in business relationships from a buyer’s perspective. This study, on the other hand, posits that from a sellers’ perspective, opportunism and conflict relate to non-economic satisfaction in a seller–business environment. In addition, it is suggested in a rival model that opportunism and conflict also relate to the outcome of economic satisfaction in seller-business relationships. It is

further argued by this research study that the joint context of opportunism and conflict relates, directly or indirectly through the outcome of non-economic satisfaction, to the outcome of economic satisfaction from a sellers perspective in B2B relationships. A model was proposed and rival model tested and verified, demonstrating from a sellers' perspective the supplier–business relationships between non-economic satisfaction, its precursors, and economic satisfaction within a supplier–business environment. From a practical perspective, the study makes a contribution by assisting buyers (customers) in a B2B environment to understand how sellers perceive opportunism and how they perceive it to potentially lead to conflict in a seller–buyer relationship. In addition, buyers will also secure improved comprehension of how sellers in the B2B relationship perceive these two negative precursors to influence non-economic satisfaction, and how the latter can have an influence on economic satisfaction.

This article starts with a theoretical overview of the theories grounding the study the hypotheses formulated for the study are then presented and a theoretical model is proposed. This is followed by a discussion on the research methodology, the results of the study, the theoretical and practical contribution made by the study, and the managerial implications of the study.

Conceptual framework

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model applied to this study to explore the relationship between opportunism, conflict, non-economic satisfaction and economic satisfaction in supply channel relationships. Although these constructs are widely researched in relationship marketing, such research is predominantly from a buyer's perspective. This study examines the relationships between the proposed constructs from a seller's perspective in supply channel relationships. Such research contributes to the relationship marketing literature in B2B research as the long-term viability of relationships between a seller and a buyer also necessitates a greater understanding of the seller's perspective on the factors under investigation in the proposed model.

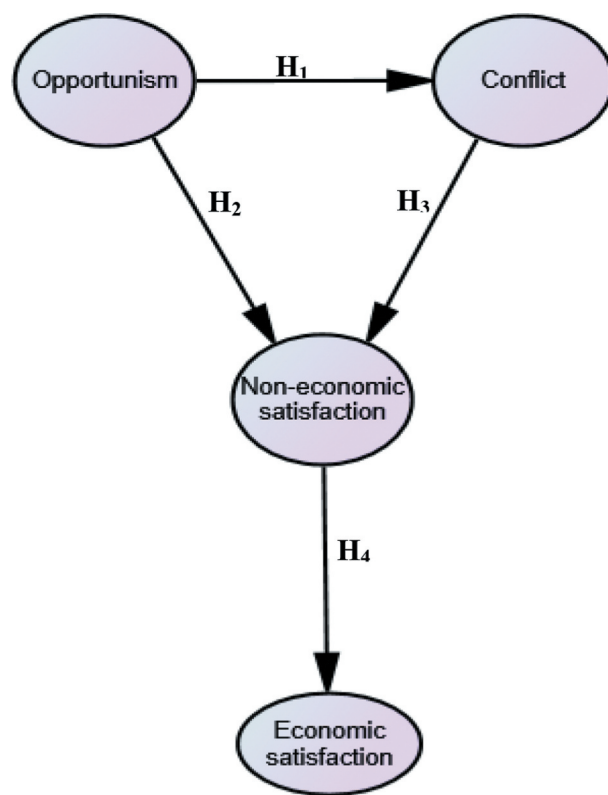


Figure 1. Proposed theoretical model.

The proposed model postulates that from a seller's perspective in B2B relationships, opportunism and conflict relate to non-economic satisfaction, and that non-economic satisfaction relates to economic satisfaction. It also proposes that opportunism relates to conflict in the supply channel. By extension, Figure 1 posits that opportunism and conflict do not relate directly to economic satisfaction, since this relationship is posited by a rival model. Consequently this study posits opportunism and conflict as precursors of non-economic satisfaction, but not of economic satisfaction. The research model therefore postulates that non-economic satisfaction mediates between the precursors of opportunism and conflict, on the one hand, and economic satisfaction on the other in supplier–business relationships.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses proposed

Theories grounding the study

The study is grounded on the philosophies of the Relationship Marketing Theory (RMT) and the

Transaction Cost Theory (TCT) in relation to the constructs explored and the relationships proposed between the constructs from a sellers' perspective in B2B relationships. Since the beginning of the 1990's academic researchers (Johnson 1999; Joshi and Stump 1999; Ganitsky and Watzke 1990; Heide & John) on channel relationships in B2B markets have argued the value of a long-term relational approach between partners. However, very few studies have used RMT and TCT to provide specifically a seller's perspective in building long-term relationships with a buyer (as a customer) in the B2B market. Considering this, an understanding of how RMT and TCT grounds a seller's perspective toward long-term relationship building is required in terms of the proposed relationships hypothesized in this study.

Sarmiento, Farhangmehr, and Simões (2015) argue that relationship marketing is grounded on the principle of engagement with a long-term intention. A relationship marketing approach toward relationship building in a seller-buyer environment is founded on an approach of mutual benefit. All parties to the relationship work together in symbiosis, benefiting from the other parties' offering to sustain the partnership in the long term (Vincent and Webster 2013). Considering this, Morgan and Hunt (1994), in their seminal work on the commitment-trust theory, argue that partners in a business relationship want to conduct business in an open and transparent manner. They will consider a long-term commitment to the relationship if the other business partners engage in a manner characterized by openness, transparency, happiness, and mutual understanding (Geyskens and Steenkamp 2000; Sarmiento, Farhangmehr, and Simões 2015). Chang et al. (2015) concur and state that a relationship marketing approach to the management of relationships is founded on an all-inclusive approach, encompassing mutual understanding, mutual respect, a feeling of joy, and satisfaction for all parties to the relationship. Therefore, when a seller and a buyer consider a relational approach toward the building of long-term relationships, it becomes increasingly important to understand the level of commitment, trust, power, opportunistic behavior, and communication of both parties before a relationship is initiated or a long-term orientation is considered (Barroso-Méndez, Galera-Casquet,

and Valero-Amaro 2015). Relationship marketing is therefore a strategy that is designed to foster a long-term commitment between parties and is founded on the creation of mutually beneficial value exchange (Badi, Wang, and Pryke 2017). To secure this, a business partnership must be characterized by mutual benefit for all parties, without the presence of self-interested behavior and deceit, which can lead to conflict in the relationship channel (Zhou et al. 2015).

Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar (1999) argue that transaction cost theory has developed as the primary theoretical framework for clarifying boundary decisions between business partners in a supplier-business relationship. It is often applied to the discipline of marketing management to describe the usefulness or advantages of partner relationships in a business environment. This is especially relevant between business buyers and suppliers in a B2B environment where the two parties are engaged in "arm's length" business dealings (Mpinganjira et al. 2014, 3). Transaction-cost theory implies that organizational sellers and buyers will be more willing to engage in a business partnership when the total fixed and continual transaction costs (such as opportunism and conflict) are decreased (Yasuda 2005). Therefore, by conducting a transactional cost analysis when contemplating a business partnership, organizational sellers and buyers can determine the potential risk of fixed and continual transaction costs before engaging in such a seller-buyer relationship (Meghwani and Thakur 2018). Sinnewe, Charles, and Keast (2016) concur and state that transaction-cost theory provides clarity on business-supplier engagement from an economic perspective, making more understandable the risks and opportunities when a seller and a buyer engage in business relationships (Sinnewe, Charles, and Keast 2016). According to Yigitbasioglu (2014), when the overall transaction costs in a seller-buyer relationship is too high, it is more economical for the business partners to vertically integrate. This is especially important when distrust becomes a deterrent to long-term commitment in the seller-buyer relationship. Such distrust could result from opportunism by one partner to the disadvantage of the other party and increase the overall transaction cost experienced by the latter (Ghoshal and Moran

1996). Considering this, Martynov and Schepker (2017) and Parida, Wincent, and Oghazi (2016) state that transaction-cost theory posits the need for business partners to protect themselves against actions that could increase transaction costs (such as opportunism and conflict) and could ultimately have a negative influence on the long-term potential of a supplier–business relationship. Preserving trustworthy relationships between business partners such as a supplier and a buyer reduces the potential for opportunism and conflict between them, ultimately enhancing their levels of both non-economic and economic satisfaction (Brown, Lusch, and Smith 1991; Standifer et al. 2015).

Relationship marketing and its importance to seller-business relationships

Relationship marketing provides a strong argument for value creation through a partnership approach. It acknowledges the importance of networking between actors with the intent of benefiting all parties concerned. Relationship marketing is the foundation of a relational approach toward relationship building, emphasizing a long-term orientation toward relational exchange. Such a relational approach needs to be built on an inclusive partnership approach where all parties to the relationship feels valued and respected (Camarero et al. 2018; Gummerus, von Koskull, and Kowalkowski 2017). The management of supplier–business relationships is complicated, since these relationships are characterized as intimate, intricate and long-term focused. However, despite its complicated nature, the need to form and sustain strong business relationships is more relevant in a B2B context than in B2C markets. The reason for this being that in a B2B context, parties to the relationship deal with orders involving large currency volumes. Therefore, the management of supplier–business relationships through a relationship marketing approach can ensure that both sellers and buyers obtain greater income and ultimately greater profits from the relationship in the long-term (Rauyruen and Miller 2007; Sarmiento, Farhangmehr, and Simões 2015). Knowing this, an understanding of the importance of relationship marketing in the management of supplier–business relationships needs to be secured from both parties in the

relational process. Most previous studies on B2B markets with a relational focus, have explored the constructs of opportunism, conflict, non-economic satisfaction and economic satisfaction from a non seller's perspective in B2B relationships. These studies are illustrated by Table 1. The lack of research on B2B research considering an understanding of the importance of relational constructs from a seller's perspective therefore supports the importance of this study to B2B research.

Considering the vast number of research studies on B2B research in supply channel relationships conducted from a generic partnership perspective in supply channel relationships (refer to Table 1), an understanding of a seller's perspective is becoming increasingly important in ensuring that a mutual beneficial relationship is secured in the long-term. Marketing scholars and practitioners (Gaurav 2016; Keung et al. 2015; Kaski et al. 2015; O'Reilly & Eckert, 2014; Segarra-Moliner, Moliner-Tena, and Sánchez-García 2013; Fullerton 2011; Theron and Terblanche 2010) have become stronger in their argument that the future sustainability of supply channel relationships will be determined by knowledge on seller expectations and preferences in B2B relationship building.

Theoretical model development

Interrelationship of opportunism and conflict

Wathne and Heide (2000) state in their seminal work on transaction-cost analysis (TCA) that the theory has become a foundation for various studies (e.g., Anderson and Weitz 1986; Dwyer and Oh 1987; Heide and John 1992; John 1984) over decades relating to relationship building and management issues in B2B markets. In these studies, much attention was focused on the risk that opportunism has on the building of long-term relationships between partners in a B2B environment. These studies also focused predominantly on the buyer's perspective toward opportunism and the challenge it has in securing long-term trading relationships. Theorists grounding their thinking on the principles of transaction-cost economics (TCE) argue that relationship management decisions between partners are inclusive of the additional behavioral assumption of opportunism (Heiman and Nickerson, 2002). This

Table 1. B2B research on the topics of opportunism, conflict, non-economic satisfaction and economic satisfaction.

Variable	Key premise	Reference
Opportunism	Actions in B2B relationships that inertly or purposefully abuse a relationship to secure a beneficial advantage	Wathne and Heide (2000)
	The intention to misinform and mislead for economic benefit in a B2B relationship.	Dahlstrom et al. (2014)
	A negative influence that is financially harmful to another party.	Zhou et al. (2015)
	Activities founded on deception in B2B relationships to intentionally mislead another party through the distortion of truth and or the spreading of lies.	Foss and Weber (2016)
Conflict	Actions that can either be developmental or damaging to channel relationships. In most academic research, conflict is described as injurious to the relationship building process.	Hunt (1995)
	A process or experience where by one party perceive their interest to be negatively influenced by the other party.	Standifer and James (2010)
	An outcome of the inability by one party to deliver on promises made to the other party.	Mazaheri et al. (2011)
	The actions flowing from dependent engagement in reaction to barriers that limits a partner's ability to reach their set objectives. It should be noted that conflict is ever present in supply chain relationships.	Marshall, Bashir, Ojiako and Chipulu (2018)
Non-economic satisfaction	A channel partner's positive emotional reaction to different psychosocial characteristics in the relationship with another partner through characterized by fulfillment, gratification and easiness.	Geyskens, Steenkamp & Kumar (1999)
	Encompass intangible aspects of channel relationships such as happiness and joy.	Sanzo et al. (2003); Johnson and Grayson (2005)
	Psychological elements having a link to satisfaction through elements of happiness, self-fulfillment and gratification	Goaill, Perumal, and Noor (2014)
Economic satisfaction	Positive economic benefits received by one partner in a channel relationship strengthening commitment to the relationship	Ring and Van de Ven (1994)
	The evaluation by one partner in a business relationship of the economical advantages flowing from the channel relationship with a partner. Such benefits can be in the form of profits margins, sales volume and mark-downs.	Geyskens and Steenkamp (2000)
	Financial benefits accruing from a channel relationship with a business partner resulting in satisfaction.	Nyaga Whipple and Lynch (2010)
	An organizational assessment of the economic result that accrues from a partnership and can include aspects such as sales volume, profit margins and discounts.	Chen Huang and Sternquist (2011)
	Economic satisfaction is secured because role performance secures the accomplishment of goals.	Mpinganjira, Roberts-Lombard & Svensson (2017); Geyskens and Steenkamp (2000)

perspective can be applied to both a buyer and a seller, as partners in a B2B relationship.

As uncertainty in the relationship-building process increases, transaction costs associated with the building and management of the relationship, also increases (David and Han 2004). In his seminal work on TCE, Williamson (1979) clearly stated that opportunism is a key notion in the study of transaction costs and that the validation of opportunistic behavior can always be rationalized from an economical perspective. More than 3 decades later, Williamson (2010) continue to argue that TCE is a philosophy that influence the governance or management of relationship continuation. TCE influence a partner's decision to continue with a relationship based on the economic costs or benefits of continuing with the relationship, inclusive of the economic value derived from a continuation of the relationship in its current form.

The existence of opportunism in a business relationship between partners reduces the level of trust, which can result in disagreement and

ultimately conflict between the parties. If conflict is not resolved or managed in the supplier–business relationship, it can ultimately lead to the relationship becoming dysfunctional or being terminated (Kang and Jindal, 2015; Das and Rahman 2010). Therefore, since opportunism occurs at the expense of one of the partners in a relationship, it does not add value to all parties and therefore creates conflict in the relationship channel (Zardkoohi, Harrison, and Josefy 2017). Therefore, opportunism is positively related to conflict. Considering this, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H₁: Opportunism has a positive association with conflict in seller–business relationships.

Interrelationship of opportunism and non-economic satisfaction

Opportunism is perceived “as a violation of an explicit contract in original transaction-cost economics” that is in direct opposition to the principles of relationship marketing. The

building of long-term relationships is founded not only on economic benefits, but also on relationship principles that strengthen commitment to the relationship, ultimately ensuring enhanced non-economic satisfaction, which is important to securing long-term relationship building between partners (Jeong and Oh 2017; Lu et al. 2015, 05015007–2). Over the last three decades, researchers (Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar 1999; Geyskens and Steenkamp 2000; Siguaw, Baker, and Simpson 2003; Mutonyi et al. (2016) have emphasized the importance of non-economic satisfaction in B2B relationships. However, most of these studies have explored this form of satisfaction as a key factor in supply channel relationships from a buyer's perspective and not a seller's perspective. Considering that non-economic satisfaction is a key element in securing long-term channel viability (Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar 1999), an understanding of how a seller perceive this form of satisfaction in a B2B relationship becomes critically important to ensure the long-term feasibility of the supply channel relationship. An understanding of non-economic satisfaction from a seller's perspective in B2B channel relationships is therefore important to discern what will create fulfillment for a seller in these relationships.

A strong relationship is founded on principles that drive non-economic satisfaction, that generate value for all parties, and that secure the sustainability of the relationship in the long term (Ledikwe, Roberts-Lombard, and Kloppe 2019). However, the practice of opportunism is not aligned with value creation for all parties founded on psychological principles (e.g., happiness, pleasure, and contentment) that supports a positive relational orientation toward the partnership. Previous studies have established that from a buyers perspective in B2B relationships, opportunistic behavior has a negative relationship with non-economic satisfaction, causing lower levels of fulfillment in the relationship (relational risk) (Liu et al. 2010). This could ultimately result in the relationship being dissolved. It is therefore hypothesized as follows:

H₂: Opportunism has a negative relationship with non-economic satisfaction in seller–business relationships.

Interrelationship of conflict and non-economic satisfaction

Problems relating to the quality of a relationship between a seller and a buyer are stern concerns that requires attention between parties in a B2B relationship (Zhuang, Herndon, and Zhou 2014). Such problems can be caused by conflict, as a result of factors such as poor communication and distrust between a seller and a buyer. In a B2B context, it is argued that conflict in the supply chain is inevitable, as such conflict occurs because one of the parties are of the opinion that the other party meddles with its ability to reach specific goals (Prince et al. 2016; Wang 2017). The overall result is that the negative influence of conflict surpasses the combined influence of supportive channel behaviors (Bai, Sheng and Li, 2016). It should be noted that the majority of these research studies do not perceive conflict from a sellers perspective in the supply chain, while this study do explore conflict from the perspective of the seller in a B2B relationship. Interestingly, conflict is not always a negative phenomenon in B2B relationships and can secure positive outcomes. This is especially true in cases where a seller or a buyer, experiencing conflict in the relationship-building process with the other partner, explores the conflict experience as a method of intrinsic analyses (Mazaheri, Basil, Yanamandram and Daroczi. 2011; Saeed et al. 2014). This implies conducting retrospection on experiences and noting how future engagement can be improved when assessing past mistakes. To understand the positive impact that conflict can have, the training of employees is important to understand the professional management of conflict (Barua and Mani 2014; Pandy. 2007). Considering this, it is important to understand that conflict should not only be perceived as a negative outcome when engaging in relationship building activities. When two parties disagree in a supply channel relationship, such a disagreement provides an opportunity for enhanced communication between channel members and a better understanding of the problem at

hand. Through an open engagement approach, supported by a willingness of all channel members to resolve potential disagreements, relational engagements are strengthened. Positive relational engagements can ultimately lead to the customization of service delivery between parties in the supply channel relationship (Fu and Xie 2017; Madhavaram and Hunt 2017).

However, despite the positive view of conflict, the majority of studies in the B2B literature (Hwang and Chung 2018; Niu, Cui, and Zhang 2017; Nyaga, Whipple, and Lynch 2010; Tang, Fu, and Xie 2017) do argue that conflict is a negative element in the relationship-building process that is harmful to the long-term relationship building process when parties hold incompatible views on specific issues and have reached an impasse on the way forward. In addition, the majority of these studies have researched conflict in supply channel relationships from a buyer's perspective and not a seller's perspective. Considering this it is argued that irrespective of the manner in which conflict is managed by the parties, it will influence the dynamics and outcomes of the non-economic satisfaction experience of each partner (Wong et al. 2018). Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to ensure that differences between parties that could result in relational conflict should be professionally managed (Varela-Neira, Vázquez-Casielles, and Iglesias 2010). Such an approach can reduce a partner's negative feelings toward the conflict experience and can lower the non-economic satisfaction outcome (Miguel et al. 2014). In the supplier-business relationship-building process, partners want to experience positive non-economic satisfaction, such as a feeling of happiness, contentment, and pleasure (Miguel et al. 2014). However, if conflict occurs in the relationship, a negative non-economic satisfaction experience is secured, ultimately resulting in negative feelings of discontent and displeasure (Coggburn, Battaglio, and Bradbury 2017; Meghwani and Thakur 2018). Although this is true, understanding conflict and its influence on non-economics satisfaction from a seller's perspective remains unclear in the B2B literature. Considering these findings, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: Conflict has a negative relationship with non-economic satisfaction in seller-business relationships.

Interrelationship of non-economic satisfaction and economic satisfaction

In a B2B environment satisfaction entails contentment throughout the relationship-building process and not just in relation to consumption of the final product. Channel member satisfaction is founded on relational principles in a seller-business environment. These relational factors are referred to as social factors that are intangible, resulting in a joyful and happy experience for partners in the relationship, inclusive of sellers and not just buyers. Social exchange do not imply an economic exchange, as the former is founded on psychosocial characteristics of the relationship. This implies that partners in a channel relationship experience interactions that are satisfying and rewarding. A channel member satisfied with the social outcomes of the relationship "appreciates the contacts with its partner, and, on a personal level, likes working with it, because it believes the partner is concerned, respectful, and willing to exchange ideas" (Hashim and Tan 2015; Veloutsou 2015; Geyskens and Steenkamp 2000:13; Anderson and Narus 1984).

Within the context of non-economic satisfaction a positive engagement between partners, founded on a social principle such as mutual understanding of the expectations from the relationship, becomes a precursor to securing a long-term orientation toward the seller-buyer relationship. Therefore, the continuation of such relationships depends on the positive non-economic satisfaction or social experience of both the seller and the buyer and is founded on psychological principles such as joy, happiness, and contentment (Hashim and Tan 2015; Sarmiento, Farhangmehr, and Simões 2015).

Non-economic satisfaction is perceived as an antecedent of economic satisfaction. The early phase of a B2B relationship is considered only from an economic perspective in terms of sales volume and profits. The quality and future existence of the relationship is initially dependent on the economic viability of the relationship to secure satisfaction. Once this is secured, business partners become more inclined to focus on the social part of the relationship, and to manage problems

that can occur in a helpful and fruitful manner (Del Bosque Rodriguez, Agudo, and Gutiérrez, 2006; Farrelly and Quester 2005). Therefore, once the relationship has been initially established, the focus of the business partners changes to include greater attention to non-economic satisfaction factors that can sustain the relationship in the long term and ensure continued economic benefits for both parties, thereby enhancing satisfaction (Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar 1999). Appreciation, fairness, joy, and happiness are important factors underlying non-economic satisfaction. Most previous studies argue that from a buyers' perspective in B2B research, these factors are required to secure a long-term relationship orientation in a supplier–business environment that can lead to increased economic satisfaction experiences by parties to the relationship. However, it remains unclear whether a positive feeling of engagement between partners, founded on non-economic and psychological factors such as positive past experiences, respect for each other, and positive impressions, are also important for sellers wanting to ensure a long-term orientation an increased economic benefits in the supply channel relationship (Ferro et al. 2016; Mutonyi et al. 2016). Therefore, based upon these findings, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4:Non-economic satisfaction has a positive relationship with economic satisfaction in seller–business relationships.

Research methodology

The study followed a quantitative and exploratory approach. The collection of data was secured from companies in Norway representing different industries and having a minimum of 50 employees, as reflected in the Norwegian database Sales Navigator at LinkedIn. Key informants were introduced to this study as an ongoing international research study on seller–business relationships along with the research team conducting it. A web-based survey was used and no incentive was used beyond that an executive summary will be provided to those interested.

To facilitate research on seller–business relationships, key informants who adhered to specific criteria were selected to participate in the study. These criteria included that respondents be designated as sales or marketing managers/directors or key account managers. In total 841 potential key informants were identified, who were subsequently contacted telephonically to verify whether they qualified to participate in the study. If they did not qualify, they were requested to identify an appropriate person at the same firm that adhered to the criteria specified above. From the 841 informants approached, a total of 523 met the criteria to participate in the survey. The selected key informants at each firm was then provided with a Qualtrics link and asked to complete an online questionnaire. Although 294 responses were returned (56.2%), it was decided to exclude 81 responses from the final sample based on the following two assessment criteria: (i) percentage of incomplete responses from key informants in the questionnaires, and (ii) key informants' time to complete the questionnaire.

A substantial non-response bias was established in 81 completed questionnaires (i.e. non-useable), where the key informants responded to less than 90% (down to 0%) of the items. Before commencing with the study, it was also established that it would take at least 3.5 minutes to complete the survey, but not more than 9 minutes. The time taken to complete the questionnaire by the 81 discarded key informants was as follows: 48 spent less than 3.5 minutes (59.2%, short timeframe); 19 spent more than 17.5 minutes (23.5%, long inactive timeframe); and 14 used between 3.5 and 9 minutes (17.3%, within the expected timeframe but with a non-response bias of 28 to 94%). The remaining 213 key informants spent between 3.5 minutes and 9 minutes to complete the questionnaire, while 212 of the 213 questionnaires contained a zero (0%) non-response bias on all items, and the remaining two questionnaires contained a non-response bias of less than 1%. In sum, the 213 questionnaires returned were satisfactorily completed by the respondents and deemed useable in this study, thereby generating a valid response rate of 40.7%.

Respondents were asked to identify one main business customer with whom they had interacted in the last year. In addition, respondents were

required to keep the selected customer in mind when answering the questionnaire. To ensure confidentiality, respondents were not requested to identify the customer. Respondents were also asked to answer the questions in the questionnaire to the best of their ability to ensure high-quality responses to each item.

The questionnaire commenced with a competency check to ensure that respondents were eligible to participate in the study (Campbell 1955). Respondents were requested to “*Please consider how knowledgeable and experienced you are concerning your business and your business dealings with this customer.*” Respondents then had to respond to the following two statements: (a) “*I have a lot of knowledge about this customer*” and (b) “*I have a lot of experiences with this customer.*” Almost all respondents (99.5%) indicated that they had much knowledge about the customer, while 94.5% indicated that they had had many experiences with the customer.

Finally, the managerial implications presented later were verified by three Norwegian sales/marketing directors who were not part of the seller–business relationship survey. These informants were selected on the basis of a judgmental criterion of having longstanding and extensive sales experience to assess the managerial implications adequately.

Construct items and measurement

The items of the precursor and outcome research model in seller–business relationships, as shown in Figure 1, were sourced from previous studies. These items were based on buyer–business relationships but adapted for this study from the sources listed below to measure seller–business relationships (e.g., changing “supplier” to “customer” in the items, as reflected in

Table 3):

- *Opportunism* – Dahlstrom and Nygaard (1999)
- *Conflict* – Brown, Lusch, and Nicholson (1983); Coughlan et al. 2001)
- *Economic satisfaction* – Sanzo et al. (2003)
- *Non-economic satisfaction* – Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar (1999)

A five-point Likert-type scale was used to determine the degree to which respondents agreed or disagreed with the items provided in the questionnaire relating to the precursors of non-economic satisfaction and of economic satisfaction in seller–business relationships. The scale points ranged from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree.” After editing of the data, it was cleaned and entered into SPSS 24.0. Assessments of both the measurement model and the structural model were secured through the use of Amos 24.0. Before the assessment of the structural model was done, assumptions underlying covariance-based structural equation modeling (using Amos 24.0) related to linearity and multicollinearity were addressed (Gaskin 2013).

Empirical findings

The SPSS/Amos 24.0 software was used to conduct the multivariate analysis in two phases. Phase one comprised a confirmatory factor analysis (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1993), while phase two constituted structural equation modeling (Hair et al. 2014). The confirmatory factor analysis was used to assess the measurement properties of each construct displayed in Table 2, while structural equation modeling was used to evaluate the hypothesized relationships in the precursor and outcome research model. A total of four constructs and twelve items were used in both phases, as shown in Figure 2.

According to Table 4, the non-response bias is one with 212 valid responses on each item of conflict, while the items of opportunism, economic satisfaction and non-economic satisfaction have zero non-response bias with 213 valid responses. Table 4 also shows the explained variance of construct items ranging from 0.43 to 0.82 and their respective factor loadings ranging from 0.66 to 0.90. It can therefore be concluded that the items meet the recommended thresholds (Hair et al. 2014) of 0.5 for variance explained and 0.7 for factor loadings, except for one item, namely (c) of economic satisfaction. Nevertheless, Table 4 illustrates that the construct means of explained variance and factor loadings satisfactorily exceed the thresholds of 0.5 and 0.7.

Table 2. Nature of business, full-time employee equivalent and annual turnover.

Accommodation, cafe or restaurant	11	1–4	9	0–4.9 million	52
Agriculture, forestry or fishing	9	5–9	15	5.0–9.9 million	16
Communication services	21	10–19	17	10.0–24.9 million	38
Construction	12	20–49	33	25.0–99.9 million	37
Cultural or recreational services	5	50–99	35	1000 + million	70
Education	6	100–249	29	Total	213
Electricity, gas or water	13	250 +	75		
Finance and/or insurance	20	Total	213		
Government administration or defence	5				
Health and community services	10				
Mining	1				
Manufacturing	28				
Personal and other services	10				
Property and business services	8				
Retail trade	19				
Transport and storage	15				
Wholesale trade	20				
Total	213				

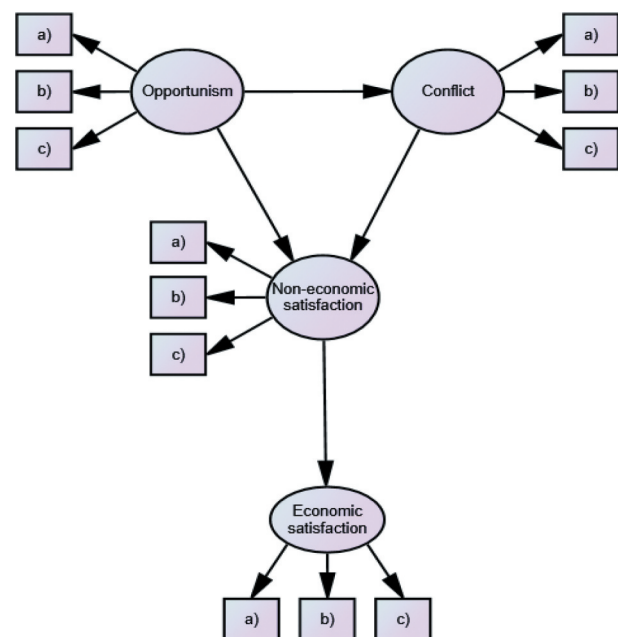
Table 3. Items – precursors and outcomes in seller–business relationships.

Opportunism
a) This customer does not always keep what they promise.
b) The customer alters the facts slightly in order to get what they need.
c) This customer is not always honest with us.
Conflict
a) We often have disagreements with this customer.
b) We often have different opinions when dealing with this customer.
Non-economic satisfaction
a) The relationship between us and this customer is positive.
b) Our firm is content about its relationship with this customer.
c) The relationship between us and this customer is satisfying.
Economic satisfaction
a) This customer contributes to our sales goals.
b) This customer contributes to our financial performance.
c) This customer generates economic growth for us.

Measurement and structural models

This section assesses the goodness-of-fit measures and other statistics in relation to measurement and structural properties of this study's research model in seller–business relationships. The measurement model offers satisfactory goodness-of-fit measures (Hair et al. 2014), with a chi-square of 59.82 and 48 degrees of freedom with a p -value of 0.12 based on a sample of 213. The fit statistics are also satisfactory, with a normed chi-square (X^2/df) of 1.25, NFI of 0.960, RFI of 0.935, IFI of 0.992, TLI of 0.986, CFI of 0.992 and RMSEA of 0.034. Based on the satisfactory empirical findings of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed (see Figure 2).

The structural model also offers satisfactory goodness-of-fit measures (Hair et al. 2014), with a chi-square of 62.45 and 50 degrees of freedom with a p -value of 0.11 based on a sample of 213. In addition, the fit statistics

**Figure 2.** Precursor and outcome research model in seller–business relationships.

are satisfactory with a normed chi-square (X^2/df) of 1.25, NFI of 0.958, RFI of 0.935, IFI of 0.991, TLI of 0.986, CFI of 0.991 and RMSEA of 0.034. The hypothesized relationships in the precursor and outcome research model (Figure 2) are significant at p -values between 0.000 and 0.012 and regression coefficients between 0.242 and 0.673, as indicated in Table 5. Consequently, the empirical findings support the four hypotheses tested based on the precursor and outcome research model in seller–business relationships.

Table 4. Univariate statistics – precursor and outcome research model.

	N	Mean	Std dev	Variance explained	Factor loading
Economic satisfaction					
a)	213	4.31	0.69	0.51	0.72
b)	213	4.17	0.73	0.65	0.81
c)	213	4.10	0.82	0.43	0.66
Non-economic satisfaction					
a)	213	4.31	0.79	0.73	0.85
b)	213	4.34	0.73	0.73	0.85
c)	213	4.24	0.86	0.75	0.86
Opportunism					
a)	213	2.49	1.00	0.58	0.76
b)	213	2.46	1.06	0.72	0.85
c)	213	2.34	0.99	0.77	0.88
Conflict					
a)	212	2.22	0.92	0.82	0.90
b)	212	2.51	0.97	0.62	0.79
c)	212	1.86	0.88	0.75	0.87

Construct reliability and validity

The discriminant validity of the precursor and outcome research model was assessed by comparing the variance extracted with the squared inter-construct correlations (Hair et al. 2014). Table 6 shows that the variance extracted for all constructs satisfactorily exceeds the corresponding squared inter-construct correlations. It shows that the tested research model offers satisfactory discriminant validity.

The hypothesized relationships of the precursor and outcome research model (H_1 , H_2 , H_3 and H_4) displayed in Figure 2 are all significant (see Table 6), offering satisfactory nomological validity.

Table 6. Squared inter-construct correlations, variance extracted, and composite trait reliability of constructs – precursor and outcome research model.

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1)Economic satisfaction	1.000			
(2)Non-economic satisfaction	0.17	1.000		
(3)Opportunism	0.01	0.27	1.000	
(4)Conflict	0.03	0.33	0.45	1.000
Variance extracted	54.7%	73.7%	69.3%	73.0%
Composite trait reliability	0.84	0.91	0.89	0.90

The variance extracted of the constructs exceeds 50% (54.7 to 73.7%), indicating satisfactory convergent validity. Furthermore, the composite trait reliability of the constructs offer satisfactory reliability, ranging from 0.84 to 0.91. It can therefore be concluded that the precursor and outcome research model shows satisfactory validity and reliability in Norwegian seller–business relationships.

A rival model

A rival model was assessed in relation to the precursor and outcome research model (see Figure 2) to verify the position of non-economic satisfaction as a mediator between opportunism and conflict on the one hand and economic satisfaction on the other. The rival model contains the direct relationships between opportunism and economic satisfaction, as well as the direct relationship between conflict and economic satisfaction. Both relationships are non-significant. The former is non-significant at a p -value of 0.308 with a regression

Table 5. Regression coefficients and significances – precursor and outcome research model.

Hypothesis	Exogenous construct	Endogenous construct	Regression coefficients	Significance	Results
1	Conflict	Opportunism	0.673	0.000	Supported
2	Opportunism	Non-economic satisfaction	−0.242	0.012	Supported
3	Conflict	Non-economic satisfaction	−0.407	0.000	Supported
4	Non-economic satisfaction	Economic satisfaction	0.406	0.000	Supported

Table 7. Comparison of goodness-of-fit measures.

	Parsimony-adjusted fit measures			Baseline comparisons – incremental fit measures					Badnessof fit	Relationships	
Index	PRATIO	PNFI	PCFI	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	H	Sig
Research model	.641	.614	.635	.958	.935	.991	.986	.991	.034	4	4
Rival model	.615	.591	.610	.960	.935	.992	.986	.992	.034	6	4

coefficient of 0.119. The latter is also non-significant at a p -value of 0.669 with a regression coefficient of 0.052.

Table 7 further illustrates that non-economic satisfaction mediates between opportunism/conflict and economic satisfaction. Consequently, this study supports the satisfactory validity and reliability of the tested precursor and outcome research model in Norwegian seller–business relationships.

Discussion

The study makes a contribution to both theory and practice. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings of the study confirm that the items used to measure non-economic satisfaction, its precursors and outcome are valid and reliable. The proposed model in the study has been confirmed, endorsing the B2B relationships between non-economic satisfaction experiences, their precursors, and economic satisfaction within a Norwegian context.

In terms of its practical contribution, the study could assist B2B partners to understand how opportunism relates to conflict, how these two precursors influence non-economic satisfaction, and how the latter relates to economic satisfaction in a seller–business relationship environment. A positive seller–business relationship can stimulate a long-term partnership if both opportunism and conflict are negatively related to non-economic satisfaction, and if non-economic satisfaction relates positively to economic satisfaction. Grönroos and Helle (2012) state that a long-term business relationship depends on the gains that both parties derive from it. Therefore, a win-win situation must be possible for both parties in order for their relationship to survive in the long term. Considering this, it becomes important in a seller–business relationship to ensure that opportunism and conflict are eliminated or at least reduced to a minimum to strengthen economic satisfaction, ultimately leading to an enhanced level of non-economic satisfaction as an outcome. Therefore, if strategies are in place to reduce unfair negotiations and other acts of opportunism, resulting in less conflict between partners, seller–business relationships can be strengthened, leading to a positive long-term economic relationship for all parties involved.

In terms of the study's theoretical contribution, it was determined that opportunism is positively related to conflict in a seller–business relationship. The argument can therefore be made that opportunism, as claimed in theory, is indeed a precursor to conflict in a Norwegian seller–business relationship environment. Secondly, it was established that opportunism relates negatively to non-economic satisfaction in seller–business relationships. Opportunism may therefore strain the non-economic relationship between two parties, since one partner could perceive that unfair negotiation practices or other forms of opportunism are benefiting the other partner. This outcome could then ultimately have a negative influence on the economic satisfaction experienced, limiting the long-term potential of the relationship.

In addition, conflict-related negatively to non-economic satisfaction in seller–business relationships. This implies that the management of conflict is critically important in relationship building. Each partner must understand that the other wants to benefit economically from the relationship, and that mutual exchange is founded on mutual agreement on what this entails. Finally, it was confirmed that non-economic satisfaction relates positively to economic satisfaction in seller–business relationships. Therefore, if all parties are content with the relationship and the benefits it has to offer, a long-term orientation can be secured.

It is important to note that opportunism and conflict as precursors to non-economic satisfaction, where economic satisfaction is an outcome, have not previously been researched from a sales perspective in seller–business relationships. No previous study has focused on relationship marketing in Norwegian B2B relationships from a seller perspective to establish the influence of opportunism and conflict on non-economic satisfaction, and its ultimate influence on economic satisfaction. This finding adds value as it indicates what constitutes non-economic satisfaction in seller–business relationships and how this has an influence on economic satisfaction. The two precursors of non-economic satisfaction can be used in future to investigate the influence of non-economic satisfaction on different outcomes such as dependence, commitment, collaborative communication, and environmental uncertainty.

Considering this, the study contributes to relationship marketing theory by suggesting valuable measurement constructs.

In conclusion, the study secures an enhanced understanding of the influence that non-economic satisfaction has on economic satisfaction from a Norwegian seller–business relationship perspective. A model is provided that elucidates how opportunism has an influence on conflict, and how these two precursors directly influence non-economic satisfaction, with the latter having an influence on economic satisfaction. Considering this, it can be noted that business partners are willing to commit to a long-term relationship if there is mutual economic benefit from the relationship, characterized by an absence of opportunism and the positive resolution of conflict in the supplier–business relationship channel (Mpinganjira et al. 2014; Nyaga, Whipple, and Lynch 2010).

Managerial implications

Three sales directors were asked in a follow-up study for their view on the managerial implications of this study. This was done to reconnect the industry insights of practitioners with the results of this study, all of which generated numerous key points of relevance and value to them.

Firstly, the practitioners indicated that the managerial implications of opportunistic customers include a few consequences for non-economic satisfaction in the seller–business relationship, namely that sellers do not make their best offers to opportunistic customers, a seller does not make new products available to opportunistic customers, and opportunistic customers cause conflicts in the seller–business relationship.

Secondly, the practitioners stated that conflict with the customer is counterproductive to performance in seller–business relationships. Therefore, sellers lose time through handling conflict instead of approaching new and other existing customers, and the sellers' energy is drawn away from investing in new customers and from maintaining and developing existing seller–business relationships. Conflict thus leads to the misuse of time on unsatisfactory seller–business relationships and results in reduced revenues and lost additional sales opportunities.

Thirdly, the practitioners indicated that opportunistic customers and conflicts with customers affect the outcome of non-economic satisfaction in seller–business relationships. For example, customers are not prioritized, the willingness to share information with customers decreases, the seller–business relationship becomes more complicated, no extra efforts are invested in customers, and an unsatisfying feeling of instability is created in the seller–business relationship.

Fourthly, the practitioners commented that the reduced non-economic satisfaction caused by opportunism and conflict influences the economic satisfaction in seller–business relationships, since it becomes difficult for sellers to research sales targets in a budget and leads to an unpredictable atmosphere in seller–business relationships.

In summary, the practitioners believed that customers' opportunism and the existence of conflict affect the outcome in seller–business relationships. They directly affect the sellers' non-economic satisfaction, which in turn affects the economic satisfaction of the seller–business relationships.

Conclusions and suggestions for future research

This study contributes to assessing the direct and indirect relationships between two selected negative precursors (opportunism and conflict) and the outcome of satisfaction (economic and non-economic) in Norwegian seller–business relationships. The study contributes to confirming that opportunism and conflict negatively influence the outcome of non-economic satisfaction but do not influence the outcome of economic satisfaction. However, the research model contributes to confirming that non-economic satisfaction itself influences the outcome of economic satisfaction in seller–business relationships. Furthermore, it contributes to assessing the relationships between negative precursors and different outcomes of satisfaction.

The research objective of this study was to test the direct and indirect relationships between the precursors of opportunism and conflict, on the one hand, and the outcomes of non-economic and economic satisfaction on the other. The precursors and outcome research model in seller–business relationships reveals that opportunism and conflict

relate only to non-economic satisfaction, while non-economic satisfaction relates to economic satisfaction. It indicates that non-economic satisfaction is a mediator between its precursors (i.e. opportunism and conflict) and economic satisfaction. The precursors and outcome research model also indicates that opportunism relates to conflict.

Consequently, the formulated hypotheses in the precursors and outcome research model are satisfactorily confirmed in Norwegian seller–business relationships. Specifically, the construct of opportunism relates positively to the construct of conflict (H_1), the construct of opportunism relates negatively to the construct of non-economic satisfaction (H_2), the construct of conflict relates negatively to the construct of non-economic satisfaction (H_3), and the construct of non-economic satisfaction relates positively to the construct of economic satisfaction (H_4), in Norwegian B2B relationships.

This study contains several limitations that offer opportunities for further studies on precursors and outcomes of satisfaction in business relationships. First, it is limited to Norwegian business relationships but provides a research model for assessing precursors and outcomes in business relationships of other countries in future. Secondly, it is limited to a seller's perspective on the precursors and outcomes of satisfaction, providing an opportunity to assess the buyer perspective in future research. Finally, it is limited to the negative precursors of opportunism and conflict, providing an opportunity for assessing other negative precursors as well.

Implications for business marketing practice

The study focused on exploring the influence of opportunism and conflict, which are negatively loaded constructs, on non-economic satisfaction as a positively loaded construct from the perspective of a seller. In addition, it wanted to determine the influence of non-economic satisfaction on economic satisfaction as a positively loaded construct from a sales perspective in a supplier–business relationship. The study ultimately proposes a model that illustrates B2B relationship between opportunism, conflict and its influence on economic and non-economic satisfaction from the perspective of the seller.

This research study propose guidelines to marketing practitioners for consideration from a relationship marketing perspective in a seller-business environment on how to establish the influence of opportunism and conflict on non-economic satisfaction, and its ultimate influence on economic satisfaction. Since the dawn of the new millennium numerous studies

have explored the precursors of non-economic satisfaction and the relationship between economic satisfaction and economic satisfaction from a buyers' perspective. However, no previous study has explored how opportunism and conflict influence non-economic satisfaction from a seller's perspective in B2B relationships and how non-economic satisfaction influence economic satisfaction when considering a sales perspective. Therefore the implications provided suggests valuable measurement constructs for sellers to consider when pursuing to build long-term relationships with buyers in a B2B market.

The results of the study concluded that in seller–business relationships, sellers have the belief that the existence of opportunism and conflict have a direct influence on the non-economic satisfaction of a seller. Such an influence then have a direct impact on the economic satisfaction of seller–business relationships. Through the study it was further established that seller–business relationships founded on positive principles can enhance the development of a long-term partnership. However, this is dependent on both opportunism and conflict to be negatively related to non-economic satisfaction and non-economic satisfaction to be positively related to economic satisfaction.

The study was grounded on the Relationship Marketing Theory (RMT) and the Transaction Cost Theory (TCT) theories in the context of the constructs explored and the relationships proposed between the constructs from a sellers' perspective in B2B relationships. Limited studies have applied these two theories to explore a seller's perspective in building long-term relationships with a buyer (as a customer) in the B2B market. At this point it is important to note that a seller will in future become more aware that a relationship with a buyer cannot only be measured from a transactional perspective, but that an understanding of the relational value of building long-term relationships with a buyer becomes increasingly important as well. As a result, when a seller and a buyer contemplate a relational approach toward the building of long-term relationships, it becomes imperative to develop an understanding of the level of commitment, trust, power, opportunistic behavior, and communication of both parties before a relationship is started or a long-term orientation is deliberated. Considering this it needs to be emphasized that relationship marketing should be applied as a strategy to foster a long-term commitment between a seller and a buyer that is built on the principle of beneficial value creation and value exchange for both parties concerned.

Increasingly, both seller and buyers are becoming aware of the importance to secure an inclusive partnership approach in their relationship-building initiatives. Both sellers and buyers wants to feel valued and respected in their relationship. Considering this, it becomes critically important for both parties in a seller–buyer relationship to understand that opportunism will ultimately lead to conflict, resulting in the development of tension between parties in the B2B relationship. Such enhanced levels of strain will negatively impact on the non-economic relationship between the parties concerned, since one partner could perceive that unfair negotiation

practices or other forms of opportunism are benefiting the other partner. Such a scenario could then ultimately have a negative influence on the economic satisfaction experienced, limiting the long-term potential of the seller–buyer relationship. Critically important is for both the seller and the buyer to know that the other wants to benefit economically from the relationship, and that mutual exchange is founded on mutual agreement on what this entails. Considering this, the study secures the following propositions for seller and buyers to consider when pursuing long-term relationships in a B2B environment.

Firstly, sales practitioners indicated that sellers do not make their best offers to opportunistic customers or make new products available to such customers, and that opportunistic customers cause conflicts in the seller–business relationship. Sellers do not want to establish a relationship with a buyer or continue with an existing relationship when it is evident that the buyer hides important information of interest to the seller. This is perceived as unethical behavior, leading to distrust. Furthermore, sellers react negatively to buyers who do not deliver on promises or alter facts in order to get what they need. Sellers perceive this type of behavior as deviant and uncooperative, perceiving the buyer as dishonest and not worthy as a potential future partner or to continue an existing relationship with a buyer based on previous experiences. Therefore, buyers should develop an increased understanding of these aspects and have clear knowledge on their importance when wanting to establish a long-term relationship with a seller.

Secondly, sales practitioners also indicated that conflict with a customer is counterproductive for performance in seller–business relationships. Therefore, sellers lose time by handling conflict instead of approaching new and other existing customers. From a seller’s perspective, conflict is perceived as a negative factor that impairs the relationship-building initiatives with the buyer. Open engagement and two-way communications becomes imperative when dealing with conflict and sellers want to ensure that disagreements can be identified, addresses and resolved in a fast and professional manner. In a seller–buyer relationship, seller’s wants to ensure that disagreements with a buyer can be professionally managed in an amicable manner, to the benefit of all parties concerned. Should conflict in the relationship with the buyer be repetitive (for example due to continuous opportunistic behavior or the inability of the buyer to deliver products to the seller on time), the seller will ultimately disengage from the relationship.

Thirdly, sales practitioners indicated that when buyers as business customers are not prioritized, the willingness to share information with such customers decreases, it complicates the seller–business relationship, no extra efforts with customers are invested and an unsatisfying situation is created with a feeling of instability in the seller–business relationship. Sellers in a B2B relationship want to feel comfortable about its relationship with the buyer. They want to know that the buyer is trustworthy, reputable and reliable. The relationship must be founded on

principles of joy and happiness, securing a positive outcome to both the seller and the buyer. For sellers it is important that buyers, as business customers, also understand their needs and expectations, have respect for them as partners in the B2B relationship and deliver on expectations as agreed upon. Through an understanding of these expectations, sellers perceive buyers to be more enabled to deliver on their expectations successfully, which can ultimately lead to stronger economic benefits for both parties. Finally, sales practitioners argue that lower levels of non-economic satisfaction is secured when opportunism and conflict is prevalent in a seller–buyer relationship. This outcome ultimately makes it increasingly problematic for sellers to explore sales targets in a budget which lead to volatility in seller–business relationships.

In summary, it becomes imperative for both suppliers and their business customers (in the context of this study referred to as buyers) to secure fair dealings when engaging in business, to abstain from conducting business practices that will secure increased profits for only one of the business partners; to secure that business dealings are founded on ethical business practices, to adhere to business undertakings agreed upon and to develop a business reputation that is founded on the pillars of trustworthiness and integrity. Ultimately, suppliers want to secure an open engagement in their relationship with buyers as business customers that is founded on the principles of trustworthiness and integrity.

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