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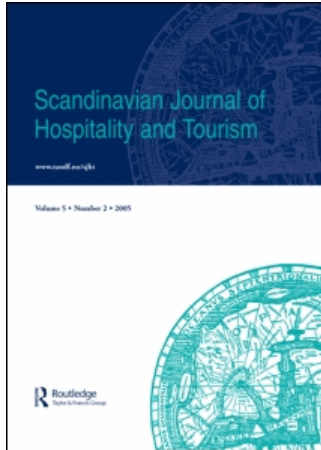
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Ossi Pesämaa ^a; Joseph F. Hair Jr ^b

^a Luleå University of Technology, Sweden

^b Kennesaw State University, Department of Marketing, USA

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RESEARCH NOTE

Cooperative Strategies for Improving the Tourism Industry in Remote Geographic Regions: An Addition to Trust and Commitment Theory with one Key Mediating Construct

OSSI PESÄMAA* & JOSEPH F. HAIR JR**

*Luleå University of Technology, Sweden, and **Kennesaw State University, Department of Marketing, USA

ABSTRACT *The success of cooperative relationships is influenced by interorganizational commitment, which is a long-run goal of networks. Our research examined cooperative relationships in the tourism industry to better understand what makes them successful. The study is an extension of previous empirical research on commitment. The overall research questions were: “What factors lead to interorganizational commitment in remote tourism destinations?” and “What are the relationships between the factors?” A literature search was conducted to identify factors related to organizational commitment. Search findings suggested a model proposing that interpersonal commitment mediates the effect of trust and reciprocity on interorganizational commitment. Data for the model was collected from a sample of tourism firms in successful cooperative networks. The theoretical model was purified based on convergent, nomological and discriminant validity as well as construct reliability. Our findings demonstrated that the relationship between trust and interorganizational commitment is in fact mediated by interpersonal commitment. We confirmed that reciprocity is directly related to interorganizational commitment, and is not mediated by interpersonal commitment. Thus, tourism firms should develop cooperative strategies in their networks by focusing on enhancing interpersonal commitment through trust, thereby ultimately helping to strengthen interorganizational commitment.*

KEY WORDS: Interpersonal commitment, interorganizational commitment, trust, reciprocity, tourism firms

Introduction

The growing acceptance of tourism networks has led to an interest in the social aspects of cooperative relationships that tie firms to each other (Cohen, 1984). Social

Correspondence Address: Ossi Pesämaa, Jönköping International Business School, P.O. Box 1026, SE-551 11 Jönköping, Sweden. Email: ossi.pesmaa@telia.com

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relationships are typically based on commitment which is established through trust and reciprocity (Mavondo & Rodrigo, 2001; Gulati & Sytch, 2007). Within this context, commitment means one firm works for all and all firms work for the survival of individual firms. Indeed, the loss of even one member of a network decreases the variety of products and activities offered to customers, as well as the ability to meet customer expectations. Thus, firms that understand the role of cooperation will accept individual short-term sacrifices to achieve longer-term benefits for the group (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Gundlach, Achrol & Mentzer, 1995; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Ylimaz & Hunt, 2001; Ekelund, 2002; Mukherjee & Nath, 2003).

The success of cooperative relationships is influenced by interorganizational commitment, which is a long-run goal of networks (Wetzels, de Ruyter & van Birgelen, 1998; Pesämaa & Hair, 2007). This concept has been operationally defined as the extent to which network firms are willing to agree to enduring relationships with other firms (Mavondo & Rodrigo, 2001; Sharma, Young & Wilkinson, 2006). By better understanding the role of interorganizational commitment, it is possible to more accurately predict the success of cooperative strategies.

Many studies have examined organizational commitment. This paper extends earlier studies by focusing on interorganizational commitment. Organizational commitment represents the individual's ties to the organization whereas interorganizational commitment involves relationships between organizations. Much of the commitment-related literature has focused on why some relationships break up while others survive to reach higher levels of exchange (Park & Russo, 1996; Wildeman, 1998). Commitment generally has been represented either as a key-mediating factor (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999) or a dependent variable measuring the "strength or success" of a relationship (Mavondo & Rodrigo, 2001).

Previous researchers have suggested the need to expand our knowledge of potential mediating constructs between trust and commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). This paper addresses that need by hypothesizing that commitment is an important consideration in developing successful tourism destinations, particularly in remote locations. Our research asks: "What factors lead to interorganizational commitment in remote tourism destinations?" and "What are the relationships between the factors?" The research provides two major contributions: (i) an expanded theoretical model of commitment, and (ii) an empirical test of the model. The model and empirical test are therefore fundamental to our proposed theoretical contribution.

The Model

A firm is an organizational arrangement often involved in interorganizational networks. Interorganizational networks are outcomes of cooperative exchanges between individuals involved in relationships between firms (Blau, 1964). Exchanges between firms imply, therefore, that the relationships extend from the "inside" of one organization to the "inside" of another organization (Zaheer, McEvily & Perrone, 1998; Pesämaa & Hair, 2007). This combination of individuals and firms is often referred to as the embedded unit of analysis. That embedded unit of analysis strongly

influences theory in this field, because relationships between individuals are assumed to affect business relationships. Interorganizational relationships are therefore important for the firm and its competitive environment because they not only influence the success of cooperative strategies they also tend to create economic imbalances. As a result, firms involved in exchanges have loyalties to each other even if it means the loss of short term business opportunities (Pesämaa, Örtqvist & Hair, 2007).

Relationships between tourism partners involve risk. To minimize these risks, firms in successful networks share resources and operations with others they can trust. Trust initially leads to greater interpersonal commitments (Becker, 1960; Axelrod, 1984; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Wetzels et al., 1998; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Varamäki, 2001; Yilmaz & Hunt, 2001; Ekelund, 2002; Rodriguez & Wilson, 2002; Wong & Sohal, 2002; Mukherjee & Nath, 2003) as does reciprocity (Kumar, Scheer & Steenkamp, 1995; Mavondo & Rodrigo, 2001). Moreover, interpersonal commitment ultimately influences interorganizational commitment (Yoon, Baker & Ko, 1994; Mavondo & Rodrigo, 2001). These relationships and hypotheses are summarized in Figure 1 (hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5 are formulated more precisely at the end of this section). Interorganizational commitments develop based on a combination of trust and reciprocity (Portes, 1998), but are ultimately enhanced through interpersonal commitment. Interpersonal commitment, therefore, will likely mediate the effects of trust and reciprocity.

Interorganizational Commitment (IOC)

Tourism firms in networks rely on other organizations' activities and future plans, and therefore develop cooperative strategies and inter-dependencies that involve sharing resources, decisions, operations and social activities. Commitment is an established construct in tourism (Medina-Munoz & Garcia-Falcon, 2000) as well as in Scandinavian tourism contexts (Björk & Virtanen, 2005). It is also a key factor in building long-term interorganizational relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Gundlach et al., 1995; Mavondo & Rodrigo, 2001), and an integral component of exchange theory (Cook & Emerson, 1978). Finally, interorganizational commitment is important for the tourism industry because it demonstrates how success and

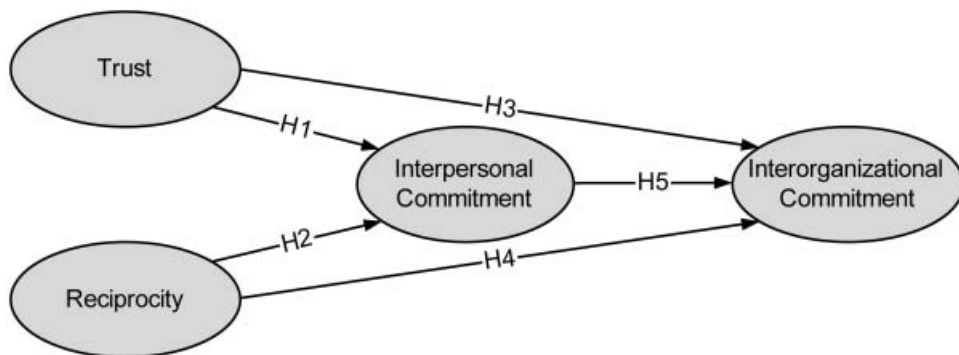


Figure 1. Model of Trust, Reciprocity, Interpersonal and Interorganizational Commitment.

strength can be achieved by combining the resources of several tourism firms at the destination level (Huybers & Bennett, 2003).

The theoretical framework for our model is an extension of Mavondo and Rodrigo (2001) and specifies interorganizational commitment as a strategic objective pursued by tourism network partners. Thus, we propose that interorganizational commitment is based on reciprocity and trust (Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Kumar et al., 1995) and mediated by interpersonal commitment (Mavondo & Rodrigo, 2001).

Interpersonal Commitment (IPC)

Interpersonal commitment is an integrating mechanism of groups. Some groups are strongly integrated whereas others have looser relationships (Yoon et al., 1994). Interpersonal commitment is therefore proposed as a mediating element of our theoretical model.

Interpersonal commitment is a value-based relationship developed over a long period with consequences for future decision-making. It includes shorter-term sacrifices as well as those that will be made in the future, and involves specific commitments by participating firms. One study of interpersonal commitment (Ingram & Roberts, 2000) found that trust is built in networks through dependencies. The dependencies, such as sharing customers with one another as well as information and decision-making, elevated the importance of trust and reciprocity. The dependencies also involved interlocks that bridged service gaps perceived by customers, and therefore represented actual commitments between firms based on trust. As an extension of this research, we propose that as firms build trust and expect reciprocity in relationships, they also make interpersonal commitments that influence future endeavours and ultimately lead to interorganizational commitment.

Reciprocity (RCP)

Reciprocity is the practice of give and take and is crucial for local development (Portes, 1998). It is driven by norms of exchange in which individuals feel obligated to return favours (Mavondo & Rodrigo, 2001). In the tourism industry, networks perform an important function for destinations by coordinating activities. These myriad activities between different firms such as hotels, restaurants, bars, ski resorts, camps, and guides, are often sustained through personal relationships involving reciprocity.

Reciprocity is important in studying success because it varies by context (Portes, 1998). Sometimes reciprocity necessitates immediate benefits but it also may involve expectations of future returns, although the initial returns may not be equal. In our research, reciprocity is therefore defined as a component of a person's cognitive system (i.e. values, ideas and experiences) that collects information, facts and feelings concerning how past exchanges were carried out, and uses them to evaluate the expected value of current decisions and to determine future commitments. Since research has shown that reciprocity leads to commitment (Kumar et al., 1995;

Mavondo & Rodrigo, 2001), feelings of being treated well are likely to lead to good outcomes and have a self-reinforcing effect that creates beliefs the relationship will lead to positive future outcomes.

Trust (TRU)

Trust involves personal relationships that are based on earlier experiences and involve honesty as well as confidence, and encourage firms to rely on others in exchange relationships. Many studies have shown that trust leads to commitment (Becker, 1960; Axelrod, 1984; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Wetzels et al., 1998; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Varamäki, 2001; Ylimaz & Hunt, 2001; Ekelund, 2002; Rodriguez & Wilson, 2002; Wong & Sohal, 2002; Mukherjee & Nath, 2003). We propose that trust can be reinforced through interpersonal commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and ultimately enhance interorganizational commitment (Mavondo & Rodrigo, 2001).

Hypotheses

We summarize the foregoing discussion in terms of the following hypotheses:

- H1 Trust is positively related to IPC
- H2 Reciprocity is positively related to IPC
- H3 Trust is positively related to IOC
- H4 Reciprocity is positively related to IOC
- H5 IPC is positively related to IOC
- H6 IPC mediates the relationship between trust and IOC
- H7 IPC mediates the relationship between reciprocity and IOC

Method

Qualitative research (observations, documents and interviews) was used to design the research instruments and identify an example of successful network relationships in tourism. The initial research was followed by a quantitative survey to empirically test the hypothesized model. A sample of 254 firms was surveyed and responses were received from 99 individuals in these firms (39% response rate).

Sample

This study sampled two tourism networks in northern Minnesota (N. MN), a geographical area with many similarities to Scandinavian countries, likely because many Scandinavians previously emigrated there. N. MN is a remote geographical area that has low population density (based on persons per square kilometre). Geographically this area of N. MN is positioned between the 10,000 lakes near the Canadian border and Lake Superior. There are many Scandinavian names and communities in this area based on the Scandinavian heritage, and cultural similarities are widespread. For example, as in many Scandinavian countries, people

share a strong identity and work ethic. Successful cooperative tourism networks are in this area sharing many strategic activities on a formal basis. As a result, the tourism networks in this area were considered relevant to study for Scandinavian purposes.

The area has fifteen formal tourism networks. Network activities for members are financed by a contribution of three percent of sales. One programme the networks cooperate on is sales strategies to attract tourists. The goal is to increase service quality and efficiency at the destination level by sharing costs of activities, facilities and marketing communications. This helps network members to outperform other destinations. Two of the networks were identified by experts and practitioners from both Sweden and the US as being especially successful – Ely and Lutsen Tofte Tourism Association (LTTA). To confirm their success, sales increases for the two networks also were examined. Member lists provided by these networks were used to draw the sample for this study.

The area is also an attractive place for wilderness tourism. The area is home to approximately 1.2 million birds, 1 million deer, 10,000 lakes, 30,000 bears, 2,500 wolves and plenty of fish. In addition, one of the destinations studied (ELY) grows during the peak season from 3,500 residents to 35,000, and hosts more than 700,000 visitors. The smaller local network, Lutsen Tofte Tourism Association (LTTA), is located near Lake Superior. Most tourism in Ely is based on canoeing and related outdoor activities, but LTTA has luxurious spas and a ski resort. Large investments have been made in hotels, shops, restaurants, and other facilities, such as providing equipment to tourists (e.g. clothing, skis, snowshoes, canoes, etc.). These considerable investments were driven by the desire to provide first class wilderness experiences to tourists. Obtaining funding for this type of investment is not easy. But creative firms in remote regions have learned that balancing hotels and cottages with the sale of second homes, including time-shares, can stimulate investment.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire development process began with a review of the relevant literature on four multi-item constructs (Mavondo & Rodrigo, 2001) reflecting different aspects of cooperative network relationships. Previously used constructs were examined and items that specifically related to this research were selected. Next a series of in-depth interviews were conducted with several experts in this field as well as individuals active in tourism firms similar to those that were included in the study. From these interviews several other questions were developed to cover issues not included in the previous studies. A preliminary version of the questionnaire was pretested and a couple of minor revisions were necessary. The final questionnaire included a total of 28 items related to the four constructs, plus firm classification information such as number of employees and annual sales. Scale items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=Unimportant to 5=Very Important. Respondents were asked to indicate how important each component of the four constructs (trust, reciprocity, IPC and IOC) was to firm performance. The constructs and the items included in the final analysis are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Operationalizations of construct indicator variables.

Interorganizational Commitment (IOC) 3 items	Interpersonal Commitment (IPC) 3 items
<p>Please assess the importance of <i>interorganizational commitment</i> among your network partners for your own business performance?</p> <p>IOC 1: How important are promises to exchange resources (e.g. cottages, rooms, staff, boats) inside our network?</p> <p>IOC 2: How important is allocating more resources (e.g. lodging capacity, competent staff and equipment) to business relationships within the network?</p> <p>IOC 3: How important is being bound to the network for future operations?</p>	<p>Please assess the importance of <i>interpersonal commitment</i> among your network partners for your business performance?</p> <p>IPC 1: How important to developing relationships with my network partner(s) is providing future advantages for my company?</p> <p>IPC 2: How important is the intention to allow my network partner(s) more decision-making in the future?</p> <p>IPC 3: How important is sharing similar business values with my network partner(s)?</p>
Reciprocity (RCP) 3 items	Trust (TRU) 6 items
<p>Please assess the importance of <i>reciprocity</i> among your network partners for your business performance?</p> <p>RCP 1: How important is the practice of “give and take” of favours in the relationship between my network partner(s)?</p> <p>RCP 2: How important is feeling a sense of obligation to my network partner(s) because they do favours for me?</p> <p>RCP 3: How important is it that network businesses return favours?</p>	<p>Please assess the importance of <i>trust</i> in the network for your own business performance?</p> <p>TRU 1: How important is it that my network partner(s) are honest and truthful with me?</p> <p>TRU 2: How important is it that I have high confidence in my network partner(s)?</p> <p>TRU 3: How important is mutual trust in developing relationships with my network partner(s)?</p> <p>TRU 4: How important is it that network partner(s) not try to take advantage of our relationship for their company’s own sake?</p> <p>TRU 5: How important is it that I have not been negatively surprised by the actions of my network partners?</p> <p>TRU 6: How important is it that I can rely on my network partner(s) to share my values?</p>

Multivariate Analysis Methods

Issues related to instrument reliability and validity were examined first. The statistical technique of exploratory factor analysis was used to eliminate items that did not meet pre-specified criteria for inter-item correlations and factor loadings (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006). Exploratory factor analysis reduces and summarizes initial questionnaire items retaining a large proportion of their explanatory power. Principal components using a varimax rotation was the method of factor analysis. Application of the method reduced the 28 original items to only 15.

In the next step a confirmatory factor analysis was undertaken. Confirmatory factor analysis differs from exploratory factor analysis because it assesses a theoretical set of factors and confirms if these factors in fact exist. In contrast, exploratory factor analysis is data driven – the factors emerge from analysis of the data instead of from theory. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using the AMOS 7.0 software (Arbuckle, 2006). The results included standardized estimates and interconstruct covariances that were used to calculate variance extracted, reliability and construct validity.

Results

Descriptives

Average means and standard deviations (SD) for each scale are shown in Table 2, as are the correlations. A review of the means shows that trust is considered very important as is interpersonal commitment. In turn, reciprocity and interorganizational commitment exhibit somewhat lower means but are still important. To facilitate analysis and eliminate multicollinearity among construct indicator variables, the individual variables were combined into summated scales for each construct.

Validity and Reliability of this Study

Several types of validity were examined. Nomological validity examines whether the constructs are correlated properly based on theory. The four constructs are all positively and significantly correlated ($p < 0.05$), which supports nomological validity of the constructs (Hair et al., 2006). Next, we examined convergent validity, which was confirmed since all standardized estimates (i.e. loadings) exceeded 0.5 (Hair et al., 2006). The standardized estimates were used to calculate the average variance extracted (AVE). Established guidelines recommend an AVE of > 0.5 and composite reliability scores > 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These results are summarized in Table 3. These guidelines were met with the exception of IPC, which had a somewhat lower variance extracted and composite reliability. However, IPC was considered acceptable for this study.

Table 2. Descriptives, correlations and variance extracted.

	N	Average Mean	SD	Construct correlations and reliabilities				VE
				Trust	RCP	IPC	IOC	
Trust	99	4.27	0.80					.70
Reciprocity	99	3.20	0.83	0.40**				.53
IPC	99	3.88	0.73	0.56**	0.21*			.37
IOC	99	2.89	0.80	0.37**	0.42**	0.46**		.54

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$. SD, standard deviation; VE, variance extracted.

Next, discriminant validity was examined. The squared interconstruct covariances should be larger than the variance extracted to establish discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2006), and for this study the criterion was met. Overall, all four constructs met established guidelines (Hair et al., 2006) and confirmed convergent, discriminant and nomological validity of the constructs, as well as construct reliability.

Tests of Hypotheses

The first two hypotheses focus on the hypothesized relationships between trust, reciprocity and interpersonal commitment (Table 4). The dependent variable was interpersonal commitment (IPC) and the independent variables were trust (H1) and reciprocity (H2). Both of the regression models are statistically significant (<0.05), and the standardized coefficients indicate the relationships between independent and dependent variables are positive. Model 1 had an R² of 0.309 for the relationship between trust and interpersonal commitment. The relationship between reciprocity and interpersonal commitment exhibited an R² of 0.046. Thus, hypotheses H1 and H2 are both supported, but the relationship between reciprocity and interpersonal commitment is quite small.

The third hypothesis is that interpersonal commitment is positively related to interorganizational commitment. Model 3 had an R² of 0.207 for the relationship

Table 3. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

	Factor loadings				Composite reliability score	Eigenvalue
	TRU	RCP	IPC	IOC		
<i>Trust (TRU)</i>					0.93	
TRU 1	0.76					
TRU 2	0.91					
TRU 3	0.91					
TRU 4	0.84					
TRU 5	0.84					
TRU 6	0.74					4.19
<i>Reciprocity (RCP)</i>					0.77	
RCP 1		0.70				
RCP 2		0.70				
RCP 3		0.78				1.59
<i>Interpersonal Commitment (IPC)</i>					0.62	
IPC 1			0.59			
IPC 2			0.70			
IPC 3			0.51			1.10
<i>Interorganizational Commitment (IOC)</i>					0.75	
IOC 1				0.76		
IOC 2				0.83		
IOC 3				0.59		1.61
N=99; oblique rotation						

Table 4. Summary of Simple Regression Models – Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3.

Coefficients variable	Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
<i>Model 1</i>			
Trust	0.555	6.579	0.000
<i>Model 2</i>			
Reciprocity	0.214	2.161	0.033
<i>Model 3</i>			
Interpersonal Commitment	0.455	5.038	0.000
<i>Model</i>	R	R square	Sig.
1	0.555	0.309	0.000
2	0.214	0.046	0.033
3	0.455	0.207	0.000

between interpersonal commitment and interorganizational commitment. Based on the standardized coefficient the relationship is positive so hypothesis H3 is supported.

Hypotheses 4–7 examined whether interpersonal commitment was mediating the relationship between trust, reciprocity and interorganizational commitment (Table 5). These four hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression. The dependent variable was interorganizational commitment (IOC), the independent variables were trust (TRU) and reciprocity (RCP), and the hypothesized mediating variable was interpersonal commitment (IPC). Model 4 had a single independent variable – Trust – and assessed its relationship with IOC. Model 4 was significant with an R^2 of 0.134. In Model 5 a second independent variable – Reciprocity – was included and again the dependent variable was IOC. Model 5 also was significant and the R^2 increased to 0.221. For both models the signs of the standardized coefficients were positive and the relationships were significant (<0.05). Therefore, hypotheses H4 and H5 are both accepted.

We next examined the possible mediating effects of IPC (Model 6). To do so, IPC was entered into the model as a third independent variable, in addition to trust and reciprocity. When IPC entered as a mediating predictor of IOC, we expected that both trust and reciprocity would be less significant and the relationships relatively weaker. If this occurred, then IPC would be functioning as a mediator (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The results show that IPC mediates trust (H6) since the path coefficient for trust is considerably weaker (0.322 vs. 2.44) and also insignificant (0.748). We can therefore conclude that IPC mediates the relationship between trust and IOC (H6). In contrast, the results show that IPC does not mediate reciprocity (H7) since the reciprocity path coefficient becomes even stronger (3.271 vs. 3.492) and also is significant (0.001). We therefore conclude that IPC mediates the relationship between trust and IOC (H6), but does not mediate the relationship between reciprocity and IOC (H7). Thus, hypothesis H6 is supported while hypothesis H7 is rejected.

Table 5. Summary Hierarchical Regression – Hypotheses 4–7.

Coefficients variable	Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
<i>Model 4</i>			
Trust	0.367	3.881	0.000
<i>Model 5</i>			
Trust	0.240	2.444	0.016
Reciprocity	0.321	3.271	0.001
<i>Model 6</i>			
Trust	0.035	.322	0.748
Reciprocity	0.323	3.492	0.001
Interpersonal commitment	0.367	3.589	0.001
<i>Model</i>	R	R square	Sig.
4	0.367	0.134	0.000
5	0.470	0.221	0.000
6	0.560	0.314	0.000

Note: Model 4 Predictor: Trust; Model 5 Predictors: Trust, Reciprocity; Model 6 Predictors: Trust, Reciprocity, Interpersonal Commitment; and Dependent Variable – Models 4–6: Interorganizational Commitment.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study explored the characteristics of relationships formed by successful tourism networks in remote geographical regions. To examine these relationships we proposed a model based on previous research hypothesizing that selected factors such as trust and reciprocity influence how interorganizational commitments develop. We further proposed that interpersonal commitment would mediate trust and reciprocity in predicting interorganizational commitment. Our results confirm that trust and reciprocity are related to interorganizational commitment (IOC), but the relationship is different. Interpersonal commitment (IPC) fully mediates the relationship between trust and interorganizational commitment. But reciprocity is directly related to IOC and not mediated by IPC.

One explanation of the finding that reciprocity is not mediated by IPC is that this type of behaviour depends more on economic considerations (lower costs, wider assortment of products/services, higher profits, etc.) than on personal relationships. That is, reciprocity motives and expectations are more strongly influenced by perceived economic benefits than personal commitments, and therefore directly lead to interorganizational commitments.

The results are consistent with and extend the theory of relationships between trust and commitment. The work of Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Garbarino and Johnson (1999) provided a strong theoretical foundation for this research, and our findings provide additional support for the relationship between trust and commitment. But a clear gap in their theory is an understanding of the sequential relationship between trust, reciprocity and commitment, both personal and interorganizational, in building successful cooperative strategies (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Specifically, an important question is how much emphasis network

partners should place on trust and reciprocity in building interorganizational commitment as a foundation for cooperative strategies. As a result, our research examined factors that lead to interorganizational commitment in remote tourism destinations as well as the relationships between the factors.

The findings suggest two different paths to pursue in building interorganizational commitments. One emphasizes building mutual trust among network partners, which will lead to interpersonal commitments to share resources and operational strategies, as well as decisions to pursue mutually beneficial goals. These shared activities will therefore build stronger interpersonal commitments and ultimately interorganizational commitment. The second path to strengthening interorganizational commitment involves emphasizing strategies based on reciprocity. Reciprocity strategies require give and take in partner exchanges, so that all firms benefit in the long run. Emphasizing trust and reciprocity are therefore simultaneous processes that can both result in successful cooperative strategies based on interorganizational commitment.

Implications for Tourism Firms in Remote Regions

The success of tourism firms in remote regions ultimately depends on the level of interorganizational commitment. Higher commitment enhances the likelihood of success. Thus, tourism firms should develop cooperative network strategies that focus on enhancing trust, which in turn builds interpersonal commitment, thereby ultimately helping to strengthen interorganizational commitment. But encouraging reciprocity is also important, and perhaps more so in the short run, because reciprocity strategies lead directly to higher levels of interorganizational commitment.

Theory suggests that cooperative strategies are best achieved through personal relationships. Conceptually, trust is the dominant factor in personal relationships (Ring & Van de Ven, 1992). Thus, emphasizing trust in personal relationships can help firms to develop successful cooperative strategies. Our results suggest that the ability to establish trusting relationships could be used by firms as a hiring criterion along with other competencies, such as an understanding of reciprocity strategies, when long term successful and committed relationships are a major goal.

Limitations

Because this study was a preliminary investigation of the potential influence of three constructs on interorganizational commitment, the models tested were kept simple. As a result, one limitation is the potential underspecification of the models tested. It is possible therefore that the theory could be better explained by some other variable not included. A second limitation is the study used self-report measures and the respondents may have interpreted questions differently than intended or may have been influenced in some way by the structure or format of the questionnaire. Third, this is a cross-sectional study and likely would benefit from a longitudinal approach. Finally, the sample size precluded the use of a validation sample which would have facilitated confirmation of the proposed model. In the future researchers can

overcome, or at least reduce, these limitations by including other related constructs, such as loyalty, and by extending the constructs used to reflect emerging issues. Moreover, a larger sample as well as one from another geographic area would facilitate cross-validation of these as well as future findings.

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