

The second description of the customer brand relationship proposed by Aggarwal (2004) is based on social relationship metaphor using “exchange” relationships and “communal” relationship dimension in order to develop an alternative concept of customer brand relationships construct. In line with Social Exchange Theory assumption, he defined “exchange” relationships as the benefits given with the expectation of receiving a comparable benefit already received. This is in contrast with communal relationships that is usually applied in a romantic setting. Aggarwal also suggests that when people form relationships with brands that mirror their social relationships, norms of social relationships are used as guiding principles in their interactions with brands. However, although the social relationship framework is vibrant, it is not exactly paralleled in the brand context, especially in the service domain.

On the other hand, some researchers, for example Hess, Story and Danes (2011) claimed that it is not enough for the brand to be a metaphor, personified or animated, because the nature is more impersonal and unidirectional. In fact, the introduction of object-person relationship by Shimp and Madden (1988) and multi-dimensional segmentation by Story and Hess (2006) have provided a creative way of looking for the customer-brand relationship phenomena. Both studies believed that the customer interaction with the brand should behave as active and as a result, there will be a few types of customer brand relationship. Specifically, Shimp and Madden, (1988) derived eight concepts from non-liking to loyalty, while Story and Hess (2006) anticipated four segmentations of relationship forms – disconnected, functional, personal, and commitment.

Previous studies have contributed significantly to the branding knowledge and the relationship marketing theory. Specifically, the studies have highlighted the rationale for establishing the relationship and the appropriate structure to manage the relationship between customer and brand. Describing the rational and structure aspect of the phenomena are important to provide a coherent and robust paradigm for marketing knowledge, especially in the context of relationship marketing. However, according to Eiriz and Wilson (2006), there is a gap that emerged between these two research priorities and suggest that there is another important aspect of research priority that is important in relationship marketing theory. This third priority is about the relationship process. The clarification about the process of customer brand relationship will provide a specific and systematic guidance to the organization on how to manage and sustain their brand in the intense market competition.