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Factors Influencing The Relationship Quality Between Shrimp Farmers And Processing Enterprises In The Mekong Delta

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ABSTRACT:*The objective of the study is to determine the factors that affect the relationship quality between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises in the Mekong Delta. The data were collected through direct interviews with 150 shrimp farmers in Ca Mau, Bac Lieu and Soc Trang Province. The PLS - SEM method was used and the results show that three factors positively affect the quality of the relationship between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises are perceived price, payment conditions and profit-loss sharing. In particular, the perceived price is the most important factor affecting the quality of the relationship between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises. Besides, the study also claims that the relationship quality factor positively impacts the loyalty among shrimp farmers and processing enterprises.*
KEY WORD*: relationship quality, loyalty, farmers, processing enterprises*

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I. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Shrimp farming in Vietnam in general and the Mekong Delta in particular, has been developing in recent years and has become a significant economic sector, creating jobs, increasing incomes for millions of coastal residents. The Mekong Delta is known as the capital of the shrimp processing industry with 94% of the total farming area and 81% of the country's shrimp production. Ca Mau, Bac Lieu, Soc Trang and Kien Giang are key provinces in shrimp production. Currently, shrimp farmers are experiencing difficulties in the process of cultivation and consumption. The market's adverse volatility factor is a problem for shrimp farmers. The primary cause leading to high risks for shrimp farmers is the weak linkage between the farmer and the purchasers, especially shrimp processing enterprises.

In theory, many studies have confirmed that the quality of the relationship has a key role in maintaining the connection between the manufacturer and the purchaser. That the relationship quality is improved contributes to increasing stakeholders' operational efficiency (Ellram and Hendrick, 1995). According to Schulze et al. (2006), the relationship between farmers and purchasers helps farmers reduce transaction costs, facilitate advanced technology in production, generate stable quality and homogeneity products; while purchasers do not have to invest more resources in producing shrimp. Shrimp industry is mainly at the level of household business. Shrimp farming is fragmented and small, quality is low, and the output is not stable; therefore, creating an effective supply chain is essential to enhance the value of shrimp quality and exploit the competitive advantages as well as strengths in the shrimp market (Vo Thi Thanh Loc, 2008). The linkage is a problem, but the quality of the linkage is still not appropriately concerned by farmers and processing enterprises. From the practical and scientific basis, research on factors affecting the quality of the relationship between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises in the Mekong Delta is essential. This is the necessary scientific basis to establish a close linkage between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises in the Mekong Delta shrimp supply chain in the future.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Theoretical framework and research model

Relationship quality

Customer loyalty is an essential target for marketing strategy planning and is an important basis for developing a sustainable competitive advantage. Loyalty is manifested in behavioural and attitude aspect

(Oliver, 1999). Behavioural loyalty is transactions that are repeated by customers and are measured by observational techniques. Attitudinal loyalty has a positive effect on the continuity of relationships and the tendency to continue to exist in relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Loyalty is a partial dedication of the buyer to maintain the relationship and increase the likelihood and the intention to purchase the product or service many times. Loyalty regarding attitude has a positive impact both in continuing the link and the tendency to exist in the relationship (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Loyalty is a partial dedication of the purchaser to maintain the relationship and increase the product or service purchase intention many times. The quality of the relationship has a crucial role in supporting the link between the manufacturer and the purchaser. That the relationship quality is improved contributes to increasing stakeholders' operational efficiency (Ellram và Hendrick, 1995).

Relationship quality that is based on relationship marketing theory is considered to be an important measure of an organisation's long-term success. According to Storbacka et al. (1994), the purpose of relationship marketing is to create, maintain and manage relationships with customers and other partners so that all stakeholders can achieve their own goals. Smith (1998) and Walter et al. (2003) suggested that relationship quality is the customer's perception of the relationship with the sales representative, it is also a concept that encompasses three distinct but interrelated aspects through three components which are trust, satisfaction and commitment. The relationship quality is formed through several stages and at each stage, customers concern about the different components of this relationship (Ravald and Grönroos, 1996). Generally, Javerlin (2001) claimed that the relationship quality is a sense of partners' relationships. According to Athanasopoulou (2009), satisfaction and trust are the two most tested aspects of relationship quality. Most studies agree that the quality of the relationship is perceived and assessed through the perceptions of stakeholders; relationship quality is also a multidimensional concept including factors of satisfaction, trust, and commitment, but they are closely related (Athanasopoulou, 2009).

The relationship between perceived price and relationship quality.

That producers perceive the trade-off between benefits and costs that a purchaser offers to consider, compare, evaluate the price of other purchasers or market prices is called price perceived (Ulaga and Eggert, 2006). After considering all the factors of production costs, if farmers are satisfied with the product price, they will continue to cooperate with buyers (Ulaga and Eggert, 2006; Barry et al., 2008). Since shrimps are seasonal products that cannot be kept too long in the pond and are dominated by many factors in the market, the price negotiation between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises is relative. In addition, Tran Thi Lam Phuong et al. (2015) have demonstrated that perceived price affects the relationship quality when purchasers and sellers co-operate for more than two years. Hence, the hypothesis H1 was proposed: Perceived price has a positive impact on the relationship quality between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises.

The relationship between supporting service and relationship quality

Ulaga and Eggert (2006) asserted that supporting services reflect the support of buyers to farmers to create products with better quality. Research by Bhagat and Dhar (2014) showed that cooperation, trust and caring attitude of buyers affect farmers' satisfaction positively, thereby, the relationship is maintained in the long-term. In this study, supporting services are manifested as the introduction, breed and medicine supply as well as shrimp raising and caring guidance. Some processing enterprises also provide shrimp farmers with information on market trends and consultancy on better production options. Hence, the hypothesis H2 is proposed: Supporting services have a positive impact on the relationship quality between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises.

The relationship among quality test, terms of payment and relationship quality

According to Zhang and Hu (2011), purchase validation and terms of payment are two essential factors to the relationship quality between shrimp farmers and purchasers. That the purchasing validation is well implemented will improve the quality of the relationship between shrimp farmers and buyers (Tran Thi Lam Phuong et al., 2015). Currently, the majority of shrimp farming households are spontaneous, have no orientation and long-term vision. The efficiency and productivity of shrimp farming are very precarious, and they reflect signs of unsustainable development (disease attack, unstable price, inconsistent quality, etc.). Preliminary research results show that shrimp farmers express a particular interest in the quality test of postharvest products and purchasers' terms of payment. Hence, the hypothesis H3 and H4 are proposed: H3: Quality test has a positive impact on the relationship quality between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises; H4: Terms of payment have a positive effect on the relationship quality between shrimp households and processing enterprises.

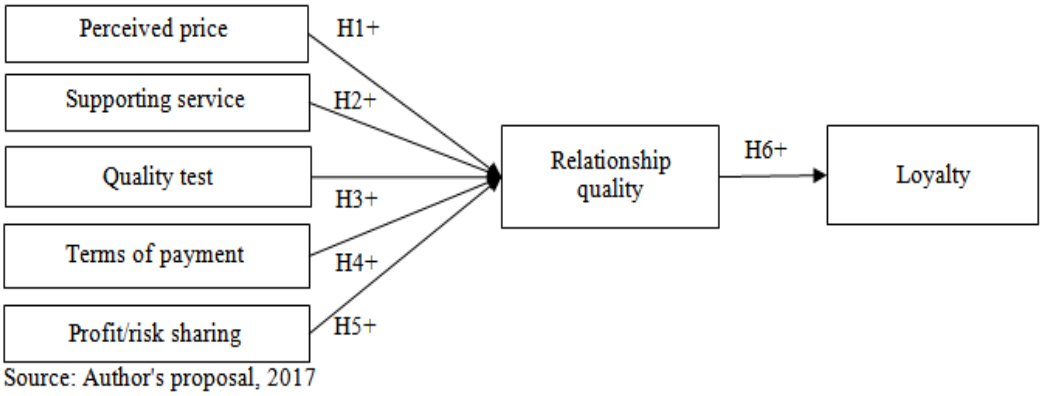
The relationship between profit and risk sharing and relationship quality

According to Dwyer et al. (1987), the relationship between sellers and buyers creates product differentiation and transition barriers. Accordingly, benefits derived from the link will help minimise instability, manage dependency, efficiency in exchange as well as satisfaction. Dwyer et al. (1987) also showed that the development of the relationship between sellers and buyers, on the one hand, will lead to benefits, on the other hand, will create additional costs. Meanwhile, investing in agricultural production always faces risks (Nguyen Quoc Nghi and Le Thi Dieu Hien, 2014). Therefore, profit and risk sharing is an essential factor in the relationship between sellers and buyers (Tang, 1999). Hence, the hypothesis H5 is proposed: Profit/risk sharing has a positive impact on the relationship quality between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises.

The relationship between relationship quality and loyalty

According to Oliver (1999), loyalty is a commitment of repeat purchase or repetitive behaviour towards favoured products/services in the future. Loyalty is also the result of a quality relationship between suppliers and customers. The better the quality of the relationship between buyers and sellers is, the greater the loyalty in the relationship is(Lemke, 2003; Lin and Ding, 2005). Therefore, the purpose of maintaining relationships in the affiliate model is to achieve the loyalty of shrimp farmers to processing enterprises. Hence, the hypothesis H6 is proposed: The relationship quality has a positive impact on loyalty between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises.

Based on the literature review, a model of factors affecting the relationship quality between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises is proposed:



Source: Author's proposal, 2017

Figure 1: The proposed research model

Table 1: Interpretation of observed variables in the research model

Factors	Observed variables	Sign	Scale	Reference sources
Perceived price(PP)	Purchasing price of processing enterprise (X) does not fluctuate	PP1	Liker 1-5	Ulaga and Eggert (2006), Barry et. (2008), Tran Thi Lam Phuong et al. (2015)
	Purchasing price of processing enterprise (X) is commensurate with shrimp quality.	PP2	Liker 1-5	
	Compared with other enterprises, the purchase price of processing enterprise (X) is reasonable.	PP3	Liker 1-5	
	Shrimp products sold to processing enterprise (X) are always at good prices.	PP4	Liker 1-5	
Terms of payment (TP)	Processing enterprise (X) is flexible in the form of payment	TP1	Liker 1-5	Tran Tien Khai (2007), Zhang and Hu (2011), the author's proposal
	Processing enterprise (X)'s advance payment is suitable to the needs of farmers	TP2	Liker 1-5	

	Processing enterprise (X) pays money according to the contract term	TP3	Liker 1-5	
	Processing enterprise (X) always pays the exact amount of money as committed	TP4	Liker 1-5	
Quality test (QT)	I am satisfied with processing enterprise (X)'s shrimp product quality test	QT1	Liker 1-5	Zhang and Hu (2011), Tran Thi Lam Phuong et al. (2015), the author's proposal.
	Criteria for quality evaluation of shrimp products of processing enterprise (X) is apparent	QT2	Liker 1-5	
	Processing enterprise (X) purchases all qualified shrimp products	QT3	Likert1-5	
	Processing enterprises (X)'s test standards match market standards	QT4	Liker 1-5	
Supporting service (SS)	Processing enterprise (X) helps farmers to increase the quality of shrimp seed source	SS1	Likert 1-5	Ulaga and Eggert (2006), Tran Thi Lam Phuong et al. (2015), the author's proposal.
	Processing enterprise (X) always provides necessary market information	SS2	Likert 1-5	
	Processing enterprise (X)'s support level is always higher than other enterprises	SS3	Likert 1-5	
Profit/risk sharing (PRS)	The relationship with processing enterprise (X) raises mutual benefits	PRS1	Likert 1-5	Tang (1999), Tran Thi Lam Phuong et al. (2015), the author's proposal.
	When risks happen, both sides discuss together to tackle the situation reasonably	PRS2	Likert 1-5	
	Processing enterprise (X) gives more benefits to farmers when it smoothly operates	PRS3	Likert 1-5	
Relationship quality (RQ)	I have a close relationship with the processing enterprise (X)	RQ1	Liker 1-5	Storbacka et al. (1994), Ericsson (1985), Dwyer et al. (1987), Smith (1998), Walter et al. (2003), Javerlin (2001).
	The relationship with processing enterprise (X) meets my goals	RQ2	Liker 1-5	
	The relationship with processing enterprise (X) goes as I desire	RQ3	Liker 1-5	
	I am satisfied with the relationship between me and the processing enterprise (X)	RQ4	Liker 1-5	
Loyalty (Loy)	I will continue to supply products to processing enterprise (X)	Loy1	Likert 1-5	Oliver (1999), Tran Thi Lam Phuong et al. (2015), Lemke (2003), Lin and Ding (2005).
	I will continue to sign contracts with processing enterprise (X)	Loy2	Likert 1-5	
	I will introduce processing enterprise (X) to other business partners	Loy3	Likert 1-5	

	Processing business (X) is my first choice	Loy4	Liker 1-5	

Source: Authors' compilation, 2017

2.2 Analytical method

In order to test the research model, Cronbach's Alpha is used to assess the reliability of the scale, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is utilised for evaluating the scale's convergent validity and discriminant validity, Partial Least Square Structural Equation Analysis (PLS-SEM) is applied to assess research model and proposed hypotheses. PLS-SEM can estimate a complicated research model with multiple mediators, latent variables and observed variables, specifically structure model. In addition, it is also appropriate for research that emphasised prediction (Reinartz et al., 2009).

2.3 Data collection methods

According to Hair et al. (1998), if Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is used, the ratios between observation and variable should be 5:1, meaning 1 variable needs at least 5 observations. At the same time, to guarantee the reliability when using Structural Equation Analysis (SEM), the sample size has to be between 100 and 200 (Hoyle, 1995). This research has 26 variables, so the minimal sample size is 130. In fact, 150 observations - which are shrimp farmers that have business contracts with seafood processing enterprises - have been collected by in-person survey method. Research areas are mainly in 3 provinces: Ca Mau, Bac Lieu and Soc Trang as these provinces are the intensive shrimp farming areas, representing the Mekong Delta.

III. RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Scale reliability assessment in the research model

Cronbach's Alpha Analysis

This research used Cronbach's Alpha to test the strictness and correlation coefficients among variables in the research model. After eliminating TP3 because of having a Corrected Item-Total Correlation lower than 0.3 (Nunnally, 1978; Peterson, 1994; Slater, 1995). The results displayed in Table 2 shows that all seven factors with 25 variables have relatively high-reliability coefficients (above 0.6) and all these variables have Corrected Item-Total Correlation higher than 0.3. This proves that all the variables will ensure the reliability (Nunnally, 1978; Peterson, 1994; Slater, 1995) and 25 variables can be used for the next step: Exploratory Factor Analysis.

Table 2: Results of Cronbach's Alpha analysis

No	Scale	Number of variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1	Perceived price(PP)	4	0.622	0.328
2	Supporting service (SS)	3	0.672	0.403
3	Quality test (QT)	4	0.677	0.335
4	Terms of payment (TP)	3	0.807	0.649
5	Profit and risk sharing (PRS)	3	0.863	0.686
6	Relationship quality (RQ)	4	0.643	0.364
7	Loyalty (Loy)	4	0.729	0.381

Source: Survey data, 2017

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

After testing the reliability of the scale, Exploratory Factor Analysis is used to assess the convergent validity and discriminant validity of variables in the model. The result of EFA with guaranteed tests: (1) Reliability of variables (Factor loading > 0.5); (2) Research model's suitability test ($0.5 < KMO = 0.729 < 1$); (3) Bartlett's test for correlation of variables ($Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05$); (4) Cumulative variance test = 68.21% > 50% (Gerbing và Anderson, 1988). EFA results form 7 factor groups: Perceived price (PP), Supporting service (SS), Quality test (QT), Terms of payment (TP), Profit and risk sharing (PRS), Relationship quality (RQ), Loyalty (Loy). There are no variables disturbance among factors, so their names remain, and we proceed to use Partial Least Square Structural Equation Analysis (PLS-SEM) by SmartPLS software.

3.2 Partial Least Square Structural Equation Analysis (PLS-SEM)

After Exploratory Factor Analysis, PLS-SEM is applied to test the relationship among factors in the research model. According to Reinartz et al., (2009), a research model is evaluated in 2 steps: test the Measurement model and Structure model.

Measurement model test

The research uses Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Outer loading to assess the reliability of scales. For a scale to acquire reliability significance, its composite

reliability and outer loading both need to be higher than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014). Besides, as stated by Fornell and Larcker (1981), AVE has to be higher than 0.5 to prove the reliability and composite reliability of the scale. Results demonstrate that all concept scales meet the requirement for reliability and convergent validity.

Table 3: Results of reliability and convergent validity

Component scales	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Perceived price (PP)	0.757	0.553
Profit and risk sharing (PRS)	0.907	0.767
Supporting service (SS)	0.816	0.604
Terms of payment (TP)	0.886	0.721
Quality test (QT)	0.794	0.592
Relationship quality (RQ)	0.783	0.580
Loyalty (Loy)	0.829	0.550

Source: Survey data, 2017

After that, research proceeds to compare the relationship among factors with Average Variance Extracted to analyse discriminant validity. Results show that square-root of AVE of each factor is higher than the inter-construct correlation between that factor and other ones. All variables acquire VIF < 5 so the model does not violate the multicollinearity problem. Therefore, the data ensure the discrimination degree of measurement factors.

Partial Least Square Structural Equation Analysis (PLS-SEM)

The results of PLS-SEM demonstrate that there are three factors positively influence the relationship quality between farmers and processing enterprises. They are Perceived price (PP), Terms of payment (TP) and Profit and risk sharing (PRS). At the same time, results also show that Relationship quality (RQ)factor positively affects Loyalty (Loy) of shrimp farmers in the relation with processing enterprises.

Table 4: Results of hypotheses test

Relations	T-test	Degree of impact	Conclusion
H1: Perceived price →Relationship quality	4.465	0.001	Accepted
H2: Terms of payment→Relationship quality	1.982	0.043	Accepted
H3: Quality test→ Relationship quality	0.073	0.942	Rejected
H4: Supporting service→ Relationship quality	1.569	0.117	Rejected
H5: Profit and risk sharing →Relationship quality	2.692	0.007	Accepted
H6: Relationship quality →Loyalty	4.550	0.001	Accepted

Source: Survey data, 2017

Based on results displayed in Table 4, three hypotheses H1, H2, H3 are accepted at a significance level of 1%, and H6 is approved at a significance level of 5%. Two other hypotheses H3 and H4 are rejected because of their statistical significance > 0.05. Therefore, it can be said that relationship quality between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises is under the influence of three factors: Perceived price, Terms of payment and Profit and risk sharing.

What shrimp farmers are concerned most about is income so if companies can fulfil the criteria of the purchase price, terms of payment and profit, the relationship between them and shrimp farmers can be improved. This is proven once again through the acceptance of H6. It means that the better the relationship quality between shrimp farmers and processing companies becomes, the closer the attachment between shrimp farmers and processing companies is. The results are in line with Lemke (2003), Lin and Ding (2005).

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aims to determine factors influencing the relationship quality between shrimp farmers and processing enterprises in the Mekong Delta, and the research has pinpointed three elements that have a positive impact on the quality of this specific relationship. They are Perceived price, Terms of payment and Profit and risk sharing. In which, the Perceived price is the factor that affects the relationship quality most. Meanwhile, the research also points out that relationship quality positively influences loyalty of shrimp farmers towards processing companies. Accordingly, the study proposes some recommendations:

For processing enterprises,

(1) Pay attention to purchase price because this is the factor that shrimp farmers concern most. Also, the negotiated price should ensure the best interests of farmers according to the business condition;

(2) Terms of payment in the transaction contract should be guaranteed, in which the punctual payment criterion is the most important to the farmers;

(3) Always accompany and share risks with the farmer in difficult times as well as regularly exchange market information, manufacturing techniques to help the farmers orientate production direction in the most optimal way.

For shrimp farmers,

(1) The most crucial thing for the farmers is to keep the principals and commit to behaving appropriately according to the terms of a contract.

(2) Regularly stay in contact with processing enterprises to update market information as well as discuss arising issues timely.

(3) Research and study advanced farming techniques to ensure product quality, increase productivity and investment efficiency.

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