

What is the Role of the Relationship in CRM? Exploring the Gaps Between Intended and Actual Behavior: An Abstract



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Abstract Fundamental to CRM theory is the establishment of a relationship which becomes deeper and more meaningful over time and will result in customer loyalty and increased customer equity. What happens however, when a customer “in a relationship” is ready to make a purchase? Do they purchase from the firm who has invested in them over time or become seduced by a more attractive offer?

In this experimental study design study, 130 Amazon Mechanical Turk workers were randomly assigned to one of two groups. Each group was conceptualized to be serviced by a combination of artificial intelligence and customer service representatives which communicated with consumers via chat and e-mail. One group was made to feel that they were dealing with an individual personalized agent, while the other group was made to believe that they were dealing with a team of specialists. This investigation provides evidence that while consumers may feel an obligation to purchase from a firm if they are actively engaged in a relationship, they can be fairly easily enticed by a competing offer. Further when an individual is made to feel that they are dealing with an individual person rather than a team of specialists, they are more likely to feel embarrassed about considering the alternative offer. At the end of the day, most respondents preferred to accept a more attractive offer at the moment of influence than to purchase from someone they have an ongoing relationship with.

Drawing on theories of reasoned action and planned behavior, consumers are driven by multiple attributes, and intended behavior may differ from actual behavior. The implications are that while individuals may be positively predisposed to a firm that is practicing CRM, the firm that concentrates their efforts at the moment of influence rather than building a relationship over time may be more successful in capturing the business.

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