"Culture and relationship marketing in neighborhood stores: Analysis of a peripheral region in Colombia"

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CULTURE AND RELATIONSHIP MARKETING IN NEIGHBORHOOD STORES: ANALYSIS OF A PERIPHERAL REGION IN COLOMBIA

Abstract

Neighborhood stores are a business that is rooted in the social and economic structure of societies in developing countries, so their importance in these areas is attractive to analyze from an academic and research perspective. This study evaluated the influence of culture on relationship marketing between neighborhood merchants and their consumers from an alternative perspective to traditional approaches. Thus, a consumer is presented as a human being inserted in a social reality and not as a matter of simple exchange. The study was quantitative in nature, approached from the deductive and correlational method, for which a survey-type measurement instrument with a Likert scale was generated and validated that evaluated the relationship between variables. The reliability of the scale was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, obtaining acceptable results for culture (a: 0.85) and relationship marketing (a: 0.93). The results indicate a positive relationship between culture and relationship marketing: trust (0.789; p < 0.00), commitment (0.658; p < 0.00), satisfaction (0.853; p < 0.00), and loyalty (0.753; p < 0.00), so that business relationships in a neighborhood store are based on cultural considerations established and maintained in constant interaction between participating members: shopkeepers, consumers, friends and relatives who attend it with some frequency, have these ties deep, since they have been appropriated through the performance of ceremonies and rites in which values, beliefs, mental representations, trust, commitment, satisfaction, and loyalty of the actors involved are implicit, giving vitality to the relationship between buyers and sellers, which they themselves call "socializing links".

Keywords	trust, commitment, satisfaction, loyalty, values, beliefs, mental representations
JEL Classification	L25, M15, M30

INTRODUCTION

Faced with the arrival of the large supermarket chains in Colombia – Éxito in 1990, Makro in 1995 and Carrefour in 1998 – Henry Salem, a European expert on large chains, predicted in 1992 that ten years later, they would end neighborhood stores and supply centers. His main argument revolved around the idea that these small traditional businesses could not compete with the variety of brands and products and the low prices that they offered. However, in 2002 he had to admit that he had been wrong to underestimate the cultural factor of the stores, when he predicted their end (Revista Dinero, 2003).

Despite the predictions made and the disadvantages of neighborhood stores compared to supermarkets and hypermarkets that some investigations have detected, in the country the mass distribution of products has developed in the opposite way to what happened in different international markets. Studies by AC Nielsen in Colombia show that, despite the growth of large chains, Colombians made 60% of their purchases in traditional neighborhood stores; a behavior completely

different from that of Europe, where traditional stores served only 5% of the market. For the year 2019, neighborhood stores in Colombia represented 52% of the mass consumption market with an estimated 266,000 establishments throughout the country (Portafolio, 2019).

Acevedo (2017) recognizes the importance of neighborhood stores in the economy due to the role of distribution and marketing of mass consumption products and the family basket, especially due to the coverage and volume of sales they have. Neighborhood stores are establishments that generally operate in a family home in peripheral areas of cities that have an active exchange with customers, suppliers, and the community in which it is located (Silva, 2012). Currently, in Colombia the number of neighborhood stores is close to 500,000 throughout the country, of which 3,500 belong to the Neiva city (Productos Naturales de la Sabana S.A.S., 2019).

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Neighborhood stores have become a notable cultural point of reference, since their dynamics condense a range of collective representations that the participants of said micro-community make explicit through feelings of belonging, desires to share, ties of solidarity, which are reflected in norms of behavior and in the management of implicit codes: "In neighborhood stores commercial practices based on trust are developed (...) people buy by proximity, the miniaturization of products sold and trust is trusting only in the word, the haggling and *ñapa*" (Ramírez & Pachón, 2004, pp. 102-103). Regarding the neighborhood store, it is stated "it is not only a place where products are bought and sold; It is the place where the problems of the neighborhood and the country are discussed; they are rooted in customs, they give personalized attention and trust them, trusting only the word of their clients" (Revista Dinero, 2003).

These traditional businesses are found everywhere, in the middle of the community: "As neighborhood stores have a spontaneous location, one finds them in the middle of the block, on corners, in front of parks, near universities and in any urban setting, regardless of social stratum, which is why they are considered a commercial phenomenon, because in addition to surviving the ravages of global markets, they transcend their hegemonic role as a supply setting and are a benchmark for human interactions, given that is integrated into the cultural fabric of each region" (Baquero, 2009, p. 23).

Its relevance is also highlighted by Ramírez and Pachón (2004, pp. 15-16) who, seeing the city as a natural space for human interaction, maintain "that the city is not only a spatial unit, but the space where citizens build identities (...) and for this reason, it is not possible to understand society in general, nor the city in particular, if there is no knowledge of the natural spaces as well as the built ones that configure it and give it its own dynamics, and unlike times Previously, in which spaces were treated as purely physical things, fixed and immobile, now they are approached as living entities in movement".

Once the relationships between the city, the neighborhood and the spaces where the stores are reconfigured have been established, it is important to specify that there are two readings for their interpretation: an instrumental one, which delimits them as scenarios for the supply of the basic products of the family basket; and another socio-anthropological, which defines them as a material reference for human interactions. From an instrumental point of view, it is considered that the closest definition to the neighborhood store is the one proposed by Pinilla and González (2004, p. 48), who affirm that "they are micro-enterprise businesses where a family group works; they sell basic necessities, groceries, drinks, liquors, miscellaneous items and cleaning products; they are part of the house and to achieve this, they fit out the garage, the living room or the front part of the main room, suitable for serving customers". From the socio-anthropological perspective, "The neighborhood store is a cultural product, because it has three relevant qualities: a physical materiality in the place where it is installed, it is symbolic because it has a significant charge that allows it to be recognized as a neighborhood store anywhere and it is a social imaginary because it is a place where,

in addition to finding the basic products for the family basket, it is a reference for social encounters and social interaction in neighborhoods of popular sectors" (Baquero, 2009, p. 29).

Baquero's argument precisely illustrates the organization of meanings that articulates the store based on the great symbolic fabric with the city: "A look at the city from the perspective of consumption, which means exploring social and cultural processes to the extent that Consumption is an expressed cultural practice, in the form of appropriation and in the use of the merchandise and the meanings present in the scenarios where the transactions take place because consumption is a way of relating, not only with the merchandise, but also with other subjects. of the local and national community" (Ramírez & Pachón, 2004, p. 25).

In relation to the contextual nature of the stores and the validity of their daily presence in national life, with Hofstede (1999) it can be reaffirmed that the cultural management practices of one country do not necessarily work in others. It is its rooting in the cultural codes of the average Colombian, which supports the political economy paradigm that points to the importance of the cultural factor to understand the channels through which it is marketed because the cultural element determines the ways in which organizations are managed, aspects of importance are determined, beliefs are configured and the behaviors of their collaborators are established (Bandyopadhyay et al., 1994). As well as Kale and McIntyre (1991) who highlight the direct and transcendental impact of culture in the conception of the marketing channel. It is also reiterated what Ronen and Shenkar (1985) indicate regarding the fact that the culture of a country transcends national borders and, therefore, culture is an important element that affects commercial practices (Deephouse et al., 2016). The Japanese, for example, have excelled in making key decisions through a consensus style (Roslin & Melewar, 2010).

Culture also, plays an important role in the application of relationship marketing. Despite this, empirical studies on consumer expectations, relationship marketing, and the role of consumer cultural values in the context of services have not been widely explored (Kueh & Voon, 2007). Some

previous studies show that service and exchange relationships are influenced by culture (Kong & Jogaratnam, 2007; Kueh & Voon, 2007).

The culture construct is considered as an abstract element that affects human behavior, which can be described and defined in different ways, and given the conceptual polysemy proposed by various researchers in social and human sciences, the concept creates difficulties for its precise dimensioning. One of the pioneering works was carried out in 1952 by Kroeber and Kluckhohn, who analyzed 174 definitions, from Tylor's pioneer in 1871 to 1950 (Páramo, 2009). "From Tylor's definition (1871) to 1903 none were found; between 1903 and 1916 there are 6; between 1920 and 1940, 47, and in the 1940s, 120, to end up giving quite cumbersome definitions" (Aguirre, 2004, p. 123).

As can be seen, when reference is made to this term by academics, consultants and managers, many meanings are identified because the topic is considered from very different perspectives (García, 1994). This high number of definitions is understandable, given that there are various sciences, multiple scientific disciplines, and many researchers, who interested in understanding its essence, have assumed different – sometimes contradictory – academic positions to find the fundamental features of culture, with which they can support their respective efforts and research purposes. From studies on culture, it is inferred that human beings are social beings, cultural beings, and therefore it is necessary to study the incidence of social norms on the goods and/or services that a company sells and that have a cultural significance in life of the targets defined by the organization.

Faced with the conceptual proliferation of the word culture, making it operational has become a challenge for those who have tried it. "… Many academics have qualified the concept in the following terms: multifaceted and not very operational; intangible and difficult to define; abstract; composed of interrelated dimensions; used in different ways, creating confusion and conceptual ambiguity" (García, 1994, pp. 3-4). Culture serves as a guide for appropriate behavior, and therefore, the individual does not have to guess what the best way is to relate to others. In this way, homogeneous behaviors make it possible to establish com-

fortable and bearable social relationships, because culture specifies socially accepted and unaccepted behaviors (Hawkins et al., 2004; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2005).

Kale and McIntyre (1991) express that, even though the multiple definitions that are offered about culture present difficulties in reaching a universal consensus, it is implicit that culture influences the context of purchases and the use of goods or services. The values and beliefs of consumers through the symbolism of consumption and the influence of the groups of belonging affect the expectations and perceptions of marketing. For this reason, companies must consider the influence of culture in the social environment where consumers or users live in relation to their possession of goods and/or services and their consumption habits.

Thus, the products are acquired for the symbolic meaning they have for a certain reference group. The purchase decision is determined by reasons that go beyond the basic function they fulfill, and this explains why people are often motivated to buy goods or services based on what such products can represent for themselves or for others according to the social referent with which they identify (Leigh & Gabel, 1992).

The group is assumed to be the one that publicly converts the symbols associated with certain products to show their importance to current or potential members; contributes to the transfer of social meaning and observes behavior, applying the rewards or punishments they deserve depending on the level of adoption that each person makes of the symbolism attached to each product or brand.

The intensification of competition, the need to retain customers, the conception of markets as networks and technological development, are some of the changes produced in the environment that have revealed the need to question the traditional conceptual framework of marketing, moving from the generic market to the relationship with the individual client, and therefore, companies should abandon their orientation to transactions and focus on the development of relationships (Marzo et al., 2006).

This approach becomes mandatory, since "today's globalized world is characterized by the maturation and fragmentation of markets, the fall of certain socialist regimes (U.S.R.S.); China emerges as a new world power, economic integration, availability and cheaper technology; changes that have caused the intensification of competition, the reduction of differentiation, the acceleration of product life cycles; that customers are more demanding, that they are more informed; that they have a range of options and are less loyal; and for this reason, attracting a new customer can be five times, or more, expensive than keeping one that you have, and in this context the importance that relationship marketing can play in sales management or relationship selling is highlighted" (Costa & Küster, 2008, p. 294).

The traditional marketing paradigm, which for several decades was the only prevailing one, showed inefficiencies as the competitive environment became more complex. Two of its most notorious shortcomings consist of focusing on the product and considering that marketing was the sole responsibility of the marketing area, which made it difficult to orient the entire company towards the market (Costa & Küster, 2008). Authors who criticize the transactional marketing perspective suggest a paradigm shift that has been called relationship marketing (Berry, 2002; Grönroos, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Relationship marketing integrates customer service, quality, and marketing orientation and involves relationships with the following markets: customers, influencers, internal, employees, referral, suppliers, and referral (Christopher et al., 1991), and focuses on creating value for the customers by meeting their expectations and leaving them satisfied (Bordonaba & Garrido, 2001).

The emphasis of relationship marketing is the establishment of long-term relationships between buyers and sellers who participate in marketing operations. Relationship marketing pursues the creation of value for customers and companies, based on the development of closer relationships between them and that are enduring in the long term. Somehow, the studies present incremental advances oriented and related to the approach and explanation of the concept of guanxi (Roslin & Melewar, 2010).

Relationship marketing is an exchange process that seeks to establish and cultivate long-term rela-

tionships with customers, prescribers, distributors, suppliers, vendors, creating links and benefits for the parties; that in relational exchanges the parties present mutual interests and try to increase the benefits of the relationship for all parties (Bordonaba & Garrido, 2001). Similarly, many companies delegate to their salespeople the responsibility of establishing relationships with customers through the generation of trust because it is the customer who decides what to buy, where to buy it, and how many times he wants to repeat such activity (Kim & Lee, 2020; Costa & Küster, 2008).

Relationship marketing becomes a philosophy that guides the strategies of companies rather than a series of techniques, tools, and tactics, to understand the causes that lead the client to establish relationships with certain suppliers (Berry, 2002; March et al., 2006). Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 58) emphasize that for exchanges to be successful, it is necessary to reduce uncertainty, increase cooperation, refusal tendencies, develop agreement, improve communication and fine-tuning of shared values, which brings greater benefits to the relationship and raises the costs of ending the relationship. Under this conception, the client becomes the center of attention, and success in the organization depends on satisfying their needs and desires.

Grönroos (1994) indicates that the key to relationship marketing is the fulfillment of promises, and if this is not done, the consumer will not repeat the purchase, and very possibly the relationship will end. Relationship marketing can be applied to industrial markets, to service markets, to distribution channels, to goods markets. And it is useful in a competitive and complex environment because it allows you to receive information from customers, process it and quickly inform them about new products, promotions and solutions of the organization (Grönroos, 1994).

The permanent links between suppliers and customers are strengthened due to the conditions of service. Aspects such as the participation of customers in the production and distribution links reinforce the sense of belonging and customer loyalty with companies, in other words, involving the customer throughout the process is the key to success in long-term relationships between companies and their customers (Marzo et al., 2006).

Although there is a broad consensus that business relationships should be mutually beneficial for the parties, only in recent years an attempt has been made to investigate what kind of benefits customers obtain from their long-term relationships with companies, and has represented a shift in the marketing literature, moving from inter-organizational relationships to relationships between companies and final consumers, called "relational benefits".

Along with the existence of trust and commitment between the parties, the close relationship with the client is very important, since it contributes to the satisfaction of certain personal needs of the clients. If the established relationships are close, the functional (time savings, convenience, making the best purchase decision) and social (familiarity, friendship, friendliness, comfort, fun) benefits increase, and the probability of loyalty increases because these small companies are considered proactive (Cheng et al., 2011).

Cultural adaptation is a process that begins when the parties become aware of the differences that exist between them; In a first step, the parties know each other and respect the particularities, and from there, one of the parties tries to understand the culture of the other and, at a higher level, one of the partners adapts to the behaviors or style of the other. The highest level of cultural adaptation occurs when one of the parties tries to integrate elements of the new culture into their own (Lin & Germaín, 2003).

Building long-term customer relationships requires knowledge of the dimensions that contribute to creating and maintaining these relationships. Theron and Terblanche (2010) found that the most used relationship marketing categories in the financial services sector were trust, commitment, satisfaction, and communication. Liang et al. (2009) identified the above dimensions as the most representative to evaluate relationship marketing in industries.

From the studies carried out by Ortega (2010), the importance of this research is highlighted because few analyses have been made on the relationships between culture and relationship marketing. Palmatier et al. (2006) in a meta-analysis on marketing relationships carried out between 1979–2006 found that the variables that most affect this

relationship are: commitment, trust, satisfaction and quality of the relationship; and in the antecedents the variables are: benefits, dependence on the seller, investments, the seller's experience, communication, cultural similarities, duration of the relationship, frequency of interactions, positive conflict; and that in the results are: the expectation of continuity, word-of-mouth communication, consumer loyalty, sales goal and cooperation.

The review of academic publications in which works on culture are published shows that studies have focused on the instrumental relationship of marketing: national culture (Hofstede, 1999); organizational culture (Schein, 1999 cited in Páramo et al., 2009, p. 37); economic growth and effectiveness; cross-country cultural comparisons (Hofstede, 1999; Bearden et al., 2006); advertising; corporate websites; acceptance of new products; sales force values; disappointment in service encounters (Poon et al., 2004); service recovery (Kanousi, 2005); service claims (Liu & McClure, 2001); purchase motivations and service encounters (Mattila, 1999); dissatisfactions in service encounters from different cultures; behavior in individualistic and collectivist culture (Liu & McClure, 2001); perceptions of service quality among clients in countries (Malhotra et al., 2005); Hofstede dimensions and service encounters (Furrer et al., 2000). This analysis shows the lack of sociological and anthropological studies that explain the influence of culture on the exchange relations established between the owners of traditional distribution businesses and their consumers.

Resolving the relationships between culture and relationship marketing practiced between consumers and shopkeepers in the traditional store implies shifting the instrumental view of marketing towards one that emphasizes the cultural aspects that from the underlying world account for the values, beliefs, artifacts, and the behaviors assumed by shopkeepers and consumers in their daily interaction with the neighborhood store (Acevedo, 2005; Baquero, 2009; Acevedo et al., 2008). Adopting this anthropological position implies overlapping other cognitive structures that provide meaning to the relationships between spaces and people, to the material, to the sociocultural fabric, and to the local with the national and global. In this sense, given that a system of

meanings that are not easily visible and therefore not perceived at first sight converge in the neighborhood store, it will be necessary to discover the non-visible aspects of culture that, therefore, serve as support explanatory and comprehensive both behaviors assumed by these market agents, as well as the devices used to carry out their daily activities related to consumption and personal survival.

Despite the efforts made both to study the behavior of the Colombian consumer in the relationship he maintains daily with his favorite store, and to get to know the shopkeeper and his store in their different particularities, up to now, no academic effort has been made aimed at discovering and understanding the impact that culture has on the ancient practice of relationship marketing that has characterized stores for generations.

It is necessary to indicate that although the emerging theories on relationship marketing have a general scope in their application, the present study raises differences between the distribution channels of the multiple markets, so some caution should be warned in the generalization of current theories; that there are few academic studies on the distribution channels in the retail sector of neighborhood stores in the world, where commercial practices are based on cultural considerations. Much of the knowledge on distribution practices has been assimilated from studies on supermarkets carried out in developed countries; however, in the retail sector there are cultural differences that must be taken into consideration, especially if emerging and developing countries such as Colombia are considered.

For the reasons stated, the objective of this study is to evaluate the influence of culture on relationship marketing between neighborhood merchants and their consumers from an alternative perspective to traditional approaches.

The development of this study represents a great advance within the academic field of marketing because it allows consumers to be approached from an ethnographic, holistic and cultural perspective and not from an instrumental perspective; likewise, it has the characteristic of being a benchmark for promoting the generation of new, innovative and useful research projects for society.

Based on the literature review carried out previously, this study proceeds to present the research hypotheses:

H1: *There is a significant and positive relationship between consumer buying culture and trust in the exchange relationship.*

H2: *There is a significant and positive relationship between consumer buying culture and relationship commitment.*

H3: *There is a significant and positive relationship between consumer buying culture and satisfaction in the exchange relationship.*

H4: *There is a significant and positive relationship between the buying culture of consumers and loyalty to the establishment.*

2. METHODS

To measure the incidence of the culture of purchasing in relationship marketing practiced by shopkeepers and consumers in the traditional store, three types of research were used: exploratory, descriptive, and correlational. The first was used to identify relationship marketing practices and the cultural aspects implicit in it. The second, to measure the contributions of the constructs on culture and relational marketing found in the exploratory studies, and the third, to evaluate the correlations.

The research was guided by the cultural model of Schein (1985), who argues that culture is explained by the underlying world that is the basis of the values, beliefs and mental representations that consumers have about a supplier. Relationship marketing was based on the trust, commitment, satisfaction and loyalty constructs (see Table 1). The methodological stage of the exploratory phase was guided by the cultural relativism, the structural anthropology, the symbolic interactionism, the ethnomethodology, and the grounded theory, through the methods of observation, interviews, film recording, photographic recording, note recording and panel of experts. During the exploratory stage, the answers from the interviews, the notes of the observations, the written records and the analysis of the films were classified and grouped in the corresponding cultural manifestation according to the type of value, belief and mental representation. Also, in the relationships between shopkeepers and consumers, the levels of trust, commitment, satisfaction and loyalty existing in said relationship were identified, and ended with a draft of the instrument structured on a five-point Likert scale on the constructs of relationship culture and marketing, which was tested during several consumer group sessions from the less educated stores until full understanding of the survey was achieved.

The structured questionnaire obtained in the exploratory phase was the basis for the descriptive research, which was applied to 420 consumers from neighborhood stores in the Neiva city (Colombia). Using Cronbach's Alpha and factorial analysis, reliability and the contribution of all the variables used to measure the constructs of culture and relational marketing were obtained. To validate the truth or falsity of the relationship between cultural aspects and relationship marketing aspects, an average variable was built for each construct, and then through statistical correlation, the level of significance and the correlation value were established.

The research population was composed of two populations: shopkeepers and consumers of neighborhood stores in the Neiva city (Colombia). The samples were obtained independently to represent them in all their characteristics. After making the corresponding adjustments, the final instrument was applied to 420 consumers in Neiva, and 20 were canceled due to having value biases (confidence margin of 95% and a maximum error admitted in the estimates of 4.7%), between the months of September and November from 2022. The main socioeconomic characteristics of store consumers were gender: 53.1% female, and 46.9% male; average age, 31 years; stratum low, (44.8%); medium (40.7%); and high (14.5%).

Quantitative data analysis was done by processing 400 surveys using the SPSS Version 28 statistical package, which allowed confirming that the applied instruments are reliable and valid. The analysis was done through principal components and correlations. Reliability means that whenever the

Table 1. Operationalization of the variables

Variable	Dimension	Question	Code
Relationship marketing	Trust in exchange relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Ganesan, 1994; Vázquez et al., 2001)	1. The shopkeeper is a person with extensive experience	TR1
		2. The shopkeeper is an honest person	TR2
		3. The shopkeeper is a tolerant person	TR3
		4. The shopkeeper is an understanding person	TR4
		5. The shopkeeper knows the needs of customers	TR5
		6. The shopkeeper gives advice	TR6
		7. I would gladly do the shopkeeper a favor	TR7
		8. I would gladly listen to the shopkeeper when he has a problem	TR8
		9. I would gladly do something to the shopkeeper	TR9
		10. I would gladly help the shopkeeper when he has a calamity	TR10
	Commitment in exchange relations (Gundlach et al., 1995)	1. The shopkeeper is a caring person	CM1
		2. The shopkeeper gives me credit when I need	CM2
		3. The shopkeeper is a helpful person	CM3
		4. The shopkeeper listens to me when I have problems	CM4
		5. The shopkeeper gives me more than what I buy	CM5
		6. The shopkeeper gives me a guarantee of the products he sells	CM6
		7. The shopkeeper gives sweets to children	CM7
		8. The shopkeeper buys products that he is ordered	CM8
		9. The shopkeeper has good customer relations	CM9
		10. The shopkeeper collaborates in community activities	CM10
		11. The shopkeeper is a leading person	CM11
	Satisfaction in exchange relations (Blackwell et al., 1993)	1. The shopkeeper prevents us from traveling to distant places	ST1
		2. The shopkeeper is a collaborative person	ST2
		3. The shopkeeper is an attentive person	ST3
		4. The shopkeeper sells quality products	ST4
		5. The shopkeeper sells a wide variety of products	ST5
		6. The shopkeeper knows the tastes of customers	ST6
		7. The shopkeeper takes good care of children	ST7
		8. The shopkeeper sells product until late at night	ST8
	Loyalty in exchange relations (Vásquez & Álvarez, 2007)	1. I usually buy in the same store	LY1
		2. I always buy in the store because of its proximity	LY2
		3. I buy in the store for friendship	LY3
		4. I shop at the store frequently	LY4
		5. I give good references to the shopkeeper	LY5
Culture	Values (Bearden & Netemeyer, 1999)	1. The store is part of the community	V1
		2. The store is a place to share with neighbors and friends	V2
		3. The shopkeeper has lent me money on occasion	V3
		4. The shopkeeper is a trustworthy person	V4
		5. The shopkeeper cordially attends	V5
		6. The shopkeeper offers payment facilities	V6
		7. The shopkeeper offers adequate prices	V7
		8. The store stays clean	V8
		9. The store remains tidy	V9
		10. I am grateful to the shopkeeper	V10
		11. The shopkeeper sells fresh products	V11
	Beliefs (Páramo et al., 2007; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2005)	1. I can go to the store dressed as I want	BF1
		2. The shopkeeper knows the signs of customers	BF2
		3. In the store it is easy to make claims	BF3
		4. In the store, customers let off steam	BF4
		5. In the store they serve quickly	BF5
		6. The store is close to our houses	BF6
	Mental representations (Acevedo et al., 2008; Páramo et al., 2007; Páramo, 2009)	1. The store is a place to crave multiple things	MR1
		2. The store is a safe place	MR2
		3. At the store I get anything I need	MR3
		4. The store is a social gathering place	MR4

instrument is applied to the same person, it gives similar results, and to evaluate it, Cronbach's alpha method is applied, which estimates the correlations between all the items in the sample and is good. in descriptive studies when its value is equal to or greater than 0.70; and 0.50 for exploratory studies. The Cronbach's Alpha results for the scales used are: relationship marketing (RM), 0.93; trust (TR), 0.82; commitment (CM), 0.84; satisfaction (ST), 0.84; loyalty (LY), 0.82; culture (CT), 0.94; values (V), 0.92; beliefs (BF), 0.88, and mental representations (MR), 0.76; provided reliable results, because the correlations of the items that made up the cultural system exceeded 0.5, a value indicated by experts for exploratory studies (see Table 2) (Grande & Abascal, 1999).

3. RESULTS

Table 2 shows the factorial load value of each item, evidencing that the indicators used in this study have an acceptable discriminant validity. Likewise, the reliability of the study was evaluated with the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, for the variables, dimensions and items used in this study. Consequently, a construct is reliable if its Cronbach's alpha value exceeds 0.70 and its mean variance value (AVE) is greater than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019), for which reason this study is considered reliable.

To validate the formulated hypotheses, the Pearson correlation method was used, which indicates the

Table 2. Discriminant validity and reliability

Variable	Dimension	Items	Factor loading (β)	Cronbach's alpha if suppressed (a)	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Relationship marketing (a = .93)	Trust in exchange relationships (a = .82)	TR1	.746	.834	.832	.502
		TR2	.719	.798		
		TR3	.615	.831		
		TR4	.663	.820		
		TR5	.747	.822		
		TR6	.769	.804		
		TR7	.654	.807		
		TR8	.636	.837		
		TR9	.678	.842		
		TR10	.792	.826		
	Commitment in exchange relations (a = .84)	CM1	.876	.799	.853	.573
		CM2	.711	.821		
		CM3	.689	.825		
		CM4	.635	.837		
		CM5	.693	.845		
		CM6	.758	.842		
		CM7	.765	.816		
		CM8	.924	.826		
		CM9	.730	.833		
		CM10	.800	.815		
		CM11	.862	.793		
	Satisfaction in exchange relations (a = .84)	ST1	.590	.799	.819	.594
		ST2	.754	.821		
		ST3	.882	.825		
		ST4	.672	.837		
		ST5	.765	.845		
		ST6	.668	.842		
		ST7	.742	.816		
		ST8	.815	.826		
	Loyalty in exchange relations (a = .82)	LY1	.675	.813	.805	.524
		LY2	.846	.805		
		LY3	.832	.883		
		LY4	.772	.781		
		LY5	.603	.841		

Table 2 (cont.). Discriminant validity and reliability

Variable	Dimension	Items	Factor loading (β)	Cronbach's alpha if suppressed (a)	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Culture (a = .94)	Values (a = .92)	V1	.701	.822	.812	.510
		V2	.760	.831		
		V3	.597	.835		
		V4	.633	.798		
		V5	.694	.815		
		V6	.786	.821		
		V7	.752	.826		
		V8	.682	.844		
		V9	.723	.889		
		V10	.766	.899		
		V11	.760	.878		
	Beliefs (a = .88)	BF1	.682	.828	.843	.548
		BF2	.680	.899		
		BF3	.705	.911		
		BF4	.742	.827		
		BF5	.682	.855		
		BF6	.722	.846		
	Mental representations (a = .76)	MR1	.623	.770	.816	.522
		MR2	.861	.806		
		MR3	.750	.813		
		MR4	.686	.909		

direction of the correlation, the value of the coefficient, the level of significance (if it is less than 0.01 (0.05), then this means that there is 99% (95%) confidence that the correlation is true in both directions of the variables analyzed) (Hernández et al., 2010). When analyzing the Pearson correlations between the proposed hypotheses, it is shown that they are all true at a 99% confidence level (1% error) in both ways.

Testing the first hypothesis, the results show that there is a positive and significant relationship (0.789; p < 0.00) between the buying culture of consumers and trust in the shopkeeper's business relationship. Therefore, the consumer culture understood as the set of values, beliefs and mental representations can affect the lev-

el of trust in the exchange relationship in the neighborhood store.

Testing the second hypothesis, the results show that there is a positive and significant relationship (0.658; p < 0.00) between the buying culture of consumers and the shopkeeper's commitment. Thus, certain cultural elements have an influence on the commitment in the relationship, understood as the desire to maintain a lasting exchange relationship in the long term.

Testing the third hypothesis, the results show that there is a positive and significant relationship (0.853; p < 0.00) between the consumer's buying culture and satisfaction in the exchange relationship. Indeed, beliefs and values can strongly deter-

Table 3. Hypotheses testing results

Variable	A	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Trust	3.88	0.93	(.82)				
2. Commitment	4.02	0.88	.721**	(.84)			
3. Satisfaction	3.92	0.71	.652**	.699**	(.84)		
4. Loyalty	4.31	0.82	.559**	.592**	.453**	(.82)	
5. Culture	4.47	0.87	.789**	.658**	.853**	.753**	(.94)

Note: Reliability indices (Cronbach's Alpha) are reported on the diagonal. ** Significant correlation at 0.01 (bilateral).

mine the levels of satisfaction experienced within the framework of the exchange relationship. In other words, the prejudices and mental schemes derived from culture affect people's satisfaction.

Finally, testing the fourth hypothesis, the results show that there is a positive and significant relationship (0.753; p < 0.00) between the consumer's buying culture and store loyalty. In other words, cultural factors such as values and beliefs frequently condition the levels of loyalty between the consumer and the store.

4. DISCUSSION

This study presents an alternative look to traditional approaches in the sense of presenting the consumer as a human being embedded in a social reality and not as a matter of simple exchange. To achieve this, two measurement instruments were generated and validated, one on culture and the other on the exchange relationship in the purchase of consumers from traditional neighborhood stores.

Bekolo (2007) found in Africa, and Fassio and Koleva (2009) in Eastern European countries, that social ties are stronger than economic ones, findings that are applicable in countries and communities in which the axis of the relationship between sellers – buyers are social aspects, above commercial ones because cultural variables weigh more than marketing decisions. The foregoing shows that cultural consideration is a subject little explored in the field of relationship marketing, therefore, this study acquires more meaning and relevance in the Latin American and global context.

In the present study, the central hypothesis that was statistically validated is that commercial relationships in the neighborhood store are based on cultural considerations, which have been established and maintained in the permanent interaction between the participating members who are consumers, their friends and family, the shopkeepers, who attend it with some frequency, finding that the value of these ties are deep because they have been appropriated over time by performing mini-ceremonies, rites, where values, be-

liefs and mental representations of the actors are implicit. participants. The present investigation disagrees with the affirmation of Rémy and Kopel (2002) that "social ties" are a social and cultural clothing that covers the commercial motivations that give vitality to the relationship between buyers and sellers.

It is necessary to indicate that relationship marketing theory tends to be universally applicable, however, this study proposes that there are differences between distribution channels that affect the application of existing theories, since there are few academic studies on distribution channels in the retail sector of neighborhood stores in the world, where business practices are informed by cultural considerations. Much of the knowledge about distribution practices is based on studies on supermarkets, which were carried out in developed countries. However, in Latin American countries, there are cultural differences between regions that have not yet been explored.

The cultural results found in the traditional neighborhood store in the present investigation indicate that there are contextualized values in the case of developing countries and that when they are unknown by multinational companies, they lose the sales goals set; that the cultural variable influences marketing strategies (Witkowski, 2005; Bekolo, 2007).

When confronting the relationship marketing actions promoted by neighborhood shopkeepers on consumers, it is emphasized that shopkeepers promote the creation and maintenance of lasting relationships, through the development of trust, commitment, satisfaction and loyalty expressed by Reichheld and Sasser (1990), Matzler et al. (2004), and Suárez et al. (2007), who indicate that the relationships between the parties are more complex, there are personal implications, the long-term horizon prevails, the identity of the parties and where customer satisfaction is the most important pillar of the relationship.

By immersing in the complexity of the relational marketing relationships that are built daily between the Colombian consumer and his store, it is indicated that they are clinging to a kind of neighborhood anchored in the commercial tradition of

the areas of each city, in terms of physical distance. between members of a community but are based on social and cultural proximity (Ibrahin & Wee, 2002; Páramo, 2009).

Research results confirm that consumption is an important information system that enables everyone to be in a complex and uncertain world. Consumers do not acquire products only to satisfy needs and desires but are trying to build an intelligible world that distinguishes them from others: classifying, comparing and ordering proprietary products and services can organize their social relationships and to classify people and situations.

In neighborhood stores, trust and commitment between the parties prevail, the close relationship with the customer because it contributes to the satisfaction of certain personal needs, which is why the established relationships are closer, the functional benefits (time savings, convenience, making the best purchase decision) and social (familiarity, friendship, kindness, comfort, fun) increase, and the probability of loyalty increases (Marzo et al., 2006).

The store is a space for cultural empowerment, a place where social ties are strengthened and replicated in those who carry out business transactions, where we laugh, where values come, where beliefs are involved, where there is familiarity and trust between consumers and shopkeepers (Hamblin & Miller, 1976). Consumption in a Colombian store has always been an active production of meanings and a field of symbolic exchanges. From this perspective, the traditional neighborhood store aims at hedonistic satisfaction (Páramo, 2009) and emphasizes the collective dimension of the consumer experience (Badot & Cova, 1995), considered a key concept in the theory of consumer culture (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

The results of this study indicate that multinationals cannot design marketing strategies as if the world were a global village and that marketing adapted to developing countries can be formulated and that marketing practices cannot be extrapolated. cultural. This study also found that consumption in the traditional neighborhood store is an active production of meanings and is a place of symbolic exchanges (Páramo, 2009), because social networks formed by shopkeepers are woven around the neighborhood store and consumers who generate a collective identity through their relationships among themselves and with the other members of the community. This identity is so strong that the intensity of the various relationships has given rise to relevant neighbors (Meneses, 2002) and that these social activity links are reproduced from generation to generation through the constant visits of parents and their children to the traditional neighborhood store. The construction of scales for the culture of purchase and relationship marketing in the retail sector from a sociological and anthropological approach has been proposed in different studies as future research in the retail sector (Palmatier et al., 2006; Runyan et al., 2008; Brown & Dant, 2008; Páramo, 2009; Sanclemente, 2012), and is an important theoretical contribution to the study of consumer behavior and contextual marketing.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the study was to evaluate the influence of culture on relationship marketing between neighborhood merchants and their consumers from an alternative perspective. For this reason, four hypotheses were established that were confirmed. Therefore, it was established that cultural elements such as values, beliefs and mental representations of consumers generate a positive and significant influence on aspects of the purchase relationship such as trust, commitment, satisfaction, and loyalty in neighborhood stores in Colombia, specifically in a peripheral region of Colombia. Aspects such as the belief that the neighborhood store is part of the community, the shopkeeper as a confidant and the store as a meeting space influence trust, commitment and satisfaction in the exchange relationship.

The contribution of the study was that it exceeds the approach to consumption from a one-dimensional perspective that, historically, has reduced it to an economic dimension, which, although important, is

not the only one. This economist approach is in line with the general tendency to present social reality as a matter of the market and the human being as a consumer by nature, and proves that consumption is not a purely economic fact, explained only by economic theories, it is the existence of sociological, anthropological and psychological theories that explain what happens when individuals consume; unfortunately, these views occur in isolation.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Juan Manuel Andrade, Elías Ramírez Plazas.
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