

# The B2Com Relationship: An Empirical Study of the Measure of Relationship Quality in a Business-to-Community Relationship

Oluyomi Abayomi Osobajo<sup>1</sup>, David Moore<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Scott Sutherland School of Architecture & Built Environment, The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland, United Kingdom

Correspondence: Oluyomi Abayomi Osobajo, The Scott Sutherland School of Architecture & Built Environment, The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland, United Kingdom.

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## Abstract

The quality of relationship between Oil Producing Companies (OPC) and their Host Communities (HC) within the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria (NDRN) is a source of concern for different stakeholders such as the practitioners, government, communities, and OPC. Scholars in the field of marketing have studied relationship quality in different contexts, such as business-to-business, business-to-customer, customer-to-business, and interpersonal relationship. In this paper, the authors build on existing studies to develop a new relationship framework in a business-to-community (B2Com) context, intended to assess the degree of relationship quality between a business and its host community. The framework is supported by the results of a qualitative research study conducted using an in-depth semi-structured interview approach in exploring and assessing the various relationship elements and constructs impacting on the quality of a relationship developed between an OPC business and its host community in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The findings showed that activity links, resources ties, actor bond, mutual benefit, communication, control mutuality, mutual goal and culture are the main antecedents of relationship quality, while trust, satisfaction, and commitment are the essential outcomes of relationship quality. The findings also showed that there is a linear relationship between trust, satisfaction and commitment.

**Keywords:** relationship, relationship marketing, relationship elements, relationship quality, community, oil producing company, oil and gas industry

## 1. Introduction

The concept of relationship emerges from the field of relationship marketing (Christopher et al., 1991; Gummesson, 1995; Buttle, 1996), which is focused on “attracting, maintaining and, in multi service organisations, enhancing customer relationships” (Berry 1983, p. 25). Likewise, Gronroos (1994, p. 355) added that relationship marketing is about “establishing, maintaining, and enhancing relationships with customers and other partners, at a profit, so that the objectives of the parties involved are met. This is achieved by a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises”. Christopher et al (1991), and Rust et al (2004) argued further that the focus within the relationship marketing paradigm has shifted completely from a transactional paradigm to a relationship paradigm. The relationship paradigm focuses on having a long-term orientation that will result in a win-win situation among relationship parties, while the transactional paradigm is merely a one-off exchange between relationship parties. Hence, these views and opinions suggest that relationship marketing can be termed as a process by which parties to a relationship obtain what they desire through creating and exchanging value with one another (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010).

Researchers have predominantly studied relationship quality through a focus on business-to-business (B2B), business-to-customer (B2C), customer-to-business (C2B), and interpersonal relationships. The development of a business-to-community (B2Com) relationship has not received any attention from researchers. Indeed, as Gummesson (2002) suggested that there are 30 different relationship types that need to be evaluated and, not surprisingly, scholars have concluded that there are many types of relationships that should be examined (Athanasopoulou, 2006). This research study intends to empirically explore and understand the quality of relationship in a B2Com context. A B2Com relationship refers to a relationship developed between a business and its host community in which it operates. This supports the assertion that, in an increasingly competitive business environment, a business must give attention to its various stakeholders such as the community that could support

or hinder the realisation of business objectives (Freeman, 1984). Hence, the development of a B2Com relationship is important for those businesses whose achievement of their objectives is strongly influenced by the community in which they operate.

This research study presented here commenced with a discussion on the importance of a relationship between a business and its host community, and subsequently conducted a literature review to determine what is a relationship, relationship elements, relationship quality and relationship quality constructs as identified by existing literature. Thereafter, the research findings are discussed and propositions are formulated.

## **2. The Importance of the Oil Producing Company (OPC) and Host Community (HC) Relationship**

Nigeria as a nation is highly dependent on crude oil as a major source of her income (Akins, 1973; Beckman, 1982; Khan, 1994; Ellis, 2003; Watts, 2004; Ross, 2012; Kadafa, 2012; Esfahani et al., 2014; Arezki and Blanchard, 2015; Ikein, 2016). Ross (2003), Adenugba and Dipo (2013), Rhodes and Suleiman (2013), and Ikein (2016) noted that Nigeria has consistently earned over 90% of her revenue from crude oil since commercial production commenced in the 1970s. In addition, Ikelegbe (2001), Eweje (2006), and Omofonmwan and Odia (2009) argued that a larger percentage of the exploration and production (EP) activities within the Nigerian oil and gas industry (NOGI) take place in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (NDRN). Hence, making the NDRN a region to be reckoned with (Frynas, 2001).

The rapid and continuous deterioration of the NDRN has been widely noted by scholars and practitioners (Puyate and Rim-Rukeh, 2008; Giraud and Renouard, 2010; Renouard, 2010; Renouard and Lado, 2012; Ubani and Onyejekwe, 2013). This decline is evidenced by poverty among the communities in the region (Nriagu et al., 2016), poorly planned and managed coastal and community development (Ubani and Onyejekwe, 2013), and a poor educational system (Osaghae et al., 2007; Omofonmwan and Odia, 2009; Onemolease and Alakpa, 2009; Nyengidiki and Allagoa, 2011). In addition, the region is facing worsened environmental conditions (Ikporukpo, 1983; Watts, 2001; Puyate and Rim-Rukeh, 2008), increases in social inequality (Renouard, 2011), water pollution, reductions in wildlife and fisheries, soil degradation (Chokor, 2004), and generally worsened economies and health condition (Giraud and Renouard, 2010; Renouard and Lado, 2012; Adelabu, 2012). Kadafa (2012), Ite et al (2013), and Ebegbulem et al (2013) acknowledged that these outcomes are attributable to crude oil exploration and production (EP) activities and by association, the presence of OPCs in the region. Hence, the region has been the subject of continuous conflicts and violence between the NDRN communities and the OPCs (Aghedo, 2013; Obi, 2014).

Among the different types of community (i.e. host community, impacted community, transit community, and terminal community) in the NDRN, the Host Community (HC) is the most highly affected. This is because the HC serve as the host for OPC's EP operations and activities. Elum et al (2016, p. 12880) referred to HC as "the places (on land) or communities where oil wells are sited". The effects of OPC presence on the HC is evidenced in the adverse environmental effects on forest, soils and water bodies in HC in the NDRN (Worgu, 2000). Likewise, Eweje (2006) asserted that the commencement of OPC's EP activities led to the emergence of environmental problems in the HC. Apata (2010) added that OPC presence within the region led to the beginning of a continuous environmental degradation that has resulted in a culminating poverty, which is depriving the HC of its resource benefits. Equally, Idemudia (2016) noted that the HC has experienced undermined human development due to the presence of OPC. Olobaniyi and Omo-Irabor (2016) stated that the HC has experienced declining health and environmental conditions since the arrival of the OPC, while Elum et al (2016) concluded that the HC has experienced disastrous and persistent effects of gas flaring on its agricultural produce.

Scholars (e.g. Idemudia, 2014b; Aghedo and Osumah, 2014; Osaghae, 2015) have likened the NDRN to a war zone since the 1990's due to the continuous conflict between the OPC and HC. Idemudia (2014a) stated that the OPC and HC relationship began to deteriorate into conflict and violence in the 1980's. Idemudia (2007) asserted that the HC perceived their relationship with the OPC as "negative" because they (the HC) believe they are considered as an obstacle by the OPC to the successful exploration and production of crude oil in the region. Therefore, OPC are regarded as increasingly viewing the HC as a risk to be managed (Idemudia, 2014a). In addition, Elum et al (2016, p. 12881) asserted that the "HC are relegated to the background in decision making as it affects oil exploration and exploitation in their territory". These standpoints necessitate the assessment of the relationship between the OPC and HC (Idemudia, 2014b).

## **3. What is a Relationship?**

There is no consensus among scholars of a single definition on what a relationship really is; the concept has varying definitions in different disciplines. Hinde (1979, 1981), cited in Blumstein & Kollock (1988, p. 468) within the social psychology discipline, define a relationship as "a series of related interactions, each affected by

past episodes, and in turn affecting future interactions". This definition considers a *relationship* to be symbiotic in nature; the behaviour of people or groups within the relationship affects each other. Likewise, Hakansson and Snehota (1995, p. 25) define a relationship as "a mutually oriented interaction between two reciprocally committed parties". They regard mutual orientation and commitment as an essential aspect of the interactions between relationship parties. In addition, it could be argued that the presence of mutual orientation and commitment connotes dependency between them, such that the existence of one party depends on the survival of the other party.

Within the communication discipline, a relationship is referred to as a link existing between two or more people with a mutual purpose over a period of time (Coombs, 2001). Relationship in this respect is considered a two-way route where parties involved need to be aware of each other and their respective interaction.

Ledingham and Bruning (1998, p. 62), within the public relations discipline, define a relationship as being the "state which exists between an organisation and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political, and/or cultural wellbeing of the other entity". Broom et al (2000) added that a relationship is as a series comprising interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between the parties involved. They claim that there exist different properties between the people involved and the relationship itself. This leads to a distinction between the attributes, perception and identities of the people involved in the relationship. Ledingham (2003, p. 190) asserted that an effective theory of *relationship* should encourage collaboration because "effectively managing organizational-public relationships around common interests and shared goals, over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics".

However, it is worth stating that a significant body of research and literature on the meaning of "relationship" adopts the standpoint of the organisation and thus incorporates some level of corporate biasness in it. From this standpoint, people who are not in support of the organisation's objectives are pictured adversely, and the organisation is required to please them. Hallahan (2004, p. 775) concluded that a relationship involves "routinized, sustained patterns of behaviour by individuals related to their involvement with an organisation ... and thus are part of a total organisational-public relationship". Even though all these scholars have different approaches to the definition of a relationship, they all seem to view relationship as a form of interaction, which often arises between two or more parties because of the outcome interdependence.

### 3.1 Types of Relationship

The evaluation of types of relationship is important in order to assess the relationship that exists between relationship parties. It provides and describes the features of a relationship and the expected relationship outcomes (Grunig, 2002). The types of relationships will be discussed under the following subheadings: exchange or discrete transaction relationship, and communal or relational exchange relationship.

#### 3.1.1 Exchange Relationship

In an exchange relationship, one relationship party provides benefit to another in return for something that is of comparable value to them (Grunig, 2002). The comparable value provided could be a future expectation or something for immediate exchange. This suggests that relationship parties are only willing to give benefits to one another because there is a benefit of perceived comparable value to receive in return. This type of relationship is also referred to as a **discrete transaction** relationship. MacNeil (1980, p. 60), asserts that "the archetype of discrete transaction is manifested by money on one side and an easily measured commodity on the other". Discrete transaction relationships are characterised by narrow content and limited communications. For example, a purchase of unleaded gasoline made by a passing customer at a filling station. In addition, a party receiving a benefit in an exchange relationship must have incurred an obligation in the past or should be ready to return a favour in the future (Hung, 2005). Hence, there is an uncertain time dimension component in this relationship. Exchange relationship is the foundation on which relationship marketing as a concept was formed (Grunig, 2002). However, an exchange relationship is not suitable for all of an organisation's stakeholders. For example, the public (i.e. the community) expect more benefit from an organisation than the benefit typically expected from the public by that organisation.

#### 3.1.2 Communal Relationship

In a communal relationship, relationship parties "are willing to provide benefits to the other because they are concerned for the welfare of the other—even when they believe they might not get anything in return" (Grunig, 2002). This relationship type is viewed as a departure from the discrete transaction relationship, which suggests that the parties involved have no expectation of an exchange of benefits, but merely provide benefits in a philanthropic manner (Clark & Mils, 1993). Communal relationship is also referred to as a **relational exchange** relationship (Dwyer et al., 1987). MacNeil (1978) asserted that in a relational exchange relationship, transactions

transpire over time such that a transaction's history is viewed in order to promote anticipation into the future. Going by this standpoint, Ganesan (1994) asserted that communal or relational relationship has a long-term orientation. An organisation often engages in communal or relational exchange relationships with different stakeholders such as the community and their employees in order to add value to itself. Communal relationships with different stakeholders are important if an organisation wants to contribute to its community and to be socially responsible. Participants often derive personal satisfaction, which in most cases results in social exchange. This is because participants' duties occur over a period. Dwyer et al (1987, p. 13) differentiate discrete transaction relationships from relational exchange relationships using 12 key features of a contract, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. A Comparison of Transaction and Relational Exchange Relationships (Adapted from Dwyer et al., 1987)

	<b>Discrete Transaction</b>	<b>Relational Exchange</b>
<b>Contractual Elements</b>		
Timing of exchange (commencement, duration, and termination of exchange)	Distinct beginning, short duration, and sharp ending by performance	Commencement traces to previous agreements; exchange is longer in duration, reflecting an ongoing process
Number of parties (entities taking part in some aspect of the exchange process)	Two parties	Often more than two parties involved in the process and governance of exchange
Obligations (three aspects: sources of content, sources of obligation, and specificity)	Content comes from offers and simple claims, obligations come from beliefs and customs (external enforcement), standardized obligations	Content and sources of obligations are promises made in the relation plus customs and laws; obligations are customized, detailed, and administered within the relation
Expectations for relations (especially concerned with conflicts of interest, the prospects of unity, and potential trouble)	Conflicts of interest (goals) and little unity are expected, but no future trouble is anticipated because cash payment upon instantaneous performance precludes future interdependence	Anticipated conflicts of interest and future trouble are counterbalanced by trust and efforts at unity
<b>Non-contractual Elements</b>		
Primary personal relations (social interaction and communication)	Minimal personal relationships; ritual-like communications predominate	Important personal, noneconomic satisfactions derived; both formal and informal communications are used
Contractual solidarity (regulation of exchange behaviour to ensure performance)	Governed by social norms, rules, etiquette, and prospects for self-gain	Increased emphasis on legal and self-regulation; psychological satisfactions cause internal adjustments
Transferability (the ability to transfer rights, obligations, and satisfactions to other parties)	Complete transferability; it matters not who fulfils contractual obligation	Limited transferability; exchange is heavily dependent on the identity of the parties
Cooperation (especially joint efforts at performance and planning)	No joint efforts	Joint efforts related to both performance and planning over time; adjustment over time is endemic
Planning (the process and mechanisms for coping with change and conflicts)	Primary focus on the substance of exchange; no future is anticipated	Significant focus on the process of exchange; detailed planning for the future exchange within new environments and to satisfy changing goals; tacit and explicit assumptions abound
Measurement and specificity (calculation and reckoning of exchange)	Little attention to measurement and specifications; performance is obvious	Significant attention to measuring, specifying, and quantifying all aspects of performance, including future benefits
Power (the ability to impose one's will on others)	Power may be exercised when promises are made until promises are executed	Increased interdependence increases the importance of judicious application of power in the exchange
Division of benefits and burdens (the extent of sharing of benefits and burdens)	Sharp division of benefits and burdens into parcels; exclusive allocation to parties	Likely to include some sharing of benefits and burdens and adjustments to both shared and parceled benefits and burdens over time

This is not to say that discrete transaction or exchange relationships should be discarded. Rather, researchers should recognise that often times, relationships begin with an exchange relationship and subsequently develop into relational or communal relationships as time passes. Contrary to this, Grunig (2002) argued that organisations could need to start a relationship from a communal relationship in order to arrive at an exchange relationship. Nevertheless, Grunig (2002) asserted that an organisation's measure of relationship success with its various stakeholders will relate to its level of communal or relational relationship with such stakeholders. Ganesan (1994) concluded that long-term relationships place an organisation in a sustainable competitive position, promote cooperation, allow mutual dependency among parties involved, and encourage goal and risk sharing.

### 3.2 Relationship Elements

It is worth stating that there are limited research studies on relationship elements. Hence, the field has been

dominated by a few researchers. Medlin et al (2005), Hakansson and Snehota (1995), and Hakansson, Blankenburg and Johanson (1992) demonstrated through a robust framework the properties of a relationship using network analysis, in which actors are seen to be performing activities and/or control resources. They suggest that relationships can only be meaningful when considered in respect of three elements i.e. actor bonds, activity links, and resource ties. Hakansson and Snehota (1995) stated that a partner relationship involves three crucial aspects of activity links, resource ties and actor bonds.

“Activity links embrace activities of a technical, administrative and marketing kind”

“Resource ties include exchanging and sharing resources which are both tangible, such as machines, and intangible, such as knowledge”

“Actor bonds are created by people who interact and exert influence on each other and form opinions about each other”

Halinen et al (1999) added that actor bonds, activity links and resource ties bind relationship partners’ together, thus giving rise to interdependence and stability between them. Ford et al (1998) argued further that the presence of these properties in any relationship could result in either a transactional relationship, a facilitative relationship or an integrative relationship. Ford et al (2008) concluded that activity links, actor bonds, and resource ties are critical to relationship partners’ strategy and capability development.

### *3.3 Relationship Quality and its Context of Study*

Relationship quality as a concept results from research and theory in the field of relationship marketing (e.g. Dwyer et al. 1987; Crosby et al., 1990; Gronroos, 2000; Gummesson, 1987; Gummesson, 2000), wherein the main focus is to strengthen and make stronger existing relationships (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991). Crosby et al (1990), and Garbarino and Johnson (1999) stated that relationship quality provides an assessment of the strength of a relationship. These definitions suggest that relationship quality focuses on the assessment and evaluation of how well or satisfied relationship partners are in the fulfilment of their expectations or needs. Hakansson (1982) added that during the evaluation process of a relationship, it is imperative to take into consideration the relationship partners behaviour and their ability to meet one another's needs, while Jap et al. (1999) contemplated that relationship quality assessment focuses on different aspects (e.g. future expectations, and process and attitudinal variables). The last-mentioned definition implies that relationships consist of various processes where by one process serves as a prerequisite to the other (Jap and Anderson, 2007; Dwyer et al. 1987) and that a relationship requires frequent assessment (Eggert et al. 2006). Johnson (1999, p. 6) asserts that relationship quality is “the overall depth and climate of the inter-firm relationship”, while Huntley (2006, p. 706) concluded that relationship quality is the “degree to which buyers are satisfied over time with the overall relationship”.

In addition, some scholars provide a context-based relationship quality definition, which focuses on relationship parties’ interactions. For example, Lagace et al (1991) define relationship quality as the level of interaction between relationship parties (i.e. the physician and the pharmaceutical sales person). In a different context, Moorman et al. (1992, p. 316) viewed relationship quality as “the degree to which users view user-researcher interactions as productive”. Holmlund (2001, p. 15) provides a working definition that views relationship quality as “the joint cognitive evaluation of business interactions by key individuals in the dyad, comparatively with potential alternative interactions”. These context-based definitions also suggest that relationship quality focuses on an evaluation of the relationship based on either relationship partners’ interaction over a period (Boles et al. 1997; Holmlund, 2001) or the outcome of relationship partners’ interaction (Moorman et. 1992). These definitions suggest that relationship parties are required to establish a working relationship which allows adequate and appropriate information and/or other resources sharing.

Furthermore, relationship quality has been defined in relation to the exchange of intangible rewards among relationship parties. For example, Levitt (1986, p. 302) referred to relationship quality as “a bundle of intangible value which augments products and results in an expected interchange between buyers and sellers”. Likewise, Crosby et al (1990) asserted that relationship quality is a higher order construct composed of satisfaction and trust among relationship parties. Relationship quality from this standpoint connotes that a party to a relationship could receive its reward by gaining the trust and satisfaction of another party to the relationship. In addition, Bejou et al (1996, p. 137) defined relationship quality as when “the customer is able to rely on the salesperson's integrity and has confidence in the salesperson's future performance because the level of past performance has been consistently satisfactory”. In this last definition, integrity and performance are regarded as intangible rewards. However, there is an element of time i.e. these rewards tend to materialise over time into the future. Crosby et al (1990, p. 76) concluded that “relationship quality contributes to a lasting bond by offering assurance that the salesperson will continue to meet the customer’s expectations (satisfaction) and not knowingly distort information or otherwise

subvert the customer's interests (trust)."

Also evidenced from research, (e.g. Crosby et al. 1990; Storbacka et al. 1994; Kumar et al. 1995; Bejou et al. 1996; Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997; Dorsch et al. 1998; Wulf et al. 2001; Walter et al. 2003; Lages et al., 2005) relationship quality has also been discussed within other fields outside of relationship marketing. Fynes et al (2005), within the supply chain discipline, define relationship quality as the extent to which parties in a relationship are involved in a long-term and active relationship. This is similar to Golicic and Mentzer's (2005) definition of relationship quality as the strength or degree of closeness of relationship parties within a relationship. It is obvious that relationship quality is an important feature in developing a successful relationship (Rauyruen and Miller 2007; Palmatier et al. 2006; Woo and Ennew 2004). Hence, relationship quality has become a key aspect within the relationship marketing discipline (Smith, 1998a; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001; Gummesson, 2002).

Building on the foregoing, it is clear that relationship quality as a concept lacks a common definition (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2002; Palmatier et al. 2006). However, Dwyer and Oh (1987), Dorsch et al (1998), Crosby et al (1990), Robert et al. (2003), and Woo and Ennew (2004) concluded that relationship quality is usually defined as a higher-order construct consisting of several distinct but related components. Evidence suggests that relationship quality has been studied, developed and empirically tested within the confine of different research contexts (Wong et al., 2005; Vieira et al, 2008). These research contexts range from interpersonal relationships (i.e. relationship between individuals), business-to-business relationships (B2B), business-to-customer relationships (B2C), and customer to business relationships (C2B).

**Interpersonal relationship** is the relationship between two or more individuals, customers, or consumers, such as the relationship between a couple i.e. husband and wife (Zimmerman and Robert, 2012). Also, the relationship between different customers through online auctions such as Amazon, eBay and Gumtree can be classified under this relationship type.

A **B2B** relationship is perceived as a working relationship between two or more firms (Dwyer et al., 1987, Anderson and Narus, 1990; Ganesan, 1994; Chumpitaz and Paparoidamis, 2007). It also involves one business making a commercial deal or transaction with another (Gummesson, 2004). For example, manufacturers in business markets relationship with their suppliers (Johnson and Selnes, 2004; Ulaga and Eggert, 2006), and an automobile manufacturer's relationship with a dealer (Dwyer et al., 1987).

A **B2C** relationship describes the relationship between a business and its final consumer. For example, an automobile retailer and its customers (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), a financial institution and its customers (Zineldin, 1995; Bejou et al 1996; Lang and Colgate, 2003; Rauyruen and Miller, 2007), and a hotel and its guests (Bowen and Shoemaker, 1998).

A **C2B** relationship describes the relationship between an individual customer and a business entity (Law et al., 2003). This is the reverse to the B2C relationship model. For example, the relationship between a patient and his/her surgery (Griswold, 2003), and an individual (i.e. customer or consumer) making an online call to a call centre (Wong et al., 2005).

### 3.4 Relationship Quality Constructs

Despite the growing body of literature on relationship quality constructs, scholars have argued that there exists a high level of uncertainty as to which of the relationship quality constructs can be categorised as determinant or dimension (Vieira et al., 2008; Rauyruen and Miller, 2007; Ivens and Pardo, 2007; Huntley, 2006). However, a review of relevant literature suggests that trust, satisfaction and commitment are the main constructs of relationship quality (Moorman et al., 1992; Dwyer and Oh, 1987). This has streamlined the focus of the majority of the empirical research conducted on relationship quality to trust, satisfaction and commitment, thus giving little or no attention to a large number of other constructs (Dwyer et al., 1987; Anderson and Narus, 1990; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Ulaga and Eggert 2006; Carr, 2006; Ndubisi, 2006; Hsin Hsin and Po Wen, 2009; Barry and Doney, 2011; Rafiq, Fulford and Lu, 2013). Relationship quality is usually defined as a higher-order construct consisting of several distinct but related components (Dorsch et al. 1998; Smith, 1998a; Van Bruggen et al. 2005; Ulaga and Eggert 2006; Rauyruen and Miller, 2007). These constructs are also referred to as components, which are categorised either as determinants of relationship quality or dimensions of relationship quality (Athanasopoulou, 2009). This is because there is no consensus among scholars as to the constructs of relationship quality. See Appendix A for a detailed and comprehensive list of various relationship quality constructs.

#### 3.4.1 Determinants of Relationship Quality

The lack of agreement as to the constructs that make up the determinants of relationship quality could be linked to the context, perspective and research settings in which various studies have been carried out (Vieira et al., 2008).

Determinants of relationship quality are referred to as precursors of relationship quality (Vieira et al., 2008). Table 2 lists authors who have cited mutual benefit, communication and control mutuality as the most frequently used constructs functioning as determinants of relationship quality.

Table 2. Determinants of Relationship Quality (summarised from the literature)

CONSTRUCT	AUTHORS
Mutual benefit	Huntley, 2006; Parson, 2002; Vieira, 2001; Boles et al., 2000; Smith, 1998a; Lagace et al., 1991; Crosby et al., 1990
Communication	Ndubisi, 2006; Athanasopoulou, 2006; Bennett and Barkensjo, 2005; Sanzo et al., 2003; de Ruyeter et al., 2001; Vieira, 2001; Goodman and Dion, 2001; Selnes, 1998; Smith, 1998b; Leuthesser, 1997; Menon et al., 1996; Kumar et al., 1995; Morgan and Hunt, 1994
Control mutuality	Kent and Taylor, 2002; Hon and Grunig, 1999; Stafford and Canary, 1991; Rusbult, 1983

### 3.4.2 Dimensions of Relationship Quality

The constructs that make up the dimension of relationship quality are not clearly distinguished or defined from one another. However, the main dimensions of relationship quality consistently identified and evaluated in the literature are trust, satisfaction and commitment (Vieira et al., 2008; Athanasopoulou, 2009). Hence, the focus of this study will be on trust, satisfaction and commitment, which are the most mentioned and studied constructs within the literature. These three constructs are also referred to as measures of relationship quality (Athanasopoulou, 2009). Other scholars (e.g. Kempeners, 1995; Crosby et al., 1990) referred to trust, satisfaction and commitment as the key relationship management building blocks. In addition, these three constructs were selected because they have been validated in different contexts and they form an area of convergence for otherwise differentiated studies on dimensions of relationship quality. Dorsch et al (1998), Smith (1998a), Hennig-Thurau et al (2002), Robert et al. (2003), Ulaga and Eggert (2006), and Rauyruen and Miller (2007) referred to the three constructs as essential indicators of good relationship quality. Arguably, the three dimensions of relationship quality (i.e. trust, satisfaction and commitment) are not independent. Hence, there is a casual link between the dimensions of relationship quality (Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997).

### 4. The Study Theoretical Framework

Based on the review of previous literature which gives an insight into the main elements, determinants and dimensions of relationship quality, figure 1 present the proposed research study framework.

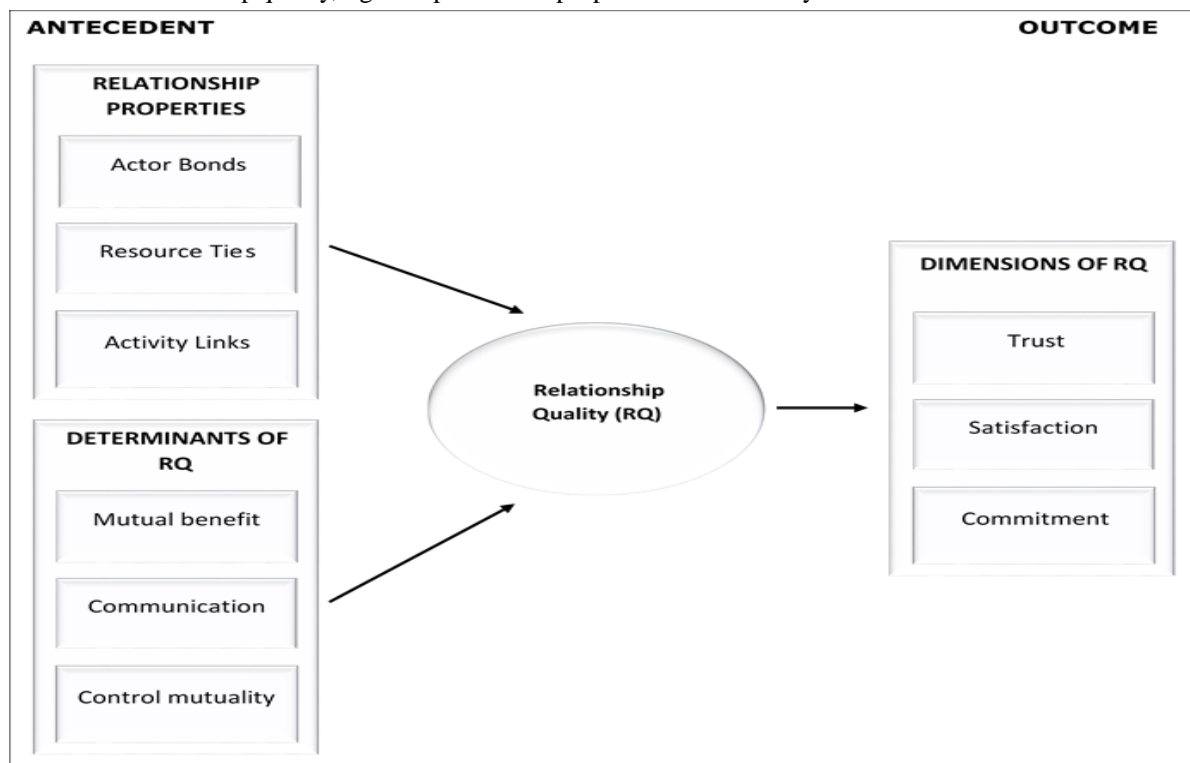


Figure 1. Research Study Theoretical Framework for a B2Com Relationship Quality (author generated)

## 5. Methodology

This research study aims to explore and understand the relationship elements and relationship quality constructs that are important in establishing a mutually beneficial relationship between a business and the community in which it operates. This was approached from the perspective of the community. Therefore, an exploratory research study was taken on board in order to gather the views and opinions of the host community. This is because the various relationship elements and relationship quality constructs identified by researchers and scholars (in a different context), which serve as the basis for this research study require a better understanding within a B2Com context. The process involved in carrying out this research is:

1. Defining the research study aims, which are to explore and understand the nature and quality of the relationship between the OPC and HC by considering the relationship elements, determinants of relationship quality, and dimensions of relationship quality as the basis of establishing and developing a successful relationship quality between the OPC and HC, and to develop a framework capable of assessing a B2Com relationship.
2. Formulating research objectives for the study. These are; to examine the nature and quality of the relationship between the OPC and HC in the NDRN, identify the relationship elements and key determinants and dimensions of relationship quality which the OPC could use to build and sustain a mutual sense-making relationship, and determine the impact of current relationship quality frameworks in improving and enhancing the integration of OPC and HC in the NDRN.
3. A detailed and comprehensive literature review was carried out in order to ascertain the research problem. In addition, the key relationship determinants and relationship dimensions suggested by scholars and researchers based on different research contexts were identified. This informed the development of the current study's theoretical framework as shown in figure 1.
4. Subsequently, data were collected from sixteen research participants from three states using an in-depth semi-structured interview, which is "the verbal interaction between one or more researchers and one or more respondents for the purpose of collecting valid and reliable data to answer particular research questions" Parahoo (2006, p. 307). The semi-structured interview was designed to give room for flexibility, which Bryman and Bell (2004) considered important because it allows the interviewer the opportunity to vary the interview questions and probe any inconsistent interviewee's response. The interview schedule focused mainly on exploring:

**The key elements of a relationship:** The purpose of this is to gain a detailed insight and background into the nature of the relationship between the OPC and HC from the HC point of view. In addition, it gave the research participants the opportunity to themselves assess and evaluate the relationship between the OPC and HC

**The determinants of relationship quality:** This focuses on capturing and understanding the constructs that give rise to relationship quality. In addition, why research participants consider such constructs as essential in achieving effective relationship quality. Crosby et al (1990) referred to these constructs as the antecedents of relationship quality

**The dimensions of relationship quality:** This aspect is included in order to establish and explore the likely constructs which serve as indicators of the level or state of the quality of relationship. Hence, it measures the quality of relationship between the OPC and HC. The interview questions explored under this section focus on relationship quality evaluation.

However, prior to carrying out interview sessions with different research participants, a pilot study was carried out in order to identify and correct the deficiencies and lapses in the research design procedure prior to major or main studies (Aitman et al., 2006). Polit and Beck (2009) defined a pilot study as a trial or small-scale version conducted prior to a major study. Arguably, a pilot study could be seen as a means of avoiding resource waste i.e. money or time. This was carried out via the telephone with five experts and operators in the field within the current context of study. Hence, the researcher was able to test the initial research interview questions and, from responses received, develop the final research interview questions (McNamara, 1999). Furthermore, the outcome of the pilot study informed the current study sample selection, which was based on selective sampling. Selective sampling originates from restrictions placed upon the researcher's observations by the research settings and/or context. Sandelowski et al (1992, p. 302) referred to selective sampling as "a decision made prior to beginning a study to sample subjects according to a preconceived, but reasonable initial set of criteria. Likewise, Glaser (1978, p. 37) defined selective sampling as "the calculated decision to sample a specific locale according to a preconceived but reasonable initial set of dimensions (such as time, space, identity or power) which are worked out in advance for a study". This



suggests that the ability of the researcher to select the appropriate sampling method depends on his or her understanding of the research context and/or settings. Coyne (1997) termed selective sampling as a purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) added that this sampling technique is widely used in qualitative research studies in order to identify and select information-rich research participants, while Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011) concluded that selective sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals that have experience or knowledge about a phenomenon of interest. Within the NDRN are nine independent states (i.e. Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers). However, three of these states (i.e. Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers) were selected for the purpose of data collection because they are worst affected due to the intensity and nature of oil production and operations, which are mostly onshore. In addition, these states experience the highest level of violence and conflicts compared to the remaining six other states in the NDRN.

The data collected was analysed using content analysis. This method of data analysis has been used both by quantitative and qualitative scholars. For example, Kaplan (1943, p. 230) referred to it as “a technique which attempts to characterise the meaning in a given body of discourse in a systematic and quantitative fashion”. Likewise, among the qualitative scholars, Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p. 1278) define content analysis as a “research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”. Webber (1990) argued that content analysis as a method of data analysis focuses directly on the transcript and/or text of human communications because communication is core to social interaction. Franzosi (2004) added that content analysis is often used to capture the key themes that emerge from a transcript and/or text.

Harris (2001) asserted that content analysis is important for studying organisations, beliefs, human relations and attitudes. Therefore, content analysis could be considered the most appropriate approach for the purpose of analysing data collected through interviews in order to understand and explore people’s views and opinions on the quality of a relationship (Golicic and Mentzer, 2005). Hence, it offered the researcher the opportunity to test and utilise the theoretical framework developed in order to assess and understand the quality of relationship between the OPC and HC. To this end, this research study adopted Harris’s (2001) eight step process for the purpose of data analysis as shown below:

1. Identify the questions to be asked and constructs to be used.
2. Choose the texts to be examined.
3. Specify the unit of analysis.
4. Determine the categories, or themes of meaning. Into which responses are divided.
5. Generate a coding scheme or coding rules.
6. Conduct a sample or pilot study.
7. Collect the data and revise the scheme as necessary.
8. Analyse the data and assess validity and reliability.

## **6. Results and Discussion**

### *6.1 Antecedents of Relationship Quality*

Data analysis revealed that activity links, actor bonds, resources ties, mutual benefit, communication, control mutuality, culture and mutual goal are perceived as antecedents of relationship quality.

#### **6.1.1 Activity Links**

Activity links become important when building a relationship because the parties involved are linked to each other through their various activities, and these links capture the efficiency in the use of resources. Hakansson and Snehota (1995) described activity links as a flow of exchange episodes involving each party to a relationship undertaking one or more activities. This description suggests the need for involvement and coordination between relationship partners as they will consequently affect how activities are carried out in the relationship. Interviewees’ understanding of activity links in this study reflects the act of participation in something, association with someone or a situation, engrossment with something which relies on performance, being considered as a necessary part of something, and when your contribution counts. These are consistent with Hallen et al (1989), Turnbull and Valla (1986) and Hakansson’s (1982) finding that relationship partners in any relationship are linked through activities.

Data gathered suggested that activity links are an important starting point when building a B2Com relationship. Whilst it is considered as a means by which a business and its community are brought together, the majority of the interviewees asserted that activity links increase the level of awareness and involvement between relationship

partners. Whilst some argued that activity links bring about proper engagement and a “right” connection, others added that proper interaction, exposure to opportunities and community building will result when there is appropriate activity links between a business and its community. Thus, the activity links in a relationship have dynamic (developments) and structural (efficiency) effects (Hakansson and Snehota 1995) and also lead to the development of capabilities (Teece et al 1997). Moller and Torronen (2003) stated that activity links affect interaction in any relationship. Research participants argued that activity links develop when the activities of parties to a relationship are understandable and visible to one another. They concluded that activity links is inherent in achieving trust between the relationship partners in a B2Com relationship.

#### 6.1.2 Resources Ties

Resource ties capture a party’s awareness and knowledge about the resources of another party within a relationship (Holmen et al 2005). Resource ties develop as parties in a relationship access or exchange resources with one another as they carry out their respective activities. In most cases, the development process transforms existing resources of the parties so as to create new resources. This further suggests that relationship parties interact and become aware of one another’s resources. Hence, as resource ties develop between two parties in a relationship they become mutually and increasingly interdependent (Hakansson and Snehota 1995).

As with activity links, research participants perceived resource ties as a key component in this relationship context. They argued that resource ties will facilitate exchanges and create positive connections between relationship partners. The findings suggested that resource ties occur when partners become aware of, and interact about, their respective resources. Research participants argued further that the resources that bring together both a business and the community in which it operate must be mutually shared between the two parties. Hence, there will be efficient use and development of relationship resources (Kalwani and Narayandas, 1995; Turnbull et al., 1996; Wilkinson, 1998; Spencer et al., 2003). Arguably, it is evident from the data collected and analysed that the existence of resource ties is an essential relationship element that should be taken into consideration as being of benefit for the relationship parties. Hence, research participants concluded that resource ties between relationship partners is important to achieving trust.

#### 6.1.3 Actor Bonds

Similar to resource ties, actor bonds refer to the ways that parties in a relationship respond to and perceive each other. Actor bonds impact on the identities of relationship partners towards one another and also affect the way these partners view and interpret situations. Hakansson and Snehota (1995, p. 198) stated that “identities, to begin with diffused, are shaped by the mutual interaction and its interpretation by the individuals within the two parties over time”. Hence, parties in a relationship react to one another’s actions in diverse situations. The development of identities between two parties in a relationship is largely related to developing commitment and trust. Hakansson and Snehota (1995) argued that commitment connotes to what parties will do for one another i.e. realizing of potential, while trust relates to what parties can do for one another i.e. identifying of potential. Hence, actor bonds between partners in a relationship emerge over time and are mutually developed through the experience and knowledge gained via interaction.

Research participants acknowledged the need for actor bonds to be mutually developed between relationship partners. They argued that this should take into consideration the long-term needs of the relationship partners. Hence, it will create a source of relationship bonding between them. Furthermore, research participants asserted that the presence of bond between relationship partners encourages frequent communication, which they perceived as a means of creating harmony and avoiding conflict in such relationship. This view by the research participants is consistent with Hakansson and Snehota’s (1995) that appropriate actor bonds between relationship partners will result in proper communication and efficient use of their respective capacity. Likewise, they argued that bond between relationship partners encourages and influences their level of commitment. This is because relationship partners tend to show more commitment in maintaining a relationship when they have a strong personal relationship. In addition, the research participants acknowledged that appropriate bonds between relationship partners will result in satisfaction, which facilitate efficient use of their respective capacity within the relationship. They concluded that bonding between relationship partners will give rise to trust, which encourages openness between the parties.

#### 6.1.4 Mutual Benefit

Data gathered revealed that for mutual benefit to exist between a business and the community in which it operate, there must be cooperation between them. Research participants acknowledged that a lack of agreed mutual benefit between the OPC and HC has resulted in underutilisation of resources within the region, leading to an increase in waste. This conforms to Wilkinson and Young’s (2002) argument that cooperation is a form of resource acquisition

strategy, while competition is a strategy useful in attaining marketplace advantage. Even though, from the business perspective, the OPCs are used to competition than cooperation. Furthermore, findings from the data gathered revealed that mutually agreed benefit between partners' prompts commitment. This is consistent with Morris et al (2007) and Morgan & Hunt's (1994) claim that mutual benefit influences commitment within a relationship. This suggests that the community in which a business is located (i.e. carry out its operations) will show commitment to the relationship with such a business if the community perceives greater benefit from the presence of the business. Similarly, data gathered revealed that trust has a positive impact on mutual benefit, which invariably results in relationship success. This is congruent with Zabkar & Brencic's (2004) assertion that trust between partners is a means of shaping partners' intentions and behaviours. Research participants concluded that the earlier both a business and its community consider one another as cooperating partners, by ensuring mutuality of benefits accruable to one another, the sooner they will both enjoy a smooth and peaceful relationship. Morris et al (2007) corroborate that the lesser the competitive rivalry between partners, the higher will be the opportunity for a mutually beneficial relationship. These findings emphasise the importance of a business and its community ensuring mutuality of benefit between one another; benefits associated with information and resources particularly help in achieving a successful relationship.

#### 6.1.5 Communication

Communication was interpreted as being an important factor that gives rise to trust, which is essential in building commitment to the relationship enhancement management between a business and its community. For effective and efficient communication purposes, most research participants emphasized the importance of employing a communication strategy that considers the nature of the information to be shared, and the affected entity within the community, in order to determine how such information will be transmitted. It was suggested by interviewees that a direct and face-to-face communication between the OPC and community people would be ideal. By doing this, research participants argued that a business would have access to first-hand information, and access to immediate feedback from the community (Cannon and Homburg, 2001).

Highlighting the importance of communication between a business and its community within the NDRN context, data gathered clearly showed that communication is crucial in maintaining continuity between the two parties because this would produce the intended or desired result within the relationship, while inadequate communication will often result in conflict and violence. In addition, research participants argued that untimely sharing of information would negatively impact the quality of relationship between relationship partners. Hence, relationship parties must be proactive in their communication process in order to arrive at the desired result. Furthermore, research participants established a connection between communication and trust. A few of the interviewees argued that trust is an afterward effect of effective communication. Their views show that effective communication has both direct and indirect outcomes in upholding trust between a business and its community within the relationship. These views support Anderson et al's (1987) assertion that communication is positively related with trust. This implies that effective communication will play an important role in maintaining, upholding and strengthen the level of trust between relationship partners in a B2Com relationship. Hence, communication has significant impact on trust.

Furthermore, communication flow was perceived as a strong predictor of satisfaction between relationship partners by interviewees. This is because proper and adequate communication between relationship partners increases their satisfaction level. A majority of the research participants concluded that communication is a prerequisite for commitment, while others perceived communication as a determinant of commitment.

#### 6.1.6 Control Mutuality

In general, research participants perceived control mutuality as the power balance in a relationship. This they referred to by agreeing with the distribution of power and level of mutual influence between relationship partners. This is in line with Men (2011) and Hon & Grunig's (1999) assertion that control mutuality shares some similarity with empowerment and a feeling of control because it is relevant to power sharing and influence. Data gathered revealed that the more a community can influence and/or control matters and issues pertaining to their relationship with a business entity, the more strongly such community believes that the business values the community's ideas and opinions. This suggests that a commendable level of interactivity and interaction between a business and its community will be of significant importance. Research participants argued that the lack of power balance between relationship partners will always result in violence and conflict. This is consistent with Stafford & Canary's (1991) claim that satisfaction with and/or agreement on the way things are done, or decisions are made, in a relationship signifies control mutuality. This further suggests the importance of relationship parties actively incorporating conflict management ability and effective communication in their relationship.

Furthermore, control mutuality was expressed in relation to decision-making between relationship partners. Research participants argued that a relationship lacks stability and interdependence when decisions that originate from such a relationship do not reflect each party's opinion. In addition, it was revealed that two-way communication between a business and its community in their decision making process is pertinent in attaining a control mutuality position. Research participants asserted that a business must allow the self-efficacy (e.g., enhance their control ability and empower them) of the community in which it operates in order to gain their satisfaction. These findings suggest that there is a need for appropriate power-sharing between relationship parties.

#### 6.1.7 Culture

Culture is one of the themes that emerged during the data analysis process. A majority of the research participants stressed the need for a business to understand the cultural heritage of the community in which its operations are being carried out in order to obtain a productive and successful relationship with such a community. In addition, the research participants added that the various strategies employed by a business must take into cognisance the importance of the people's cultural heritage in order to avoid violence and conflicts. This finding is in line with Tobor and Muzorewa (2016, p. 15) assertion that "A majority of researchers writing on the Niger Delta crisis proffered possible solutions without considering the significance of the culture of the people for whom the program is meant". Even though there is no consensus on the definition of "culture", it is usually perceived to connote values and beliefs. Jaques (1951) defined culture as a traditional and customary way of thinking and doing things, shared by all its members. This suggests that members are bound by a common set of values and that any new member must learn and at least partially abide by such values in order to be accepted. Research participants concluded that culture plays a significant role on how a community engages with the outside world, such as business coming into their community, and that it is embedded in community participation (Tobor and Muzorewa, 2016). Hence, involving the community in a B2Com relationship context could lead to increased quality of decisions, access to new information, and enhanced fairness.

#### 6.1.8 Mutual Goal

Wilson (1995) defined mutual goals as the extent to which relationship partners share goals which are meant to be achieved jointly by the relationship partners, and the maintenance of such a relationship. Hence, parties to a relationship must all participate in the relationship as agreed (Adler, 1967). McQuiston, (2001) added that mutual goals provide relationship partners with the right conditions and the opportunity to participate effectively in a relationship. Vieira et al (2008) argue further that mutual goals between relationship partners encourages similarity of values, such that relationship partners equally work towards a common long-term goal or achievement. Zineldin (2004) stated that a mutual goal is when relationship parties cooperate and coordinate their activities together. These definitions further suggest that relationship parties are expected to work towards achieving a unified goal that could create value and mutually beneficial exchanges.

The research participants emphasised the benefit of involving the community in the formulation of goals and strategies that affect the communities. They stated that the OPC relationship with the HC will be successful when the OPC takes into cognisance the community when making decisions and formulating strategies. This is consistent with Zineldin's (1998) standpoint that a mutual goal is a way of integrating a relationship such that partners' will achieve a common goal. Vieira et al (2008) argued that the nature of a mutual goal should be considered as a core determinant of relationship quality. Likewise, some scholars (e.g. Huntley, 2006; Parsons, 2002; Boles et al., 2000; Smith, 1998a; Lagace et al., 1991; Crosby et al., 1990) asserted that mutual goal is one of the most commonly emphasised relationship quality determinants. The research participants stated that when both the OPC and HC pursue the same goal(s), their level of trust and satisfaction would improve. These excerpts are in line with Anderson and Weitz's (2008) assertion that trust between relationship partners is enhanced when they share similar goals, and Vieira et al's (2008) argument that the level of satisfaction experienced by parties to a relationship is enhanced when they share mutual goals. Likewise, the research participants argued that when both the OPC and HC share a mutual goal, their level of commitment will improve. Hence, this research study considers mutual goal as a determinant of relationship quality.

### 6.2 *Relationship Quality Outcome*

Data analysis revealed that trust, satisfaction and commitment are termed as the relationship quality outcome.

#### 6.2.1 Trust

Within the literature, trust has been viewed from two distinct standpoints (LaBahn and Kohli, 1997). One standpoint viewed trust as a combination of behavioural intentions and beliefs (Moorman et al 1992), while the other considered trust to centre on trustworthiness (Morgan and Hunt 1994, Anderson and Weitz 1989). This study

adopted Morgan and Hunt's (1994) standpoint which referred to trust as trustworthiness. In addition, trust has been studied at three different levels; firstly, at the individual level (Crosby et al 1990), secondly at the organisational level (Garbarino and Johnson 1999), and thirdly Rauyruen and Miller (2007), and Karantinou and Hogg (2009) focused on both individual and organisational level. Regardless of these views and levels of study, Smyth et al (2010) concluded that trust is not a calculated judgement but rather an attitude which is socially measured through interactions.

It was made known that trust is developed over time through numerous interactions and information sharing between relationship partners. Hence, communication is an important driving factor for relationship parties to act to establish trust. Research participants revealed that a business's perceived honesty, openness and reliability in giving appropriate and timely information on issues that affect the HC is crucial to the success of a B2Com relationship. This will help the parties build mutual understanding and establish confidence between them and also reduces the risks associated with failed projects and over-promising. Research participants noted that trust has a positive impact on satisfaction. They argued that when relationship partners share a higher level of trust, they would be less concerned or worried about their level of interaction, which ultimately results in a greater level of satisfaction with each other. In addition, research participants added that trust between a business and its community is important in establishing commitment between the OPCs and the HC. They concluded that commitment will be the follow-on effect of a business and its community improving the level of trust between them.

### 6.2.2 Satisfaction

Satisfaction is the pleasurable fulfilment of need (Oliver 1997, 1999) and can be regarded as an overall evaluation of performance (Fornell 1992). Satisfaction from these two researchers' perspectives can be seen as an emotion-based judgement and an evaluation of a service experience. Oliver (2010) revealed that satisfaction can be judged and evaluated at three different stages; (i) during interactions, (ii) at the end of a series of interactions, and (iii) a global assessment taking into consideration the whole encounter and experience between partners.

The majority of the research participants argued that satisfaction is an essential construct because relationship parties must have a feeling of fair treatment. They stated that both the business and its community should be responsible for building and/or enhancing the level of satisfaction within a B2Com relationship. This suggests the need for a business and its community to have a common understanding of what constitutes satisfaction within their relationship context. Research participants added that satisfaction is perceived when desired outcomes are achieved, when agreed promises are fulfilled or when results are consented to by parties to the relationship. They concluded that when relationship partners are satisfied with their dealings and interactions with one another, they create an atmosphere that get each other committed to the relationship.

### 6.2.3 Commitment

Commitment, according to Caceres and Pappas (2007), focuses on involvement, while La (2005) argued that commitment has two dimensions; relationship orientation and attitudinal disposition. Commitment for the purpose of this study has been termed as the desire of parties in a relationship to retain and maintain the relationship. This is consistent with assertions by Moorman et al (1992) and Anderson and Weitz (1992). Research participants argued that genuine commitment of relationship partners to each other results in a long-term and stable relationship. This is consistent with Gundlach et al's (1995) assertion that two-way approaches to commitment between partners promotes their relationship and fosters trust also. Research participants added that commitment presents relationship partners with an opportunity to determine their future exchanges and develop a shared norm in the process.

## 7. Contribution

The success of existing research studies on relationship quality is shifting towards the study of new relationship types (Athanasopoulou, 2009). The concept of "relationship" is one that includes relationship parties who are not necessarily an organisation or individuals (Huang and Chiu, 200), or where the parties involved do not take on the traditional roles of a seller and buyer (Athanasopoulou, 2009). Osobajo and Moore (2016), and Athanasopoulou (2009) recommend that researchers should look at new relationship types between parties that may not be organisations or individuals using qualitative approaches to analyse the quality of relationship, while Vieira et al (2008) suggest that relationship quality constructs could be varied depending on the research context. Consequently, this research study extended the concept of relationship and relationship quality in several aspects.

First, this research study was the first of its kind to develop a detailed and comprehensive framework of relationship quality in the context of a business-to-community (B2Com) relationship in a unique commercial

context. It draws from the literature in four main areas: interpersonal relationships (i.e. relationship between individuals), business-to-business relationships (B2B), business-to-customer relationships (B2C), and customer-to-business relationships (C2B). Figure 2 demonstrate the final proposed model for a B2Com relationship model.

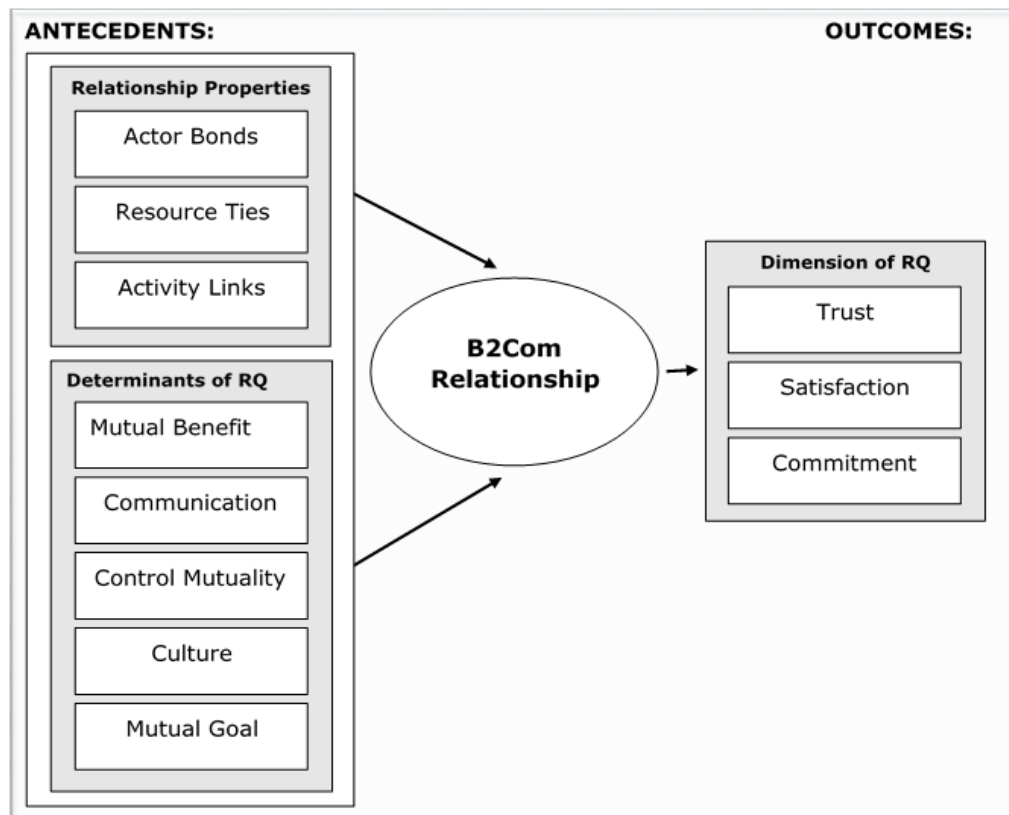


Figure 2. The Final Proposed Theoretical Framework for a B2Com Relationship Quality (author generated)

Second, existing research on the constructs of relationship quality have either analysed data deductively (i.e. by applying existing theories and literature to a specific research context (Hennink et al., 2010)) or inductively (i.e. moving from data to the development of framework (Kerlinger, 1986)) using a statistical or mathematical analytical tool (Osobajo and Moore, 2016). This is the first to employ both the deductive and inductive reasoning approaches using content analysis to inform the research final framework. This is because the two reasoning approaches to research give a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the concept of relationship quality within the context of a business-to-community relationship. Hence, certain determinants of relationship quality (i.e. culture and mutual goal) were identified by research participants (Vieira et al., 2008).

Third, this research study extended the application of relationship quality frameworks that were conducted in a developed economic environment such as the United Kingdom and United States of America (Osobajo and Moore, 2016) to a developing economic environment such as Nigeria through the replication of these frameworks. This is consistent with Vieira et al's (2008) suggestion that additional constructs may need to be included in order to acknowledge the context of the current study. Likewise, Collins (1985) stated that replication of previous or existing studies is imperative for the generation of knowledge, while Hubbard and Armstrong (1994) concluded that replication is the key to generalisation for the advancement of science. Even though researchers have made adequate and robust effort in developing these frameworks, the fact that these studies were carried out in a developed economy suggests scope for further replication and extension studies. In addition to mutual benefit, communication and control mutuality, this research study adds to the body of knowledge by confirming that culture and mutual goal are important determinants of relationship quality within the NOGI context.

Fourth, this research study also enhances the understanding of practitioners (i.e. public relation officers) working within the Nigerian oil and gas industry (NOGI) and other sectors on how to develop and maintain their relationship with the communities they operate within. It is obvious that as the OPCs experience difficulty in the exploration and production of crude oil, establishing and maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship will become more of a priority. In addition, the OPCs will be able to exploit crude oil resources that were previously

uneconomical due to the accessibility of such resources. Practitioners need to work with the community to develop a mutually beneficial relationship that meets the needs of all relational parties. Effort should be made in creating a mutual goal atmosphere and understanding the culture of the people in order to develop a better relationship with the community.

### 8. Limitations and Direction for Future Research

Deciding on the research design for this research study resulted in certain trade-offs, which could limit the research findings.

The aim of this research study is to develop a framework that is capable of enhancing the quality of relationship between the OPC and HC, but with specific focus on the NOGI. In doing so, this research study offers a framework that draws from the literature reviewed and the data gathered. The research study analysis supported the connection and interlink that exists between the determinants of relationship quality and dimensions of relationship quality based on the samples surveyed. However, caution should be taken in generalising the research study results to other sectors within the NDRN. This research study acknowledged that it is likely impossible to develop a framework that is appropriate for all sectors because of the following reasons:

1. The process followed in drawing the sample size for the research study produced results that were specific to the oil and gas industry. This is because research participants interviewed were selected based on their perceived knowledge of the relationship between OPC and HC within the NDRN, which may not be applicable to other sectors.
2. The use of content analysis as the most appropriate method for analysing the data collected through interviews in order to understand and explore people's views and opinions on the quality of relationship may not be applicable to other sectors.

Hence, further refinement and modification of the constructs proposed by this research study may be necessary in order to take into account the industry specific context of future research studies. Future research studies should consider using other sampling approaches such as a stratified systematic sampling which would divide the community population into the various groups, and each group of actor sampled using a systematic approach in order to obtain a reliable sample size.

Furthermore, this research study supported the relevance of the various relationship quality constructs suggested by previous scholars as used in this research study framework, and expanded the constructs to include culture and mutual goal. However, further research could explore the propositions formulated by the current study. In addition, future research studies should consider drawing samples from either the OPC or both the OPC and HC in order to have diverse opinions and views from research participants and facilitate investigation of the interdependence of the relationship. This is because the research samples selected for this research study come from the community only. It would be worthwhile if future research in the field of study could look into the optimum order in which the different constructs and/or elements identified within the framework would be effective in enhancing and/or improving a B2Com relationship. However, the order suggested by the findings of this research study flow from the interrelationships between the various elements and constructs that made up the study framework. Also, the findings suggested a linear relationship between trust, satisfaction and commitment. Having considered different relationship quality frameworks, this research study is concluded with the notion that the developed theoretical framework is a tool capable of enhancing and/or improving the quality of relationship between two or more relationship parties

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#### Appendix A. Relationship Quality Constructs (summarised from the literature)

Authors	Method	Relationship type	Industry	Constructs
Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987	Survey and random sample	Manufacturers and dealers i.e. sellers and buyers	USA Automobile	Trust, satisfaction, minimal opportunity
Crosby et al., 1990	Survey i.e. questionnaire and random sample	Sales people - retail customers	USA life insurance	Trust, satisfaction
Lagace et al., 1991	Telephone request and mailed questionnaires	physicians and Pharmaceutical sales people	Business	Trust, satisfaction
Moorman et al., 1992	Survey i.e. questionnaire and convenience sample	Providers and users of market research e.g internal marketing manager & researcher	Marketing research	Trust, satisfaction
Han et al., 1993	Survey i.e. questionnaire and convenience sample	buyers and suppliers e.g Purchasing agents and sales people	Industrial relationship	Trust, satisfaction
Johnson et al., 1993	Survey i.e. mailed questionnaire and convenience sample	Japanese distributors of U.S. manufactured consumer products and U.S. suppliers	Consumer goods	Satisfaction, cooperation, stability
Wray et al., 1994	Telephone survey and random sample interview	Financial intermediary and customers of financial service intermediaries	Financial service	Trust, satisfaction
Morgan & Hunt, 1994	In-depth on-site interview for preliminary study, questionnaire and random sample	Retailers and their customers	Automobile	Trust, commitment
Zineldin, 1995	Survey i.e. mailed questionnaire and random sample	Banks and corporate customers	Financial service	N/A
Kumar et al., 1995	Survey and random sample	Large manufacturers and small regional new car dealers	Automobile	Trust, commitment, willingness to invest
Bejou et al., 1996	Survey i.e. questionnaire, random sample and telephone interviews	Sales people and retail customers	Financial service	Trust, satisfaction
Menon et al., 1996	Mailed survey letter and questionnaire	Intraorganizational relationships	Busines/organisation	N/A
Leuthesser, 1997	Questionnaire and random sample	Supplier to buyer (B2B)	various businesses	Trust, satisfaction
Doney & Cannon, 1997	Mailed questionnaire and random sample	Supplier to buyer	Manufacturing	Trust

Gwinner et al., 1998	In-depth interviews judgement sample and Survey and random sample	Service provider and customers in	various industries	N/A
Dorsch et al., 1998	Mailed questionnaire and random sample	Vendors and purchasing executives	Purchasing	Trust, satisfaction, commitment, opportunism, ethics
Smith, 1998a	Survey, random sample	Purchasing professionals and sales representatives	domestic market	Trust, satisfaction, commitment
Smith, 1998b	Survey, random sample	buyer-seller relationship	domestic market	Trust, satisfaction, commitment
Selnes, 1998	Prior telephone invitation and survey i.e questionnaire and random sample	Food producer and its customers	Cafeterias and Restaurants/ food supply	Trust, satisfaction
Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998	survey i.e questionnaire and random sample	Hotels and their guests	hotel industry	Trust, commitment
Jap et al., 1999	In-depth interviews and interaction data were obtained from four key informants	Buyers-sellers	Retail firms	Trust, Continuity
Baker et al., 1999	Survey and convenience sample	Suppliers and resellers	Channel: various industries	Trust, satisfaction, commitment
Johnson, 1999	Survey i.e. questionnaire and convenience sample	Suppliers distributors (buyer-seller) and	Industrial machinery and equipment distribution	Trust, fairness
Garbarino & Johnson, 1999	Survey i.e. questionnaire and random sample of	Service providers and consumers	customer-firm	Trust, satisfaction, commitment
Henning-Thurau, 2000	Face-to-face questionnaire survey and random sample	Customers and manufacturers	Electronic	Trust, commitment, quality
Naude & Buttle, 2000	Questionnaire	Executives in various industries and their suppliers (B-to-B)	Business	Trust, satisfaction, coordination, power
Boles et al., 2000	Survey i.e. questionnaire and random sample	Business to business	Business	Trust, satisfaction
Scanlan & McPhail, 2000	Exploratory i.e. in-depth interview and descriptive research i.e. survey and convenient sampling	Business travellers and hotel receptionists	Hospitality	Satisfaction
Hibbard et al., 2001	Mailed questionnaire	Manufacturers and their independent dealers	Market channel	Trust, commitment
Goodman and Dion, 2001	Mailed questionnaire	Distributor-manufacturer	Industrial distribution channel	Commitment
De Ruyeter et al., 2001	Indepth interview and questionnaire	Business to business	Technology	Trust, commitment
Hewett et al., 2002	Questionnaire and convenient sample	buyer-seller	Industrial	N/A
Woo & Cha 2002	Questionnaire	Service provider i.e. hotels and guests	Tourism/hotel	Trust, satisfaction
Henning-Thurau et al., 2002	Questionnaire	Customers-services business	Service business	Trust, satisfaction, commitment
Wong & Sohal, 2002a	Questionnaire	Department store and retail shoppers	Retail	N/A
Wong & Sohal, 2002b	Questionnaire	Employee and company	Retail	Trust, satisfaction, commitment, quality
Friman et al., 2002	Case study	Business to business i.e. service firms and international partners	International business	Trust, commitment
Lang & Colgate, 2003	Stratified probability sampling and questionnaire	Financial service providers (banks) and online retail customers	Information technology	Trust, satisfaction, commitment, bond
Keating et al., 2003	Focus groups and an online survey and convenient sampling	Online retailing	Online retail	Trust, communication, understanding, value
Walter et al., 2003	Supplier-customer	Manufacturing supplier and purchasing professional, various industries	Various industries	Trust, satisfaction, commitment
Roberts et al.,	Questionnaire	Service firms and their	Various service	Trust, satisfaction,

2003		customers	industries	commitment
Sanzo et al., 2003	Questionnaire	Buyer-seller firms and suppliers	Industrial	Trust, conflict, value
Woo & Ennew, 2004	Questionnaire	B-to-B relationships	Professional services (consulting engineering services)	Adaptation, cooperation
Fynes et al., 2004	Mailed questionnaire and convenience sampling	Supply chain relationship	Manufacturing	Trust, communication, adaptation, cooperation
Veneti & Ghauri, 2004	Semi-structured interview and questionnaire, convenience sample	Advertising agencies and business customers (products and services)	Advertising	Commitment
Lages et al., 2005	Survey i.e. questionnaire and convenience sample	Exporters - importers	Export market	Satisfaction, communication
Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005	Survey i.e. interview and questionnaire and convenience sample	Charities and their beneficiaries	Charity	Trust, commitment
Farrelly & Quester, 2005	Survey i.e. interview and questionnaire and convenience sample	Football teams (Australian Football League) and their sponsors	Sport	Trust, commitment
Van Bruggen et al., 2005	Survey i.e. mailed questionnaire convenience sample	B-to-B relationships Professional painters (owners/heads of painting firms) and distributors of paints	Channel distribution	Trust, commitment, satisfaction, conflict
Huntley, 2006	Telephone survey and convenience sampling	Buyer-seller	Technology	Trust, commitment
Athanasopoulou, 2006	Case study, indepth interview and document review	Corporate customers and financial service providers (leasing services)	Corporate financial service	N/A
Park & Deitz, 2006	Survey, convenience sample	Automobile manufacturers and their salespeople	Automobile	Satisfaction
Ramaseshan et al., 2006	Survey i.e. questionnaire and random sample	Department stores and their tenants	Distribution channel	Satisfaction, commitment
Ulag & Eggert, 2006	Depth-interview and mailed questionnaire	Industrial purchasing managers and vendors - various industries	Manufacturing	Trust, commitment, satisfaction
Leonidou et al., 2006	Random questionnaire i.e. and systematic sample	US exporters and importer	Industrial export	Trust, commitment, satisfaction, cooperation, communication
Carr, 2006	Interview	IS departments and IS users	Information systems	Trust, satisfaction, commitment
Ndubisi, 2006	Survey i.e. questionnaire and convenience sample	Banks and retail customers	Banking	Trust, satisfaction, commitment
Naudé et al., 2007	Questionnaire	Manager to manager	Business to business	N/A
Rauyruen & Miller, 2007	Mail and online survey; convenience sample	Business to business	Courier Delivery services	N/A
Prinsloo et al., 2007	Internal mail system questionnaire	Inter-functional	Small-medium size marketer	N/A
Shabbir et al., 2007	Semi-structured interview			N/A
Beatson et al., 2008	Self-completed questionnaire	Business and leisure travellers	Tourism	Satisfaction, trust, and commitment
Ibrahim & Najjar, 2008	Questionnaire	Retailer-customer	Retail	N/A
Kilburn & Kilburn, 2008	Online questionnaire	internal customers and suppliers	organisation	N/A
Skarmeas & Robson, 2008	Mailed questionnaire	Importers and foreign suppliers	International business	N/A
Hsin Hsin & Po Wen, 2009	questionnaire, case study and interview			satisfaction, trust, and commitment
Morry & Kito, 2009	Questionnaire	self-friend relationship	interpersonal	N/A
Vieira, 2009	Questionnaire	Business to business	Hotel	N/A
Vesel & Zabkar,	Telephone interviews	Retail relationship	Retail	Trust, commitment and

2010				satisfaction
Knobloch & Knobloch-Fedders, 2010	Questionnaire	Actor-partner interdependence	Couple	N/A
Al-alak, 2010	Questionnaire	N/A	Health and fitness setting	N/A
Canevello & Crocker, 2010	Questionnaire	Interpersonal relationship	Human relationship	N/A
Cannière et al., 2010	Questionnaire	Customer-firm	Retail	N/A
Cater & Cater, 2010	Email and web based questionnaire.	Business-to-business	Manufacturing	N/A
Morry et al., 2010	Questionnaire	Self- versus partner	Human relationship	trait, perception,
Park et al., 2010	Questionnaire		Industrial selling	N/A
Barry & Doney, 2011	Exploratory research, pretesting, and final survey administration	Suppliers and retailer	Industrial service marketing	Satisfaction, trust, and commitment
Clark et al., 2011	Online questionnaire	physician and the pharmaceutical sales representative	Medical marketing	Relationship benefits, relationship investment, relational dependences
Gentzler et al., 2011	On-line questionnaire	Parental relationship	Parenting	Communication
Hunt et al., 2011	Questionnaire	Financial planners and clients	Financial sector	N/A
Keating et al., 2011	Online questionnaire	Customer to business	Online banking service	Service delivery, loyalty
Liang et al., 2011	Questionnaire	User's social sharing and social shopping	E-commerce	N/A
Petrican et al., 2011	Questionnaire	Partner-couple		N/A
Weigel et al., 2011	Questionnaire	Individuals in romantic relationships		N/A
Vikas, 2011	Structured questionnaire	Customers and service providers	Telecoms	N/A
Zhang et al., 2011	Questionnaire	Information systems professionals and online customer	Online	N/A
Chu & Wang, 2012	Questionnaire	Company-third party logistics providers	Supply chain	N/A
Ndubisi et al., 2012	Questionnaire	Retail banking and customer	Retail banking	N/A
Vidal, 2012	Questionnaire	Supplier-retailer	Industrial distribution context	N/A
Yen et al., 2012	Questionnaire	Life insurance service provider and customer		N/A
Zimmerman & Roberts, 2012	Questionnaire	Couple	Marriage relationship	N/A
Ahamed & Skallerud, 2013	Questionnaires	Business to business.	Garment-exporting firms	N/A
Bellavance et al., 2013	Questionnaire	Superior-manager relationship	Organisation	N/A
Brouer et al., 2013	Questionnaire	Unit leader-staff personnel relationship	Academic/ school	N/A
Kühne, et al., 2013	Questionnaire	Relationship between chain members	Food chain	N/A
Kang et al., 2013	Face-to-face interview and questionnaire	Business	Food	N/A
Leonidou et al., 2013	questionnaire	exporter-importer relationship	international business	cooperation, communication, trust, and commitment
Lin, 2013	Questionnaires	Customers and their service provider		Trust and satisfaction
Marquardt, 2013	Questionnaire	Buyer-seller relationships	Industrial	N/A
Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2013	Questionnaire	Individual-leader	Organisation/work place	N/A
Rafiq et al., 2013	Online questionnaire	retailer and online grocery shoppers	Internet retailing/e-grocery	Satisfaction, commitment, trust
Rašković et al.,	Email and web based	buyer-supplier	industrial	N/A

2013	questionnaire.	relationships	procurement	
Tareque Aziz & Azila Mohd Noor, 2013	Questionnaire	Retailer-supplier relationship	Retail	N/A
Tung & Carlson, 2013	Questionnaire	Retail banking and customer	Banking industry	N/A
Tripathi & Dave, 2013	Questionnaire	Customer-retail	Retail	N/A
Ying-Pin, 2013	Questionnaire	Suppliers and retailers	Automobile industry	Commitment, cooperation, trust, satisfaction, coordination, adaptation
Akrout, 2014	Semi-structured interview	Business to business		N/A
Al-Alak, 2014	Questionnaire	Banks-client		N/A
Atrek et al., 2014	Semi-structured interview	Business to business i.e . Company & supplier	Supply chain	Service performance, service quality, product quality
Giota and Kleftras, 2014	Questionnaire	Facebook users	Online media social	N/A
Huang et al., 2014	Online interview, web link and questionnaire	Online customer - buyer	Online market/ buying	N/A
Lai, 2014	Questionnaire	Business to customer	Travel agency industry	Service quality and perceived value are antecedents of relationship quality
Lo & Im, 2014	Questionnaire and in-depth interviews	Hotel staff and customers	Hotel industry	N/A
Nguyen & Nguyen, 2014	Questionnaire	Business	Export	N/A
Subramony, 2014	Questionnaire	Firm-client	Business	N/A
Semrau & Werner, 2014	Interview	Network relationship	Business network	N/A
Uchino et al., 2014	Questionnaire	spousal relationships	marriage relationship	N/A
Ahamed et al., 2015	Questionnaires	Business to business	Exporting firms	N/A
Hoppner et al., 2015	Mailed questionnaire	Business to business	Business	N/A
Itani & Inyang, 2015	Questionnaire	Sales person to customer	Retail banking	N/A
Sheu, 2015	Face-to-face interview and questionnaire	Producer-dealer distribution channels	Distribution channels	N/A
Williams et al., 2015	Questionnaires	Business/firm	Project management	N/A

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