Beyond relationship marketing: technologicalship marketing

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Abstract
Argues that relationship marketing is not a complete paradigm shift. Without effective use of technology, relationship marketing is not an effective strategy. Hence, relationship marketing, based on technological advances, can be considered as a new paradigm. It is demonstrated that everything companies do to build consumer loyalty is affected by technology. It is shown that traditional, relationship, and technologicalship marketing are fundamentally different. The technologicalship marketing allows for different types of synergy effects, solutions, different customers, and different types of interactions and relationships.

It is very obvious that nowadays organizations and people (consumers) will find it difficult to separate a relationship from information technology and other technological advances. Relationship marketing, which includes strategic alliances and strategic networks, has been devised by organizations to navigate through this disorder. This paper is part of a long-term research effort, the ultimate objective of which is to offer suggestions to integrate marketing functions with other functions and to better understand how information technology can be used as a source of competitive advantage (e.g. Zineldin *et al.*, 1997; Zinedlin, 1998). Our theory framework is based on current understanding of recent developments in relationship marketing and information technology theories and concepts with application in practice by some organizations.

The only certainty is change

It is commonplace to rethink and talk about the speed of change in our present-day highly technological society, and of the need for the overall economy and business to respond to its rapidly changing environment and market conditions. Every decade, according to one's point of view, probably appears either as the most doomladen, the most opportunistic and hopeful, the most retrogressive and wasteful or the most perplexing of our lives. Change can be exciting and stimulating. It can trigger new ideas, fire us with enthusiasm, provide new opportunities, confront us with new challenges, and awaken us from our slumber. It also brings uncertainty, and in doing so seems to bring us, as individuals, many problems. New technologies bring new ways of thinking, challenging us to let go of chorused beliefs.

Some factors that have had a major impact on the development of marketing and management during this decade are: the knowledge explosion in technology, the arrival of the commercial computer, the emergence of a more broadly educated and more discerning consumer with increasing discretionary spending and purchasing power, the internationalization and globalization of business, and the emergence of the modern multinational companies. Today, information technology skills have also emerged as a priority.

A company that does not learn and adapt to changing technology can face painful competition and may fall victim to competitors that switched their strategies to the more technologically-based relationships and advanced products and services. Douglas C. North (1993), one of the Nobel prize winners in the economic sciences in 1993, argues that learning from each other, from past experience, and from new innovations, enables organizations to find a common, probably unexpected, pattern or network of relationships that works for them. Such learning leads to emergent strategies.

Technology is an effort to maintain a firm's ability to handle an increase in product/service volume while controlling costs; it also enables firms to be innovative and market oriented. The communications and computers (C&C) networks between companies helped them to remain competitive and profitable. Many roles are given to the computers and Communications networks. John Sculley (1987), president of California-based Apple Computers states that:

> Time compression has nearly crippled our ability to cope with change. Technology has made the world a smaller, faster place that penalizes the slow-moving and stable

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institution. Companies that can quickly get ideas and information through their organizations for discussion and action will have distinct competitive advantages over others.

However, the unprecedented pace of the technological change facing organizations as they move into the first decades of the twenty-first century demands that marketers and managers must be aware that making inappropriate decisions about the technological dimension may affect their competitive powers. It may also affect their profits by requiring expensive corrective actions. Success is the result of the symbiosis of technology and marketing. Many companies believe that blending technology with customer requirements is an important success element in establishing and developing customer relationships (Zineldin *et al.*, 1997). Moreover, marketing as a scholarly discipline developed early in the twentieth century. As we approach the end of this century and the beginning of a new millennium, it is an opportune time to reflect on what the discipline has accomplished and to look to its future. The partnering of IT, relationship, and marketing is the most important way to understand this future.

The rapid and radical changes in today's marketing environment resulted in an emphasis on relationship marketing, i.e. the importance of building and keeping a close relationship between companies, customers, and other business parties. Now, the importance of IT in creating and enhancing business relationships should be stressed. The problem of integrating IT in building marketing relationships has not been solved yet in a comprehensive and satisfactory way.

> While technology has a prominent role in organization theory, its absence in marketing theory is conspicuous (Ford, 1997).

This paper is part of a long-term research effort, the ultimate objective of which is to offer suggestions to integrate information technology and marketing functions with other functions within and among organizations. The purpose of this paper is to elaborate on the indispensable role of information technology (IT) and other technological advances (T) in enabling business and consumer relationships to better understand how information technology can be used as a source of competitive advantage in marketing activities. It is a conceptual study based on the recent developments of relationship marketing and management, as well as information technology theories and concepts with application in practice. The paper is organized accordingly. A brief outline of relationship marketing is presented first, followed by a discussion of the role of IT as a foundation for relationship marketing, a definition of technologicalship marketing, and an overview of the changing nature of the market and marketing activities. Some synergy effects of utilizing technologicalship marketing are highlighted.

Relationship marketing and IT (a brief review)

Relationship marketing

Today's businesses are facing fierce and too aggressive competition while operating in both a domestic or a global market. This diverse and uncertain environment has forced organizations to restructure themselves in order to enhance their chances of survival and growth. The restructuring efforts have included, among others, the emergence of the "new paradigm" which is commonly referred to as relationship marketing, RM (e.g. Berry, 1983; Ford, 1990; Håkansson, 1982; Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Zineldin *et al.*, 1997; Grönroos, 1994; Gummesson, 1995; McKenna, 1991; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). RM has been used to reflect a number of different types of relational marketing activity. Unfortunately, the precise meaning of relationship marketing is not always clear in the literature. The term relationship marketing has become a buzzword, with the concept being used to reflect a number of differing themes or perspectives and becomes a "catch-all" phrase (Brodie *et al.*, 1997).

However, these definitions of relationship marketing provide the basis for the new paradigm argument which views marketing as an integrative activity involving personnel from across the organizations, with emphasis on building and maintaining relationships over time. Personal relationships, interactions, and social exchange are the most important core elements of relationship marketing.

Brodie *et al.*, (1997) state that relationship marketing has emerged from six streams of research. The first stream examines marketing from a service context (e.g. Berry, 1983; Grönroos, 1990; Gummesson, 1995; Zineldin *et al.*, 1997). The second stream focuses on inter-organizational exchange relationships (e.g. Håkansson, 1982; Ford, 1990; Hallen *et al.*, 1987; Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Gummesson, 1995; Zineldin, 1998). The third stream underlying the new paradigm of relationship marketing is based on channels literature, e.g. the development of effective and efficient channel relationships (e.g. Brown *et al.*, 1995; Buzzell and Ortmeyer, 1995; Zineldin *et al.*, 1997). The fourth one examines network relationships (e.g. Webster and Frederick, 1992; Easton, 1992; Johanson and Matsson, 1985, 1988; Zineldin *et al.*, 1997). The fifth stream stems from strategic management literature about the role or relationships in value chains (Normann and Ramirez, 1993; Zineldin *et al.*, 1997). Finally, the sixth stream examines the strategic impact that information strategy has on the relationships within and between organizations (e.g. Scott Morton, 1991; Zineldin, 1998).

In an effort to clarify and reconcile the various views and streams of marketing research and practice, Brodie *et al.*, (1997) refer to Coviello *et al.*, (1996) who developed a classification scheme based on a synthesis of both European and North American schools of thought in marketing, across the service, interaction, channels, and network streams of research. From this, two general marketing perspectives were identified, encompassing four distinct types of marketing:

1 Transaction marketing
   - Transaction marketing
2 Relationship marketing
   - Database marketing
   - Interaction marketing
   - Network marketing

As a matter of fact, many researchers argue that organizations in industrial and service sectors practice inherently different types of marketing than do consumer packaged goods firms, given their involvement in complex network relationships with customers, suppliers, and other organizations (e.g. Grönroos, 1990; Easton, 1992; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Low, 1996). Grönroos (1990) suggests that consumer goods companies are characterized more by the practice of transaction marketing than are consumer durable, industrial goods, or service firms. Brodie *et al.* (1997) ask: "Does this mean that consumer packaged goods firms do not practice relationship, interaction or network marketing?" Further, are service firms necessarily dominated by the practice of relationship marketing activities.

Any organizations that apply any of the above mentioned marketing cannot operate effectively unless they have the ability to communicate quickly, accurately, and over great distances. Advances in IT should make it much easier for managers and marketers to communicate and do business within national or international networks.

According to Payne (1995), transaction marketing and relationship marketing have a number of different specific characteristics (see Table I for sample).

Indeed, some of the six marketing research streams and the following four types of marketing have considered the impact of IT on marketing activities. Unfortunately, they view IT as a separate supporting element in developing relationships or as facilitative relationship (Ford *et al.*, 1998), but not as a main core element that has impact on every aspect of all types of organizations, markets and marketing. Marketing thought is shifting from an emphasis on transactions and acquisition to relationships and customer retention. Meanwhile, IT changes the role of the customer and the patterns of market communication, relations, and interactions. There is a pressing need to understand the sources and implications of these evolving forms of linkages: how will IT and interactivity transform markets? Today's IT is the most important factor in creating, developing and tightening relationships.

As Brodie *et al.*, (1997), said, the impact of information technologies on marketing practice warrants investigation, given some of the trends that have emerged in their study. Looking to the marketing future raises questions concerning how organizations should and do relate to their customers, customers' customers, suppliers, partners, and competitors. IT is making the world of marketing smaller, enabling business-to-business, business-to-consumers, and one-to-one relationships to grow faster. In the twenty-first century's environment IT is the major player in almost all markets, from transaction markets to relationship markets. The marketing future needs a comprehensive perspective. This perspective should be based on integrative relationships.

Some authors make strong statements that the concept of relationship marketing reflects a "new paradigm" in marketing thought and practice (e.g. Kotler, 1992; Gummesson, 1995; Grönroos, 1994). Brodie *et al.* (1997) state, however, that a paradigm shift implies that a "change has occurred, to one . . . whose world view replaces that of an existing world, and whose underlying assumptions replace those of an existing research mode". An empirical investigation has been made by Brodie *et al.* (1997) to clarify the emergence of these paradigm shift statements. The findings do not support the notion of a complete "paradigm shift". The study shows that for many firms, transactional marketing is relevant and practiced concurrently with various types of relational marketing.

From the reviewed literature, the following general proposition linking relationship marketing to information technology were developed:

P1: The impact of information technology on marketing is not well developed.
P2: Relationship marketing is not a paradigm shift.
P3: Technological change is now such an accepted facet of business life that no organization or individual can afford to ignore it.
P4: Organizations, suppliers, channels, customers and others all stands to gain through the integration of all marketing activities and IT.

In this paper, we argue that technologicalship marketing (relationship marketing-based IT) should incorporate everything from transaction marketing to relationship marketing. We employ the term technologicalship marketing to show the inseparable nature and impact of IT on all kinds of markets and relationships. Let us now describe what is IT and then explore how IT and relationship marketing can be partnered in order to create what we later call technologicalship marketing (TechM).

The impact of IT on relationship marketing

Technology is constantly changing. We can no longer assume that our current range of products will continue to be demanded by our customers. The advent of the computer, of course, has revolutionized just about every facet of business life, whilst the merging of telecommunications and computer technology is causing a fundamental reappraisal of a whole host of industries, with new ones springing up to replace those that do not keep abreast of changing technology (Blatberg and Deighton, 1991; Glazer, 1991; Blattberg *et al.*, 1994).

The marketplace has never been static, and the need to anticipate and respond to change has been a basic prerequisite for survival since business first began. However, it can fairly be said that marketing management today faces a greater number of challenges of a more complex nature and from a wider number of sources. The impact of technology on marketing relationships is one of the most serious challenges.

IT is much broader than advertising, data collection, home pages, selling products/services, direct mail, data base, or public relations. IT will have as profound an effect on the way firms market products and services as the airplane, car, and television have had on other aspects of our lives. Marketing scholars, managers, and marketers must begin to take IT more seriously (Glazer, 1991; Hoffman and Novak, 1996). Marketers and managers must be aware of the new development in technology and their possible effects because technology can and does affect business activities and relationships in many different ways. It influences communication and coordination processes within a network with alliances and other collaborators. Technological advances and implementation can revolutionize an industry or destroy one. How an organization uses, or does not use, technology is important for its long-term relationships and its long run survival.

Yet information technology (IT) and information systems (IS) are most essential to provide the information needed for successful relationships or partnering (Cash *et al.*, 1992; Achrol, 1991; Konsynski and McFarlan, 1990; Pawar and Sharda, 1997). Without information partnership and information sharing (relationship based on information), Tom Peters emphasizes, " . . . all other aspects of partnership remain stuck at the stage of lip service or less" (Konsynski and McFarlan, 1990).

Venktraman (1997) states the following:

> How to best extract value from information technology (IT) resources is a major challenge facing both business and IT managers, particularly as they turn their focus from searching for the competitive benefits of strategic information systems and striving for benefits beyond process reengineering.

To this statement one can add that IT should also be a considerable issue for the marketers as they strive for benefits beyond relationship marketing. The previous discussion forms the basis for more general propositions concerning relationship marketing and IT:

P5: The rate of technological development, not relationship marketing, is one of the most forceful catalysts for marketing change.

Table I
Characteristics of transaction marketing and relationship marketing

Transaction marketing	Relationship marketing
• Focus on a single sale	• Focus on customer retention
• Orientation on product features	• Orientation to customer values
• Short time-scale	• Long time-scale
• Little emphasis on customer service	• High customer service emphasis
• Limited customer commitment	
• Moderate customer contact	• High customer contact
• Quality is primarily a concern of production	• Quality is the concern of all

Source: Payne (1995)

P6: No marketer or manager would doubt that IT is an important element in his or her relationship with a customer.

P7: The IT inherent in every marketing activity has succeeded in "shrinking" the marketing world, and facilitating the design and manufacture of products, as well as enabling the creation and development of effective and efficient marketing relationships.

P8: Without effective use of technology, relationship marketing is not an effective strategy.

Information technology advances and the market

The rate of technological change in the marketing environment is a most important factor that affects relationship marketing success. The relationship between the rate of effective IT use and relationship effectiveness would be positive.

Internet

The Internet and World Wide Web (WWW) will dramatically alter the way the company conducts business and establishes business or customer relationships, changing both the market opportunities and the IT and network infrastructure. The Internet affects every facet of the company – obliterating current business models, opening new market opportunities and redefining customer relationships and interaction. The Internet has not always been friendly to business. Launched in 1969 by the US Department of Defense, the Internet was intended to link universities with government research facilities, allowing researchers in various locations to communicate and exchange documents and other information by computer. The Internet quickly spread worldwide, becoming a super network consisting of many lesser networks. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Internet and business were incompatible notions. The Internet began to open up to business about three years ago, as companies and individuals became increasingly interested in using their computers to communicate (McCollum, 1997). Some professionals have very recently acknowledged its potential for a commercial revolution (Rayport and Sviokla, 1994; Bussgang and Spar, 1996).

Marketing on the Internet marries the needs of consumers with the ever-evolving cyber technology. The result: companies go electronic to communicate with their customers, create an awareness of their product and, perhaps, make a profit. Also, online marketing is self-selective. Companies know the customers who visit their site are interested. They want to know more about the product. Not only does this help identify the highest-potential consumers, it permits a depth of sale that no other medium can provide. It reaches consumers in literally every part of the world. Another benefit of online marketing is that it is interactive. It enables companies to engage consumers in away that no other medium can. One-to-one marketing is the online's unique capability.

Intranets, extranets and EDI

Intranets are one of the hottest applications of the Internet technology in business. Intranets capitalize on the fact that most organizations distribute far more information internally than they do to the outside world. The Intranet serves as an easily accessible repository for corporate information – anything from strategic targets to health plans (Frost and Strauss, 1997). One of the most significant changes in IT in recent years has been the emergence of electronic data interchange (EDI). EDI is a system based on IT that links, for example, channel members for purposes of facilitating the flow of a product or service through the channel (Kahn and Mentzer, 1996). EDI can also be a "tie that binds". Getting customers to invest in sharing information about sales and inventories can provide a powerful disincentive to switching suppliers. The benefits are reduced system costs, efficiency and increased customer and consumer satisfaction. Business-to-business electronic commerce is expected to be the fastest growing area for Internet sales. In 2000, such commerce will generate $66 billion (McCollum, 1997).

EDI is a technology for facilitating information exchange between channel members. EDI involves the paperless transmission of information exchange between manufacturers, suppliers and retailers. These paperless transmissions include sales data, purchase orders, invoices, shipment tracking data, and product return information. Quick-response (QR) logistics and inventory systems use EDI applications to automatically replenish stock as it is sold. QR systems also build customer satisfaction by reducing stockouts. A high level of commitment between channel members must exist throughout a logistics pipeline for QR to operate. Technologies that assist and expedite information exchange between channel members are also contributing to a revolution in manufacturing processes. By operating on real-time (transmissions of sales and other logistics data between the channel parties operating at different levels in distribution systems) JIT eliminates the need for excess inventory. In addition to the impacts of QR on the manufacturing operations and inventory systems, marketing management improved as well (Allen, 1994).

Marketers and managers must be aware of new developments in technology and their possible effects because technology can and does affect marketing activities in many different ways. To provide marketing mixes that satisfy customers, marketers must be aware of these influences. IT's impact on marketing is summarized in the following propositions:

P9: As a new medium with almost no distribution costs, the Internet has the potential to reshape the media world, letting new competitors in and forcing established giants to evolve or die.

P10: IT allows companies to create new and strong relationships and alliances, e.g. between logistics suppliers, manufacturers and retailers. In short, IT should have an impact on every aspect of organization and marketing.

P11: How a company uses technology in creating and keeping long-term and close business and consumer relationships is important for its long run survival.

What is technologicalship marketing?

Nowadays, with so much work being subcontracted, relationships among partners become crucial to better accomplishing overall goals. Relationships which are based on IT enable organizations to address and integrate the overall customer and company performance requirements. As such, partnerships should consider long-term objectives as well as short-term needs of the participant organizations, thereby creating a basis for mutual investments and rewards. The building of relationships-based technology (T), therefore, should address the means of providing regular communication and information sharing among participants (organizations or consumers) to enable them to evaluate progress, modify objectives, and accommodate changing conditions. Organizations are expected to include key suppliers and customers in quality improvement, planning and control activities. This requires sharing of information technology, planning together and systems coordination (Godfrey, 1993).

The free and smooth flow of information, about such factors as consumer, product and service performance, operations, logistics, competitive comparisons, suppliers, cost and finance, is crucial in creating, developing, and enhancing long-term relationships in the IT era. IT is not a separate factor in relationship marketing. The quality of the decisions cannot consistently rise above the quality of shared information upon which those decisions are based. In short, the twenty-fist century's organizations should be managed on the basis of facts rather than on the basis of instinct or feelings. And if information technology provision is the basis for business relationships, information systems group (IS) is the catalyst in managing and utilizing powerful IT structures needed of the information flow and sharing among the aligned partners (Broadbent and Weill, 1997).

Relationship marketing will not be established without IT-based relationships using advanced technological tools (e.g. EDI support systems, intranet, extranet, local area networks "LANs", client sever architecture, executive information system "EIS", video/teleconferencing, groupware, multimedia). A study conducted by Spethmann (1993) shows that 77 per cent of marketing executives viewed linking electronically to their customers as being vital to their organization's marketing strategy within the next five years. One reason for the growing number of EDI systems is the need for real-time information in order to make proactive decisions. We shall see later in this paper that most modern organizations and most consumers are using IT in their business life.

Relationship marketing, however, will fall short of success if it is not supported with a quality information technology base that is easily accessible by partners. Lightning quick reaction to market responses will only be possible by being directly wired to the pulse of markets (Achrol, 1991). If it is true that many companies consider knowledge and information as their most valuable asset, then it stands to reason that information sharing via use of IT will play a major role in creating long-term relationships. Additionally, Internet, intranets, extranets, and EDI, as the major means of exchanging this information, would be the keys for such relationships (relationship based on IT).

Technologicalship marketing provides a viable means for making RM a reality. IT tools should be used to provide relationship-building credibility and opportunities. It is very obvious that nowadays organizations and people (consumers) will find difficulty in separating a relationship from IT. Thus, this type of new relationships could be called technologicalship (relationship based on using information technology). Effective use of relationship based on IT encourages the establishment of long-term relationship marketing with customers, suppliers, competitors, and others in the organization's external environment. Here, marketers and managers can keep their finger on the customer's pulse and respond to changing needs. It is only through the effective use of IT in addition to any other marketing assets that the company can build successful relationship and marketing strategies.

Technologicalship marketing is marketing based on technology tools used by firms to acquire and manage their relationships. Most of the marketing activity should be based on technology and a desire to make a relationship work. A technologicalship partnership is a type of relationship which offers a natural linkage between the internal environment and the interaction process because it emphasizes how IT, consumers and organizations are a function of win-win interaction (Figure 1).

Information technology (IT) and other technologies (T) present opportunities to develop new relationships with end users (of consumer or industrial goods/services) at lower cost. However, many companies recently did that by allowing customers to track offerings through the companies' World Wide Web (WWW) site on the Internet. Now customers can locate an offering in transit by connecting on-line to the company site and entering the airbill number. After the offering has been delivered, they can even identify the name of the person who signed for it. To meet customer needs and to create and extract value with IT, IKEA furniture outlets address their very important persons, VIP customer base (holder of family cards), and provide them with bonus offerings and information about its variety of products/services (Zineldin *et al.*, 1997).

For instance, online marketing permits for one-to-one marketing. That is the most important loyalty-building benefit of online marketing, because it gives companies the ability to establish an enduring relationship with individual consumers. McDonald's McFamily, on America Online, is a good example. This site reinforces the idea of McDonald's as a parent's best friend. Parents can get information on the latest happy meal or nutritional information about McDonald's products. But even more valuable is the community McDonald's has created. For not only can parents talk directly to McDonald's, they can also talk with experts and with each other on a whole range of parenting issues – from how to keep the family healthy and safe to how they can spend more quality time with their kids.

Using an effective IT structure allows each linked firm to do more with less. It affords new market opportunities for channel members, suppliers, consumers, etc. Companies that cling to a "go-it-alone without exploring the IT opportunities" attitude are in danger of going the way of the dinosaur. Therefore, IT not only represents a linkage of computer systems, but moreover, it can represent a change in company philosophy towards sharing and building strong and long-term relationships with respective partners or consumers based on IT and information transfer. Overall, the emergence of IT relationships and alliances has encouraged the use of new practices and technologies by organizations to share greater more real-time information, and thus, reduce the business uncertainty.

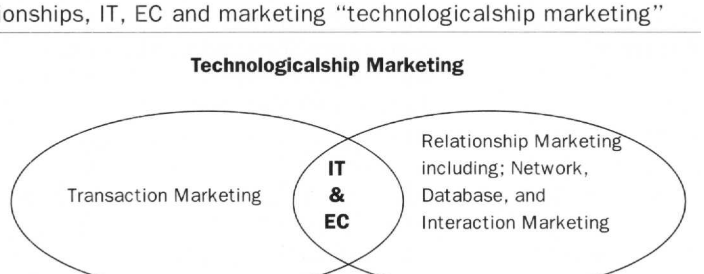
Technologicalship marketing is a general approach that can be used to consumer marketing-business to consumer/mass markets (goods, services, information) as well as industrial markets (business to business). This combined perspective yields comprehensive insight into the impact of the technologies on relationship marketing and the business. However, the previous discussion forms the basis for general propositions relating to the technologicalship marketing:

P12: Organizations that structure themselves with relationships based on T paradigm position are much better able to develop and sustain long-term relationships and strategic alliances such as supplier-driven partnerships, intra-industry partnerships, joint marketing partnerships, customer-supplier partnerships, consumer-driven partnerships, and others.

P13: IT is playing a major role in creating long-term relationships and in making strategic decisions regarding networks and alliances. These changes can reflect a real paradigm shift.

P14: Therefore, we call such a relationship philosophy "technologicalship marketing". It should have strong

Figure 1
Relationships, IT, EC and marketing "technologicalship marketing"



implications for marketing functions and activities. This marketing relies heavily on "getting things done by technology (i.e. IT and T)", not doing them itself. In short, we can state that such a technologicalship marketing is the new paradigm.

P15: Engaging in such technologicalship should enable organizations to have a competitive advantage in dealing with the competitive forces such as potential new entrants, the bargaining power of buyers, and the threat of substitute products/services.

Transaction marketing, relationship marketing vs. technologicalship marketing

Table II shows that traditional, relationship, and technologicalship marketing are fundamentally different. The technologicalship marketing allows for different types of solutions, different customers, and different types of interactions and relationships with different customers. Indeed, technologicalship customers expect new kinds of relationships and solutions because the technology makes them possible. A technologicalship is fully integrated marketing which combines the activities of every marketing tools at once.

The differences between traditional marketing (including relationship marketing) and technologicalship marketing depend upon the nature of the technologies used to substitute for physical proximity. For example, the retailer of the future, with a multi-media interactive Web site, will be able to become more involved with customers, respond to queries, make suggestions and offer many of the audio-visual sensations of physical retailing.

Success in designing and running such technologicalship marketing depends on developing or using technology (in the broadest sense) to manage the relationships between the involved parties in question. These relationships will have to be managed differently as long as technology provides anything short of a total replication of physical presence.

The changing nature of marketing: some evidence

Computerizing and electronizing relationships also provide organizations with a powerful tool to profile its existing customer base and to create and retain stronger relationships within it, as well as to find new potential collaborators, e.g. customers, suppliers, distributors, etc. (Zineldin, 1998). However, just as the technologicalship approach suggests, using an effective, profitable mix of physical elements, as well as the use of information technology, and human resources and skills, is a vital aspect for developing an organization's competitive position in the competitive marketplace.

We argue that the overriding goal of IT is to foster cooperative exchange relationships to create the greatest value for customers. The following examples will prove that a technologicalship marketing or a paradigm shift is occurring. These examples illustrate how the best use of technologicalship can create a strategic network of customers, wholesalers and manufacturers and facilitate more added value.

Potential technologicalship partners

IT also links an organization, the sales agents, the factory and the warehouse together. To create value with IT, managers must gather, organize, select, and distribute information about the partners involved. The data about the customer's needs and behavior enables organizations to identify today's key customers, develop relations with tomorrow's customers (e.g. consumers, distributors or suppliers), calculate the revenue that each customer generates, and estimate their own future investment opportunities.

End user opinions should be involved at every step in the marketing process (e.g. designing and delivery). Buyers of products/ services should always be encouraged to respond, on a continuing basis, to the experience of purchase and consumption. Feedback from different actors, including end users, can be obtained by using a feedback loop system through customer hot line numbers, customer-satisfaction surveys or any other available feedback method. When analyzing the relationship strategies, managers should consider, in addition to the internal technologicalship, four primary candidates for such a technologicalship (Figure 2):

1 Customers
2 Suppliers
3 Distributors
4 Facilitators.

The growing interdependence among these vital business connections provides added incentive for using the technologicalship approach to strengthen these links. Through efficient technologicalship management, human resources and skills, and the use of the relationship marketing mechanisms of mutual benefits, respect, confidence, trust, trusting behavior, commitment and adaptations, a company can establish, enhance and sustain ongoing business relationships with its different customers.

Customer technologicalship

Recognizing the importance of the customer is the foundation of a successful technologicalship. Looking to possible customer needs for technological advancements and communication tools may provide great opportunities for creating long-term and close relationships. A technologicalship relation with customers may provide an advantage over other suppliers and help garner more of the

Table II
Some key differences between transaction, relationship and technologicalship marketing

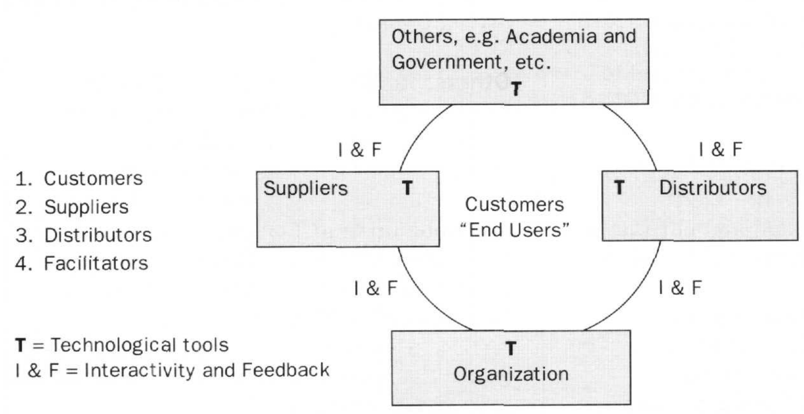
Category	Traditional marketing assumptions	Relationship marketing assumptions	Technologicalship marketing assumptions
The marketing environment	Marketing rules are very clear, defined and constant	Marketing rules are relatively clear, defined and constant	Marketing rules continually evolve, driven by technology advances
	Market is bound by countries and regions	Market is relatively bound by networks and alliances	Market is borderless by default
	Market niches are difficult to identify	Market niches are easy to identify	Market niches are generally larger, thereby creating additional niche business opportunities They are also more easily identified and catered to
	A firm and buyers are involved in a general market. Arms-length and impersonal contact	A dyad relationship (individual sellers and buyers); sellers, buyers, and other firms. Face-to-face, close interpersonal contacts based on commitment and trust	A firm and buyers in a specific target market Personalized contacts ranging from distant to close
	Corporate-push marketing (the business defines the place and time) dominates	Corporate-push and customer-pull marketing (they define the place and time) dominates	Customer-pull marketing (the customer will define the time and place) dominates
	Too high cost advertising	High cost advertising and high cost relationship building and keeping	Lower cost advertising and low cost relationship building and keeping
	Low information systems-enabled marketing.	High information systems-enabled marketing	Highly information systems-enabled marketing, more conscious integration with IT, EC, and marketing groups become important
Marketing success factors	Transactions/sales volume and creating new customers are considered a success	Keeping the existing customers, retention is considered as a success	Transactions, attracting new customers as well as keeping the existing ones are considered as success
	Focus on product quality	Focus on customer satisfaction	Focus on customer satisfaction and IT, EC, advances
	Awareness of product and services is considered as success	Awareness relatively exists for customers	Awareness often already exists for customers
		Perceived value is essential to success	Perceived value is essential to success
	Alliances and relationships not essential to marketing	Business alliances and networks are essential to marketing	Interlinking business partners and consumers is essential for marketing success, as links provide more complete customer solutions. This allows a marketer to get more into customers and influence their practices and routines
	The quality of the product is important for differentiation. The marketing mix can be used for the differentiation	Creativity is important for differentiation. Long-term and close relationships, adaptation, putting customer at the center of the organization is a source of differentiation	Innovation becomes essential for differentiation as number and type of competitors increase. Technology (e.g. Internet) offers dramatically different ways to innovate, such as through personalisation
	Low customer interactivity	High customer interactivity	Higher and considerable customer interactivity.
Organizational position	Decision focus on product/brand and 4Ps	Decision focus on relationships between firms in a network and individuals	Decision focus on product/brand and customers in a target market as well as how to use IT advances and capabilities to create the exchange relationships
	Marketing drives product development	Relationships between firms drive product development	Marketing and information systems drive product decisions
	Separate and organizational low integrated marketing groups	Marketing groups exist as umbrella organizations	Marketing groups become more integrated with other business and technology groups.
Customer perspective	Customers are less knowledgeable and informed	Customers are aware and informed. Their feedback can be immediate to access	Customers are more aware and informed. Their feedback can be more immediate and easier to access
	Customer behaviors and expectations are less predictable	Customer behaviors and expectations are relatively predictable	New customer behaviors, expectations, and interests are being created and can be better monitored
	Customers are considered as a group or sector	Customers are considered as a group of collaborators	Customers are considered more individually and products are customer-defined (virtual products) and customer specific

customer's business. Customer technologicalship permits longer time horizons for the participants to plan and grow together. By serving the customer's needs of technological advancements and communication tools, a firm benefits by extending its own technical frontiers.

An example of this type of customer technologicalship is found in the health care field, where cost containment is a paramount concern. PCS, Inc., a unit of McKesson Corporation network, has signed a contract with four health insurance companies to create an electronic information network to assist in their cost containment efforts. PCS is expected to design a system that is similar to a bank credit card system. After receiving a service, patients will present their health-care card to their provider. The clerk will process the transaction like a credit card purchase, except the charge will go to the insurance company. This will eliminate the need for either patient or provider to complete insurance forms (Winslow and Stout, 1992). Formal cooperation between marketing and operation can provide significant direction and guidance to profitable new technological ventures to reach and keep the customers.

Another example is provided by Benetton, the Italian-based global fashion manufacturer and retailer. By using an international electronic data interchange (EDI) system, Benetton ensures that its products are available to consumers when and where they want them. The EDI system links sales agents, factories and warehouses together. Close attention to and effective combination of both the physical and virtual activities have helped the company achieve its objectives and become a worldwide and major competitor company in the fashion industry.

Figure 2
IT and EC as an inseparable part of marketing



Through Procter & Gamble's Web site, consumers can request a handy dispenser for Ariel brand, and find solutions to common laundry problems (Wehling, 1996). Teleconferencing technology will be so effective by the next decade that significantly fewer business people will need to fly as often as they do today.

Supplier technologicalship

Just as customers provide more added-values and revenues to the firms, suppliers may represent the bulk of the costs. Effective use of IT in creating long-term and close partnership relationships, allowing the supplier, to reduce costs or improve the quality supplied can greatly affect the attractiveness of the firm's own products and services to its customers. IT further strengthens the business relationship. Establishing suppliers as partners is generally a win-win situation. Suppliers who are technologically linked are assumed to be committed to the firm's objectives.

Technologicalship can dramatically reduce business cycle times and, consequently, help achieve competitive advantages (Abned, 1992). Honda Motor Corporation has developed its sophisticated communications networks to reduce cycle time in new car production for the US market (Broadbent and Weill, 1997). For example, using effective streamlined inventory management systems in which all vendors are online via EDI reduces costs and increases profitability. The system places replenishment orders on a consumption basis, causing inventory turns to run furlongs ahead of any other retailer, facilitating just-in-time replenishment, and lowering overall costs. This is perhaps the reason why organizations such as GTE, Milliken, Xerox, Baxter, and Ford, Johnson & Johnson, etc., are cutting down their suppliers' lists dramatically and bringing in the survivors as long-term partners and sharing with them information via different IT tools (e.g. EDI). Such technologicalship enables organizations to collaborate with their suppliers on common problems, new ideas, and potential opportunities.

The Internet has revolutionized the way A&A printers and Digital Graphics in Menlo Park, California, and many of its customers do business. Today, customers with computers and modems dial in to A&A's site on the WWW to place orders, track the status of their projects, make revisions to those projects, and submit questions via electronic@mail. Hu, president of A&A says:

> The global computer network has sparked a gold rush for the 1990s. Businesses that don't catch the fever may be left in the dust . . .

> We've never looked at the Web to solicit business but to improve business with our existing customers, even though the company has attracted new customers with its Web site (McCollum, 1997).

Another example of this type of technologicalship is found in the banking industry, where many financial products/services have become increasingly complex and competitive. At the same time, technologically advanced computers, communications (C&C), networks and information systems provide the banks with a competitive edge. They ensure an interactive link to serve their markets more efficiently.

Distributor technologicalship

Distributors must be considered as potential strategic resources. Cooperative relationships with distributor channels can bring new innovations to the market that neither firm alone could have accomplished. This synergy results from the fact that the distributors have direct contact with customers. Distributors must be treated as strategic partners (Anderson and Narus, 1990), linked to the manufacturing firm with sophisticated telecommunications and data-processing systems that afford seamless integration of manufacturing, distribution, and marketing activities throughout the network. Customer focus, market segmentation, targeting, and positioning, assisted by information technology, will be the flexible bonds that hold the whole thing together (relationship).

> Breakthroughs in computer and communications technology advancements are also stimulating improved distribution standards. For example, Grid System Corporation (GSC), a manufacturing unit of Tandy Corporation, has installed an on-line computer ordering system that ties customers directly into its manufacturing facility. GSC's direct mail operations and its 800-number telephone line enable customers to get new products faster. This cost-effective ordering system has enabled GSC to lower prices by over 30 percent . . . In effect, changes in the technological environment have helped GSC to address customer needs faster and to tighten its customer relationships (Pelton *et al.*, 1997).

Further, Benetton uses CAD (computer-aided design) and CAM (computer-aided manufacturing) for design and cutting in order to respond to dynamic demand as rapidly as possible.

The Canadian telephone company NORTEL together with a group of Swedish firms has established a Modenet, a computerized network for the fashion industry. Among the firms cooperating in the NORTEL network are Infonet, the Swedish telephone company Telia, the computer firm Lap Power, Gerber Garment Technology, and the European Business Network, EBN. A clothing wholesaler can contact a customer over Modenet and communicate by means of speech, images, telefax and written materials. While the customer is linked up, the wholesaler can, with the help of a video camera, demonstrate clothing designs or textile samples. A pattern can also be sent via Modenet to a manufacturer, feeding directly into a clothing factory's computers so that production can start immediately (Hedensjö, 1996).

Kmart's relationship with Lee Apparel illustrates how supply chain management – using IT – works. Kmart shares sales transaction information with Lee. These data inform Lee of the exact Lee products sold – including color, size, and style – in each Kmart store. With this information in hand, Lee knows which products need to be restocked at each Kmart location, and is thus able to coordinate its production and distribution plans to accommodate a major customer's needs. Lee can also identify early warning signs of merchandising problems for Lee products at particular Kmart locations (Abned, 1992). This channel integration via IT reduces suppliers' and retailers' inventory needs and creates close and long-term relationships.

In most industrial and service sectors, old-line channel structures have been weakened by the introduction and rapid growth of the Internet and other third-party information service providers such as CompuServe, Prodigy and America Online. Late twentieth century retailers are now able to quickly gain accurate information regarding items which are or are not popular with their customers. IT is making change the only constant in channel relationships (Pelton *et al.*, 1997). IT is making the world of marketing channels smaller and faster. IT allows bilateral contributions to and involvement in channel decision making.

Others: facilitators technologicalship

According to North (1993), "There is an interactive perspective which views economic performance as a dynamic interaction between institutions. Institutions are made up of formal constraints (rules, laws, constitutions), informal constraints (norms of behavior, conventions, and self imposed codes of conduct), and their enforcement characteristics. Together they define the incentive structure of societies and specifically economies".

It is not unusual for facilitators outside the firm's boundary or market environment to foster relationships. Actions by government and academic institutions influence a firm's activities. The political, legal and regulatory forces and changes affect an organizations' competition ability and also influence marketing activities. Also, governments influence the way of establishing relationships and networks with domestic and/or foreign suppliers, subsidiaries, governmental authorities, as well as public and private customers. Politicians can play key roles in helping organizations secure foreign markets. In addition, many government agencies are large existing and potential buyers, and creating a long-term relationship with them can be a competitive force for a company. Marketing organizations need to create and maintain good relationships with political parties and other regulatory agencies.

Research relationships or coalitions with universities might be considered another form of supplier relationship. Increasingly, the world's academic institutions are major suppliers of advanced technologies. Because the transfer time from theory to application is rapidly shrinking, academic contributions are directly shaping the form of new product development. Therefore, it is essential for the modern firms to create a technological relationship with academic institutions.

These examples of the technologicalship partners (Benetton, IKEA, McDonald's, NORTEL, Procter & Gamble, etc.) have proven the idea of partnering IT tools and relationship marketing (technologicalship marketing). And these organizations believe the interactivity of IT marketing will make it even easier to build relationships with consumers. In fact, the level of relationship building they are achieving would have been almost impossible to create without the effective use of IT. These examples demonstrate that everything companies do to build consumer loyalty is affected by IT. Through supportive formats and contents, a company may provide a consistent and integrated brand image for its global consumers. Whether in information distribution or retrieval, firms are beginning to see the Web as an effective yet reasonably cheap medium with immense communication capabilities. Finally, the examples outlined above, however, provide us with an insight of how creating value with technologicalship marketing can be conducted faster, better, and less expensively than treating information technology as a mere supporting activity. The previous discussion forms the basis for more general propositions relating utilizing of technologicalship marketing with competitive advantages:

P16: Linking suppliers, distributors, and customers (end users) together through electronic data interchange (EDI) in a network of closer relationships provides enormous cost advantages and eliminates the need for rework by quality improvement programs. The ultimate relationship is with the end users, even though the business may distribute its products through intermediaries.

P17: In the absence of such real technological-based relationships, goals are hard to sustain and relationship marketing no longer exists.

P18: A technological partnership in supply chain relationships is a very powerful strategy. It encourages a joint approach to problems and it leads to reductions in costs and improvements in quality.

P19: Distribution channel relationships based on IT are unlikely to flourish in the absence of cooperative decision making or coordinated action. IT permits a better understanding of one's partner and contributes to an understanding of partnership activities.

P20: A technological relationship can be a powerful weapon in following up-to-date research, as well as new regulations or government decisions. In this way, organizations are able to identify new ventures and may strengthen the current market positions.

P21: Technologicalship-based marketing makes bidding and order fulfillment more efficient than face-to-face marketing, by automating the business process and eliminating much of the paperwork.

P22: Partnering IT with marketing activities enables organizations to create new values easier. The involved partners can benefit by reducing the transaction costs, uncertainty and the level of the financial and practical risks associated with the purchase or joint investment.

Some technologicalship synergy effects and managerial implications: summary

The use of technologies (T) to create more customer added value and to facilitate the coordinating of networks, is of particular importance for a modern organization and its networks. Jeffrey and Sviokla (1995) referred to this IT as the marketspace (or virtual world) to distinguish it from the physical world of the marketplace. Managers have to look to the marketspace, IT, to create added-value with information. They have to integrate the activities of the physical world with those of the marketspace (virtual world) in order to create and extract value in the most efficient and effective manner.

A well integrated application of technology and staff and through operations that respond to customer needs, encourage customers to use a whole range of firms' products/services rather than just a few. It also helps to create deeper and fuller customer relationships by building client loyalty. However, to create and develop technologicalship partnership, managers and marketers should ask and address the following issues:

- What are the driving principles for organizing IT resources in the twenty-first century?
- What is the best design for organizing our IT activities as a business driver?
- How can we allocate and mange IT investments?
- How can we develop a strategic approach to IT sourcing that balances the risks and benefits of insourcing and outsourcing?
- What types of sourcing options should we explore?
- What truly distinguishes our ability to exploit IT functionality differently from our competitors?
- How can we continually achieve and sustain the required strategic alignment between business and IT operations?

Technologicalship partnership via using an effective IT structure and tools enables organizations to achieve the following potential synergies:

- Reducing cost of sales (production, distribution, sell).
- Exceeding client expectations for quality at reasonable price.
- Collaborate with other companies on joint development efforts.
- Jointly develop and use training programs with other companies.
- Exchange large volumes of data using electronic data interchange (EDI)
- Share product catalogs exclusively with wholesalers or those "in the trade".
- Provide or access services provided by one company to a group of other companies, such as an online banking application managed by one company on behalf of affiliated banks.
- Share news of common interest exclusively with partner companies.
- Redesigning current business processes to create new business capabilities sharing expertise in generic cross-business processes: managing financial resources and service, managing human resources, environment, and safety policy, information systems infrastructure provision.

These synergy effects permit creating, developing, sustaining, mutual effective, efficient, and profitable long-term relationships with internal and external actors in the domestic and global markets. Technologicalship marketing, clearly, shows how technology changes the interactions and relationships between the parties involved. The boundary between these parties can no longer be managed in quite the same way as it is through face-to-face encounters or social exchanges. In short, it is a major step forward in the evolution of marketing, from transaction throughout relationship to technologicalship marketing.

Conclusions

In this article, we synthesize our observations and analyses into a framework for using and managing IT tools as the most important factors to effectively and efficiently create, develop, and sustain mutual profitable business-to-business and business-to-consumer long-term relationships. The technologicalship concept is introduced to indicate the close and almost inseparable partnership between information technology and business relationships concepts. The article describes the essential features of the technologicalship marketing concept and highlights its use and role in shaping and supporting business relationships. It reexamines the strategic impact that IT has on the relationships within and between organizations and redefines the relationship marketing concept in order to be able to cope with the highly technological arena of today.

In this paper we argue that technologicalship marketing (relationship marketing based on IT) should incorporate everything from transaction marketing to relationship marketing. Marketers and managers must be aware of new developments in technology and their possible effects because technology can and does affect marketing activities in many different ways. Therefore, we call such a philosophy "technologicalship marketing". It should have strong implications for marketing functions and activities. In short, such a technologicalship marketing can be considered as a new paradigm.

A technologicalship partnership is a type of relationship which offers a natural linkage between the internal environment and the interaction process because it emphasizes how technologies, consumers and organizations are a function of a win-win interaction. Most marketing activity should be based on technology and a desire to make a relationship work. Technologicalship marketing is a general approach that can be used in consumer marketing, business-to-consumer/mass markets as well as industrial markets. This combined perspective yields comprehensive insight into the impact of the technologies on relationship marketing and the business.

Because of the long-term strategic and competitive synergy effects of such partnerships, organizations should adopt a proactive approach that views the technologicalship approach as central to their way of doing business in order to enable them to cope with the challenges of the rest of the 1990s and the coming era of the twenty-first century. By failing to utilize technologicalship philosophy, organizations risk being isolated, while successful organizations move ahead together toward the twenty-first borderless or virtual reality.

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