DETERMINANTS OF BUYER RELATIONSHIP INTENTION

FROM A SIGNALING PERSPECTIVE:

THE CASE OF VIETNAMESE IMPORTERS

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree, except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

Marketing scholars and practitioners have recognised the importance of developing and nurturing relationships to achieve sustainable competitive advantages. However, while selling firms prefer to establish relationships with buyers, it is strongly argued that not all buyers have the motive or desire to do so. Therefore, understanding determinants of buyers' relationship intentions is crucial for sellers to develop appropriate relationship marketing strategies.

A review of the literature on business-to-business relationships reveals that limited research has investigated the existence of imperfect and asymmetric information in buyer–seller relationships. The degree of imperfection and asymmetry is more marked in the importer–exporter relationship context because of differences in cultural, social and business environments. Signaling theory suggests that sending signals can solve problems caused by asymmetric and imperfect information. Signaling theory has become a standard framework for studying a wide variety of phenomena. However, the question of how signals can help to encourage buyers to engage in long-term relationships with sellers has been largely ignored. This study attempts to enhance our knowledge by investigating the determinants of buyers' relationship intention from a signaling perspective.

Based on a review of literature on relationship intention, signaling theory and supplier selection, this study develops a theoretical model to explain: (1) how signal consistency and signal clarity determine importers' relationship intention; and, (2) how signal consistency and signal clarity influence importers' perceptions of the three critical supplier selection criteria (product quality, price competitiveness and delivery performance). Two competing models are also proposed in association with the theoretical model.

A transition economy (Vietnam) was selected in which to test these models. A survey questionnaire was developed based on the literature review and nine in-depth interviews, then tested via a pilot study. Survey data utilising a sample of 418

Vietnamese importers, was used to validate constructs via Confirmatory Factor Analysis, and then to test the theoretical model and its two competing models via two-step approach in Structural Equation Modeling. All constructs achieve reliability and validity, and the theoretical model is selected over its two competing models. All eleven hypotheses derived from the theoretical model are supported by the data.

The results show that signal consistency and signal clarity positively influence perceived product quality, perceived price competitiveness and perceived delivery performance. These perceptions then have positive effects on exporter credibility. Exporter credibility, in turn, positively influences importer relationship intention. The findings also support the moderating roles of ownership and relationship duration.

The study concludes with a discussion of theoretical, methodological and contextual contributions. Managerial implications for exporters, importers and government, as well as directions for future research, are also addressed.