Relationship Marketing within the Irish Shopping Centre Industry:

Do FM Service Providers really know what the clients desire in a post pandemic business environment?

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Abstract

This research aims to shed light on how businesses providing Facilities Management (FM) services have modify their relationship marketing strategies to make the most of digital mediums. Cleaning and security guarding are only two examples of the labour-intensive services provided by Facilities Management companies. The provision of such services may be vital to the success of their client's organisation and for this research it will be focused on the Irish Shopping centre industry.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, reflection on how FM businesses' regular, in-person interactions with customers were unexpectedly and significantly hampered by this outbreak. They had to completely revamp their strategy for relationship marketing, shifting their focus from the "real world" to virtual spaces in order to keep up with the competition and expand their clientele. There is a need for research into how companies that provide Facilities Management services have modify their relationship marketing strategy for online channels in light of the pandemic, and what the future hold in a post pandemic business world.

This dissertation investigates the perspectives of relationship marketers and their customers on this issue and offers suggestions for enhancing the effectiveness of relationship marketing in the digital era and after the pandemic. Research for this dissertation included interviews of both FM industry experts and survey of shopping centre management professionals to identify factors from both sides of the relationship.

According to the findings, the fundamentals of relationship marketing have not changed, but the resources, channels, and frame of mind necessary to put those resources to work effectively have evolved. The pandemic has hastened the trend toward digitising commercial communications and partnerships. This research identifies that size of FM service provider matters, highlighting discrepancies to literature studied with small FM companies narrow approach to relationship marketing and the drive for offline connections only. It also highlights the factors for this strategy but is not limited to these companies, it also emphasises evidence of failing of large FM business in approach.

Declaration

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

Research Students Declaration Form

Name: Ian Hunter

Student Number: 20161808

Degree for which thesis is submitted: Master of Business Administration (MBA)

Material submitted for award

a) I declare that the work has been composed by myself.
b) I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.
c) My thesis will be included in electronic format in the College Institutional Repository NORMA (thesis reports and projects).
d) I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

Signature of Research Student: Ian Hunter

Date: 17th August 2022

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This thesis is dedicated to my three children Ben, Cara and Ross who supported me through the last 2 years with their love, help and “proud of you dad” statements which maintained my drive to complete this experience. I hope that my trip back into education acts as a stimulant for them to achieve whatever they want no matter what is going on in their lives, wherever they are, that age is no barrier and that I can give them the same support as they have afforded me.

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List of Abbreviations

B2B:	Business to Business
e-CRM:	Electronic Customer Relationship Management
FM:	Facilities Management
FMSP:	FM Service Providers
HRM:	Hybrid Relationship Marketing
KPI:	Key Performance Indicator
ORM:	Online Relationship Marketing
PUP:	COVIS-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment
RM:	Relationship Marketing
SCM:	Shopping Centre Management

Chapter 1: Introduction

Research Background

Shopping malls are categorised as functional businesses. A functional business is described as containing well-defined departments, a well-defined hierarchy of jurisdictions, and some links between roles and duties according to Callahan and Brooks (2004). A critical element of any Shopping Centre / real estate organisation is the interface with outsourced facilities services.

To date, academics have failed to agree on a universal definition for Facilities Management (FM) (McCarroll, 2017). Nonetheless, the International Facilities Management Association defines it as "encompasses multiple disciplines to ensure functionality, comfort, safety and efficiency of the built environment by integrating people, place, process and technology" (IFMA, 2021). It is the mechanism whereby a business creates and maintains a high-quality work environment and procures high-quality support services to achieve the business's goals at the lowest possible cost. FM encompasses complementary business functions such as cleaning, security, and parking (seen fig 1. for further examples of services offered) which are critical to ensuring positive brand perceptions (Kurdi, et al., 2011). According to Salonen (2004), when businesses contract out FM, a conflict generally develops with the client's prevailing management tactics and the contractor's ability to deliver excellent service.

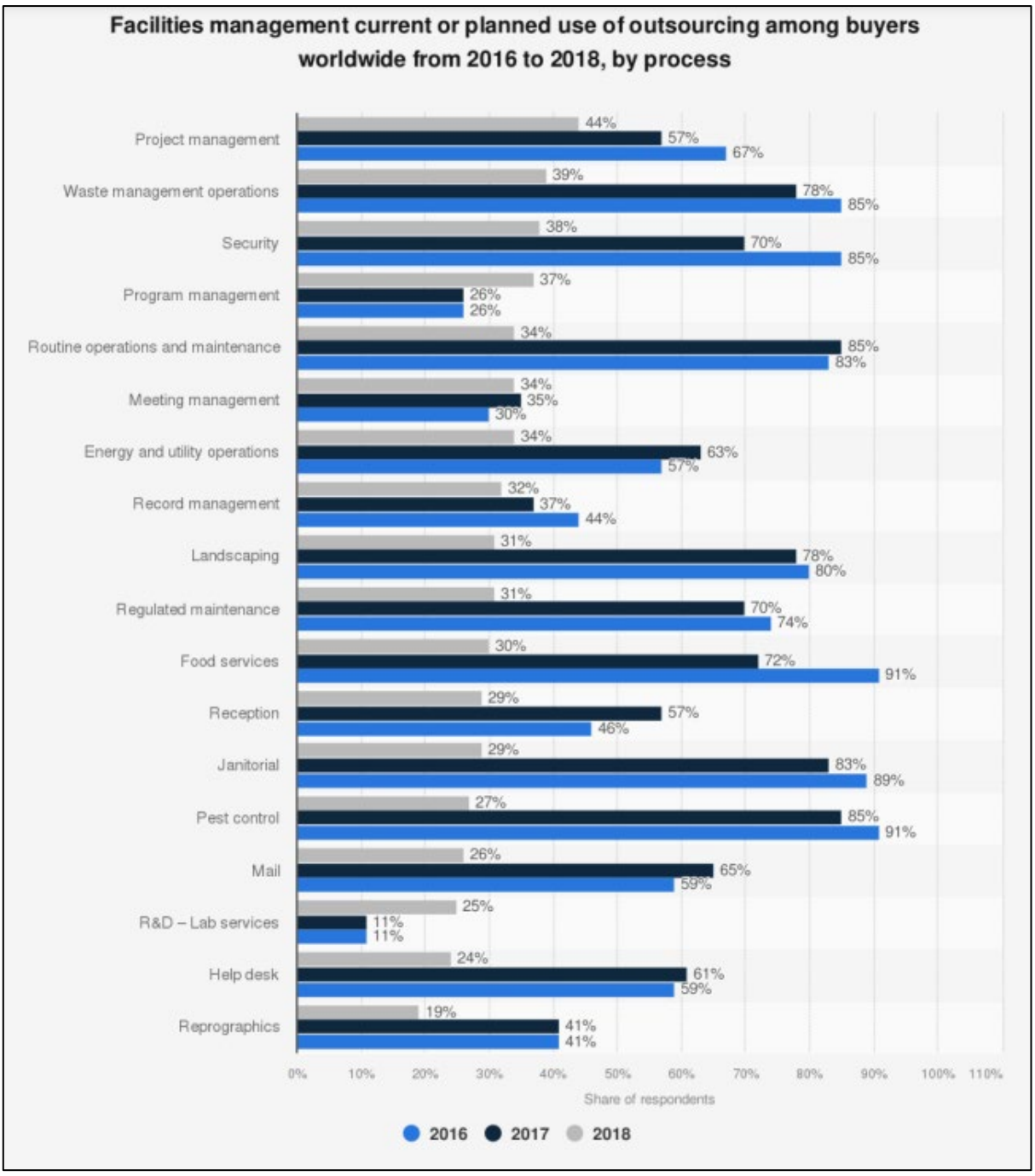

Figure 1: Facilities management current or planned use of outsourcing among buyers worldwide from 2016 to 2018, by process (Statista, 2022)

Globally, the provision of outsourced facilities management services is a huge sector. By 2028, the worldwide market is expected to be valued at $1,759.3 billion, up from $1,234.6 billion in 2020 (Statista, 2022). Figures from Statista are shown in Fig 2.

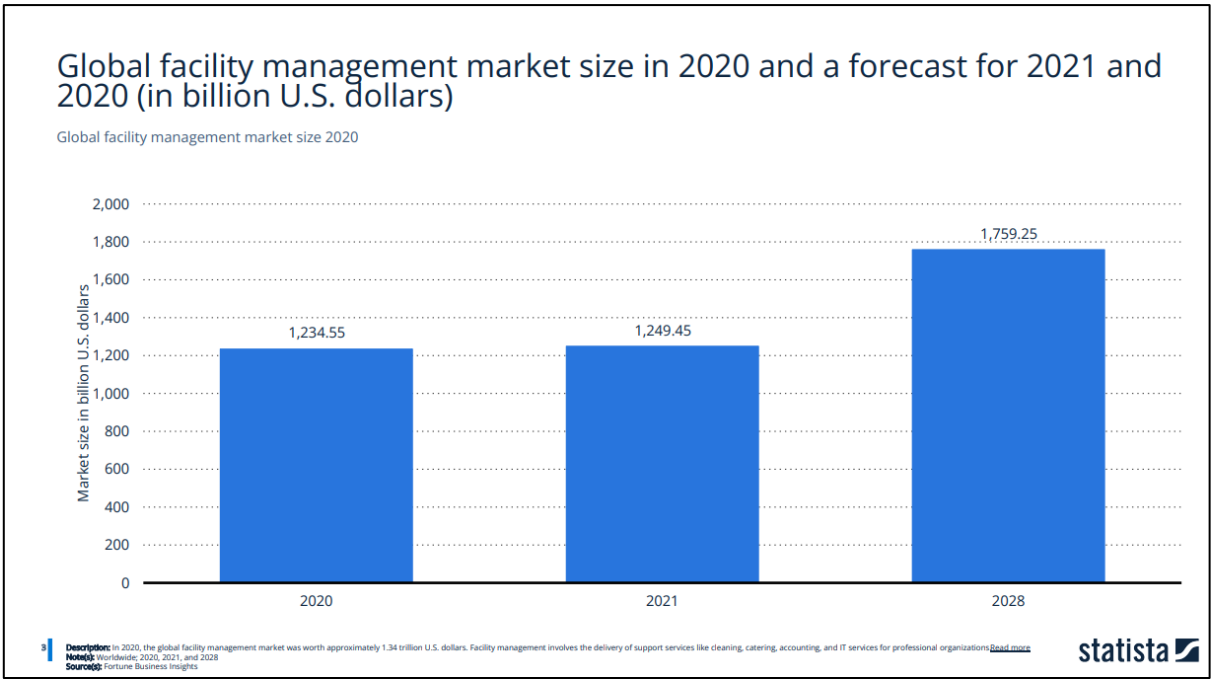

Figure 2: Global facility management market size in 2020 and a forecast for 2021 and 2028 (in billion U.S. dollars) (Statista, 2022)

The increasingly complicated nature of shopping centres in terms of their size, kind, and attributes exemplifies the difficult responsibilities of the management team. It is essential for the owner/developer to assemble exceptional management teams in order to meet the difficulties. Revo, the representative body for retail, leisure, and placemaking real estate community based in United Kingdom, has taken the initiative to sponsor diploma certificate courses in shopping centre management (SCM) in order to provide managers with the required knowledge and expertise (Revo, 2021). In the United States, the University of Shopping Centres has been created to provide shopping centre personnel with continuing education training in specialised disciplines related to the shopping centre sector (ICSC, 2012). Nonetheless, the quality of management in the shopping centre is a crucial component that might determine the prosperity or malfunction of the centre's operation (Morgan & Walker, 1988).

In order to evaluate these FM service providers (FMSP) effectively SCM are professionals who conduct multi-stage tendering processes that systematically evaluate service providers. Individual services, multi-service packages, or comprehensive facility management solutions can be procured, with the service provider having responsibility for part or all of the spectrum of FM.

Typically, companies offering FM services take a relationship marketing (RM) approach which this research defines within the Literature Review. They strive to identify the influencers and decision makers within their client's and new business organisations to utilise these relationships for business growth. During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020/2021, access to current and new clients was significantly hampered for FMSP.

The government-imposed restrictions, National Framework for living with COVID-19, which fluctuated between 2020 and 2022 level 1 to level 5 (see appendix A for Framework), effectively eliminated numerous forms of customer and service provider engagement, including tradeshows, business lunches, and in person meetings. An example of some of these restrictions for Level 5 can be seen in Fig 3., During this time, FM businesses increased their reliance on their online presence to establish and maintain interactions with customers. With the pressures experienced within the Shopping Centre Industry to make their service model future-proof and traditional relationship marketing transitioning between on and offline, the question for FM service providers is do they really know what their clients in the Shopping Centre industry desire post pandemic?

Placing Ireland at Level 5 Restrictions will have the following implications:
• People are asked to stay at home. People should work from home unless providing an essential service for which their physical presence is required
• People will be permitted to exercise within a radius of 5 km of their home
• There will be a penalty for movement outside 5km of home, with exemptions to this for essential work and essential purposes
• Essential retail and essential services will remain open
• There should be no visits to other people's homes or gardens
• No social/family gatherings should take place, with the exemptions to this for weddings and funerals
• It is possible to meet with one other household in an outdoor setting which is not a home or garden, such as a park, including for exercise

Figure 3: Placing Ireland at Level 5 Restrictions will have the following implications (Department of the Taoiseach, 2020)

Research Rationale

For RM activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and the national and international responses to this catastrophe, relationship marketers in the FMSP relied on online channels. With the country only emerging from it, study in this area is limited about how FMSP have responded to the new scenario after the normalisation of business following the pandemic. The author's research wants to know what effect this time period has had on relationship marketing's ability to comprehend what customers genuinely desires. FM companies' RM strategies and online RM have both evolved, but how will FM relationship marketing evolve in the future? Will it become hybrid or stay entirely online? Unprecedented occurrences of COVID-19 have increased the demand for contributions to this field's knowledge base.

The author's research will draw parallels and disparities of information from literature reviews, in-depth interviews with FM practitioners from Ireland, and a survey of SCM teams from the Shopping Centre industry throughout Ireland to present a sharper depiction of how RM in the FM sector will be shaped in the future to meet customer demands.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Within the literature review the author will cover the definition of RM, and the differences between that and transactional marketing. Thereafter a review of why businesses engage in RM, their mutual benefits, and the characteristics of RM. To conclude the author will review RM and sales in the digital era, online RM, the characteristics of online relationships in business from forming to perceived value.

Defining Relationship Marketing

There is much discussion on an agreed definition of relationship marketing with academics and practitioners debating its fundamentals (Harwood & Garry, 2006).

Gummesson (2017) indicates, RM can be understood in variety of ways due to the subject's complexity. Sheth (2017), concurs, that RM has a variety of meanings for academics and practitioners, and that the discipline of RM has been diverging rather than converging.

Numerous prominent academics in the field have proposed their own definitions, which frequently overlap. Grönroos (1994) emphasises the concept of mutual benefit, arguing that the goals of RM are to “establish, maintain, and enhance 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” (p. 9). This description also clearly expands the scope of RM beyond customer-client affiliation to encompass other stakeholders through its reference to other partners. Berry (2002) identifies RM as “attracting, maintaining and, in multi-service organisations, enhancing customer relationships” (p. 61). Harker (1999), is more specific, proposing that RM is about “proactively creating, developing, and maintaining committed, interactive and profitable exchanges with selected customers [partners] overtime” (p. 16). RM should be restricted to the marketing discipline concerned with analysing and controlling consumers' procuring, expenditure, and consuming activities (Sheth, et al., 1999), other academics find this too restrictive.

Bendapudi and Berry (1997) advocate for the incorporation of stakeholder concerns in RM, referring to RM as a wide collection of marketing connections between enterprises and

clients, manufacturers, and government agencies which are examples of additional stakeholders contradicting Sheth, et al. (1999). Palmatier (2008) proposes the following definition, which excludes reciprocal benefit or care for stakeholders: “relationship marketing is the process of identifying, developing, maintaining, and terminating relational exchanges with the purpose of enhancing performance” (p. 3).

Raval, et al., (2005) argue that RM definitions place a high premium on post-transaction connections and pay less attention to pre-transaction activity.

Recent academic research, however, indicates that RM practitioners are more initiative-taking in developing relationships. Gummesson (2017) argues that numerous definitions of RM suggest that organisations should attract, develop, maintain, grow, and terminate relationships. This contradicts Raval, et al., (2005) suggesting attracting ideal partnerships through pre-transaction activity.

While definitions vary the connecting tenet, they all demonstrate that RM seeks to construct and oversee relationships with clients thus enhance an organisation's performance through these relational activities.

What Distinguishes Relationship Marketing from Transactional Marketing?

According to Harker and Egan (2006), transactional marketing (TM) originated in 1950s North America. The exceptionally strong economic conditions that followed World War II obscured the TM's flaws during this period. Harker and Egan (2006) argue, however, that these flaws were uncovered over time as corporate contexts matured.

TM is predicated on the notion that competition and the pursuit of self-interest drive the production of value, with firms offering customers additional options to outperform their competitors and further their own self-interests (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995), like Adam Smith’s invisible hand theory. This theory is an allegory for the invisible influences that push the free-market economy (Heath, 2021). Businesses that follow this approach place a premium on profit maximisation from each individual transaction (Alexander & Colgate, 2000). According to Tadajewski (2015), TM maintains a singular emphasis on obtaining sales, perceiving each as unique from the others, and as a result, organisations that employ the technique are less

customer-oriented and more prone to pursue profit at the expense of repeated long-term business. Harker and Egan (2006) bolster the argument that TM is not oriented towards the client. They contend that TM attempted to adapt the client to the product when a more tailored approach to the product required. In otherword just sell the product to the client whether they really need it or not as the relationship may only be that one transaction.

At its most fundamental level, the distinction between RM and TM is that TM is concerned with acquiring customers, whereas RM is concerned with retaining them (Grönroos, 1994). Sonková & Grabowska (2015) substantiated this characterisation of TM by claiming that the method is aimed at attracting an ever-increasing number of customers and is characterised by a short-term orientation and poor customer service. While clients are often more price sensitive, firms that employ a TM technique may be more vulnerable to competitors selling a comparable product at a lower price (Grönroos, 1994) due to a lack of loyalty which is not a FM sectoral specific issue.

With the advent of RM, marketing's focus evolved from transactional to relational (Sheth, 2017). With a history of creating long-term consumer relationships, the services industry was quick to embrace the relationship strategy (Gummerus, et al., 2017). Today, it is used in a wide variety of industries; nonetheless, researchers admit that TM is still necessary. TM may be used to kick-start a relationship-building strategy. While academics have traditionally viewed RM and TM as mutually exclusive, recent research indicates that the two are not mutually exclusive, with frequent transactions facilitating the building of connections (Palmer & Bejou, 2005). While a transactional approach may be preferable Berry (2002) contends that some clients can be lucrative as transactional customers only. Furthermore, he believes that corporations may wish to pursue a relational strategy in some market segments while pursuing a transactional strategy in others (Berry, 2002). Organisations may need to employ both transactional and relationship techniques since some customers are averse to participate in business relationships (Roa & Perry, 2002).

Why Businesses Engage in Relationship Marketing

Some firms use relationships to retain profitable customers, while others form supply chain relationships to reduce costs, manage quality, and provide greater value to customers

(Harwood & Garry, 2006). Academics say RM can be a major issue for a firm. Bendapudi and Berry (1997) contend that a firm's relationship with its customers is critical to its survival, particularly in FM sector. Alharbi (2020) contends that RM is critical to a business's accomplishment because it cultivates enduring relationships with customers that help reduce the threat of competitors. It has been argued by Alharbi (2020) that long-term connections with consumers are essential to a company's success since it makes it more difficult for rivals to gain an advantage.

Firms adopt RM for a variety of reasons, including long-term financial gain (Buttle, 1996), and it can help any business (Grönroos, 1996). Although RM does not directly impact financial performance, the relationships it fosters drive customer behaviour that benefits the selling firm (Palmatier, 2008, p. 15) which in turn boosts a firm's bottom line (Palmer & Bejou, 2005). Berry (1995) asserts that loyal customers are more profitable and that the costs associated with maintaining existing clients often less expensive than the price of obtaining new clients.

RM can improve a company's efficiency by allowing partners to share resources and improving customer retention (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). Customer preferences may also drive relationship building. Customers may want an enduring association with a FM supplier to reduce perceived risks (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997).

Palmatier (2008, pp. 18-24) identifies five factors that influence the success of interfirm relationships:

1. The nature of the relationship

The word "relationship quality" refers to the strength of the ties that exist between a business and its partners. The quality of the partnership has a beneficial effect on the performance of the relationship.

2. Relationship Vastness

The breadth of a relationship is the quantity of links between a business and its partners. By establishing a higher number of relational links with clients, a business may have access to more information and profit prospects, as well as establish more solid partnerships.

3. Composition of Relationships

Given that choices are made and affected by individuals at various levels within an organisation, companies should attempt to have a wide portfolio of connections. The mix of relationships reflects the firm's potential to influence choices via its ties in partner organisations.

4. The Strength of Relationships

The term "relationship strength" refers to the way in which relationship quality and breadth interact to strengthen the connection's robustness.

5. Relationship Effectiveness

Relationship Effectiveness is a term that refers to the way in which relationship quality interacts with relationship composition to produce desired outcomes. Three of these factors may have an effect on a firm's relationship marketing activities: relationship quality, breadth, and composition (Palmatier, 2008, p. 19).

Mutual Benefit

Numerous scholars have highlighted reciprocal benefit as a key concept of RM. The RM method is based on the concept that participants in relationships may create conditions that benefit both parties (Gronroos & Helle, 2012).

Berry (1995) believes that a connection must be mutually beneficial in order to survive. Berry is not alone in holding this position. Additionally, Steinhoff et al., (2019) believe that in order for partnerships to endure, they must benefit both buyers and sellers. Intimate connections need reciprocal benefit, since consumers who do not profit from their close ties do not view them to be in their best interest (Howard & Doyle, 2006).

Businesses that follow an RM approach are driven to serve their clients. According to Rao and Perry (2002), RM strives to develop long-term connections with clients that fulfil their wants and beliefs. According to Radionova and Praude (2016), businesses that use a relationship marketing strategy seek to build client loyalty via customer happiness.

RM benefits both the business and its consumers via information sharing (Alharbi, 2020). Anderson (2001) asserts that when a FM business retains a client’s business, both the firm

and its client profit from the experience due to knowledge enhancement of each other operation and therefore target end goals.

Characteristics of Relationship Marketing

Stakeholder Relationships

Payne and Frow (2017) criticise a large portion of the RM literature, arguing that it focuses too heavily on the dyadic customer-firm relationship and not enough on relationships with other stakeholders. Payne, et al., (2005) admit, however, that although mainstream marketing literature fails to highlight the critical nature of stakeholder relationships, RM literature does focus on the subject. Stakeholders can significantly impact business performance. Stakeholders have the ability to restrict vital resources from the business, influencing how importantly they regard the company (Maignan, et al., 2005). Advances in social media communication have stimulated stakeholders, allowing them to instantly convey their experiences with much larger audiences, so theoretically influencing other significant stakeholders (Payne & Frow, 2017).

Grönroos (1996) characterised RM as a practice for creating, preserving, and enriching relationships with stakeholders. Das (2009) argues in favour of this position, claiming that relationship marketing transcends the firm-customer dyad to develop partnerships with all stakeholders.

Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) explain how stakeholder connections are developed, stating that RM aims to involve various stakeholders, such as customers and suppliers, in the firm's marketing operations, resulting in the development of intimate relationships with these stakeholders. Clients that move employment from one shopping centre to another, will review the operation and business links of the new centre. Once that review has been completed, they may rekindle relationships previously held with FMSP to invite them to tender for contracts at an appropriate time where that FMSP is not currently on the approved suppliers listing.

Relationship marketers develop ties with six stakeholder markets, according to (Payne, et al., 2005):

- **Customer Markets** (buyers, intermediaries, and consumers)
- **Referral marketplaces**, which comprise both customers and non-customers as referral sources.
- **Supplier and alliance markets**, which supply resources and collaboration that allow the company to function.
- **Market influence**, which includes various entities such as industry organisations and unions.
- **Recruitment marketplaces**, which include prospective workers and avenues via which candidates might be found, such as recruitment agencies
- **Internal markets**, which include the company's own personnel, particularly those in customer-facing positions.

Figure 4: The 6 Markets Model (Payne, et al., 2005)

Trust and Commitment

In RM, trust is a critical aspect (Grönroos, 1994; Roa & Perry, 2002; Grönroos, 1996; Berry, 2002). Customers prefer dependable relationship partners. They do so because a competent, trustworthy, and informed partner mitigates the dangers associated with relational trade. According to Morgan and Hunt (1999), relationship advantages are a

necessary prelude to the category of relationship commitment demonstrated by customers who cooperate in relational exchange. Customers seek partners who value the same things as they do, ideally businesses that share their beliefs on what constitutes significance versus insignificance (Morgan & Hunt, 1999).

Rao and Perry (2002); Grönroos (1996); Berry (1995) emphasise the critical nature of RM trust development. Establishing trust entails developing mutual confidence and dependability between the company and its client. For example, if companies outsourcing complementary activities feel the FMSP is socially responsible, they are more likely to select that FM company (Roa & Perry, 2002).

For FMSP, trust is critical. Purchasing services is more challenging and riskier than purchasing items (Marquardt, et al., 2011). Purchasing services has financial, social, and security concerns (Berry, 2000). FMSP strive to mitigate the perceived risk associated with purchasing services (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2007), by ensuring the potential client have a sense of trust in the service offer and therefore in the FM company's ability to deliver. Purchasers inside organisations frequently fear making errors, losing competitiveness and innovation, losing trust, seeming dumb, and losing their positions (Kemp, et al., 2017). According to Biong (2013), buyers have difficulty differentiating between the quality of suppliers before making a purchase and evaluating the supplier's compliance with the contract following the purchase. Suppliers may provide a lower-quality service in order to maximise earnings.

Customers want trustworthy organisations since labour-intensive services are intangible, their quality fluctuates, and they are difficult to judge prior to purchase (Berry & Lampo, 2004). Palmatier (2008) adds that trust is crucial when purchasing services, as FMSP contact with clients more closely than suppliers of tangible goods.

Businesses can mitigate perceived risk by developing emotional bonds with their consumers (Herbst & Merz, 2011). Marketers who build relationships with their clients must demonstrate loyalty and win their trust (Buttle, 1996).

Customer loyalty is built on trust (Rauyruen & Miller, 2007; Barry, et al., 2008). Additionally, developing trust provides a number of mutual advantages. Trust is a critical aspect in motivating consumers to spread the news about a business, which results in greater revenue and value (Brock & Zhou, 2012).

With FMSP supplying in most cases non-tangible products such as security or cleaning, clients will use trust either through gained experiences or other trusted opinions within the shopping centre industry to select providers who they know will deliver the service required.

Bonding

RM can increase customer loyalty by strengthening relationships (Palmatier, et al., 2006). RM exchange processes are classified by Rao and Perry (2002) as structural and social bonds. Turnbull and Wilson (1989) explain structural bond as "two parties make investments that cannot be retrieved when the relationship ends, or when it is difficult to end the relationship due to the complexity and cost of changing sources" (p. 233).

According to Sheth (2017), relationship marketers should focus on building emotional connections with customers rather than financial ones. According to Pandey and Mookerjee (2018) and Howard and Doyle (2006), emotional factors influence B2B buying decisions.

Emotions drive organisational buying, according to Kemp, et al., (2018). In addition, data shows buyers with personal connections to B2B brands are more likely to purchase from them. Lynch and De Chernatony (2007) agree, stating that organisations, including B2B companies, can gain competitive advantage by developing emotional connections with their customers. Berry and Lampo (2004) argue that great service brands create emotional connections with their customers based on shared values. These are all references to social bonding.

RM can have negative impacts according to Kumar and Pansari, (2016), the sales force builds relationships by assigning people to understand each customer's needs and challenges. Customers can connect with employees rather than the company itself and follow them if they move FMSP, resulting in a potential financial risk to the original company.

Share of Wallet

Relationship marketers attempt to understand their customers' lifetime worth and change their focus away from market share growth and toward increasing their 'Share of

Wallet' (Sheth, 2017). Buttle (1996) argues in favour of this notion, claiming that relationship marketers now track share of customer, which refers to the proportion of a client's whole yearly or lifetime expenditure that a business achieves. According to Sheth (2017), the RM technique placed a premium on customer profitability analysis and offer bundling.

Shopping Centre's clients may exhibit a prominent level of satisfaction with the FM service delivery, enthusiastically recommending the company within their trading sector, however if rivals match or deliver higher standards the share of wallet can decrease. Making improvements to recover satisfaction is not always beneficial. This is not to say that conventional metrics are unimportant; knowing if clients are content and willing to provide references with the industry may be quite beneficial. Nevertheless, these metrics alone cannot tell you how your clients will allocate their spending between one FMSP and another (Keiningham, et al., 2011).

Word of Mouth

Relationship marketers can gain from non-monetary benefits such as word-of-mouth marketing (Gronroos & Helle, 2012) and can have significant influence on relationship building (Palmatier, et al., 2006). The consumer's willingness to recommend their provider is the ultimate test (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997).

According to Alharbi (2020), word-of-mouth marketing is the best way to market a business. Customers are most persuaded by those they trust, so word-of-mouth marketing can be a powerful tool (Buttle & Groeger, 2017). This is critical for service businesses that rely on and benefit from word-of-mouth marketing (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). Word-of-mouth has many advantages. According to Alharbi (2020), loyal customers can reduce customer acquisition costs.

B2B Relationship and Sales in the Digital Era

During the COVID-19 pandemic, business-to-business (B2B) enterprises increased their emphasis on digital communications, shifting the bulk of sales efforts to video

conferencing (Gavin, et al., 2020). The increasing usage of digital technology benefits and complicates B2B partnerships (Hofacker, et al., 2020).

Digital technologies enable the analysis of consumers' transaction histories in order to adapt their contacts with them and to forecast their future requirements and desires (Catlin, et al., 2015). Digital leaders in the B2B arena are using technology to expand personalisation of information and products for customers (Andersen, et al., 2017). The internet allows businesses to communicate with big groups of people while yet treating each one as an individual (Harrison-Walker & Neeley, 2004).

Buyers in the digital age begin the purchasing process by doing internet research and have already learnt about and developed opinions about providers prior to engaging sales professionals (Almquist, 2018). Many corporate buyers nowadays would rather avoid meeting with a salesperson until they are ready to clinch a purchase (Andersen, et al., 2017). Angevine, et al., (2018) observe that although the majority of consumers prefer human connection while assessing a product or service, the majority prefer digital channels when making retention, cross-selling, or upselling decisions.

Online Relationship Marketing

RM is seeing a renaissance in the digital age, as the value of fostering client connections grows (Steinhoff & Palmatier, 2020). Boateng (2019), says that the rising significance placed on business connections is partly due to the introduction of innovative technologies that are altering the nature and development of company partnerships. Zolkiewski and Litter (2004) even propose that these technologies have the potential to alter the fundamental character of RM.

Boateng (2019) defines online relationship marketing (ORM) as the practise of using an assortment of various online features and tools to develop and grow mutually beneficial long-term client connections. According to Steinhoff, et al., (2018), “Online relationships encompass relational exchanges between the customer and company that are mediated by Internet technology and take place in a non–face-to-face (i.e., human-to-technology interactions) setting” (p388).

While some scholars distinguish between RM and ORM, others see areas of overlap. According to Harrison-Walker and Neeley (2004), although businesses continue to adapt to the internet, their basic need to attract clients, create trust, and satisfy customers remains the same. Kozlenkova, et al., (2017) argue that while online and offline relationships are similar in many ways and are motivated by the same human need to connect, there are significant differences that must be addressed as firms adapt their relationship management strategies for online use.

Relationship marketers now have new tools available to them, like e-commerce, mobile commerce, social media, big data, and anthropomorphized agents (Steinhoff & Palmatier, 2020). These technological advancements are altering consumer expectations and placing more pressure on marketers to keep up with their customers' evolving demands and desires (Boateng, 2019).

Characterising Online Relationships

Offline, the psychological foundations and desire to develop connections are also experienced online, and the relationships built online may be just as powerful as those formed offline (Kozlenkova, et al., 2017).

Steinhoff, et al., (2019) describe online relationships as " relational exchanges mediated by Internet technology that occur in a human-to-technology environment" (p. 370)," and they identify and examine five distinctive aspects of these relationships:

1. **Seamless:**

   These connections are not constrained by time or geographical distance limits. Thus, internet shopping and communication are more frictionless than offline.

2. **Networked:**

   Individual consumers are connected to and impacted by bigger networks.

3. **Omnichannel:**

   Businesses connect with clients across a variety of channels. Additionally, these encounters may occur through a variety of devices.

4. **Personalised:**

Through the gathering and analysis of data, businesses may tailor their interactions with consumers.

5. **Anthropomorphized:**

Businesses are engaging consumers via the use of artificial intelligence. Their technologies are becoming more human-like in their interactions with clients.

How Online and Real-World Relationships Differ

Kozlenkova, et al., (2017) found four barriers to online connection formation:

1. Offline relationship partners are often geographically proximate, allowing for face-to-face interaction and the exchange of rich interpersonal communication. By contrast, online relationship partners may never meet in person and may be limited to very imprecise communication with fewer verbal and non-verbal signs.
2. While partners in real relationships are often aware of one another's identities, this is frequently not the case with online relationships.
3. Online relationships may be unilateral, in which one person never reciprocates, but in offline interactions, participants are compelled to reciprocate by societal pressure.
4. Online dating couples are often less linked than offline dating partners, owing to the fact that they share significantly fewer acquaintances.

They emphasise that since these disparities enhance the likelihood that a partner may act opportunistically in the relationship, it is critical to communicate trustworthiness. Steinhoff, et al., (2019) claim that it may be more difficult to maintain consumer loyalty when internet channels provide global competition and cheaper search costs, as well as less opportunities for human engagement.

Forming Relationships Online

Whether online or offline, individuals need and require connections, and the psychological mechanics behind relationship formation are same in both environments

(Steinhoff, et al., 2019). However, since online environments are so distinct from offline environments, academics and practitioners alike are interested in learning how connections may be developed, grown, and maintained in this new world (Steinhoff, et al., 2019).

People establish business ties both online and offline in order to eliminate uncertainty and purchase from reputable vendors, (Kozlenkova, et al., 2017). Because online and offline relationship situations are so different, practitioners and academics alike must understand how relationships are established, maintained, and expanded online (Steinhoff, et al., 2019). 2019). However, these channels have substantial distinctions, which indicates that we cannot simply transfer offline techniques to the online realm (Kozlenkova, et al., 2017). Conversely, Yoon, et al., (2008) discovered that the same relationship-building techniques employed offline may be effectively used online in a modified version.

Harrison-Walker and Neeley (2004) propose a typology for online customer relationship development that considers both the client's 'purchase phase' and the relationship bonding type:

Stage prior to purchasing

Customers recognise an issue that may be rectified via the purchase of a product or service during the pre-buy stage. At this stage, firms seeking to form a connection with the client strive to create economic relationships, by saving the consumer time. They assist the buyer in swiftly obtaining the information necessary to make a purchasing choice. They may achieve this by offering FAQs and digital catalogues, but to be effective, they must be able to anticipate the customer's informational demands.

At this level, businesses may develop social relationships with these prospective clients by customising and personalising their interactions with them. Firms may develop structural relationships with a prospective client by assisting them in increasing the efficacy of their information search via the use of technologies such as real-time chat.

Stage of Acquisition

The buy stage occurs after the client has made a purchasing choice and is attempting to finalise the transaction. During this stage, businesses may establish economic connections with customers by saving them time via the use of convenient order forms and online payment choices. Businesses may form social relationships with their clients by getting a thorough grasp of their goals and requirements and then delivering advice and customised products.

At this stage, firms may strengthen their structural relationships with consumers by enhancing their efficacy and productivity. Firms may adopt a variety of strategies, including the creation of personalised Favourites pages that allow each consumer to rapidly access the things they desire to purchase or are more inclined to purchase.

Stage After Purchase

During the post-buy stage, businesses wishing to establish economic ties may attempt to deter the client from spending time or money tracking the arrival of their purchase. They guarantee that the consumer is kept informed about the status of the transaction and receives prompt responses to post-purchase queries. Firms attempting to develop social relationships with consumers post-purchase adopt techniques that include providing continuing assistance and enhancing the customer's sense of connection to the firm. Firms may do this by establishing chat rooms and discussion forums.

Firms utilise tactics such as online channels to give customer service and improve client engagement with the company to establish structural relationships. Businesses may use technology to have real-time dialogues with their consumers over the internet. Additionally, firms may construct customer activity cards to measure how customers engage with the business across several channels, so increasing the efficacy and seamlessness of the customer-firm connection.

Connecting with Clients on Social Media

When it comes to building connections with clients online, social media platforms are a popular choice for businesses since they allow for two-way conversation (Steinhoff, et al., 2019). They have become a critical part of the customer relationship management process (Steinhoff & Palmatier, 2020). Businesses may learn more about their clients, their requirements, and the likelihood of a sale or need for assistance via the use of social media (Buratti, et al., 2018). Social media platforms like Twitter, according to Alharbi, (2020), let companies interact with clients informally and continuously, impacting their decision-making processes.

Marketers should prioritise connection development in their social media strategy, as advocated by Achen, (2017), and recognise the potential of social media to improve the quality of those relationships. B2B service organisations may utilise social media to improve their awareness of clients, identify requirements, provide value, complete sales, and give customer support, state Buratti, et al., (2018). They argue this can have a significant impact on the whole marketing process. Social media may help B2B companies in several ways, including the creation of new possibilities and the management of existing connections, as stated by Rodriquez, et al., (2012). Although this is the case, many well-established B2B companies are ignorant of the potential of social media and their marketing teams are less adept at using it (Diba, et al., 2019).

According to Järvinen, et al., (2012), there is some evidence that B2B organisations may use social media to deepen current connections, but many companies concentrate on utilising it to gain new consumers. B2B companies may be reluctant to utilise social media to strengthen existing ties because of worries about privacy and the possibility that rivals may learn too much. When a company communicates with a customer in a public arena, it runs the risk of damaging relationships with other consumers and jeopardising the competitive edge it has built up (Karjaluoto, et al., 2018).

Perceived Relationship Investment

Verma, et al., (2016) describe relationship investment as the time, effort, and resources spent on developing a connection with a client and identify it as one of the most influential predictors of strong partnerships. Customers may detect relationship investment by assessing criteria such as the interactivity of a business's website and the extent to which their sense of relationship investment impacts their opinion of relationship quality (Yoon, et al., 2008).

Summary of Literature Review

The literature review outlines theoretical benefits of RM across a spectrum of areas both on and offline. What is transparent is the mutual benefits RM can bring to both business and the client. Driving profitability through the development of strong bonds across stakeholders, utilising the backbone of trust and commitment are critical to the success of the relationship. The challenge within this research will be to identify whether this RM theory transverses the to the real-world relationships between FMSP and SCM.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The term "research techniques" broadly refers to a collection of activities and measurements used to collect and make sense of effective observations in conjunction with studying and comparing pertinent theories and literature (Cassell & Lee, 2011). Saunders et al. (2007) provide a more straightforward definition of research, referring to it as a technique that individuals engage in, in order to uncover results in a methodical manner. The intention of this research is to ascertain and consider FMSP understanding of RM and do they really know what the customer desires.

Research Design

The research design, strategy, and all other parts of the research technique were consistent for participants to feel comfortable engaging in a candid and forthright conversation. The researcher's findings are presented in a more orderly fashion to the methodology selected (Saunders, et al., 2007). The methods used in this research were a mix of primary and secondary research, as well as quantitative and qualitative assessments. Primary and secondary research were combined in this research, with qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey being conducted as part of a mixed-methods strategy that began with a review of relevant academic literature and periodicals (Saunders, et al., 2007). The author used the research approach of "Triangulation," which entailed using several data sources in order to substantiate, improve quality and dependability of outcomes (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Secondary Research

This research strategy started with secondary research analysis. Reports, surveys, journal articles, and books were examples of secondary research sources utilised (Saunders, et al., 2007). According to Bryman and Bell, (2007), examining relevant literature is a powerful

analytical technique. The researcher did obtain significant insight and expertise in reviewing current literature and research on RM. To demonstrate how valuable and relevant the researcher's work was to the field, secondary data analysis revealed any existing disparities in existing literature on RM (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Academic journal articles, case studies, and books were used as secondary data sources for this research. The National College of Ireland Library's online databases and journals, as well as books, were used as secondary data sources by the researcher. Within the authors research strategy, literature studied was analysed and evaluated. This allowed the researcher to identify where there was a disparity in the field and how this primary research added value to current literature.

Primary Research

Structured survey and individual interviews were the basis of the primary research. Due to the potential number of participants and diverse geographical region, surveys were selected as a data collecting method. Surveys were, anonymous, and confidential. The surveys also had the benefit of standardisation, allowing for easy comparison of results (Saunders, et al., 2007). The researcher utilised Qualtrics to create the online survey and analyse the responses. The participates were drawn from SCM personnel within Ireland, where the demographic were a majority males and between the ages of 25 to 65 years old which deliver bias however other options were limited. Participants received an email explaining the research's objective and an online survey link. In acknowledging respondents' "goodwill" for volunteering their time to participate, it is vital to highlight the limitations of using surveys to obtain data (Saunders, et al., 2007, p. 139). The researcher created clear, intelligible, and insightful research questions based on objectives and relevant literature to acquire efficient, useful, and clear replies. The online survey questions was based on the research objectives and relevant academic literature.

The other phase in this research design was qualitative interviews. In qualitative research, Bryman and Bell (2007) report that interviews are the most often employed technique. Interviews were chosen for this research because of their many advantages. Interviews are flexible and can help build trust between the researcher and participant (O'Leary, 2017). Interviews were conducted with twelve FMSP selected due to their business interaction

across Ireland with the shopping centre industry. The interviews were semi-structured. This interview framework included organised questions as well as a conversation flow that allowed for off-topic exploration of relevant information (O'Leary, 2017). Interview questions focused on:

- Participants' understanding of RM
- Understanding of what the customers really desire,
- Has customers desires changed since with pandemic?
- Have FMSP behaviours changed linked to changing customer demands?
- What does the future of RM look like for FMSP post pandemic?

Interviews were categorised by the number of employees. This generated three categories, totalling twelve interviews with a mix of scale and variety of services companies. Each interview lasted around 45 minutes and was conducted over Microsoft Teams. The researcher recorded the interviews with participants' consent to efficiently capture and analyse replies for a comprehensive data analysis.

Interview Questions

1. *What does the term 'Relationship Marketing' mean to you?*

This question is intended to elicit information on the respondent's understanding of relationship marketing and their attitudes toward it. The answer to this question gives context for analysing the responses to succeeding questions.

2. *Who do you build relationships with?*

Customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders such as local governments and community organisations may build relationships with responders. It is critical to determine which groups respondents wish to develop ties with and which groups they are considering when responding to subsequent questions.

3. *(a) How has your approach to building and managing relationships changed since the pandemic began?*

   (b) How do you envisage you will approach this into the future?

This question will allow respondents to explore how government-imposed restriction have influenced their approach and how they have evolved. If respondents expanded their usage of online channels or discovered a new method of managing connections, this information will be disclosed here and also how they plan to relate in the future.

4. *(a) To what extent, if any, do you use online channels for relationship marketing?*

   (b) (IF ANY) what online channels do you use for this purpose?

This set of questions is intended to elicit information on whether the respondent uses online channels for relationship marketing and, if yes, which channels and approaches are used. The 4(a) and 4(b) series eliminates prejudice and is easier to answer than a complex question for responders. The question allows the responder to explain their online relationship marketing efforts and the channels that are most beneficial to them.

5. *How, if at all, do you build trust with customers online?*

Numerous experts have recognised trust as a critical component of relationship marketing. To engage in successful relationship marketing online, it is necessary to grasp how to develop trust online. This topic elicits responses about the methods and extent to which people can create trust online.

6. *How, if at all, do you bond with customers online and in-person?*

According to Kozlenkova et al. (2017), creating stronger, more committed ties can result in more favourable results, including relationship development. Liang, et al., (2008), distinguished three effective bonding strategies: financial bonding, structural bonding, and social bonding. This question is intended to elicit information about respondents' attitudes on bonding online and offline and the bonding strategies they adopt.

7. *(a)In your opinion, in the context of relationship marketing, what are the strengths of online channels?*

   (b) How in the future do you see the utilisation of online play out?

This question is intended to elicit information on the perceived possibilities and efficiencies that relationship marketers perceive using internet platforms. The question allows the responder to talk freely about the suitability and relevance of online platforms for many areas of relationship marketing.

8. *In your opinion, in the context of relationship marketing, what are the weaknesses of online channels?*

This inquiry aims to elucidate the perceived constraints of internet platforms by relationship marketers.

9. *How is your approach to online relationship marketing different from offline relationship marketing in a post pandemic world?*

According to Kozlenkova et al. (2017), we cannot simply apply offline techniques to the online world. However, Yoon et, al., (2008) discovered that several offline strategies may be successfully adapted for usage online. This question aims to ascertain how respondents see the differences between offline and online relationship marketing tactics and results.

10. *How, if at all, does your approach to relationship marketing change depending on the stage of the relationship, from relationship formation to growth?*

This question is intended to ascertain whether respondents use different relationship marketing methods and channels when establishing relationships than when maintaining or growing them, and whether the channels and techniques used vary as the connection evolves.

11. *Do you operate any e-CRM platforms?*

The purpose of this inquiry is to ascertain what systems if any relationship marketers utilise to manage client data.

12. *If you believed relationship marketing was critical to success, and you had the necessary budget, what are the things you would do both online and offline?*

This question is intended to elicit information on the actions and resources that relationship marketers feel are most beneficial to their relationship marketing efforts. This question permits interviewers to offer a detailed response and explore any points raised in prior replies that were not addressed. The researcher may use the replies to this question to gain a better understanding of how relationship marketers see impressive performance in the domain of offline / online relationship marketing.

Survey Questions

1. *What is your understanding of the term Relationship Marketing?*

This question is intended to elicit information on the respondent's understanding of relationship marketing and their attitudes toward it. The answer to this question gives context for analysing the responses to succeeding questions.

2. *How did you interact with your FM Service Provider pre COVID-19? (Zero = no interaction)*
3. *How do you want to interact with your FM Service Provider post COVID-19? (Zero = no interaction)*

While the researchers' in-depth interviews will indicated what FMSP preference is for interactions with clients, the literature analysis indicates that relationships that are largely or online are becoming more prevalent, and ORM is gaining relevance. This inquiry aims to challenge literature thinking by gaining an understanding of the clients' perspective.

4. *Can you number the following communication channels in order of reference when interacting with your FM Services Providers.*
   - *Video chat (e.g., Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams)*
   - *Email*
   - *Voice Calls*
   - *In Person*

Respondents said that video chat, email, and voice conversations were their preferred modes of contact during the in-depth interviews. Video chat was recognised as an especially beneficial route. This inquiry identifies which of the channels used by relationship marketers is favoured by clients and if video chat earns that distinction.

5. *What FM Service Provider interactions (either on or offline) worked for you during COVID-19 pandemic that you would like to retain or is missing?*

This inquiry is intended to ascertain SCM comfort level when it comes to communicating with and learning about prospective new suppliers of facility management services. The literature research demonstrated that trust building is vital to the development of new relationships. This inquiry examines the SCM's perspective in order to assess their stance.

6. *Please indicate on which (if any) of the following social media channels you are happy to engage with FM services providers. (please select all that apply)*
   - *Facebook*
   - *LinkedIn*
   - *Twitter*
   - *WhatsApp*
   - *Instagram*
   - *Slack*
   - *Email Marketing*
   - *Other*

This question solicits SCM feedback on their preferred communication channel thus giving the researcher the ability to compare against interviewee responses to utilised channels to demonstrate FMSP understanding of SCM desired communication routes.

7. *To what extent do you agree with the statement "that online relationships with FM services providers can be as strong as relationships with FM services providers in person"?*
   - *Strongly agree*
   - *Agree*
   - *Neither agree nor disagree*

- *Disagree*
- *Strongly disagree*

According to Kozlenkova, et al., (2017), online connections may be just as robust as offline interactions. This inquiry seeks to ascertain the SCM's viewpoint on this critical issue.

8. *By which of the following communication types do you prefer to learn about FM services providers?*
   - *Written content*
   - *Visuals (e.g., infographics, photos, illustrations)*
   - *Videos*
   - *Webinars*
   - *Trade shows*
   - *Word of mouth*
   - *Other*

This inquiry is intended to ascertain the preferred method of communication for SCM to get information about FMSP's. The results may show if relationship marketers' preferred channels are similarly preferred by SCMs, as well as which communication types relationship marketers should prioritise.

9. *How important is it to you for your FM Services Provider to give you access to a customer portal? (Respondent are asked to use a slider which ranges from 'not at all important to very important)*

Harrison-Walker and Neeley (2004) address the benefits of economic bonding; they argue that companies that practise economic bonding attempt to eliminate the need for clients to spend time or money staying educated about their purchase. Numerous relationship marketers emphasised the critical need of supplying clients with accurate management information such as client portals. The purpose of this inquiry is to ascertain the significance of online client portals to SCM.

10. *Do you currently utilise an electronic customer relationship management (ECRM) tool such as a client portal, ECAT?*

The purpose of this inquiry is to ascertain if SCM have the availability of a client portal or similar thus demonstrating FMSP investment in this area as a relationship marketing tool.

11. *In your opinion, how can FM Services Providers improve how they build, maintain, and grow relationships with clients both in-person and online?*

This question allows respondents to be creative and highlight the areas they believe are most critical to RM efforts and those that have not been managed by FM services businesses.

12. *In your opinion, do you believe that your FM Services providers fully understand your requirements as a business?*

• *Yes (How?)*

• *No (Why)*

This question is intended to ascertain the proportion of SCM who believe their FMSP understands their business needs and how that is demonstrated verse those that do not believe they do and why this is. This may demonstrate the clarity on why customer needs are not being understood by the FMSP and its link to the interaction.

13. *Do you believe that FM Service Providers really care about client relationships or is it just about the contract?*

- *Yes*
- *No*

Simple to establish where SCM believe the FMSP are focused on a relationship or the transaction.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the collection, modelling, and analysis of data to enable decision-making. Both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies inform these various data analysis approaches. Gaining a 360° view of the researchers participates by analysing their data to learn more about their business, strategies, views, and contractual decision-making influences was key to the success of this research.

Data analysis of surveys was performed using Qualtrics as it filtered, organised, and display ed quantitative data. A broad variety of algorithms, filters, and charts and graphs were used to synthesise the information the researcher obtained. To ensure the researcher got the qualitative research primary topics, comparable quotes were grouped together. The author could see the topics and sub-themes that developed from the interviews and linked with survey results to then analyse against his research topic question

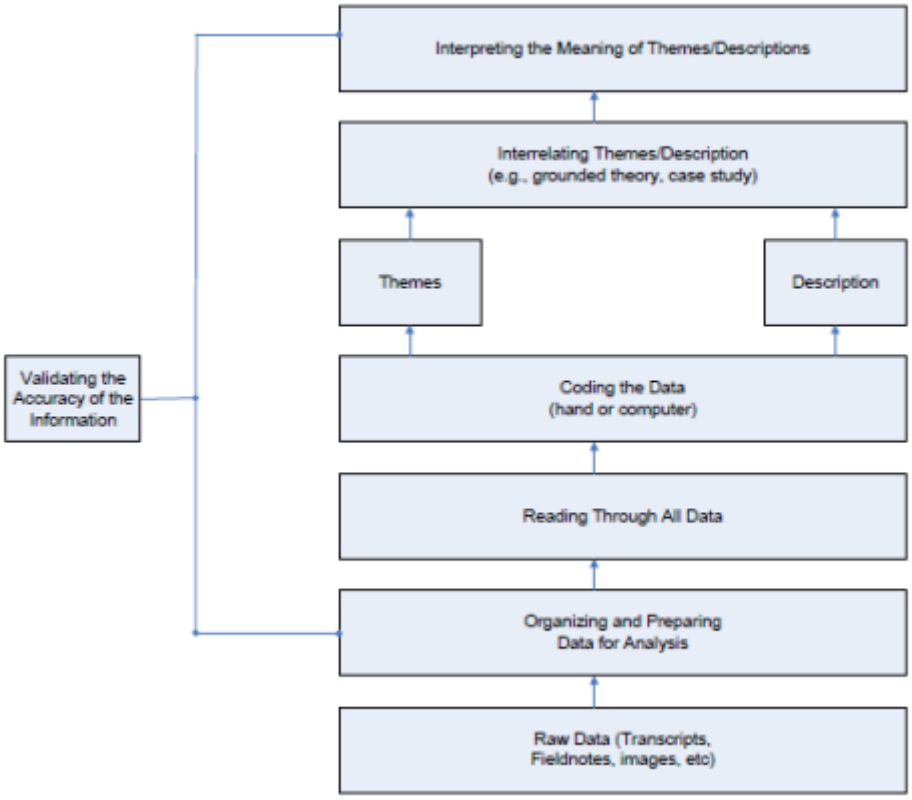

Figure 5: Data Analysis in Qualitative Research (Creswell, 2009)

Pilot Study

To safeguard the ethical reliability of the research project, consideration was given to a pilot survey, which was conducted to ensure clarity in the survey question, ease of completion and timings to complete. Following this test question were revised slightly following feedback. This study was completed by four trusted colleagues within the SCM industry prior to the sending out of the finalised survey.

Limitations

Interviews

Lancaster, (2005) believes that questioning might cause complications while collecting data. For Example:

- Respondents may be affected by the procedure and offer biased information.
- Interview information might be difficult to acquire and analyse.
- Interview respondents may respond to the interview process and perform differently.

The research was limited by the number of willing relationship marketers. Twelve in-depth interviews were conducted.

Convenience sampling as a methodology itself has limitations. Malhotra & Birks, (2006) worry that samples collected using this technique may not be representative of the population. Six participants the researcher frequently contacted were interviewed. Even though these individuals regularly collaborate with the researcher, significant effort was taken to guarantee that accurate data was gathered from their interviews. The researcher kept an impartial stance and made no assumptions. All interviewees were treated in the same manner.

Surveying SCM

The researcher sought input from SCM in Ireland who are responsible for acquiring facilities management services for shopping centres. The need for FMSP is not shared by every business. When it comes to providing these functions, several businesses rely on in-house teams. This makes it hard to find people who work in the field of purchasing facilities management services. The researcher used LinkedIn to find industry experts who might help them with this problem. As a result, this approach has a disadvantage since it cannot locate professionals who do not use LinkedIn.

The SCM survey for FM services is restricted by a small sample size and a medium response rate. There were 67 SCM who were invited to take part in the survey. The survey had a response rate of 46.3% from the thirty-one professionals who took the time to fill it out.

Ethical Considerations

Research ethics are predicated on the role values play in our research process. Ethics is a fundamental component of research integrity. With power comes an elevated level of responsibility. It is the responsibility of the researcher to guarantee that the participants in their research are treated with dignity and respect. Respondents' mental and physical health and well-being are of the utmost importance. A researcher must be aware of the legal, moral, and ethical ramifications of taking on this role (O'Leary, 2017). Ethics according to Saunders, et al., (2007), is the “appropriateness of your behaviour in relation to the rights of those who the subject of your work or affected by it” (p. 178).

As a result, the authors research will be governed by the ethical principles of the National College of Ireland. Complete information regarding the study will be provided, and participants will be free to withdraw at any time. All information obtained from the interviews and surveys will be protected by passwords. Each participant must read and sign a consent form prior to commencement of research with them.

Summary of Research Methodology

This section discussed the study's rationale, its central question, methodology, findings, caveats, and ethical issues. Further, it elaborated on the researcher's sampling method and the steps they took to gather and analyse data. It addressed possible ethical problems and recognised the limits of the methodology used.

Chapter 4: Research Findings & Discussion

Introduction

Twelve interviews conducted from across FMSP industry. The themes for the questions arose from the literature; they can be seen in the appendix. Additional questions were asked as a direct result of interviewee answers, which is one advantage from employing the semi-structured interview.

The author has allocated letters to each interviewee, so the reader is aware of position, sector of business and company size as below:

Interviewee Code, Position, Sector and Company Size				
Code	**Job Title**	**Industry Sector**	**No. of employees**	**Company Size Identifier**
P1	Commercial Manager	Maintenance Management	100	Large
P2	General Manager	Car Park Management	14	Small
P3	Corporate Account Manager	Waste Management	1,200	Large
P4	Director	Media	4	Small
P5	Owner	Christmas Decorations	5	Small
P6	Managing Director	Landscaping	85	Small
P7	Client Relationship Director	Security, Cleaning, Car Park Management	9,600	Large
P8	Managing Director	Maintenance Management	17	Small
P9	Senior Account Manager	Water Management	25	Small
P10	Project Co-Ordinator	Sprinkler Services	17	Small
P11	Managing Director	Fire Management	7	Small
P12	Director	Construction	17	Small

Defining Relationship Marketing

Although there is no universally accepted definition of RM among academics, there is substantial overlap between the several available definitions. When it comes to multi-service companies, RM means "attracting, sustaining, and strengthening client connections," as stated by Berry (1995, p.25). "Proactively generating, growing, and sustaining committed, engaging, and lucrative interactions with chosen consumers [partners] over time," as Harker (1999, p. 16) put it, is the essence of RM.

The phrase "Relationship Marketing" is not a term used in either the FMSP sector nor the shopping centre industry. 7 out of 12 interviewees either didn't understand the term “Relationship Marketing” and/or didn't see the relevance to it. This was not unique to any particular size of FMSP, it was across the industry. The five who saw some relevance could all agree on what it meant based on their personal experiences with RM and relationship selling. Different strategies for establishing and maximising the value of interpersonal connections

were reviewed, as were the results each party hoped to see from prioritising the development of such ties.

This alongside survey feedback demonstrated that client loyalty, customer retention, forming relationships for mutual benefit were the most important results of RM. Researchers in the field of RM have shown that trust plays a significant role in regulating human interactions.

Discussion

All of the interviewees offered no clear and considered definition of the term RM, and all had never heard of the term. This challenges the ability of theory to transfer to real-world within the FMSP industry. This was not limited to this sector as SCM also had no knowledge of the term. Excluding the term itself all FMSP had a practical appreciation of RM are using RM tactics without necessarily knowing. On analysing the response from both interviews and surveys, all participants develop their interpretation of the topic matter through personal experience, via trial and error rather than formal education or training courses.

According to the results, RM is an effective strategy for increasing profits, retaining more clients, and providing more value to existing ones as well as loyalty to FMSP. Credence is supported by the longevity of the FMSP length in business and linkages with SCM that they are not TM focus and that they understands Sonkova & Grabowska (2015), interpretation of TM, nevertheless, profitability and efficiency of their business could be developed through enhanced RM strategies.

Who do FM Service Providers Build Relationships With?

According to the study's findings, senior managers/ business owners in the FM services industry focus on cultivating connections with a wide range of stakeholders, including SCM's, Facilities Managers, Property Managers, and other service providers. While they agree that it is beneficial to have a wide network of contacts, they take particular care to focus their efforts where they will see the most return. They see it as their responsibility to dissect the SCM layers to identify different decision-making relationships. Also, they identify the

development of an ambassadorial role played by their own teams on the ground in delivering the contract. FMSP see this as a mutually beneficial relationship role with SCM.

Forming Relationships with Clients

FMSP, according to the research, aim to build a wide network of contacts inside the shopping centre of their target clients. As P7 stated, he cultivates connections "*three deep and three broad.*" He described how he cultivates a connection with a key player like a shopping centre manager. His goal is to network with this stakeholder's senior management team, the property management team who are appointed by landlords to manage the centre, and his onsite contract employees. He went on to say that he is interested in making connections with people in adjacent roles, such as the Facilities Managers, Customer Experience Managers or the management team of his contracts operating in the shopping centre. This targeted approach strengthens his relationship with the shopping centre making the connections more robust and prosperous.

For successful client relationships, relationship marketers prioritise identifying and cultivating connections with key decision-makers and influencers inside their client organisations. P2 stated *"I think it's important for us to listen first. I think if you have that foundation then that's 90% of the success for both parties"*. As relationships develop listening is a key to understanding the key personnel, access routes to them and the desired direction they are looking to take their business in.

Smaller FMSP were very focused on service provided and felt relationships were built from delivery, they simply didn't get the "people" element to the relationship.

Forming Relationship with Colleagues

Finding common ground with other employees at the same company was identified as a top priority for FMSP. Professionals in the field of business development for the FMSP were aware that their service delivery colleagues, such as operations managers or site

managers, have vital SCM connections. These co-workers may introduce the senior managers to the client, opening the door for them to begin building a rapport that will aid in retention, cross-selling, and up-selling efforts.

According to the study's findings, FMSP also foster connections with co-workers to boost their own performance, with the goal of getting their requests for assistance prioritised.

Forming Relationships with Others

According to the study's findings, FMSP forge ties with their suppliers to boost their own productivity by gaining access to more efficient services to get a competitive edge in the market.

FMSP seek to connect with organisations such as Shopping Centre Manager's Association of Ireland or individual service experts who yield influence in the shopping centre sector. The strategy of building these connections is to broaden their reach and provide more access to potential business leads via word-of-mouth marketing.

Discussion

Research findings indicate FMSP industry rely heavily on the assistance of their peers in order to successfully create and nurture connections with their customers. This supports Palmatier (2008, p.20), stance that a network of interconnected links allows for the continued existence of a community in the face of the breakdown or destruction of any one link. Access to customers and prospects may be facilitated via networking with peers, and members of industry associations. They also rely on their supplier’s performance, in delivering a competitive advantage, thus empowering them to win new clients and more significantly the long-term retention on current clients.

The consequence placed on internal relationships was remarkable. Senior managers that focus on building relationships understand that their co-workers may make or break their

success in gaining and keeping clients. Business owners who concentrate on building connections with clients often rely on their operations-focused co-workers for client introductions, recommendations, and assistance. Additionally, they focus on strengthening internal connections to guarantee they will have the support they need in other areas, such as sourcing and administration. This supports Palmatier (2008, p.21) who points out, a company's influence may grow when it develops connections with a wide range of influential people inside its own organisation. P5 summed it up *"It's how I communicate with my customers and how I field their requests, it has to be a continuous stream of contacts. So, it's not good enough to stick an email in once a year and say show me your order"*.

FMSP strike a balance between expanding their network and prioritising the connections most likely to provide results. Analysis of interview transcribes highlights no succession plan in smaller/owner operator FMSP - owners are single point of failure if anything happens to them which is not covered within the literature review and is critical to any business's survival.

The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

It has been challenging for FMSP to make new connections. Staying connected with clients became increasingly challenging due to government restrictions. Also, throughout the pandemic, clients' wants and demands evolved as circumstances within the shopping centre industry changed, trading in one centre saw only six out of 101 tenants open forcing reaction from SCM to the pressures on the service charge budget as tenants stopped contributing.

FMSP faced additional challenges as a result of the pandemic. Many companies temporarily closed their doors throughout Ireland, while others increased security measures. There was a widespread adoption of remote work arrangements and a corresponding increase in PUP and termination policies. It drove greater complexity of just delivering a level of continuing service demanded by current SCM linked to moving landscape customer demand, never mind trying to meet potential new clients. Contacting new customers was extremely challenging, client indecision due to the resulting industry uncertainty became the norm. A majority of

interviewees said that these difficulties significantly hampered their ability to maintain current clients never mind attracting new connections.

According to eight FMSP within the smaller groups of companies interviewed, they ceased focusing on building new connections and concentrating on capitalising on the current clients. This was just to maintain or minimise the impact on their revenue. An opinion shared by SCM, expressed by a survey respondent, provides more evidence for this example. They were happy to hear from the FMSP digital channels with one commenting *"MS Teams was extremely useful during COVID. The FM platform BIM 360 Ops was also extremely helpful with keeping up to speed with PPM actions and objectives"*. To prove their worth, FMSP must demonstrate awareness the current economic climate and understanding of articulated SCM specific requirements, focusing on providing specifics by which those requirements will be delivered. Some SCM teams complained that businesses do not listen to them, saying instead that they *"should stop blanket marketing the same material to their whole network"* when, in fact, they should be using the information they have gleaned to tailor their communications and products to each individual customer.

As SCM became less accessible for in-person meetings, it became more difficult to maintain positive working connections with them. Reports from FMSP indicated that they were unable to use hospitality and entertainment as part of their relationship management strategy with clients.

The researcher found that in the first weeks of the pandemic, SCM communication moved completely to online, as they rallied to get to grips with restriction and support each other's understanding of the situation the industry found itself in. SCM also said the quality of these interactions was poorer than typical offline interactions with one commenting *"I feel our roles and responsibilities transferred from in-person to online, so while we got the same Facetime to discuss issues, I feel in the in-person meeting provides more value."*

Only two out of the twelve interviewees spoke of supporting their clients during COVID-19 with P4 declaring "*So I was picking up the phone to people but not touting for business. We developed care packages. We put 12 or 14 little luxuries into it, so it wasn't COVID heavy but more self-love heavy"*

Discussion

The research found that the effect on communication was not uniform. Existing connections saw a significant increase in communication as individuals worked to grasp the issue and devise replies, whereas potential customers were significantly less communicative and less eager to interact with FMSP demonstrating the point Maignan, et al., (2005) makes in clients ability to control vital resources such as communication. Antagonism from clients towards compelling offers be diminished with displays of in-depth knowledge of the client's desires therefore opening up opportunities for engagement rather than allowing distance forming gaps in the relationship to form that could be unbridgeable supporting Alharbi (2020) view of cultivating relationships.

During this period, a number of FMSP interviewed stopped trying to build new connections and instead focused on strengthening and capitalising on its current ones with P4 affirming, "*we try to get the majority of our work from existing client base rather than forming new relationships".* This backs up Verma, et al., (2016) research into the time and effort required to develop a new connection. Focus especially for small FMSP was simply survival. This might be a result of customers being wary of collaborating with a new company, or it could point to a failure in establishing rapport via digital means. Statements provided by those in the shopping centre industry lend credence to the assumption that online channels were not well utilised to establish relationships, at least in the first few months of the pandemic. Also due to the reactionary nature of the period SCM employed FMSP in a TM manner which supports Roa and Perry (2002) point that organisations may need to employ both transactional and relationship techniques at times.

Use of Online Channels

Every FMSP interviewed said they were using more digital tools for RM. One respondent said that 80 percent or more of their RM activities takes place online, while another said that all of their RM efforts takes place online.

The following digital tools were used by these companies:

- E-mail
- Video conferencing
- LinkedIn
- Company websites
- WhatsApp

Although email is still crucial, FMSP believe that channels with video capabilities, such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom, are more productive for their efforts. All SCM surveyed said they've utilised Microsoft Teams which they found to be a vital communication mechanism for fostering collaboration throughout the company. Four FMSP did struggle with the digital element of communication, while email was customary practice, Microsoft Team was challenging with P12 saying, *"he couldn't wait to switch it off*". Not all business moved online with P10 who operates within the life safety sector asserting *"No, none of our business went online. We had a lot of safety business, and we all have to be hands on, that just the way we are".*

Since the start of the pandemic, FMSP have been more aggressive in their usage of LinkedIn, according to the research findings. Numerous activities, including market research, communicating with current and potential clients, replacing email, and brand development, are all made possible by this medium. Only four FMSP utilised this media, but only shared centrally developed messages as their own use of this medium was virtually zero, with knowledge and confidence the main factors in avoidance of use.

29% of SCM see WhatsApp as professional enough for their needs however this is not echoed with FMSP who perceive it as a social platform. Those who have built personal ties with contractors and co-workers say they use WhatsApp to communicate quickly and efficiently.

Outside of in-person meeting as a way of interacting with FMSPs, SCM would rather use video chat as against email or phone conversations to discuss service needs with their FMSP, according to a poll of twenty-four professionals who acquire FM services within Ireland. With 57.1% of the vote (when in-person poll votes removed), video chat was clearly the front runner.

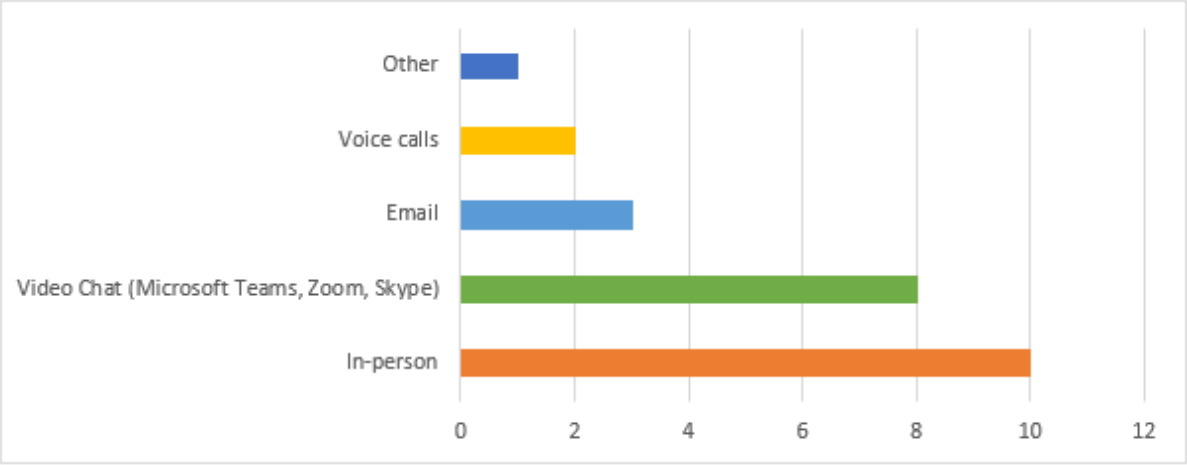

Figure 6: Preferred online communication channels for Shopping Centre Management

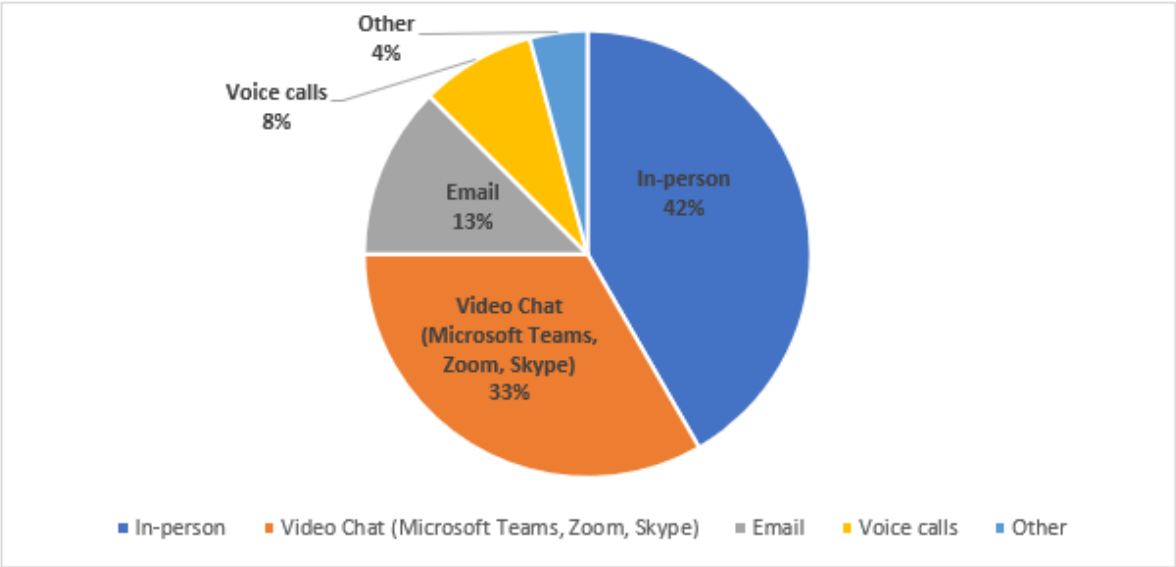

Table 1: Preferred online communication channels for Shopping Centre Managers

A survey question, designed to discover on which social media channels shopping centre management are happy to engage with FMSP, found that 29%, are happy to engage with service providers on WhatsApp. 38.75% with LinkedIn a close second on 26%. Interestingly Twitter was not rated as an online communication tool at all. The responses to this question show that LinkedIn can be an asset to FM service providers, to demonstrate services on offer, case study's etc., however they must do the necessary work to understand which of their clients are open to engage with them on social media.

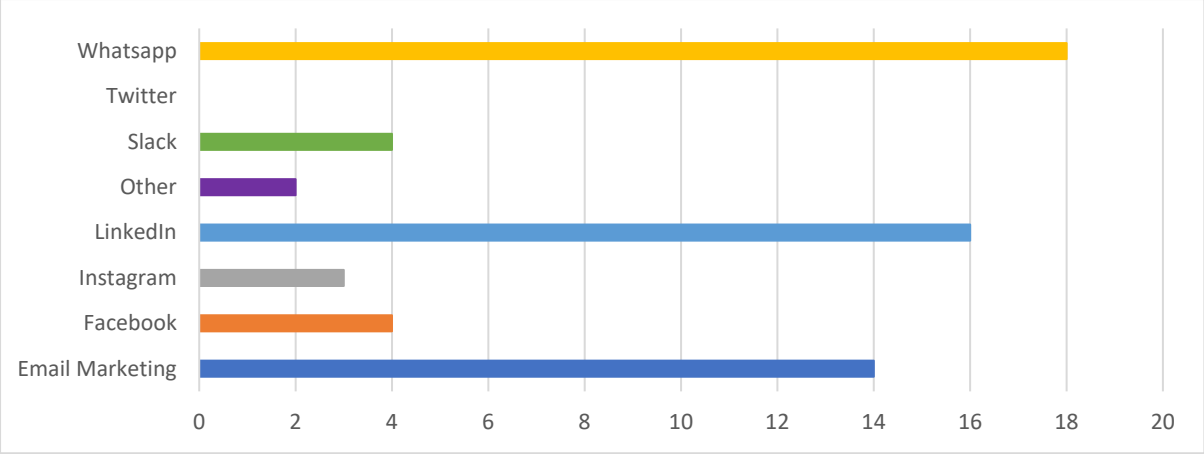

Figure 7: Engaging with FM services providers on social media

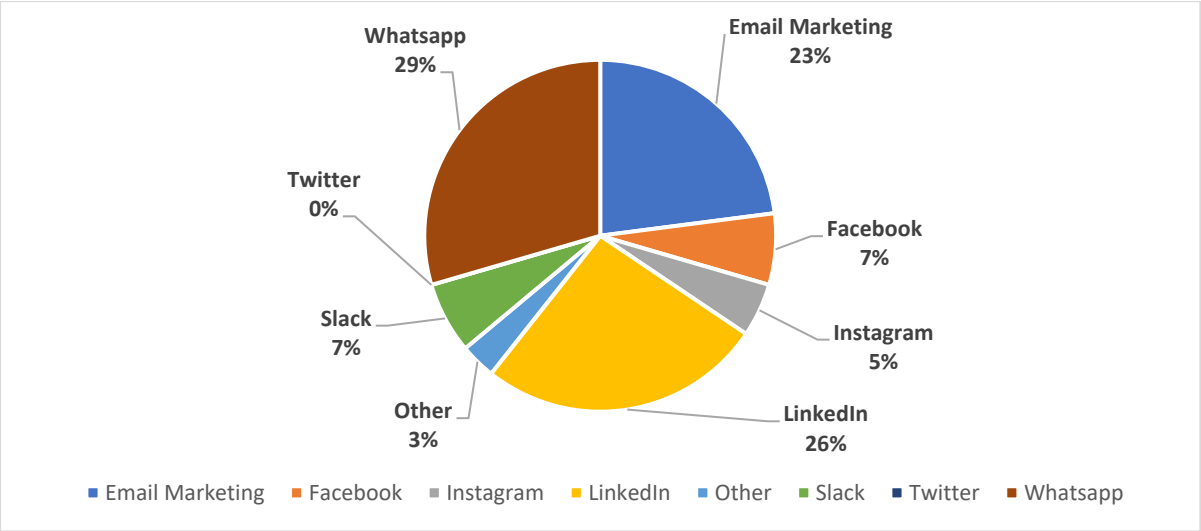

Table 2: Engaging with FM services providers on social media

When asked how FM services firms can improve their RM performance online, SCM stated that firms should increase their consistency in terms of setting up monthly and quarterly meeting, showing visibility and tracking on all key deliverables. What is also clear is that SCM do not rate webinars as a source of online communication due to challenging time commitments and content quality was inconsistent.

The research also found that having a professional produced website is of value to SCM as well as FMSP. What was clear in the interviews with FMSP was the disparity between large and small providers. The three large FMSP had inhouse marketing teams who maintained and populated information on a regular basis, the nine remaining FMSP lack this resource, outsourced designing of their websites. Once launched they are rarely updated. The challenge

these nine FMSP face is instilled confidence or trust in their business's ability to deliver the intangible service via their website.

When analysing the research survey on interactions that SCM had pre-COVID-19, it was clear to see that the favoured way to interact with FMSP was via in-person at 67.9%. Following the two years of pandemic restrictions, the influence on changes in ways of working and preferred interaction methods has significantly changed with SCM now preferring online as a way of working, moving from 40.2% usage to 59.6% post pandemic. The biggest difference was seen in a hybrid way of working increasing by 23.7% points. This is of little surprise with comments from SCM as *"teams calls saved so much wasted time"* and *"MS teams was extremely useful during COVID"* which were counterbalanced by comments like *"I prefer to do business face to face"* and *"PPM maintenance schedules worked on online basis by general repairs and maintenance required lot more face to face*."

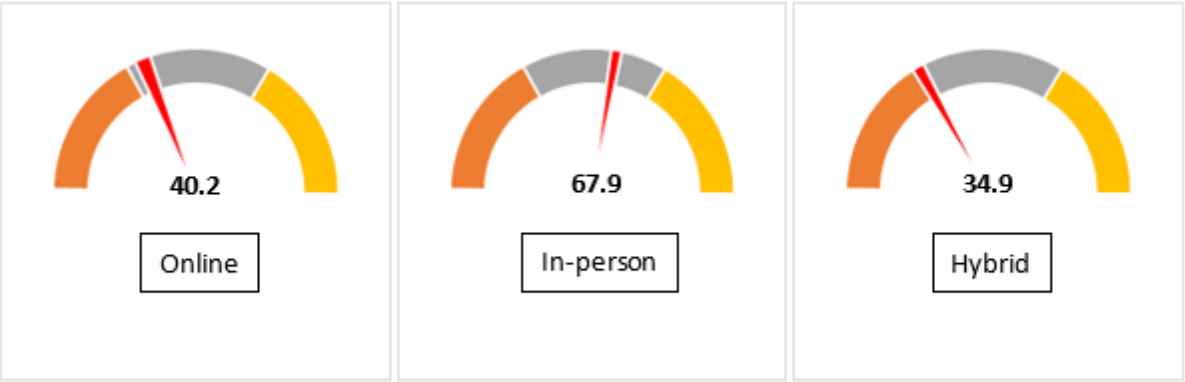

Figure 8: How did you interact with your FM Service Provider pre COVID-19? (Zero = no interaction)

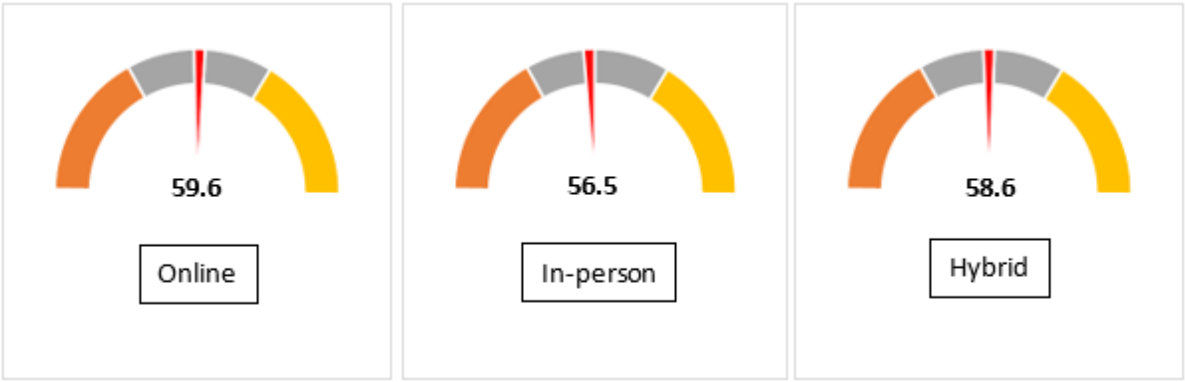

Figure 9: How do you want to interact with you FM Service Provider post COVID-19 (Zero = no interaction)

Discussion

Kozlenkova, et al., (2017) believed that online and offline relationships could be as powerful as each other. This research disagrees with this stance with SCM preferring face-to-face communication from FMSP. This is supported by issues around Steinhoff, et al., (2019) highlighted aspects of online relationships which identified issues with around the seamless of interactions online. This is not always possible as he does not consider the nature of business of FMSP such as life safety. The preference for online communication is such that the benefits are driving efficiencies in the number of interactions that FMSP can facilitate with clients. One P2 demonstrated this by saying "It's obviously a wider reach whatever sector you're in" does support his network theory.

When you consider both omnichannel and personalisation Steinhoff, et al., (2019) can be discussed by splitting interviewee into two groups, large and small FMSP. Large FMSP can deliver on both as they have the capacity of structure and expertise, but he fails to identify any link to size of company's ability to deliver either. Clearly on evaluating all the literature studied academics fail to understand that size does matter! Large FMSP utilise social media to create brand awareness however evidence of these companies demonstrates that they take a one-dimensional approach with push strategies of information which contradicts Buratti, et al., (2018) identification of two-dimensional approach of push and pull strategies.

Achen (2017) advocated marketers should prioritise social media strategies, which demonstrates a lack of either appreciation or understanding of small FMSP resources or abilities. This cohort operate in the offline environment and while adoption of Microsoft Team has got them through the pandemic period they have reverted back to offline. Confidence and lack of time are key factors in embracing online, and during the pandemic their soul focus was survival, maintaining current relationship without touting for new business. If they did gain new business, it was via word-of-mouth, their predominate marketing tool.

It is interesting that WhatsApp was perceived differently by SCM and FMSP. SCM are comfortable to use it, (29%), however it was never mentioned by FMSP interviewees, this is assumed that its less professional a platform. LinkedIn identified by FMSP as the most important social media platform for RM. When analysing content on LinkedIn the large FMSP clearly push corporate messaging with no personalisation to the local market. When

challenged during interviews they supported this analysis stating confidence or not policy as reason for this missed opportunity to resonate with their Irish marketplace. This would support Diba, et al., (2019) that marketing teams are less adept at using social media. Small FMSP do not use social media and P11 summed up the small FMSP cohort perfectly stating, *"the only form of marketing I've done is set up a website".*

Finally, the pandemic has changed ways of working. SCM have clearly indicated that a move to hybrid working is their preferred direction of relationship management. FMSP need to heed this desire and see the benefits of deeper connection with clients as indicated by Järvinen, et al., (2012). There lies the challenge for all FMSP!

Building Trust Online

Since purchasing services may be difficult and dangerous, Marquardt, et al., (2011) argue that trust is particularly crucial for FMSP. The significance of developing trusting connections with customers was a theme shared by all those interviewed.

FMSP interviewed said that developing trust in a digital setting is challenging and calls for evidence in the form of fulfilled promises. A P1 argued that trust may be achieved through the supply of proof in the form of case studies and performance metrics. A P7 gave an example of how their company gained the confidence of a customer by demonstrating its competence via client tours.

According to the findings, recommendations via word of mouth helped establish credibility online. According to P7, SCM often inquire about their company's credibility by contacting individuals within the SCM industry they know personally. This shows why reputation management is crucial for gaining people's confidence.

FMSP believe that body language and face-to-face communication are important to the formation of trust. They use visual cues to show their clients and prospects that they are listening and interested to understand them. They are skilled at reading nonverbal cues from their counterpart to deduce how that person is reacting to the words they are speaking.

Discussion

FMSP have conflicting views on how trust is built. While some maintain that trust is earned through consistent performance and fulfilling of commitments a point supported by Berry (1995), others argue that it can be gained through the careful management of first impressions such as by improving the quality of the company's website or the individual's LinkedIn profile which backs Kemp, et al., (2017) viewpoint.

FMSP interviewed emphasised the significance of being able to see and be seen by SCM. This highlights the element of a service being intangible and as Marquardt, et al., (2011) stated its "riskier". Morgan and Hunt (1999) talked about shared values, this was shared by large FMSP who listen to SCM and had the ability to flex their positions to respond to changing client values. However, there was no correlation with finding for smaller FMSP to support this as they have limited resources to adapt, or services provided are linked to legislation. Future challenges around sustainability businesses practices will be a real issue affecting trust between SCM and FMSP.

Small FMSP encountered challenges around the utilisation of technology to demonstrate trust with the majority accentuating that trust was not possible to be built online. According to Fiske, et al., (2007), people's judgments of others' warmth and competence have a role in the choices SCM make. Both FMSP and SCM agreed with Berry and Lampo (2004), that delivery quality is impossible to demonstrate online, and would challenge Payne & Frow (2017) view that online allows FMSP to convey their experience to a larger audiences, yes it does but fails to build trust. This is a critical point, Payne and Frow (2017) fail to identify that service are intangible, therefore harder stimulate trust in the FMSP presenting.

Bonding

Eight interviewed FMSP stated that bonding with clients online is difficult or unachievable. They supported this position by discussing the traditional approach, as they see it, to bonding. They talked about the provision of hospitality and entertainment such as coffee, dinner, sporting events and to other settings that are conducive to forming social

connections with clients. P9 commented "*In person it's fine, it's quite easy to bond with somebody ... you just have a generic conversation that isn't work related… let's have a coffee and just chat".* They argued that online meetings do not offer this possibility and instead move swiftly into business discussions. This issue has also been identified by a SCM responding to the client survey, who suggested FMSP *"need to be consistent in terms of setting up monthly and quarterly meetings but also need to ensure they call in when available to keep the strength in the relationship when possible."*

When discussing their approach to bonding with clients, all twelve interviewed FMSP referenced methods to connect personally or socially with clients. FMSP seek to form friendly or personal relationships with SCM, and they use tactics such as small talk, joking and the establishment of common ground to advance relationships into friendships.

The survey reveals that SCM also appreciated regular good-quality interaction with their FMSP. SCM, responding to the survey, highlighted the need for service providers to stay in touch with them. They said that *"through regular feedback,"* firms should demonstrate *"understanding the client's requirements and objectives"* and have *"regular site meetings."*

While FMSP in pure business development roles focus on social connections, business owners with some operations responsibilities showed more concern for the delivering on expectations and providing added value. Six FMSP interviewees discussed the provision of added value such as delivering on expectations consistently, solving client problems, and providing useful information. However, the SCM survey found FMSP frustrating with comments such as *"relationship continuity. Don't change account manager", "provide innovative solutions"* and *"continue to relook at their service proposition".*

SCM survey highlighted the importance of providing a customer portal to access management information. Harrison-Walker & Neeley, (2004) offered that businesses employ economic bonding tactics to attract and retain clients, explaining that this may involve finding ways to reduce the effort and cost required by clients to access information about the product or service they have purchased. The provision of a customer portal may be an effective economic bonding tactic. The SCM survey found that having access to a customer portal is important to them (73.5%), however 55% did not have access to one. Only one FMSP portals was identified from the survey. Only two interviewees actually had a customer portal.

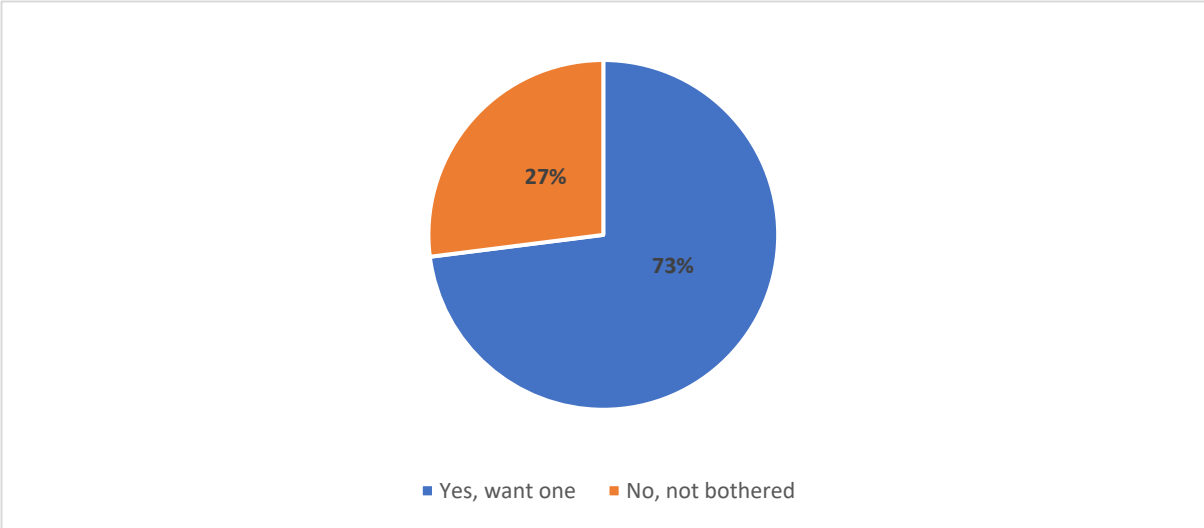

Figure 10: How important is it to you for your FM Services Provider to give you access to a customer portal?

Figure 11: Do you have access to a FM Services Providers portal?

Discussion

Bonding may have two distinct forms, as outlined by Roa and Perry (2002). They described structural bonding as the result of mutual investments in the structural and technological adaptation of two or more organisations. When entering into contractual agreements with FMSP, SCM create an economic bond and if broken due to contractual failures this terminates the econonic element of the bond. However, the structural bond, while limited due to the intangibility of services provided will remain in part due to TUPE, e.g. the employees on site for the FMSP. Turnbull and Wilson (1989) fail to identfy the difference from sector to sector and within the SCM industry relationship breakdowns, investment are

limited and cost of changing is minor. According to interviewees, smaller FMSP do not place a high value on building strong bonds with their clients with P11 declaring "*It's nice to be friends but I find that it can get in the way of professionalism… A lot of big jobs go certains ways because somebody knows somebody*". Maybe their job role doesn't lend itself to structural bonding. Also this maybe evidence of bonding on a more strategic level like shopping centre owners having preferred supplier thus influencing SCM decision making process in selction of FMSP.

Social bonding it critical within SCM industry as they rely on FMSP to bring innovation to the table. Within FM industry, SCM follow the industry rather than lead which supports Lynch and de Chernatony (2007) of the importance placed on social connection resulting in competitive advantage within the shopping centre marketplace. Nevertheless, the author disagrees with Berry and Lampo (2004) due to the inability of small FMSP to fully connect with clients on shared values and brand awareness maybe limited to servicing one particular client industry sector. However the author through their research agrees with Sheth (2017), with small FMSP focusing on emotional connection rather than finacial ones demonstrated by their flexibility in reacting to SCM desires and demands for service delivery.

Both SCM and FMSP, indicated digital platforms as less ideal for fostering emotional connections. People prefer face-to-face encounters in developing this bonding. They identify online as an inferior means of communication due to the lack of body language psychology and being one dimentional. Interviewees highlighted the difficulty of casual discussions via online channels. In accordance with the warmth and competence model proposed by Fiske, et al., (2007), this supports that interviewee's evidence of being at ease conveying their expertise but not their warmth online.

Harrison-Walker and Neeley (2004) introduce the idea of economic bonding and describe how it mixes time and monetary inputs with the aforementioned types of bonding. Customer portals, an example of economic bonding, is made available by only two FMSP, yet according to the SCM survey, this kind of availability is crucial to satisfy their desire in business. The research indentifies in all FMSP interviewed, that analysis is lacking in tranaction histories therefore resulting in lost opportunities to forecast and predict clients desires. While Catlin, et al., (2015) identifies this as an opportunity via digital technologies, its clearly not happening no matter the size of FMSP. Anderson, et al., (2017) fails to take into consideration digital

resources or ability and only discusses digital leaders in B2B arena. This indicates a wasted opportunity for FMSP in offering quality consumer portals thus developing strengthened monetary bonding but also identifies major challenges to small FMSP in achieving this SCM desired tool.

What is evident from the research is neither FMSP or SCM know the different levels of bonding described or identify with actions they take linked to a patricular bond.

The Strengths of Online Channels

Online channels boosted interviewees' efficiency and productivity with P6 stating, *"Definitely there are pluses in the sense that we don't have to travel ... you can have 10 meetings in a day"*. During the pandemic, they held meetings online, saving hours of travel time. FMSP could contact people and get replies quicker online, allowing them to discover and pursue prospects faster.

An interviewee remarked that individuals may be hesitant to commit to a face-to-face encounter but more eager to participate online. Online channels let companies distribute information in several forms. Visuals and video may boost communications. P2 said internet platforms provide for reviewable and editable material, graphics, and video. He published a video on LinkedIn, and he could edit it numerous times to meet his organisation's goals.

A FMSP identified that Microsoft Teams sessions may be recorded and shared with others who could not attend live broadening reach and distribute information directly to more individuals, reducing the *'Chinese whispers'* effect that often-caused false information to spread across teams.

Both SCM and FM service providers utilising LinkedIn as a research tool before meetings. They claimed knowing the individual's job, background, hobbies, and motivations aided relationship building creation.

Discussion

The author agrees with Kozlenkova, et al., (2017) there are substantial distinctions between online and offline connections that simply can move for one to the other. Interviewees identified significant efficiencies meeting management and client connectivity during the pandemic restriction. SCM highlight researching FMSP online before engaging in discussions with possible providers demonstrating the point Almquist (2018) identified. The pandemic forced this movement, neverthe less this triat will fall into SCM supplier research in the future.

FMSP may boost their efficiency and reach by using online platforms, according to this research. It is possible to boost productivity by reducing time-consuming commuting via online methods such as Microsoft Teams. As proficiency develops especially in the smaller cohort of FMSP, ORM will be enhanced by growing confidence in online tools, driven by digital companies improving them therefore growing mutually beneficial long term client connections backing up Boateng (2019) viewpoint. As a result, these online live meetings, they were able to contact more individuals and cultivate a greater number of connections as a result of these gains in reach and efficiency.

Interviews highlighted FMSP felt that they have more influence over their messages through online channels. When it comes to RM, the ability to alter and amend their words in real-time face-to-face conversations is not achievable. Visual aids and video may be used to enhance the impact of their messaging. The fact three of the interviewees described how they were able to personalise their approach resulting in more targeted meetings online. This implies that relationship marketers may fine-tune their messaging in order to get the best results possible. These finding support Boateng (2019) of changing client expectations and desires being talked by FMSP. This was only the largest FMSP interviewees who identified this.

The Weaknesses of Online Channels

P5 revealed *"online conversations are less personal, harder to employ personality online and customers are more likely to ignore them".* Online platforms *"has the great*

advantage of time but as I said, I'm old school and it's less personal. When you're talking about specifics onsite, you need be onsite" said P6 when interviewed.

"We had a social media strategy and I found it wasn't driving business and all it was actually doing was showing our competitors stuff we had done... so I found it to be more difficult" stated P4 demonstrating the challenges of gaining a competitive edge against other FMSP in their sphere of the sector.

Relationship marketers read their clients' body language and facial expressions to help them steer discussions carefully. Interviewees state that video conferencing facilitated them meet this need. Nevertheless, SCM and FMSP are regularly uneasy enabling their webcams during video conferencing calls, reporting some users are awkward with online technologies in general. P2 declared *"yeah there's definitely an apprehension online. I think you can get it wrong, that's just a fear factor".*

Online interactions, particularly in the lack of video, are more susceptible to misinterpretation. FMSP acknowledged that it is simple to misconstrue the requirements and desires of SCM when connecting with them via online channels. Delicate facial expressions and signals that imply a client is fascinated in a topic or approach can be effortlessly overlooked. This is particularly prone to arise when webcams are not enabled.

FMSP's endeavours can be unfavourably influenced by technology failures. Malfunctions can arise at the extremely inconvenient moments such as presenting to SCM.

FMSP say firms may easily mishandle online channels by releasing content of inferior quality or quantity. P7 revealed *"putting out content for the sake of generic content… its stale, provides a false impression of who we are".* This can give a negative impression which harms the company's capability to win desirable opportunities.

Discussion

The research highlights a number of difference between the academics and real-world operators. Small FMSP evidence disagrees with Yoon, et al., (2008) in their inability to effectively utilise skills developed offline and transfer them online. While agreeing with

Zolkiewski and Litter (2004) that online alters the fundamentals of RM online was simply a step to far for small FMSP due to resource issues, expertise, and confidence. While large FMSP made the move more efficiently, interviewees from those companies highlighted the quality of information shared, this again contradicts Anderson et al., (2017) with no personalisation of information even with marketing departments experts overseeing circulation for the businesses.

FMSP highlighted issues with competitive edge being jeopardised when posting online with competitors gaining invaluable insights that they can utilise to their benefit, which clearly supports points made by Karjaluoto, et al., (2018). This is a risk to both FMSP and SCM when posting success or new concepts online.

Clarity from the research highlights both FMSP and SCM believe online encounters are less personal. Companies are less capable of utilising social bonding strategies and influence methods to manipulate consequences online. FMSP say online platforms are restrictive, but this does not mean they cannot show personality and engage personally online. Body language and facial emotions are crucial, their signals assist to interpret their interlocutors' meaning and deploy social bonding and persuasion methods. These issues severely impact on business engaging in RM and negatively influence factors identified by Palmatier (2008). They affect the nature, composition, strength, and effectiveness of the relationship.

Not one FMSP interviewee mentioned how customers may connect with them. Website reviewed have no calls to action or are well out of date. FMSP are more likely to use a push approach than a pull strategy online. It is not apparent whether FMSP invest enough effort to attract clients, or their efforts are just ineffective in relationship building. This does highlight Harrison-Walker and Neeley (2004) point that FMSP need to get the basic right.

Differences Between Online and Offline

When using online platforms for RM, interviewees said that they are more vigilant about managing perceptions. When addressing the need for engaging with clients online, *"it is easy to be seen as a pushy salesman,"* according to P11.

To ensure they come across as knowledgeable and innovative, FMSP are pre-planning ahead prior organising for online meetings. The significance of personal appearance in online meetings was also emphasised by SCM, who indicated that FMSP should present a *"well prepared"* and *"knowledgeable about the asset,"* thus demonstrating professionalism and confidence in delivering the service the client requires.

When interacting with clients offline, interviewees engaged in *"small chat"* and develop social ties which is in contrast with their evidence regarding online. They all referred to conversations shift rapidly to business topics, meetings times condensed; therefore, they must be well-prepared. In addition, they said more dedicated effort is required to be successful online due the significate risk of negative impressions given online impacting on trustworthiness verses in-person communication.

Hospitality and entertainment formerly played a significant role in RM, as a component of their relationship marketing strategy. According to FMSP, there is no online option for this. P7 summed it saying, *"online approach is colder, customers are less forthcoming than in-person".*

FMSP are focused on exploiting existing relationships, their online interactions are with those with whom they began connections in-person.

Discussion

The research demonstrates the significance of social bonds. Social bonding allows FMSP to conduct productive meetings with less preparation than is necessary online. SCM survey indicated online social relationships are weaker than physical ones, contradicting Kozlenkova, et al., (2017) and the online environment is less suited to the utilisation of social connections. FMSP make more use of informative messaging in online encounters, exhibiting professionalism and proficiency.

There is much evidence that FMSP are still battling with how to establish and develop effective online customer connections even after two years off an inflicted new ways of working. Clearly hybrid solutions as indicated by SCM is the equilibrium required in the online/offline interaction debate. Interviews identified large FMSP have a greater ability to

utilise a hybrid strategy for RM due to the availability of expertise within their business. When small FMSP interactions went online, their attempt to embrace it yielded less results.

Online Interactions and Online Relationship Strength

FMSP have a high preference for connecting with clients face-to-face, indicating the strength of interactions to be crucial. The analysis of relevant literature revealed the increasing significance of online RM. Steinhoff & Palmatier, (2020) emphasise that completely or partly online relationships may be found anywhere.

A few instances excepted, SCM want a connection that is partly mediated via online channels. The literature revealed parallels between online and offline relationships, with Kozlenkova, et al., (2017) asserting that both types of connections may be as powerful. FMSP interviewed did not support this stance. According to interviewees, offline connections are more robust and stand the test of time especially from the smaller FMSP cohort. Opinions among SCM are divided, although a slim majority, 50%, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that online connections are as strong as in-person interactions. 43.7% of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed of the remark. 6.3% of respondents were indifferent.

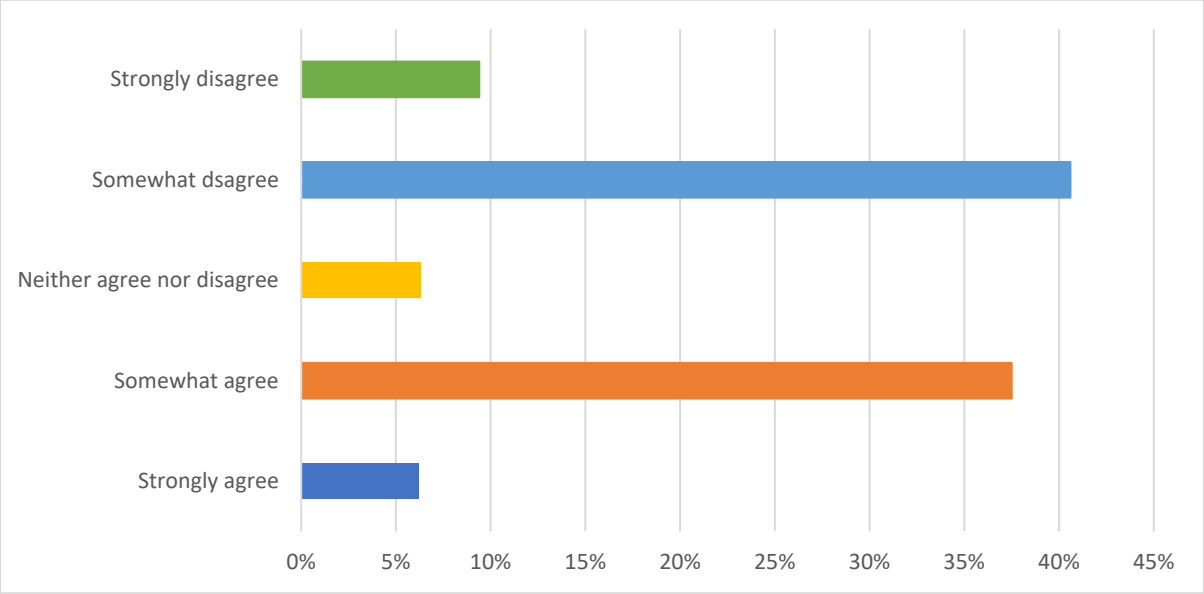

Figure 12: Can online relationships with FM service providers be as strong as relationship in-person?

Evolving the RM Approach with the Relationship

Typically, as their connections with customers progress, FMSP want to adopt a less formal approach. This is evident in the channels they utilise as the relationship becomes established and grows over time with SCM.

In the first phase of a business relationship, FMSP take precautions to prevent misunderstandings and misperceptions. SCM surveyed noted that new FMSP personnel are more prone to misinterpret instructions and desires.

Additionally, early-stage collaborations need increased attention and communication frequency from both sides. FMSP must show their commitment to the relationship and exert significant effort to acquire clients' confidence comprehending the client's requirements, desires, and personality. The majority of these interaction are in-person rather than online for reason already discussed.

As the relationship evolves, so the channels uses evolve. A FMSP owner noted that some clients become friends, even connecting outside of work environment. Consensus across FMSP was, the rate and manner in which their relationships develop differs from client to client and is heavily client dependent.

Discussion

The primary research indicates that FMSP want to cultivate amicable connections marked by informal encounters supporting the view of Sheth & Parvatiyar (1995). There is little indication, however, that companies adopt well-developed processes for reaching this objective. In contrast, the data indicates that relationships evolve naturally and differ from one connection to the next, is essential to survival, especially of small FMSP, which emphasises RM importance in a company's strategies supporting Bendapudi and Berry (1997) work in this area.

Getting the balance right across both online and offline or the development of Hybrid relationship marketing (HRM) is key in developing long-term connections and retaining

competitive advantage within the marketplace. This is argued also by Alharbi (2020) where they also link it to business success.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

FMSP relied on online platforms for relationship marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic. As Ireland recovers from the pandemic period, little is known about how FMSP will evolve as they also emerge into this new business environment.

This research aimed to understanding how this timeframe has affected relationship marketeers' ability to grasp consumers' true desires in a post pandemic world. FMSP have developed online RM strategies during the pandemic, did they work? What does the future hold for FM relationship marketing, will it become hybrid or stay entirely online or offline? The unprecedented occurrence of COVID-19 has increased the demand for contributions to this field's knowledge base. This research sought to address the following question:

Relationship Marketing within the Irish Shopping Centre Industry: Do FM Service Providers really know what the clients desire in a post pandemic business environment?

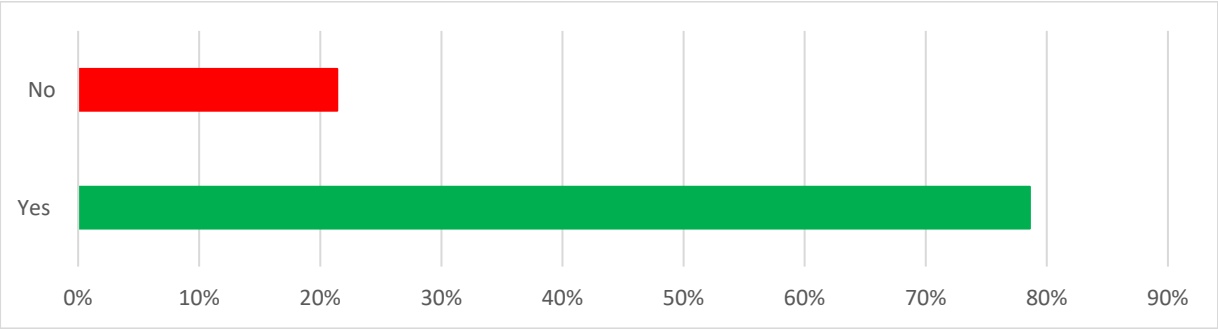

Figure 13: Do you believe that your FM Services Provider fully understand your requirements as a business?

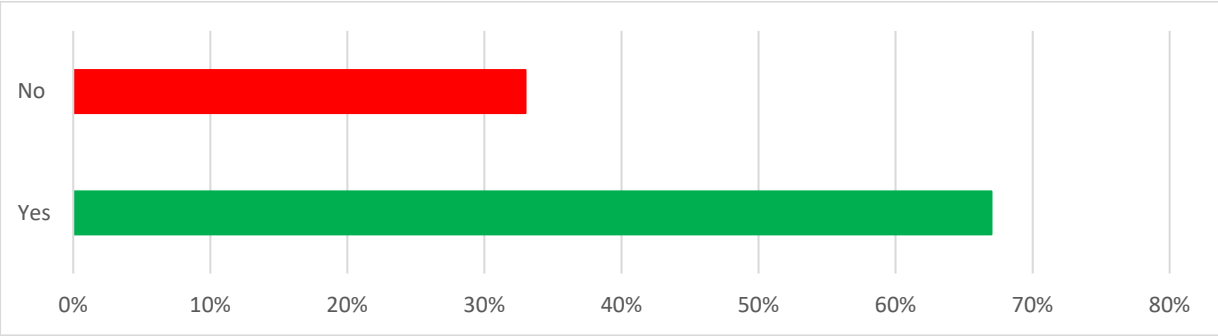

Figure 14: Do you believe that FM Service Providers really care about client relationships or is it just about the contract?

According to the primary research, FMSP hastily transferred their connections online as a consequence of the events surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic that affected the world in 2020 and 2021. FMSP have attempted to engage in RM online, majority have not fully embraced the possibilities that online channels offer and are or have returned to old participation techniques especially the smaller FMSP cohort.

Interviewees were seasoned professionals entrusted with establishing relationships on behalf of their organisations with a significant market presence within the SCM industry. All interviewed industry professionals including surveyed SCM were unfamiliar with the term "Relationship Marketing". It is never used, in other words a theoretical term. FMSP use RM methods and develop pragmatic approaches without knowing they were. They understood the relevance of the relationship-based approach and worked to create and capitalise on excellent customer relationships.

While working with a variety of stakeholder groups, formation of alliances is critical to FMSP and their client's performance. As FMSP leveraging existing contracts to maximise their relationships this will ensure that their link with the SCM is robust enough to endure the dissolution of individual connections and to increase their ability to influence choices. As seen in Fig 13 and 14, SCM do believe (78%) FMSP understand their desires with a small decrease in positivity (67%) who believe they care about the contract.

Building and Maintaining Relationships Online

The pandemic forced FMSP into new ways of doing business. While this may have organically developed over time, it occurred overnight. SCM accessibility restricted due to limitations on travel, social distancing, and work-from-home. The result, FMSP modified their strategies just to retain connections via online methods. P6 who participated in an interviews said that "*building new connections was near impossible online*". Kozlenkova, et al., (2017) talked about building relationship online can be as powerful as offline. Through the interview and survey research is this not the belief shared by any respondents. Offline will remain the strongest RM tool especially in small FMSP where they do not have the expertise or resource to exploit online. In-person relationships is critical to these small FMSP as a tool to

demonstrate an ability to deliver thus influencing word-of-mouth marketing which they survive on.

Interestingly SCM desire this in-person linkage to deliver confidence on the delivery of the intangible service but in future, require balance through creating a hybrid method utilising customer portals and Microsoft Teams meeting.

Throughout the research the identified difference in viewpoint between FMSP and SCM may be due to perceived variations in control and influence between online and in-person encounters. Online interactions may be regarded as SCM being less susceptible to persuasion and have a stronger grasp on the agenda and the FMSP less influential and vice versa for offline.

The author would agree with Steinhoff, et al., (2019) that client loyalty is exceedingly difficult to maintain online with clients having the ability to research competition / pricing. While SCM will exploit online for that very purpose, that is not their only desire, they look for partnership with FMSP for mutual benefit.

Building Trust

RM relies on the establishment of trust (Grönroos, 1994); and the formation of trust requires businesses and customers to develop confidence and dependability (Roa & Perry, 2002). Establishing online trust is virtually impossible for FMSP. While FMSP focus on their perceived credibility and online appearances, showcasing their expertise and professionalism via websites and LinkedIn profiles, trust establishment does not take place online.

The research reveals a fascinating contrast in how SCM perceive the formation of trusts. SCM recommend that the majority of their interactions with prospective new service providers should take place in-person. SCM reported utilising online as a screening method. This suggests that online platforms are a steppingstone for establishing a level of trust between FMSP and SCM. However, SCM continue to value in-person interaction to develop sufficient trust to award a contract supplying an intangible product.

No matter how impressed SCM are by case study videos and information regarding how FMSP collaborate with other clients they will reach out for peer group recommendation from trusted allies within the shopping centre sector.

Bonding

It is difficult for FMSP to form online bonds with customers. They believe that online platforms are inadequate for this objective. Social bonding is the key device in FMSP toolbox which supports Angevine, et al., (2018) observation around consumers preferring human connection, Small FMSP utilise this way of working and have already moved 90% back to in-person only meetings exploiting time for casual "chat" where they can yield undue influence and control of that environment.

The research found evidence that FMSP use economic bonding strategies. They seek innovative ways to reduce the time and money their clients must invest. The customer portal is transparently lacking with the FMSP and demanded by SCM, so delivery of this offer will augment economic bonding.

Recommendations

Instilling a HRM Culture

Following COVID-19, HRM will become a component of the new global standard. Even as FMSP and clients resume in-person encounters, the value of online interactions will continue to increase. In the post-epidemic environment, behaviours that evolved during the pandemic will continue. The balance between on and offline interaction as more FMSP work remotely is critical to a balanced lifestyle and delivery of current and new relationship resulting in achievement of meeting clients' desires.

We have learned that meetings that formerly necessitated time-consuming travel may now be done successfully online. Significant numbers of these interactions will continue to take place online in the post-pandemic period. While the larger FMSP have the technology and

expertise to delivery online they must focus on listening to clients demands around portals and deliver. Small FMSP sector faces challenges around hybrid working with no strategic HRM plan in place. The owners are single point of failure if anything happens to them. Their strategies are shaped by their experiences and with no support behind them they will continue to revert back to pre-pandemic ways of working without taking advantage of HRM.

Future Research

The area of small FMSP business interaction methods requires deeper research to develop an understanding around the psychology of “just getting by” culture that they employ just to survive and the challenge over the coming years, as property technology, or "proptech" rises in popularity. The transformation that the real estate industry will experience through the virtualisation and digitisation of physical infrastructure via the convergence of property and technologies such as the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality as they become available on the real estate market and utilised by Shopping centre owners.

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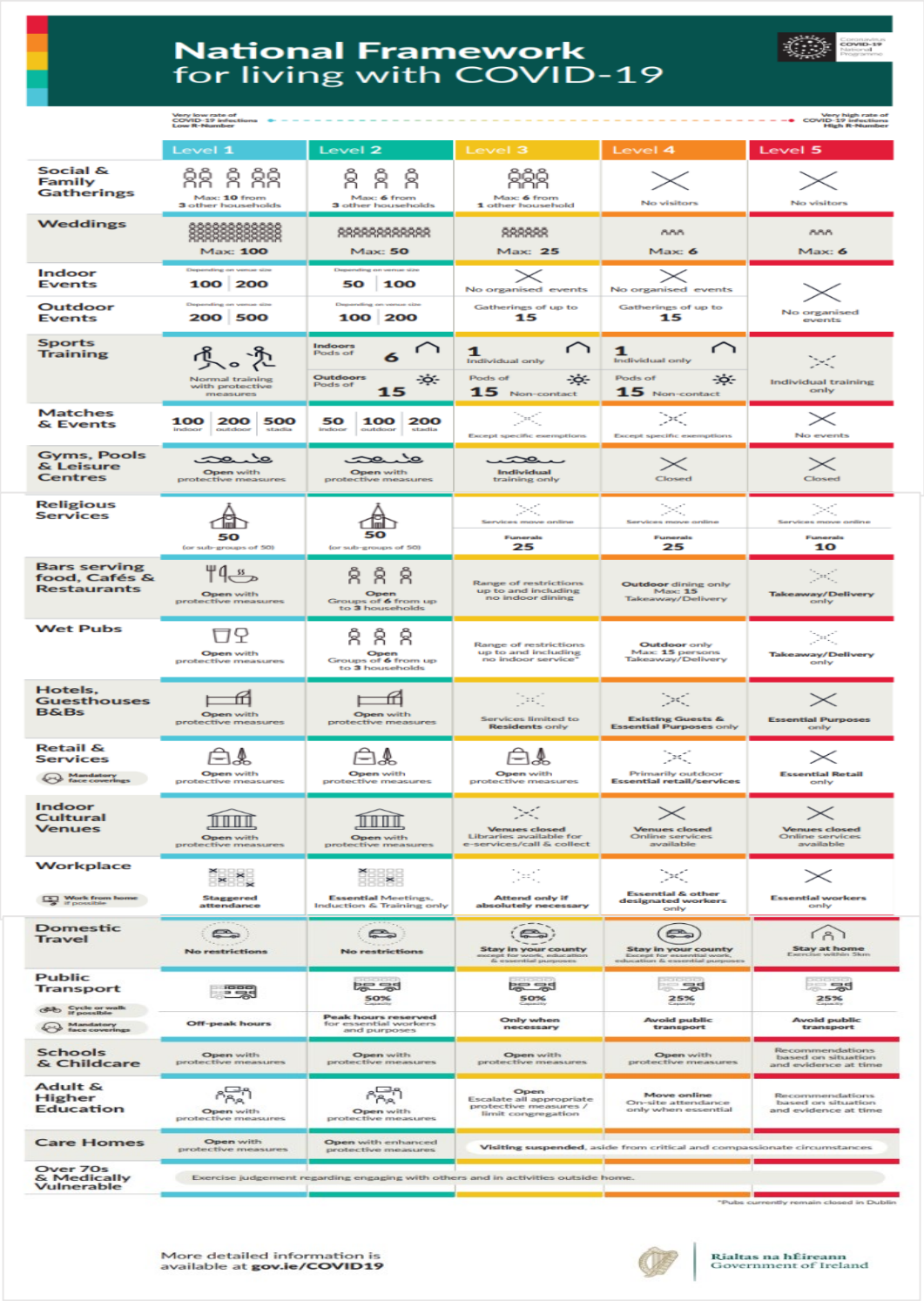
Appendix

Appendix A: National Framework for living with COVID-19



National Framework for living with COVID-19

Very low rate of COVID-19 infections Low R-Number → Very high rate of COVID-19 infections High R-Number

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Social & Family Gatherings	Max: 10 from 3 other households	Max: 6 from 3 other households	Max: 6 from 1 other household	No visitors	No visitors
Weddings	Max: 100	Max: 50	Max: 25	Max: 6	Max: 6
Indoor Events	Depending on venue size 100 | 200	Depending on venue size 50 | 100	No organised events	No organised events	No organised events
Outdoor Events	Depending on venue size 200 | 500	Depending on venue size 100 | 200	Gatherings of up to 15	Gatherings of up to 15	
Sports Training	Normal training with protective measures	Indoors Pods of 6; Outdoors Pods of 15	1 Individual only; Pods of 15 Non-contact	1 Individual only; Pods of 15 Non-contact	Individual training only
Matches & Events	100 indoor | 200 outdoor | 500 stadia	50 indoor | 100 outdoor | 200 stadia	Except specific exemptions	Except specific exemptions	No events
Gyms, Pools & Leisure Centres	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Individual training only	Closed	Closed
Religious Services	50 (or sub-groups of 50)	50 (or sub-groups of 50)	Services move online; Funerals 25	Services move online; Funerals 25	Services move online; Funerals 10
Bars serving food, Cafés & Restaurants	Open with protective measures	Open Groups of 6 from up to 3 households	Range of restrictions up to and including no indoor dining	Outdoor dining only Max: 15 Takeaway/Delivery	Takeaway/Delivery only
Wet Pubs	Open with protective measures	Open Groups of 6 from up to 3 households	Range of restrictions up to and including no indoor service*	Outdoor only Max: 15 persons Takeaway/Delivery	Takeaway/Delivery only
Hotels, Guesthouses B&Bs	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Services limited to Residents only	Existing Guests & Essential Purposes only	Essential Purposes only
Retail & Services (Mandatory face coverings)	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Primarily outdoor Essential retail/services	Essential Retail only
Indoor Cultural Venues	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Venues closed Libraries available for e-services/call & collect	Venues closed Online services available	Venues closed Online services available
Workplace (Work from home if possible)	Staggered attendance	Essential Meetings, Induction & Training only	Attend only if absolutely necessary	Essential & other designated workers only	Essential workers only
Domestic Travel	No restrictions	No restrictions	Stay in your county except for work, education & essential purposes	Stay in your county Except for essential work, education & essential purposes	Stay at home Exercise within 5km
Public Transport (Cycle or walk if possible; Mandatory face coverings)	Off-peak hours	50% Capacity; Peak hours reserved for essential workers and purposes	50% Capacity; Only when necessary	25% Capacity; Avoid public transport	25% Capacity; Avoid public transport
Schools & Childcare	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Recommendations based on situation and evidence at time
Adult & Higher Education	Open with protective measures	Open with protective measures	Open Escalate all appropriate protective measures / limit congregation	Move online On-site attendance only when essential	Recommendations based on situation and evidence at time
Care Homes	Open with protective measures	Open with enhanced protective measures	Visiting suspended, aside from critical and compassionate circumstances		
Over 70s & Medically Vulnerable	Exercise judgement regarding engaging with others and in activities outside home.				

*Pubs currently remain closed in Dublin

More detailed information is available at **gov.ie/COVID19**

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Figure 15: National Framework for living with COVID-19 (Government of Ireland, 2020)

Appendix B: Details of Research Interviews Completed

Details of In-Depth Interviews Completed						
Interviewee	**Company**	**Job Title**	**Industry Sector**	**No. of employees**	**Interview Date**	**Interview Duration**
Pilot	Aramark	General Manager	Maintenance Management	4,600	09/05/2022	42 Minutes
Interviewee	**Company**	**Job Title**	**Industry Sector**	**No. of employees**	**Interview Date**	**Interview Duration**
P1	BAM FM	Commercial Manager	Maintenance Management	100	23/06/2022	35 minutes
P2	Skidata	General Manager	Car Park Management	14	23/06/2022	59 minutes
P3	Panda	Corporate Account Manager	Waste Management	1,200	27/06/2022	37 minutes
P4	Big Picture Media	Director	Media	4	27/06/2022	44 minutes
P5	MK Illuminations	Owner	Christmas Decorations	5	28/06/2022	35 minutes
P6	O'Brien Landscaping Ltd	Managing Director	Landscaping	85	28/06/2022	29 minutes
P7	Bidvest Noonan	Client Relationship Director	Security, Cleaning, Car Park Management	9,600	30/06/2022	47 minutes
P8	EES	Managing Director	Maintenance Management	17	30/06/2022	37 minutes
P9	Clearwater	Senior Account Manager	Water Management	25	30/06/2022	33 minutes
P10	M&P Fire Solutions	Project Co-Ordinator	Sprinkler Services	17	01/07/2022	32 minutes
P11	Independent Fire Services	Managing Director	Fire Management	7	01/07/2022	39 minutes
P12	Briarpark	Director	Construction	17	02/07/2022	29 minutes

Appendix C: Details of Survey's Completed

Details of Shopping Centre Management Survey				
Open Date	**No. of Invitees**	**No. of Respondents**	**Response Rate**	**No of Questions**
27th June to 18th July	67	31	46.3%	17

Appendix D: In-depth Interview Invitations

Dear X

I am inviting you to take part in important research on Relationship Marketing within the Irish Shopping Centre industry and do FM service providers really understand what the client desires, by completing an online interview. This interview is part of the requirement for the completion of my Master of Business Administration at the National College of Ireland. You are eligible to participate if you are 18 years and over, and currently working full-time in an Irish FM service provider company.

The focus of the research is to examine what the future of relationship marketing will look like in a post pandemic world following the movement seen during the pandemic from in person to online interactions between clients and their FM service providers. This research will help understand the gap in understanding what the client wants in a hybrid working relationship.

The information you provide will be treated with strict confidentiality. The interview does not require any personal, identifiable information (i.e., your name, email address) or any information which can be traced to you and so your participation is anonymous. The data from this study will be held on a password-protected computer, to which only the lead researcher will have access. A report of the study will be produced to meet course requirements and may be submitted for publication, but the data will be analysed on an aggregate level, and no individual participants will be identifiable. Your data may be shared with other researchers if requested after publication. However, there is no identifying information in the data and your responses will be completely anonymous.

Participation in this research is voluntary. You can discontinue the interview simply by asking to stop. However, you will be unable to withdraw after completing the interview, as the data analysis process may have begun and as all responses are anonymous, we will not be able to identify your data.

The interview will take approximately 30 to 45mins to complete. At the conclusion of this study, you will receive further information to inform you about the nature of this research. Should you have any concerns or need clarification at any point, you may reach out to the lead researcher through the following emails: ihunter@pavilions.ie (Lead Researcher); Stephen.Walsh@ncirl.ie (Stephen Walsh, Project Supervisor).

By completing this interview, you are consenting to participate in this study. If you do not wish to participate, please respond as appropriate.

If you are happy to proceed with this interview for my research, can you come back to me with some dates and times for your availability.

Kind Regards

Ian Hunter | General Manager | Swords Pavilions

Appendix E: Shopping Centre Management Survey Invitation

Dear Participant,

As part of my MBA with National College of Ireland I am conducting research into what the future of Relationship Marketing between Facilities Management service providers and the Irish Shopping Centre industry will be as we move out of the disruptive period of COVID-19.

Currently, within the Shopping Centre Industry in Ireland, there has been a move, post pandemic, to ensure that their service model is one that is more future-proofed. This is coupled with the traditional model of relationship marketing transitioning from off to online. With such change, this study will examine if FM service providers really know what their Shopping Centre clients want post pandemic? Secondly, the study will examine in depth this new model of hybrid FM services (on and offline). In order to carry out this research, I am conducting a brief self-report questionnaire for which I am asking for your help. (You are eligible to participate if you are 18 years and over, and currently working full-time in an Irish Shopping Centre).

The information you provide will be treated with strict confidentiality. This survey will take approx. 10 minutes and the information you provide will be anonymous. The survey does not require any personal, identifiable information and the survey will be analysed at an aggregate. The data from this study will be held on a password-protected computer, to which only the lead researcher will have access. A report of the study will be produced to meet course requirements and may be submitted for publication. Further, your data may be shared with other researchers if requested after publication. Participation in this research is voluntary. You can discontinue the survey simply by closing your internet browser window. However, please note that you will be unable to withdraw after completing the study, as the data analysis process may have begun and as all responses are anonymous, we will not be able to identify your data. At the conclusion of this study, you will receive further information to inform you about the nature of this research.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you would like to know more about my study before deciding whether to participate, please contact me at ihunter@pavilions.ie (Lead Researcher); Stephen.Walsh@ncirl.ie (Stephen Walsh, Project Supervisor).

Thanks!

Ian Hunter

Appendix F: Original Questionnaire used in the Pilot Interview

1. What does the term 'Relationship Marketing' mean to you?

2. Who do you build relationships with?

3. (a) How has your approach to building and managing relationships changed since the pandemic began?

(b) How do you envisage you will approach this into the future?

4. (a) To what extent, if any, do you use online channels for relationship marketing?

(b) (IF ANY) what online channels do you use for this purpose?

5. How, if at all, do you build trust with customers online?

6. How, if at all, do you bond with customers online?

7. (a)In your opinion, in the context of relationship marketing, what are the strengths of online channels?

(b) How in the future do you see the utilisation of online play out?

8. In your opinion, in the context of relationship marketing, what are the weaknesses of online channels?

9. How is your approach to online relationship marketing different from offline relationship marketing in a post pandemic world?

10. How, if at all, does your approach to online relationship marketing change depending on the stage of the relationship, from relationship formation to growth?

11. What is your approach to developing new relationships in a post pandemic world – offline or online?

12. (a) If you believed offline relationship marketing was critical to success, and you had the necessary budget, what are the things you would do?

(b) If you believed online relationship marketing was critical to success, and you had the necessary budget, what are the things you would do?

Appendix G: Pilot Survey

Relationship Marketing within the Irish Shopping Centre Industry

Q1 Are you...

- ◯ Female
- ◯ Male
- ◯ Prefer not to say

Q2 What is your job title?

- ◯ Centre Manager
- ◯ Facilities Manager
- ◯ Operations Manager
- ◯ Customer Services Manager
- ◯ Marketing Manager
- ◯ Property Manager
- ◯ Other _____

Q3 What is the size of your shopping centre?

- ◯ Up to 150,000 sq. ft
- ◯ 151,000 to 200,000 sq. ft
- ◯ 201,000 to 250,000 sq. ft
- ◯ 251,000 to 300,000 sq. ft
- ◯ 301,000 to 350,000 sq. ft
- ◯ 351,000 to 400,000 sq. ft
- ◯ 401,000 to 450,000 sq. ft
- ◯ 451,000 sq. ft and above

Q4 What is your understanding of the term Relationship Marketing?

_____

Q5 How did you interact with your FM Service Provider pre COVID-19? (Zero = no interaction)

	0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
ONLINE ()	
IN PERSON ()	
HYBRID ()	

Q6 How do you want to interact with your FM Service Provider post COVID-19? (Zero = no interaction)

	0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
ONLINE ()	
IN PERSON ()	
HYBRID ()	

Q7, Can you number the following communication channels in order of preference when interacting with your FM Services Providers.

_____ Video chat (e.g., Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams) (1)
_____ Email (2)
_____ Voice Calls (3)
_____ In Person (4)
_____ Other (5)

Q8 What FM Service Provider interactions (either on or offline) worked for you during COVID-19 pandemic that you would like to retain or is missing?

. _____

Q9 Please indicate on which (if any) of the following social media channels you are happy to engage with FM Services Providers. (Please select all that apply)

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ WhatsApp
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Slack
- ☐ Email marketing
- ☐ Other _____

Q10 To what extent do you agree with the statement "that online relationships with FM Services Providers can be as strong as relationships with FM Services Providers in person"?

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Somewhat disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

Q11 By which of the following communication types, in order of preference, do you prefer to learn about FM Services Providers?

_____ Written content (1)
_____ Visuals (e.g., infographics, photos, illustrations (2)
_____ Videos (3)
_____ Webinars (4)
_____ Trade shows (5)
_____ Word of mouth (6)
_____ Other (7)

Q12 How important is it to you for your FM Services Provider to give you access to a customer portal?

	0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
Zero = not important at all ()	

Q13 Do you currently utilise an electronic customer relationship management (ECRM) tool such as a client portal, ECAT?

○ Yes - Which system? _____

○ No

Q14 Please rank in order of importance the following when selecting a FM service provider

_____ Price (1)
_____ In person meetings (2)
_____ Availability of client portal (3)
_____ Innovation (4)
_____ Partnership (5)
_____ Flexibility (6)
_____ Additional services available (7)
_____ Contract delivery (8)
_____ Invoicing requirement (9)
_____ Regular online interactions (10)

Q15 In your opinion, how can FM Services Providers improve how they build, maintain, and grow relationships with clients both in-person and online?

☐ In Person _____

☐ Online _____

Q16 In your opinion, do you believe that your FM Services Providers fully understand your requirements as a business?

○ Yes - How? _____

○ No - Why? _____

Q17, Do you believe that FM Service Providers really care about client relationships or is it just about the contract?

○ Yes

○ No