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Article

Which relational benefits really matter to multi-channel agencies?

Chang-Ju Lee [1], Sae-Mi Lee [2], Yong-Ki Lee [3]*

[1] Baegnyeonga F&C Co., Ltd, Seoul 03404, Korea; 68lcj@hanmail.net
[2] School of Business, Busan National University, Busan 46241, Korea; sm.lee@pusan.ac.kr
[3] School of Business, Sejong University, Seoul 05000, Korea
* Correspondence: yongki2@sejong.ac.kr; Tel.: +82-2-3408-3158

1. Introduction

A multi-channel agency is not an exclusive dealer controlled and authorized by a single food manufacturer, but an open dealer that freely sells food produced by multiple food manufacturers. Multi-channel agencies play a role in distributing multi-brands, not single brand. Multi-channel agencies that account for more than 90% of B2B food distribution channels in Korea are becoming specialized and large, so competition between manufactures supplying products or suppliers is intensifying to maintain superior business relations with B2B food multi-channel agencies. In the food industry, the relationship between food manufacturer and multi-channel agency can be regarded as an inter-firm relationship based on dyadic exchanges. This indicates that the motivation to maintain an exchange between the two is determined by relational benefits (RBs) gained by relationship partners [1]. RBs mean incentives provided by food manufacturers to dealers. Social exchange theory (SET) explains that RBs are a key factor in explaining relationship marketing [2] and can be crucial role in developing and advancing supplier-buyer relationship.

From a supplier's point of view, the most important outcome of providing RBs is maximization of buyer commitment, which in turn lead to long-term orientation. Numerous studies show that RBs can be drivers in maximizing relationship commitment in the context of B2B (e.g., Chou and Chen [3]; Li et al. [4]) and B2C (e.g., Lee, Choi, Kim and Hyun [2]; Yang et al. [5]). Commitment explains why exchange partners maintain a lasting relationship with each other [6] and is divided into affective and calculative commitment. The former is a commitment that focuses on the emotional attachments of others, organizations, and individuals, and the latter is a commitment that maintains a lasting relationship with the exchange partner in consideration of damages at the end of the relationship [7]. Therefore, research on the relationship between affective and calculative commitment and long-term orientation is expected to explain whether the B2B relationship will remain stable or not.

The significance of this study is as follows. First, in the food distribution market in Korea, manufacturing-based companies are expanding their participation in the market through forward integrated vertical integration, while consignment catering-based companies are expanding the market through backward integrated vertical integration. Large retailers are also participating as food marts, and existing small wholesalers and retailers are responding through alliance, specialization, and large-scale. In Korea, the foodservice and catering channel accounts for 42.2 trillion won, and the proportion in the B2B market is 63.8%. Unlike the existing B2B studies, this study explores the relationship between manufacturers and multi-channel agencies in the food distribution industry. This attempt of this study responds to the call that the effects of RBs need to be studied in various settings [2]. Second, this study contributes to the B2B literature by incorporating various areas of study and integrating SET, the RBs paradigm, and commitment-long-term orientation linkage. While RBs have been shown to end within food manufactures-multi-channel agencies relationship, this important stream of RBs approach-based literature has rarely been explored within B2B marketing discipline. Research on RBs will provide insights into which RBs are important for relational continuity [8] between multi-channel agencies and food manufactures. Lastly, this study concerns the treatment of affective and calculative commitment as mediators in the relationship

between RBs and long-term orientation. In this study, the mediating effect is a valuable step forward in testing the effects of RBs on affective and calculative commitment. Researchers believe that RBs, perceived by multi-channel agencies, will strengthen their beliefs about inter-firm relationship, build affective and calculative commitment, and lead to long-term orientation.

Our attempt in this research is to provide guidelines on how to establish a sustainable long-term food manufactures-multi-channel agencies relationship. The framework of RBs-affective and calculative commitment- long-term orientation explains that RBs are an important factor adding value to the partnership, and as a result, RBs are an important driver for reducing calculative commitment and enhancing affective commitment and long-term orientation. However, research on the structural relationship between RBs, affective and calculative commitment, and long-term orientation is not sufficient in the context of food manufactures-multi-channel agencies.

2.1. Social exchange theory

SET explains that the maintenance or dependence of the relationship between two or more people is achieved by the economic or social consequences (or rewards, benefits) they provide to each other [9]. SET is suitable to be applied in B2B situations where it is difficult to achieve exclusive or comprehensive contracts because the exchange process between companies is dominated by a non-contract mechanism [10]. Recent research has generalized SET logic to an exchange relationship between companies and groups (e.g., Voss, Tanner Emily, Mohan, Lee and Kim [11]; Chang et al. [12]) rather than an exchange relationship between people [13]. While differing views exist regarding subtleties of SET, most agree on the simple premise that when a choice is presented, people undergo a subjective cost and benefit analysis and weigh alternatives before making a decision [14].

Applying this SET logic to the relationship between a food manufacturing company and a multi-channel agency in the B2B food distribution industry, which is the subject of this study, the food manufacturing company provides RBs such as core benefits, operating benefits, social benefits, and special treatment benefits to the multi-channel agencies. When the RBs provided are effective against transaction costs, the multi-channel agencies are committed (calculative and affective) to the food manufacturing company and rewards such as continuous transactions, recommendations, and increase in sales as compensation. In this case, if the compensation of the multi-channel agencies is large compared to the transaction cost of the food manufacturing company, continuous social exchange action will take place through interaction.

2.2. Relational benefits (RBs)

RBs refer to the benefits that consumers receive as a result of long-term relationships from service providers [15-17]. Gwinner, Gremler and Bitner [16] classified RBs into confidence benefits (psychological), social benefits, and special treatment benefits (economic, customization). Confidence benefits based on psychological benefits mean that customers know what to expect at the service encounter and are aware of anxiety reduction and comfort. The social benefits are friendships between an employee and an emotional part of the customer, which is gained by the long-term relationship between the service company and the customer. Special treatment benefits are customer-centered and relationship marketing concepts that can be perceived by buyers, such as price discounts, quick service, or personalized service [18]. This means benefit offerings (e.g., discounts, services) that are not provided to irregular buyers [19]. Ulaga [20] presented RBs as process benefits, operational benefits, and core benefits from a different perspective in manufacture industry context. Yang, Lee and Han [21] defined core benefits, procedural benefits, and operating benefits as follows in a study on the Korean foodservice franchisees' perceived RBs; (1) the core benefits consist of product quality which means competitiveness, reliability, and consistency, and logistics quality that includes punctuality, flexibility, and accuracy, (2) process benefits include service support, including product-related support and customer information support, and interpersonal relationships which mean communication and problem solving, (3) operational benefits consist of know-how including benefits related to increasing market knowledge and innovation, and new product development, and timeliness which means benefits for design, prototype development, testing and verification.

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While previous studies have verified the effect of different dimensions of RBs examined in this study, we redefined the dimensions of relationship benefits as core benefits, operational benefits, special treatment benefits, and social benefits. In the context of B2B transactions, RBs are known to have the effect of integrating the supply chain through close interaction, mutual commitment, and desirable operational performance among exchange partners [4]. Research on RBs in B2B relationship has only recently been published, and few studies have considered several dimensions of RBs [22]. In the articles on the existing B2B relationship benefits, the dimensions of relationship benefits were presented and studied as follows. Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner and Gremler [8] and Kinard and Capella [23] classified relationship benefits into social benefits, confidence benefits, and special treatment benefits in the service industry. Sweeney and Webb [24] presented RBs by classifying them into functional benefits, social benefits, and psychological benefits that encompass economic and non-economic benefits based on the social exchange theory. Mukhopadhyay and Kekre [25] investigated the relationship benefits of EDI as strategic and operational benefits from the supplier's perspective in the B2B procurement process. Ulaga and Eggert [26] argued that there are five types of relationship benefits: product benefits, service benefits, know-how benefits, time-to-market benefits, and social benefits. Gil-Saura, Ruiz-Molina, Berenguer-Contrí and Seric [22] investigated the effects of special treatment and social benefits on trust and commitment in B2B retailing. Therefore, in this study, based on such previous studies, four dimensions of relational benefit (core, operational, special treatment, and social) were selected and studied appropriately in the B2B context.

The core benefit consists of product quality and logistics quality, and product quality is the product's competitiveness, reliability and consistency, and means the reliable and stable supply of competitive products. Logistics quality is punctuality, flexibility, and accuracy, and it means supplying accurately at a fixed time and responding flexibly to customer needs. It is the most important benefit in B2C transactions [20, 21] , and plays an important role in short-term performance.

Operational benefits consist of know-how and timeliness. Know-how is the ability to respond to the market, product development and innovation, and it connotes possessing know-how related to product improvement and new product development, and product sales plans. Timeliness includes product response, service time reduction, and rapid sales promotion response, and it means providing support to quickly supply products and promote sales in response to the market in a timely manner [20, 21].

Social benefits refer to the recognition of the emotional relationship that the buyer feels familiar with the salesperson through friendship between the buyer and the salesperson, and the social benefits should be studied as an antecedent variable of other relationship benefits [16]. In a B2B situation, a salesperson represents the company and provides various information through social interaction with the dealership owner. At this time, through the process of explaining the benefits such as core benefits and special treatment benefits, customers who have rich experience in social interaction and service become satisfied, trusted, and committed. This is because customers trust benefits and understand the importance of benefits and the service benefits attributes [27].

Special treatment benefits, which take the form of relational consumers receiving price breaks, faster service, or individualized additional services. These RBs are benefits that exist above and beyond the core service provided [16]. Special treatment benefit is a special benefit received by consumers in the form of extra attention or personal recognition, and specialized services that are not available to other customers [16]. Crosby, Evans and Cowles [28] proposed upgrade of core services while Berry [29] proposed an additional benefit as a way to provide benefits to customer's special treatment as a form of appreciation to consumers.

2.3 Affective and calculative commitment

Relationship commitment plays a vital role for the exchange partners to maintain a lasting relationship with each other, and appears as a sense of pride in affiliation, expectation for long-term success, and friendliness to suppliers Morgan and Hunt [6]. Commitment can be expressed as emotional attachment or cognitive calculation [30, 31].

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Geyskens, Steenkamp, Scheer and Kumar [30] studied the relationship between suppliers and buyers by dividing them into two types: affective commitment and calculative commitment. Gruen, Summers and Acito [7] focused on the emotional attachment of others, organizations, and individuals in relational commitment, and classified relationship commitment into affective commitment related to pleasure and happiness, and calculative commitment that considers personal benefits and losses at the end of the relationship. Therefore, in this study, relationship commitment is divided into two dimensions of calculative commitment and affective commitment.

Affective commitment is not only an individual's participation in an organization, but also an emotional combination with pleasure as a member of the organization and psychological identification of the organization [32, 33]. Affective commitment is defined as a psychological attachment to recognize how much one likes an object [7, 34]. In addition, affective commitment also refers to a state of mind that wants to maintain a family-like relationship with suppliers and buyers, recognizing and enjoying their attachment, belonging and loyalty [30].

Calculative commitment is a form of commitment based on the perceived cost of economic and social status that occurs when a person exits the organization according to his/her interests in an exchange relationship [7]. Allen and Meyer [34] and Gruen, Summers and Acito [7] defined calculative commitment as a mental state in which an individual perceives the absence of an appropriate alternative psychologically related. Bansal, Irving and Taylor [35] and Jones, Comfort and Hillier [36] argue that calculative commitment occurs when customers feel the need to maintain a continuing relationship with a service provider.

2.4. Long-term orientation

Studies of long-term buyer-provider relationships describes several structural relationships between buyers and supplier, including continuity, commitment, and long-term orientation of relationships [37-40]. In a relationship based on long-term orientation, short-term gains can be sacrificed because the firm seeks the long-term benefits to both parties [41]. Given the role of relationship quality, the focus of long-term orientation is for buyers to perceive the interdependence of outcomes for buyers and suppliers [42], because long-term orientation affects both non-financial and financial performance.

3. Methodology

3.1. Hypotheses development

3.1.1. Relationship between RBs and calculative commitment

These benefits are generally defined as functional benefits because they reflect the functional competitiveness of a specific company [43]. These functional benefits influence the commitment to the relationship as the relationship of the company ultimately pursues a profit goal [44]. Bolton, Smith and Wagner [45] argued that economic investment affects the evaluation of the organizational level rather than the individual level. In addition, the acquisition of functional interests, including strategic interests, is important for companies [46-49]. Calculative commitment is generated by cool-headed calculations based on economic benefits and switching costs [8]. In online community-related research, consumers who visit the community for the purpose of obtaining useful information (functional benefits) have been shown to engage in calculative commitment unless their visits provide functional benefits and switching to other communities provides additional benefits [50]. Han, Kwortnik Jr and Wang [51] indicated that commercial friendships like social benefits in the hospital and banking industries had a positive effect on calculative commitment, a concept focused on cost and benefit. Continuance commitment is very similar to calculative commitment in terms of how easy it is to leave an organization for other work [52]. Essentially, loyalty commitment is like affective commitment, and continuance commitment is like calculative commitment [53]. Continuance commitment arises from concerns about the reduction in investment or the customer's intention to

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obtain special treatment in the relationship and to maintain the current level of compensation [54], and is related to switching costs [35]. Studies related to loyalty rewards programs have identified a positive relationship between economic reward and continuance commitment [55].

Based on the above arguments, we hypothesize as follows.

H1: Core benefits positively affect calculative commitment.
H2: Operational benefits positively affect calculative commitment.
H3: Social benefits positively affect calculative commitment.
H4: Special treatment benefits positively affect calculative commitment.

3.1.2. Relationship between RBs and affective commitment

The perceived consumer benefit from the relationship with the company is a necessary condition for relationship commitment [56]. As consumers enjoy confidence benefits, social benefits, and special treatment benefits, their commitment to relationships increases [57]. Wu, Zhou and Wu [53] verified the positive relationship between perceived relationship benefits and relationship commitment. In addition, a positive relationship between social benefits and consumer commitment was proved [8, 58, 59]. The social benefits provided by established service relationships strengthen social solidarity with customers and service providers and improve service experiences [60]. Social solidarity between customers and service providers increases the customer's dependence on service providers and induces a deep commitment to the company [29, 59, 61]. Meanwhile, Cheung and Lee [62] found that social benefits such as social enhancement value and interpersonal interconnectivity value influence affective commitment in online community context. Therefore, RBs attract the benefited customer to be affectively committed the service company and maintain a relationship with that company [63]. When service providers provide special treatment benefits, affective and cognitive barriers to switch are increased [64], resulting in increased commitment to service providers [65]. Because customers want to continue to receive special offers, loyalty to service providers increases and they do not switch to other companies. Thus, the increase in the special treatment benefits that customers receive increases their commitment to relationship with service providers [3].

Based on the above arguments, we hypothesize as follows.

H5: Core benefits positively affect affective commitment.
H6: Operational positively affect affective commitment.
H7: Social benefits positively affect affective commitment.
H8: Special treatment benefits positively effects affective commitment.

3.1.3. Relationship between calculative and affective commitment

According to the traditional general causal order of cognitive-affective-conative, calculative commitment is more cognitive, so it can be seen that calculative commitment precedes affective commitment [66]. Wetzels, De Ruyter and Van Birgelen [31] viewed calculative commitment as emphasizing the cognitive evaluation aspect of the value of the continued relationship with the organization. Bolton, Lemon and Verhoef [67] argued that the calculative commitment from economic motives can be more important than affective commitment because buyers consider the cost and benefits of services in a transactional relationship. The reason is that calculatedly committed buyers have affective commitment to suppliers to reduce the cognitive dissonance they experience when their goal fulfillment is not achieved in their relationship with suppliers ([68, 69]). Another reason is that the initial purpose of the transaction between multi-channel agencies and manufacturers was to generate economic profit, but as the duration of the transaction increases, trust between the manufacturer and the salesperson is formed, resulting in affective commitment. Davis-Sramek, Droge, Mentzer and Myers [66] empirically identified that calculative commitment has a significant effect on affective commitment in a study related to commitment between manufacturers and retailers.

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Based on the above arguments, we hypothesize as follows.

H9: Calculative commitment positively effects affective commitment.

3.1.4. Relationship between commitment and long-term orientation

Commitment can be seen as an antecedent for long-term customer behavior [70]. In addition, commitment appears as a constant desire to maintain a relationship, reflect an attitude, and pursue the long-term orientation of the relationship [6, 71]. Commitment causes specific behaviors for organizational member's long-term orientation [6, 71, 72] through attitudes, beliefs and commitment to continuing relationships [71]. In addition, the organization tries to maintain a lasting relationship with the organization when affective commitment occurs. The calculative commitment of the distribution member can be maintained during the payback period of the initial investment [73, 74]. In relationship marketing research, relationship commitment is considered a very important factor for the success of long-term relationships and long-term orientation [30, 75, 76]. In order to strengthen buyers' commitment in the relationship, suppliers must try to maintain the relationship by creating and providing the value they need to enable buyers to interact with the supplier [77]. Commitment means a temporal dimension, that is, a long-term concept, and is considered one of the key factors in building and maintaining long-term relationships [30, 75, 78].

Based on the above arguments, we hypothesize as follows.

H10: Calculative commitment positively affects long-term orientation.

H11: Affective commitment positively affects long-term orientation

3.2. Method

3.2.1. Sample and data collection

The processed food wholesale business (PFWB) is subdivided into 7 wholesale businesses (1) meat, 2) seafood, 3) bread/snacks/sugar/chocolate, 4) dairy products, animal, and vegetable oils, 5) coffee and tea, 6) seasonings, and 7) other processed food wholesalers), and consists of wholesale distribution companies that supply food materials to the restaurants, supermarkets, and food service. The type of PFWB is divided into agencies (exclusive, multi-channel (or complex)) and product supply stores (transactions without signing an agency contract). Most of them are operated in the form of multi-channel agencies, except for exclusive agencies in the B2C route of some food large firms targeting individual supermarkets.

The seasoning wholesale business is a general food wholesaler, mainly in the form of a multi-channel agencies that deals with foodstuff products of Daesang, CJ, Ottogi, and Dongwon companies, and deals with products of meat processing and fishery processing companies in addition to large-scale products. Therefore, the seasoning wholesale business with many general food complex agencies is a suitable context to achieve the purpose of this study. The processed food wholesale business (22,351, as of 2018), the seasoning wholesale business (general food handling) (2,322) accounts for 10.4% of the PFWB. 300 multi-channel agencies agreed to the survey, of which 230 dealers (CEO owners, professional managers, and working-level managers) responded. Out of 230 respondents, 22 who responded incompletely were excluded, and a total of 208 were used for the analysis.

Table 1 shows the general characteristics about the sample used in this study. More than half of the respondents were males (76.0%). In terms of age, 43.8% of the respondents were the age groups of 40-49, followed by 50 years old (23.1%) and 30-39 years old (23.1%), respectively. Most respondents were educated with 2 year- (36.5%) and 4 year- (36.1%) degree. 38.9% of the respondents were CEO owners, followed by middle-level managers (32.7%), and professional managers (19.7%). As for distribution channels, 51.4% were non-enterprise distribution channels, followed by school foodservice distribution channels (42.8%). In terms of the relationship duration with the current headquarters, 40.4% were 5-〈10 years, followed by 10> (26.9%), and 3-〈5 years (20.2%). As for the

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number of employees, 31.7% had 4 or less, followed by 5-9 (31.3%) and 10-19 (22.6%). Based on Lee et al.'s [79] study, we tested the moderating effect of duration of the relationship. However, we could not find that it plays a moderating role in the relationship between benefits, commitment, and long-term orientation.

Table 1. Demographic profiles (n = 208)

Category		n	%
Gender	Male	158	76.0
	Female	42	20.2
	Missing	8	3.8
Age	Below 29	9	4.3
	30-39	48	23.1
	40-49	91	43.8
	50 and above	48	23.1
	Missing	12	5.8
Education	High school	54	26.0
	2 year-college	76	36.5
	Bachelor's degree	75	36.1
	Missing	3	1.4
Position	CEO owners	81	38.9
	Professional managers	41	19.7
	Executive-level managers	18	8.7
	Middle-level managers	68	32.7
Distribution channel	Non-enterprise foodservice	107	51.4
	Self-operated channel	89	42.8
	Supermarkets	1	.5
	Traditional markets	4	1.9
	Missing	7	3.4
Duration of relationship (year)	Below 1	3	1.4
	1-〈3	22	10.6
	3-〈5	42	20.2
	5-〈10	84	40.4
	10 and above	56	26.9
	Missing	1	.5
Number of employees	Below 4	66	31.7
	5-9	65	31.3
	10-19	47	22.6
	20-49	9	4.3
	50 and above	3	1.4
	Missing	18	8.7
Average monthly sales	Below 10	6	2.9

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(Million won)	10-<50	20	9.6
	50-<100	10	4.8
	100-<500	101	48.6
	500 and above	52	25.0
	Missing	19	9.1

3.2.2. Measures

All the items measured in this study were measured on a seven-point scale of "1 = Strongly Disagree", "7 = Strongly Agree". RBs were classified into four subdimensions such as core benefits (product quality, product quality), operational benefits (know-how, timeliness), social benefits (interpersonal relationships), and special treatment benefits and measured by adopting and modifying items in previous studies [21, 80, 81]. Commitment was classified into two subdimensions, such as calculative and affective commitment and measured by adopting and modifying items in previous studies [34, 82]. Long-term orientation was defined as the level of expecting to maintain a long-term relationship with the headquarters and continue business and measured by adopting and modifying items of Ganesan's [42] study.

4. Results

4.1. Exploratory factor analysis and reliability test

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with a varimax rotation procedure and reliability test were conducted to verify the validity and reliability of the measurement items for the variables used in this study. To determine the suitability of factor analysis, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used. As a result, the KMO value was 0.962, which was higher than 0.5. Bartlett's test of sphericity yielded a significant value ($p = 0.000$). The χ^2 value of Bartlett's test of sphericity was 8,446.726 and the degree of freedom is 861, which was acceptable. The cumulative proportion of the total variance explained was 75.833, representing 75.8% explanatory power for the entire model. As shown in Table 2, the factor loadings of the 42 items were 0.495~0.782, which were found to satisfy the criteria of 0.4 or above, and finally no items were removed. In addition, the Eigen values, the sum of the squares of the factor loading values, were greater than 1.0. Cronbach's alpha value also exceeded the threshold of 0.7 or more, from 0.886 to 0.940.

Table 2. Result of EFA and CFA.

Constructs and Items	Factor Loadings	Eigen Value	Explained Variance (%)	α	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Core benefits		6.649	15.831	0.955		0.906	0.934	0.780
ReBfC1	0.752				0.894			
ReBfC2	0.723				-*			
ReBfC3	0.715				-*			
ReBfC4	0.712				-*			
ReBfC5	0.759				0.867			
ReBfP1	0.538				-*			
ReBfP2	0.495				-*			

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ReBfP3	0.503				-*			
ReBfP4	0.585				0.865			
ReBfP5	0.602				0.907			
ReBfP6	0.515							
Operational benefits		5.691	13.550	0.925		0.902	0.931	0.772
ReBfT1	0.567				0.870			
ReBfT2	0.705				-*			
ReBfT3	0.519				-*			
ReBfK3	0.623				0.886			
ReBfK4	0.578				0.877			
ReBfK5	0.604				0.881			
Special benefits		4.215	10.035	0.916		0.916	0.941	0.799
ReBfSB1	0.659				0.883			
ReBfSB2	0.731				0.878			
ReBfSB3	0.764				0.913			
ReBfSB4	0.719				0.902			
Social benefits		4.044	9.628	0.941		0.935	0.949	0.755
ReBfSo1	0.667				0.895			
ReBfSo2	0.661				-*			
ReBfSo3	0.717				0.838			
ReBfSo4	0.717				0.837			
ReBfSo5	0.679				0.884			
ReBfSo6	0.675				0.865			
ReBfSo7	0.643				0.891			
Calculative commitment		3.859	9.187	0.886		0.886	0.916	0.687
CalComit1	0.469				0.766			
CalComit2	0.672				0.876			
CalComit3	0.735				0.867			
CalComit4	0.782				0.803			
CalComit5	0.820				0.829			
Affective commitment		3.838	9.138	0.932		0.932	0.952	0.831
AffComit1	0.737				0.912			
AffComit2	0.748				0.923			
AffComit3	0.752				0.914			
AffComit4	0.754				0.897			
AffComit5	- #							
Long-term orientation		3.555	8.464	0.939		0.940	0.954	0.807
LongO1	0.665				0.908			
LongO2	0.709				0.894			
LongO3	0.705				0.901			
LongO4	0.727				0.906			
LongO5	0.630				0.881			

Items were deleted during the EFA..

* Items was deleted during the CFA.

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4.2. Measurement model

Overall measurement quality was evaluated using measurement model with SmartPLS 3.3.3 [83-86]. The measurement model results show that nine items that hinder convergent and discriminant validity were deleted (Table 2). The values of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were larger than 0.7, indicating high levels of internal consistency were established. And the values of average variance extracted (AVE) were larger than 0.5, so convergent validity was confirmed. Also, the square root of each construct's AVE is higher than correlation values among constructs and the value of the HTMT was under 0.9, indicating that discriminant validity was well established [85] (see Table 3 and Table 4).

In addition, the common method bias (CMB) was tested using the values of VIF (variance inflation factor) (3.3 <). The VIF ranged from 1.671 to 3.215, which is below the cut-off threshold of 3.3 [87], indicating CMB seems not to be problematic.

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Core benefits	**0.855**						
2. Operational benefits	0.756	**0.878**					
3. Special benefits	0.667	0.647	**0.894**				
4. Social benefits	0.760	0.763	0.674	**0.869**			
5. Calculative commitment	0.589	0.556	0.576	0.592	**0.829**		
6. Affective commitment	0.620	0.698	0.644	0.609	0.634	**0.912**	
7. Long-term orientation	0.728	0.726	0.666	0.708	0.662	0.636	**0.898**
Mean	4.713	4.575	4.550	4.739	4.604	4.372	4.767
SD	0.957	0.916	1.083	0.938	0.992	1.089	1.018

All coefficients are significant at the level of p = 0.01.

Bold numbers indicate the square root of AVE. Off-diagonal elements are the correlations among constructs. For discriminant validity, diagonal elements should be larger than off-diagonal elements.

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Core benefits							
2. Operational benefits	0.820						
3. Special benefits	0.717	0.710					
4. Social benefits	0.808	0.827	0.726				
5. Calculative commitment	0.640	0.617	0.633	0.645			
6. Affective commitment	0.660	0.758	0.693	0.649	0.695		
7. Long-term orientation	0.772	0.786	0.717	0.754	0.719	0.677	

4.3. Structural model

For evaluating the research model fit, SmartPLS 3.3.3 which is the most extensive software for employing PLS (partial least square)-SEM (Structural equation modeling) analyses [88] was used. PLS method is an analysis method suitable for research to maximize explanatory power of endogenous variables or to minimize structural errors [89]. The research model was evaluated as follows. First, the mean of VIF value is used as an index to diagnose multicollinearity, and if the mean

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of VIF (variance inflation factor) value is considerably larger than 1, the model has multicollinearity problem [90]. The VIF value of this model is 1.675 to 3.215, indicating that the multicollinearity problem was not problem.

To test the model fit for the PLS structural equation, cross-validated redundancy measure (Q^2), R-squared (R^2), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) were used (see Table 5 and Figure 1). First, Stone [91] and Geisser's [92] Q^2 assessing predictive relevance of the model was used. When Q^2 is a positive value, the structural model is evaluated as appropriate. In this study, as shown in Table V, the Q^2 of the dependent variables has a positive value, so the model fit is found to be adequate. Then, the model fit was evaluated using the R^2 (coefficient of determination) value which is also a crucial criterion for assessing the PLS-SEM model. The effect size of the R^2 value is classified into high (0.67), medium (0.33), and low (0.19) [93]. In this study, each of R^2 values for calculative and affective commitment, and long-term orientation was 0.431, 0.601, and 0.517, which was acceptable. Finally, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) value was used in evaluating the overall model fit. The SRMR value (0.086) is less than 0.1, indicating a good fit.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

4.4. Test of hypotheses

First, H1 and H2 examine the effect of core benefits on calculative commitment and affective commitment. As shown in Table 5, the finding shows that core benefits have a significant effect on calculative commitment ($\beta = 0.226$, t-value = 2.224, $p < 0.05$), but has no significant effect on affective commitment ($\beta = -0.001$, t-value = 0.011, n.s.). Thus, H1 was supported, but H2 was not. Second, H3 and H4 examine the impact of operational benefits on calculative commitment and affective commitment. The results indicate that operational benefits have no significant effect on calculative commitment ($\beta = 0.089$, t-value = 0.801, n.s.), and have a significant effect on affective commitment ($\beta = 0.410$, t-value = 5.443, $p < 0.01$), only supporting H4. Third, special treatment benefits have a significant positive effect on both calculative commitment ($\beta = 0.243$, t-value = 2.957, $p < 0.01$) and affective commitment ($\beta = 0.234$, t-value = 3.074, $p < 0.01$), supporting H5 and H6. Fourth, Social benefits have significant effect on calculative commitment ($\beta = 0.188$, t-value = 2.214, $p < 0.05$), but not on affective commitment ($\beta = -0.035$, t-value = 0.473, n.s.), supporting H7 and not supporting H8. Next, H9 and H10 analyze the effect of calculative commitment on affective commitment and long-term orientation. Calculative commitment has a significant influence on affective commitment ($\beta = 0.291$, t-value = 3.378, $p < 0.01$) and long-term orientation ($\beta = 0.434$, t-value = 5.988, $p < 0.001$), supporting both H9 and H10. Lastly, H11 examines the effects of affective commitment on long-term orientation. Affective commitment significantly influences on long-term orientation ($\beta = 0.361$, t-value = 4.571, $p < 0.01$), so H11 was supported.

Table 5. Structural model (PLS).

	Paths	Estimates	t	p	Results
H1	Core benefits → Calculative commitment	0.226	2.224	0.026 [b]	Supported
H2	Core benefits → Affective commitment	0.001	0.011	0.992	n.s.
H3	Operational benefits → Calculative commitment	0.089	0.801	0.423	n.s.
H4	Operational benefits → Affective commitment	0.410	5.443	0.000 [a]	Supported
H5	Special benefits → Calculative commitment	0.243	2.957	0.003 [a]	Supported
H6	Special benefits → Affective commitment	0.234	3.074	0.002 [a]	Supported
H7	Social benefits → Calculative commitment	0.188	2.214	0.027 [b]	Supported
H8	Social benefits → Affective commitment	-0.035	0.473	0.636	n.s.
H9	Calculative commitment → Affective commitment	0.291	3.378	0.001 [a]	Supported
H10	Calculative commitment → Long-term orientation	0.434	5.988	0.000 [a]	Supported

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H11	Affective commitment → Long-term orientation	0.361	4.699	0.000 [a]	Supported

	R^2	Q^2
Calculative commitment	0.435	0.287
Affective commitment	0.601	0.485
Long-term orientation	0.517	0.412
SRMR	0.085	

4.4. Mediating roles of calculative and affective commitment

We tested the moderating roles of calculative and affective commitment in the relationship between RBs and long-term orientation. The findings show that operational benefits ($\beta = 0.247$, t-value = 2.793, $p < 0.01$) have directly significant effects on long-term orientation. Thus, calculative, and affective commitment play partial mediating roles in the relationship between core and operational benefits and long-term orientation but play full mediating roles in the relationship between core, special, and social benefits and long-term orientation.

5 Implications and future research

Our study provides guidelines on how to build long-term customer relationship in the non-contract mechanism context. More specifically, the findings show that special, social, and core benefits influence calculative commitment, and operational and special benefits influence affective commitment. This study also supports that calculative and affective commitment play a crucial role in understanding multi-channel agencies' loyalty. In sum, this study revealed that calculative and affective commitment can be considered as partial or full mediators in the relationship between RBs and loyalty. This study not only contributed to the existing SET and RBs paradigm but also provided practical implications for food distribution management.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the literature of SET and RBs paradigm. First, we integrated the RBs paradigm and SET to hypothesize that four RBs dimensions influence on commitment (calculative and affective) and long-term orientation in the B2B food distribution channel from the perspective of multi-channel agencies. The current study is the first one that developed and tested a research model that accounted for key RBs dimensions in food distribution context. The attempt of this study contributes to explain that the RBs approach based on SET helps to maintain and sustain the relationship in the context where the non-contract mechanism dominates the exchange process.

Second, unlikely with the existing studies on RBs in B2B context, the study identified different RBs types that enable multi-channel agencies to be more committed to food manufacturers. The findings show that the dimensions of RBs that influence affective and calculative commitment are different, allowing us to understand the causal process in which affective and calculative commitment is formed. The resource-matching perspective that explains message processing enhance persuasion when available processing resources match required cognitive demands [94, 95] supports our findings. Thus, this research provides a theoretical framework that allows us to understand how to match difference RBs dimensions in enhancing affective and calculative commitment in the context of difficult exclusive or comprehensive contracts.

Third, this study investigated the effect of calculative and affective commitment as mediators in the relationship between RBs and long-term orientation and calculative commitment is an antecedent of affective commitment. The attempts of this study richly explain the calculative and affective commitment – loyalty mechanism in the context of food manufacturers-multi-channel agencies

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relationship. The findings show that RBs perceived by multi-channel agencies enhance calculative and affective commitment to the food brands, leading to long-term orientation.

5.2. Practical implications

The practical implications of this study are as follows. First, core benefits were found to have a positive (+) effect on calculative commitment, but not affective commitment. The reason core benefits (product quality, logistics quality) affect calculative commitment, but not affective commitment is that product quality and logistics quality are benefits that are directly connected to sales and profits in a transactional relationship. Confronting these core benefits much perceptively affects calculative commitment by considering switching costs and lack of alternative options based on social exchange theory and commitment theory. In the case of multi-channel agencies, it can be explained that there are many options for core benefits, and because the relationship is maintained only to increase sales and profits, it does not affect the affective commitment to feeling attached to the business relationship.

Second, operating benefits (know-how, timeliness) were found to have a positive (+) effect on affective commitment but did not affect calculative commitment. Operational benefits, including know-how and timeliness, are related to an operating system that can continuously grow together in terms of relationship marketing, suggesting that it does not affect the calculative commitment centered on short-term performance. From a long-term perspective, joint product development and proposals that can win-win with each other form partnerships and are judged to influence affective commitment, the concept of attitude loyalty.

Third, social benefits influenced calculative commitment, but did not influence affective commitment. In the food distribution channel, multi-channel agencies have various alternatives to transactions, so they maintain the relationship for the purpose of increasing profits and sales rather than attaching themselves to the transaction relationship itself. Therefore, it can be explained that the relationship between the salesperson and the head office does not affect the dealer's psychological attachment. However, according to Gwinner et al.'s [16] study, social benefits are exogenous variables that give trust in the process of explaining other benefits and have an indirect effect. Depending on the intensity of social benefits, perception of other benefits can be faster.

Fourth, special treatment benefits affected both calculative and affective commitment. There are many manufacturers who trade due to the characteristics of multi-channel agencies, and because the sizes of multi-channel agencies are different, the larger the size, the more special treatment benefits are often requested. In this case, if you receive special treatment benefits over other dealers, you will be recognized by the manufacturer as compared to other multi-channel agencies, and you will think that you are forming a close relationship, affecting your affective commitment. Since multi-channel agencies that do not have jurisdiction are in fierce competition with each other, they think that receiving special treatment benefits compared to other multi-channel agencies will lead to competitiveness, which also affects calculative commitment.

Fifth, calculative commitment had a positive (+) effect on affective commitment. This implies that a continuous calculative commitment relationship will eventually have a partnership and affect affective commitment. Lastly, it was showed that calculative and affective commitment had a positive (+) effect on long-term orientation, which supports the researches of Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande [71] and Morgan and Hunt [6] that commitment appears as a constant desire to pursue long-term orientation in a relationship. These results empirically confirmed that relationship commitment influences long-term orientation even at B2B multi-channel agencies.

To summarize the implications, this study presented a relationship marketing system for sustained long-term performance in the B2B food material distribution channel, away from the short-term performance-oriented transaction marketing in the previous studies. Therefore, it is necessary for companies to change the transaction marketing system that focuses on short-term performance and core benefits, which were emphasized in the B2C-oriented system, to suit the distribution of B2B food materials. If a company builds a solution system (operation benefits) suitable for B2B food

material distribution and a customized special treatment benefit system for each customer and rethinks the strategy to maintain continuous relationship through social benefits in terms of effectiveness, the company's competitiveness is strengthened and the customer. The trust and commitment to the relationship will be reinforced to create continuous relationship performance which will enable companies and dealers to grow together.

5.3. Limitations and directions for future research

Although this study presents theoretical and practical implications by empirical analysis focused on multi-channel agencies in the B2B food distribution channel, there are limitations of the studies, and thus the direction of future research is to be suggested. First, this study was conducted for targets wholesalers and retailers who deliver to individual foodservice channels and school foodservice channels, it is difficult to generalize B2B food distribution channels, as no survey on enterprise type foodservice channels and consignment-managed foodservice channels has been conducted. Hence, in future studies, research including enterprise type foodservice channels and consignment-managed foodservice channels will be carried out, and a comparative analysis of each channel will lead to a study on the entire B2B food distribution channel. Second, this study was only targeting B2B multi-channel agencies, but in future studies, it will be possible to draw good implications by comparing and analyzing all types of dealers such as exclusive dealers and franchise store. Third, we focused on the perceived relationship benefits. Future studies need to understand the dynamics between constructs, including perceived costs or opportunistic behaviors, which can reduce the effect of perceived relational benefits on commitment and long-term orientation. Fourth, as suggested by Gwinner et al. [16], we analyzed the effect of social benefits on other relational benefits and found that social benefits had a large effect on the other three benefits (β = social benefits $\rightarrow$ core benefits (0.761, $p < 0.001$); social benefits $\rightarrow$ operational benefits ($\beta = 0.763$, $p < 0.001$); social benefits $\rightarrow$ special benefits ($\beta = 0.676$, $p < 0.001$)). This means that the relationship between social benefits and the other three benefits is very high, so future studies need to build a dynamic model that differently explains the effect of social benefits on the other three relational benefits.

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Appendix. Scale items

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Compared to other suppliers, …

Core benefits-Physical distribution	
ReBfC1	Supplier A is good at meeting set deadlines.
ReBfC2	Supplier A has fewer shipping-related errors.
ReBfC3	Supplier A delivers products accurately with no omissions or mis-delivery cases.
ReBfC4	Supplier A responds well to urgent orders of goods.
ReBfC5	Supplier A executes orders accurately.
Core benefits-Product quality	
ReBfP1	Supplier A provides us with better product performance.
ReBfP2	Supplier A provides us with products that meet quality standards.
ReBfP3	Supplier A provides us with reliable products.
ReBfP4	Supplier A provides us with fewer rejections (returns).
ReBfP5	Supplier A provides consistently us with products of stable quality.
ReBfP6	Supplier A provides consistently us with no difference in quality.
Operational benefits-Timeliness	
ReBfT1	Supplier A assists us respond to market needs.
ReBfT2	Supplier A assists us in reducing service delivery time.
ReBfT3	Supplier A helps us to launch more rapidly new products on the market.
ReBfT4	Supplier A assists us do sales promotion quickly and well.
Operational benefits-Know-how	
ReBfK1	Supplier A provides us with more transfer of their know-how.
ReBfK2	Supplier A assists us how to improve their current products.
ReBfK3	Supplier A is good at offering us new products.
ReBfK4	Supplier A assists us how to sell the products.
ReBfK5	Supplier A has new product development know-how.
Special treatment benefits	
ReBfSB1	Supplier A gives us special support that other distributors don't get.
ReBfSB2	Supplier A provides support even though we do not require it.
ReBfSB3	Supplier A assists us faster than other distributors.
ReBfSB4	Supplier A knows our preferences and help tailored to our preferences.
Social benefits	
ReBfSo1	Supplier A is easier to work with us.
ReBfSo2	Supplier A' executives have a good working relationship with us.
ReBfSo3	Supplier A' staffs have a good working relationship with us.
ReBfSo4	Supplier A maintains good mutual relations with us.
ReBfSo5	Supplier A easily accepts our suggestions.
ReBfSo6	Supplier A is comfortable to negotiate the issues we suggest.
ReBfSo7	Supplier A makes us feel treated as important customers.
Calculative commitment	
CalComit1	I have no intention of quitting my current agency because there is no other alternative.
CalComit2	Too much of my business would be lost if I decided to quit the dealership now.

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CalComit3	If I quit my current agency operation, the losses will be much greater than the gains.
CalComit4	I feel that I have too few options to consider quitting this agency.
CalComit5	I will continue to operate this agency because it will cost me a lot if I quit this agency.
Affective commitment	
AffComit1	I really feel as if the supplier's problems are my own.
AffComit2	I feel a strong sense of belonging to the supplier.
AffComit3	I feel emotionally attached to the supplier.
AffComit4	I feel like part of the family at my agency.
AffComit5	This supplier has a great deal of personal meaning for my agency.
Long-term orientation	
LongO1	We believe that over the long run our relationship with this supplier will be profitable.
LongO2	Maintaining a long-term relationship with this supplier is important to us.
LongO3	We focus on long-term goals in this relationship.
LongO4	We expect this supplier to be working with us for a long time.
LongO5	We are willing to make sacrifices to help this supplier from time to time.