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Analysis of the “Relationship Manager” Management in the Shopee Marketplace Through the Lens of Systems Management Theory

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Abstract: Research Objective: This study aims to analyze the management of the "Relation Manager" in the Shopee marketplace in maintaining seller loyalty.

The theories used in this study are Systems Management Theory and Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Theory, to understand the systems management process and communication management between Relationship Managers and sellers on the Shopee Marketplace.

The research method is qualitative, conducted through observation and in-depth interviews with several seller representatives who use the Shopee platform as a sales medium.

The research results show, based on Systems Management Theory with the following assumptions: Environment, Inputs, Transformation Process, Output, and Feedback. Based on field data, a conducive work environment makes the job of Relationship Manager easier, allowing for a more personal approach and more open and enjoyable information delivery to Sellers. This ensures that the entire management process, including inputs, transformation processes, outputs, and feedback, runs smoothly. Two-way communication between the Relationship Manager and the Seller allows the overall management process to run as expected by both parties.

Keyword: Management, Relationship Manager, Shopee Marketplace, System Management Theory

INTRODUCTION

The management process in the business world is crucial because without good management, the business run by the Company will not function well. The processes a company undertakes also involve communication, both internally and externally. In their book "Management Principles for Health Professionals," Liebler et al. (2017) describe communication management as a systematic process between organizational members to

perform various management functions, such as planning, coordination, and negotiation, with the goal of achieving mutual understanding.

The current technological developments have transformed the social order in various fields, including company management, operational management, and corporate governance, many of which are now online-based. One of them is Shopee, an e-commerce site based in Singapore, owned by Sea Limited (Kumparan.com, 18 May 2022, accessed on 10 August 2025). Shopee was initially called Garena, founded in 2009 by Forrest Li. It was first launched in 2015 in Singapore, and since then, Shopee has expanded its reach to Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, and the Philippines. In 2019, Shopee reached Brazil (Shopee.co.id, accessed on 10 August 2025).

In early 2024, Ipsos, a multinational market research and consulting company headquartered in Paris, France (Shopee.co.id, accessed on 10 August 2025), conducted research examining online shopping experiences and satisfaction across various e-commerce platforms. The company was founded in 1975 by Didier Truchot and has been listed on the Paris Stock Exchange since July 1, 1999. The results of this research show that Shopee successfully achieved the highest level of customer satisfaction. Ipsos 2024 e-Commerce Most Satisfying: 62% of respondents recommend Shopee to their relatives, followed by Tokopedia (46%), TikTok Shop (42%), and Lazada (36%).

This research shows that the Shopee platform is the most popular e-commerce platform and is also the most recommended to relatives. This indicates that the Shopee platform is not just a place to buy and sell goods; it also combines social aspects, entertainment, and a comprehensive shopping experience. Thru major campaigns like "11.11" and "12.12," Shopee successfully attracted the attention of millions of consumers by offering massive discounts, flash sales, and free shipping, making online shopping more affordable and appealing. Additionally, Shopee leverages advanced technologies such as "Shopee Live" and other interactive features to provide a more dynamic and interactive shopping experience, where customers can interact directly with sellers or watch live product promotion broadcasts. Just like in this study, the communication strategies employed by a relationship manager in maintaining seller loyalty on the Shopee marketplace.

Customer loyalty is defined as a deep commitment to consistently repurchase or support specific products/services in the future, regardless of situational influences and competitors' marketing efforts. Seller loyalty in the context of e-commerce refers to the seller's willingness and commitment to continue using and selling thru a specific platform even tho other platforms offer similar features or higher incentives (Richard, 1999). Loyal customers tend to be more tolerant of price changes and less easily influenced by competitor campaigns. They are also more likely to recommend the brand to others, both directly and thru digital platforms. In the effort to build and maintain customer loyalty, the role of the Relationship Manager is very important.

A Relationship Manager is part of the Relationship Marketing concept, which emphasizes building long-term relationships between a company and its clients. In this context, the Relationship Manager is responsible for maintaining ongoing communication, ensuring client needs are met, and building trust that leads to loyalty. A Relationship Manager is responsible for building and maintaining close relationships with customers, ensuring they feel valued and heard. With a personal approach tailored to each customer's needs, Relationship Managers can help increase customer satisfaction, resolve issues quickly, and strengthen customers' emotional connection to the brand. This not only boosts loyalty but also encourages customers to become active brand advocates. Thru effective, relevant, and consistent communication, the Relationship Manager acts as a liaison between the company and its customers, ensuring that marketing strategies successfully retain a loyal customer base.

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METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach, an approach to understanding social phenomena from the subject's perspective (Samatan, 2017 & Degdo et al., 2024). In this approach, researchers focus on a deep understanding of the experiences, perspectives, and meanings given by individuals or groups within a social situation. Commonly used data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. This qualitative approach is very suitable for use when researchers want to explore the context and complexity of social behavior and interactions that often cannot be explained solely by numbers or quantitative data.

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method, which, according to Creswell & Creswell (2018), is an approach used to describe and understand social phenomena in depth and holistically. The main focus of this method is to collect descriptive and narrative data to explore the experiences, perspectives, and meanings that research subjects attribute to the phenomenon being studied. The data collected is not only used to describe what is happening, but also to understand why and how a phenomenon is occurring. In this study, the researcher used in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to understand the communication strategies employed. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), data validity is the process of ensuring that the collected data is valid and reliable.

The triangulation technique is the most commonly used method for testing the validity of qualitative data, by comparing data from various sources to reduce bias. In this study, the researcher used various data sources such as interviews, written documents, archives, and personal notes (Denzin, 1970; Patton, 2002), so that the accuracy of the data obtained could be verified. Data collection in this study consists of primary and secondary data. According to Campbell & Stanley (1963), primary data is data collected directly by the researcher from the original source or research subjects. This data was obtained thru observation, interviews, and documentation techniques (Sugiyono, 2013; Creswell, 2007).

Observation techniques allow researchers to record phenomena directly in the field, while in-depth interviews help to gather richer insights from informants. Additionally, documentation techniques are used to strengthen the findings from observations and interviews. Secondary data, on the other hand, is data that has been previously published by another party and is used by researchers to strengthen their analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Researchers selected informants based on the representative informant technique, which considers individuals believed to have a deep understanding and knowledge of Relationship Managers' communication strategies in maintaining seller loyalty on Shopee.

The selection of informants was made to ensure that the data obtained was relevant to the research objectives. Researchers conducted in-depth interviews and direct observation at the research site, which was PT Shopee Indonesia (Sugiyono, 2013). In data analysis techniques, researchers apply three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. According to Miles & Huberman (1994), data reduction is done by simplifying, selecting, and focusing on data relevant to the research objectives. Irrelevant data is eliminated, making analysis easier for the researcher. After the data is reduced, the next step is to present it in a more structured format, such as tables, graphs, or narratives that illustrate the patterns or relationships in the data being studied. The final step is drawing conclusions, where the researcher interprets the presented data and ensures the conclusions are consistent with the data obtained.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Relationship Manager Communication Strategies

The increasingly competitive marketplace landscape makes the role of Relationship Managers (RMs) at Shopee crucial in ensuring harmonious relationships between the platform and sellers. The effective communication strategy of the Relationship Manager not only aims to maintain good relationships but also to retain seller loyalty amidst various business challenges. Relationship Managers act as a liaison between Shopee and sellers, employing a personal, empathetic, and data-driven strategic approach to build trust and engagement. Larasati, a Relationship Manager at Shopee, emphasized the importance of understanding sellers' communication styles and their needs thru behavior analysis and regular communication to maintain long-term relationships. Based on interviews with three sellers, they believe that Shopee's innovations, such as the chat feature for complaints, transparency in daily to annual sales reports, and promotional features, help sellers monitor and grow their businesses.

Mr. Supriatno emphasized the importance of Shopee's commitment to maintaining service quality and trust, while one of the sellers, Putri, appreciated the transparency of sales reports, which made it easier to monitor her business. Maulina praised Shopee for its trustworthiness in finance and shipping, although she suggested improvements in the product return policy. All three sellers agreed that Shopee's communication and innovation strategies have successfully built seller loyalty, although there is still room for improvement in some aspects such as the product return policy.

Utilizing Shopee Marketplace Features

Shopee has become one of the leading e-commerce platforms in Indonesia, offering various features that make it easier for sellers to manage their businesses, communicate with buyers, and promote their products. Features like Shopee Ads, Shopee Live, and live chat enable direct interaction between sellers and buyers, making it easier to resolve complaints and increase product visibility. Additionally, Shopee provides a structured notification system thru the app and email, informing users about promotions, new features, and business opportunities, helping sellers stay up-to-date. Solution-oriented customer service and technical support thru workshops and webinars also support seller literacy regarding platform

features, accelerate the resolution of technical issues, and improve their business performance.

Additionally, product promotion features and price settings make it easier for sellers to compete more effectively and attract more customers. The combination of all these features creates an ecosystem that supports business growth, increases seller trust and loyalty toward the Shopee platform, making them feel helped and supported in running their online businesses efficiently and sustainably.

The Two-Way Symmetrical Model on the Shopee Marketplace

The Two-Way Symmetrical Model, developed by Grunig and Hunt in 1983 (as cited in Samatan, 2018), with three assumptions: Preparation, Implementation, and Impact, shows that as a Relationship Manager at Shopee, it involves a series of deeply and personally designed processes to create and maintain long-term relationships between Shopee and Sellers, who are the backbone of Shopee's online marketplace existence. From the implementation perspective, good preparation by the Relationship Manager not only focuses on technical aspects but also involves emotional and social elements in the relationship between Shopee and Sellers.

The first step taken by the Relationship Manager is to collect seller data, which is done in detail thru a background check. According to Rania, this data not only includes technical information such as transaction volume or the frequency of seller activity on the Shopee platform but also personal information such as gender, age, and the seller's personal characteristics as the Person in Charge (PIC). This data is very important because it determines the communication style that the Relationship Manager will use. For example, when a Relationship Manager interacts with older sellers, they will typically appreciate a more formal approach and listening first, while younger or peer sellers tend to be more comfortable with a more casual communication style. By understanding these preferences, Relationship Managers can tailor their communication approach to build more personal and relevant relationships.

The second step is segmenting sellers based on their performance on the platform. This segmentation is crucial in determining the appropriate approach for each seller, especially when conveying information that could potentially impact their business. Rania explained that before communicating with sellers, the Relationship Manager (RM) always checks their performance first. Sellers with good performance on the platform are generally more flexible and accept changes made by Shopee, even if those changes might be detrimental to them in the short term. This is because sellers with good performance have generally experienced the benefits of the platform, making them more receptive to updates that may not always be advantageous for them.

Conversely, for sellers with poor performance or frequent complaints, the Relationship Manager (RM) needs to be more cautious. For example, if the changes made by Shopee have the potential to cause losses for sellers, RM must find a way to convey this information more strategically so as not to create negative sentiment or worsen relationships. This performance-based segmentation highlights the importance of a tailored approach for each seller category, ensuring that communication from Relationship Managers remains effective and relevant.

The next implementation in the Shopee Marketplace is to ensure customer loyalty and satisfaction, which is closely related to complaint handling. One of the complaints from sellers is the role of the Relationship Manager. When sellers express complaints, they are often emotional, and the Relationship Manager is required to listen patiently and attentively. Rania stated that the Relationship Manager must record the important points from the seller's complaint to ensure that every aspect of the complaint is addressed properly. After listening to the seller's complaints until their emotions subsided, the Relationship Manager then

explained the situation from Shopee's perspective and offered concrete solutions that could address the issues faced by the seller.

Next, the Relationship Manager tracks information about the features most frequently used by Sellers, the types of issues they often face, and their interaction patterns with the Shopee Platform. With this information, the Relationship Manager can design more personalized and targeted communication strategies, ensuring that every interaction with Sellers adds value to the Shopee Platform. If Shopee introduces new features or updates the platform, the Relationship Manager compiles clear and easy-to-understand points for Sellers. This information is then automatically communicated thru the system, ensuring that sellers always receive the latest updates in a way that best suits their preferences, such as thru image illustrations, case studies, or written explanations.

Additionally, Shopee periodically sends feedback forms to sellers, which are anonymous, to gather input regarding their experience on the platform. The results of this feedback are analyzed in-depth using analytics technology and are used as evaluation material for Relationship Managers to improve the quality of their relationships with sellers. By leveraging information technology, Shopee can not only improve efficiency in managing seller relationships but also create more personalized and responsive interactions. Relationship Managers can easily identify potential issues faced by sellers and take immediate necessary action, whether it's providing additional guidance or offering technical solutions.

Analysis Based on Systems Management Theory

Systems Management Theory, with five assumptions proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972), includes several assumptions: Environment; Inputs; Transformation Process; Output; and Feedback.

The environment is the contextual setting in which an organization operates. As stated in Shopee's profile, the Company operates, including several external factors such as market conditions, competitors, suppliers, and customers. The environment built by the Shopee Platform includes providing a comfortable atmosphere between Relationship Managers and Sellers to build a broader marketplace. The inputs prepared by Shopee, through the presence of Relationship Managers, are of course by preparing good resources, especially Relationship Managers, who will bridge the various interests of the Company with Sellers.

The Shopee Platform assigns responsibilities to Relationship Managers, including: [1] Building Seller participation in various transaction activities within the Shopee platform; [2] Resolving issues, including internal issues related to policies and systems, and external issues with users of the Shopee platform's services; [3] Business planning and analysis, including monitoring Seller performance, optimizing operations, and driving order growth from buyers; [4] Cross-functional collaboration thru working with internal teams to improve efficiency. The transformation processes undertaken by the Shopee Platform, as stated by the Relationship Manager, include: [1] Logistics Model Transformation, by implementing AI-powered warehouse management, which reduces inventory errors by up to 40%; [2] Collaboration with local logistics providers using hybrid last-mile delivery, combining drones and conventional couriers; [3] Use of blockchain for transparency in the global supply chain.

Internally, the transformations used by Shopee are: [1] Full migration to a multi-regional system for data redundancy; [2] Optimization of customer service with Generative AI that can understand 23 local languages; [3] Internal operational cost savings.

The next transformation is revenue model diversification, with Shopee reducing its reliance on traditional Marketplace transactions and developing 3 new business pillars: [1] Shopee Fintech 2.0, which offers performance-based microcredit services with a 98% approval rate; [2] Enterprise Solutions for SMEs, including inventory management and predictive analytics; [4] Metaverse Commerce, which are virtual stores integrated with

AR/VR technology. The output, as the final product on the Shopee platform, consists of approximately 120,000 stores, complete with basic information about the stores: Total products, Response rate, Tracking volume, Store conversion rate. Revenue earned in the last 30 days, orders sold in the last 30 days, product views, and total store sales overall.

The feedback provided by Shopee as an online marketplace is conducted according to rules established by Shopee management, to be implemented by Relationship Managers. Generally, these are: [1] Expressing gratitude for all feedback, both positive and negative; [2] Responding personally so that buyers feel valued; [3] Relationship Managers are asked to handle negative reviews wisely, sincerely apologize, and offer solutions, without responding defensively or aggressively; [4] Relationship Managers are required to use polite and professional language, maintaining a friendly and courteous tone of communication to keep the store's image positive in the eyes of other buyers; [5] Communication is concluded by inviting buyers to shop again or try other products available on the Shopee platform.

Analysis Based on the Two-Way Symmetrical Theory

Shopee is one of the largest e-commerce platforms, serving as a bridge between sellers and buyers in the ever-evolving digital trade ecosystem. As a marketplace, Shopee not only provides a platform for sellers to sell products and buyers to make transactions, but is also responsible for creating a healthy, safe, and comfortable business environment. In this context, effective, transparent, and interactive communication between Shopee, sellers, and buyers becomes a crucial factor in creating an optimal user experience and building strong long-term relationships within its ecosystem. One of the communication models implemented by Shopee is the Two-Way Symmetrical Model, developed by James E. Grunig, which prioritizes two-way communication where Shopee, sellers, and buyers interact, provide feedback, and influence each other equally. This model allows Shopee to function not only as a digital transaction service provider but also as an active communication facilitator that builds trust, satisfaction, and loyalty among users. The implementation of the Two-Way Symmetrical communication model at Shopee began with a crucial preparation stage.

At this stage, Shopee needs to develop a communication strategy that not only focuses on one-way information delivery but also opens up space for interactive dialog between the platform, sellers, and buyers. The main goal in this preparation phase is to build a shared understanding that allows sellers and buyers to feel heard, valued, and given the opportunity to provide input that can contribute to the development of Shopee's policies. Transparency in communication is key at this stage, where Shopee must ensure that important information such as commission policies, payment procedures, and return mechanisms is clearly accessible to all users. If there are policy changes, Shopee must communicate them in an easy-to-understand manner and allow users to provide feedback before the policy is widely implemented. Additionally, an open mindset in accepting and responding to feedback from both sellers and buyers is crucial to ensure that Shopee can adapt to market needs and provide rational explanations if policy revisions are not possible.

During the implementation phase, Shopee ensures that the communication used is active, participatory, and two-way, providing opportunities for both sellers and buyers not only to receive information but also to provide feedback and contribute to decision-making. Shopee optimizes various communication channels to effectively reach users, such as hosting webinars, live Q&A sessions, online discussion forums, and dedicated consultations to directly listen to complaints and suggestions from sellers and buyers. The data-driven system used by Shopee also allows the platform to understand user behavior patterns and needs more deeply, so frequently encountered problems can be addressed immediately with more targeted solutions.

For example, if there are complaints about late deliveries from a specific logistics partner, Shopee can immediately evaluate the service and offer more efficient alternatives.

Additionally, in the event of a conflict between seller and buyer, Shopee acts as a neutral and objective mediator to resolve issues fairly by providing digital mediation facilities where both parties can submit transaction evidence and explanations regarding the problem. Effective conflict management is crucial for maintaining user trust in the platform and ensuring they feel protected in every transaction. The impact of implementing this Two-Way Symmetrical model is very significant in building strong relationships between Shopee, sellers, and buyers.

One of the impacts is increased trust. With transparent and reciprocal communication, both sellers and buyers feel valued and heard. When their issues are addressed with quick and fair solutions, they will trust Shopee even more as a platform that cares about their needs. This trust becomes very important because the higher the level of trust users have, the greater the likelihood of them returning to transact on Shopee. Another impact is the formation of closer long-term relationships between Shopee and its users. Interactive and continuous communication, such as thru webinars or discussion forums, makes sellers and buyers feel like they are part of the Shopee community. With loyalty programs like Shopee Live, Shopee Affiliate, and Shopee Seller Center, Shopee is also strengthening long-term relationships with sellers and buyers, which not only focuses on transactions but also provides additional benefits for their shopping and selling experience.

Shopee's reputation as a responsive and user-caring platform is also growing, making Shopee increasingly popular among users. Additionally, this Two-Way Symmetrical communication also opens up space for compromise and mutual understanding between sellers, buyers, and Shopee. In case of issues, such as delivery delays, Shopee can act as a fair mediator, helping to find a solution that benefits all parties. With this approach, Shopee creates a more convenient and trustworthy shopping and selling experience for its users. Overall, the application of the Two-Way Symmetrical communication model in Shopee's communication helps build a more collaborative, interactive, and responsive e-commerce ecosystem. Thru open, transparent, and solution-based communication, Shopee successfully increased user trust, satisfaction, and loyalty.

This model allows Shopee to not only act as a service provider but also as a strategic partner supporting seller business growth and enhancing the shopping experience for buyers. The trust built between Shopee, sellers, and buyers is a crucial foundation for maintaining loyalty and keeping Shopee the top choice in the e-commerce industry.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal that the communication strategies used by Relationship Managers (RM) at Shopee are proven to be highly effective in maintaining seller loyalty. The approach used is the Two-Way Symmetrical communication model, where the RM not only acts as an information provider but also proactively listens to the needs and complaints of sellers. In its implementation, this strategy involves three main stages: careful communication preparation, proactive execution, and continuous evaluation. Thorough preparation allows RM to deliver information clearly and accurately, while proactive execution is carried out thru consistent daily interactions with sellers. Continuous evaluation ensures that every seller input is followed up on and adjusted to meet the dynamic needs of the market. Shopee has also successfully built long-term relationships with sellers thru a combination of communication transparency, relevant feature innovation, and responsive service.

One concrete example of this service is the availability of detailed sales reports, which helps sellers monitor their business progress in real-time. Additionally, the promotion features specifically designed by Shopee also support sellers in expanding their market and increasing sales. From interviews conducted with informants, it was found that the communication carried out by the Relationship Manager has helped create mutual trust between Shopee and sellers. This communication also strengthens seller engagement in various business activities on the platform, and provides relevant solutions to seller-facing

issues, such as operational challenges or product visibility improvements. Thus, the communication strategy implemented by Relationship Managers at Shopee not only maintains good relationships with sellers but also plays a crucial role in supporting their sustainable business growth.

Analysis based on Systems Management Theory with the following assumptions: Environment, Inputs, Transformation Process, Output, and Feedback. Based on field data, a conducive work environment makes the job of Relationship Manager easier, allowing for a more personal approach and more open and enjoyable information delivery to Sellers. This ensures that the entire management process, including inputs, transformation processes, outputs, and feedback, runs smoothly. Two-way communication between the Relationship Manager and the Seller allows the entire management process to run as expected by both parties.

CONCLUSION

Shopee, as one of the Southeast Asian marketplaces that has recently gone public in Latin America, is implementing a strategy to improve and become a leading marketplace in Southeast Asia. One such implementation is using Relationship Managers as a form of internal management to build higher-quality relationships with Sellers, while also resolving various consumer issues through intensive and publicly acceptable communication, targeting both existing and potential Shopee customers.

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