Mobile applications from a Relationship Marketing perspective: How consumers relate to mobile applications in a Relationship Marketing context

Consumers on: Nikon Learn and Explore, Danske Bank Net banking, H&M, Rejseplanen and McDonald’s-Foursquare

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Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to potentially find a link between relationship marketing and mobile applications, and therefore to provide more insight on how a company can benefit from employing relationship marketing strategies via a mobile application by creating a relationship with the consumer, and engaging them through hyperreality, experience and consumer culture.

**Design & Methodology:** Through 5 interviews with 5 different consumers using 5 different mobile applications the study is aimed at getting more in depth information about how consumers experience mobile applications created by companies, how it has affected their relationship and what is there to learn from these 5 cases. The scientific paradigm of social constructivism allows insight into how these 5 consumers think and feel about their use of the mobile applications.

**Findings:** The findings show that every mobile application can be learned from in terms of relationship marketing, and there is largely potential for the development of relationship marketing strategies through mobile applications that are viewed as beneficial by the consumers as well. All consumers, with the exception of one regarded the mobile application as an added value on behalf of the company, and there were signs that they could also be engaged through consumer marketing based on special experiences, creating a consumer culture and by constructing a hyperreality.

**Value:** The value of this paper stems from the empirical findings which show that there is high potential for companies to engage consumers through relationship marketing strategies via a new channel that is the mobile application.

**Key words:** Relationship marketing, Consumer marketing, Mobile applications, Experience, Consumer culture, Hyperreality.
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Introduction

The great technological breakthrough called internet has become a way of living for each member of the society. We shop, make payments, have fun, make friends, and ultimately get by with the help of this great tool. According to Ryan & Jones (2009), the internet, the people who use it, and consequently, online advertisement have never stopped expanding, causing the UK market to spend 2.02 billion pounds on it in 2006, and double that amount, i.e. 4 billion pounds in 2011. The newest trend for internet users is mobile marketing. 21st century mobile internet usage has increased so much that one cannot be at a venue for 5 minutes before someone next to them checks the Wi-Fi on their phone. Postmodern consumers have become dependent on their mobile devices to tell them what they are interested in, and what they need at a given moment. The British Office of Communications predicts that mobile applications will grow, independent of mobile networks, further on causing an explosion of the mobile applications’ market in the next 2 years (Hurlburt et al., 2010: 58).

Postmodern consumers have new needs in terms of what a trustworthy and engaging company is. They seek to be engaged by companies that form cultural epicenters (Holt, 1999), while also looking for activities that ensure a great experience (Caru and Cova, 2003). In addition, consumers form relationships with the company for self-affirmation reasons (Fournier, 1998). Hyperreality, i.e. consumption through computers and computer-mediated environments creates new ways of identity building for consumers, leading to the development of cybertulture (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995).

Newer developments in IT are making way for RM strategies to be put into practice. The marketing literature has increasingly been directed towards building relationships (Fournier, 1998; Grönroos, 2004). Relationship marketing (RM) has earned more interest due to the added value it can bring to a company (Buttle, 1996; Grönroos, 2004, Liljander et al. 2007). In contrast with traditional marketing, RM focuses on the long-term relationship with the customer, employing ongoing and personalized processes, while customizing the whole marketing mix for a single customer. According to Egan (2001), the latest developments in technology influence the theory and practice of RM in a particular way mainly because IT has potential for relationship building. Mobile applications are moving into the corporate space, because as consumers grow accustomed to smartphone usage, the demand for mobile-ready web content is growing as well. Researchers have found at least 4 reasons as to why the mobile channel could be used with the purpose of building
relationships with customers: personalize content and services, provide content and service at any given moment, track consumers, and engage with consumers through content (Chan & Lam, 2004).

M-commerce is seen by many as e-commerce for users on the move (Vittet-Philippe and Navaro, 2000; Kalakota and Robinson 2001 ap. Anckar and D’Incau, 2002); and from a marketing perspective “mobile commerce refers to the ability to offer value through virtual transactions that allow for location-specificity and time-sensitivity, as well as the ability to build personalized relationships with the customer” (Swilley and Hofacker, 2006) – a definition which already includes the concept of relationship. Furthermore, the special characteristics of m-commerce, such as accessibility, personalization, location-specificity are theoretically compatible with RM, and some companies, especially in the service industry are already acting upon it (Buttle, 1996; Bejou and Palmer, 1998).

Seeing as consumers have the need to form relationships with companies with a special attention to experience and cultural richness and hyperreal contexts, the opportunity to employ RM strategies via mobile applications arises as a theoretical perspective.

The driving hypothesis of the paper at hand is that RM is potentially compatible with mobile services such as m-commerce, and many corporations are already aware of the potential advantage. The research aims to shed light on a more clear relation between the two, by looking into five cases of corporate mobile application usage. Through five interviews sustained with five different subjects on the use of corporate mobile applications the research aims at identifying specific RM signalers in the testimonies of the interviewees, and, consequently, relate it back to the theory.
Problem statement

Mobile applications present a great potential for marketing, with a particular interest for relationship marketing. The paper at hand aims at giving directions on the following problem:

- **Can corporate mobile applications help in building, maintaining and enhancing a relationship with the consumer, according to relationship marketing theory?**

This problem statement calls for the following research questions to be answered:

- Do consumers perceive relationship driver incentives in their usage of corporate mobile applications, according to relationship marketing theory?
  
  - Do consumers perceive the usage of corporate mobile applications as beneficial to the relationship between themselves and the company?

Structure of the thesis

The structure of the thesis is made up by two overarching parts, the theoretical considerations and methodology on the one hand, and the empirical data and analysis on the other.

The methodological considerations are divided up between data collection and data analysis, where in the data collection the interpretive stance is presented, followed by the scientific paradigm description, quality specifications including authenticity and trustworthiness, the presentation of the method i.e. the interview, the detailed description of the goal with each question of the interview guide, an additional interviewing technique, sampling considerations, and last but not least, and extensive argumentation on objectivity issues.

The specification on the data analysis are regarding the type of analysis carried out, which is an idiographic analysis, followed by a cross-case analysis.

The literature review starts out with considerations on the authors used for the purpose of the paper. The following part is divided into theoretical sub-domains, such as Consumer marketing,
Relationship marketing, a short introduction to the theoretical potential of relationship marketing via mobile applications, and finally, an introduction to the literature on mobile commerce.

The analysis follows, which is structured according to the methodological considerations – an idiographic analysis on each respondent, followed by a cross-case analysis.

The discussion summarizes all the empirical findings in a strong relation to the literature review, and lastly, the conclusion answers the research questions in a concise way. Limitations are also in line in order to reflect upon what has been positive and negative during the research of this paper.

Methodology
Study design and data collection

The aim of the research is first and foremost to find out what the motivations behind consumers’ use of corporate mobile applications are, and secondly to relate them to relationship marketing theory. In light of the research question, the scope is to “explore people’s intensions, motivations and subjective experiences” (Daymon and Holloway, 2002) in order to understand them in a RM context, and most importantly, to understand it from the consumer’s point of view. It is only natural to take on an interpretive stance according to which the social reality is to be understood from the point of view of those in it. Another important issue is the logical way from an inductive reasoning to a deductive one, which is one of the main characteristics of the interpretive worldview, and which applies to the research at hand. The paper starts out with a hypothesis about the relation between RM and mobile applications based on previous study of literature – an inductive reasoning, which then will be tested against the actual experiences of consumers concerning the subject, relating it back to the previously mentioned theory – deductive reasoning.

Accordingly, the focus will be laid upon words rather than numbers – in order to dig deeper rather than wider in terms of how can mobile applications be used as part of a RM strategy. Similarly, the research proposes a small scale study during which only a small number of consumers are interviewed for a wider scope of getting qualitative information rather than statistical information. In the same line of thought it is the belief on which the paper at hand is carried out that a number of such studies could eventually lead to a clear and proven relation between RM strategies and mobile applications, which would in turn provide valuable knowledge to the practicing marketers.
The interpretive approach naturally calls for a social constructivist paradigm. According to social constructivism, the social reality people live in is not a given, and is instead constructed by the people through communication and interaction, and a shared history (Daymon and Holloway, 2002). Just in the same way, the research at hand argues that the relation between RM and mobile applications is constructed by the interactions between the consumers and the applications, and therefore this interaction must be studied from up close, leading to it being understood from the point of view of those in the interaction.

The quality of the research will be assured with the use of a number of tools. According to the interpretive paradigm by Lincoln and Guba (1985, ap. Daymon and Holloway, 2002) and Guba and Lincoln (1989, 1998, ap. Daymon and Holloway, 2002), the issues that arise in the case of a qualitative research are most importantly authenticity and trustworthiness. Authenticity is insured when the strategies used are appropriate for the study of the interviewees’ thoughts on the matter, helping them understand it better too, as well as when the study is fair. The scientific paradigm utilized in the paper at hand provides an opportunity to study the interviewees’ thoughts on mobile applications, while also helping them understand it better after talking about it and after a member check, which gives them the possibility to understand it from an objective point of view as well, as opposed to the user point of view. In addition, the study is fair in the methods used, the chosen theoretical background and the interviews carried out.

Trustworthiness is a more complex criteria that needs to be insured by credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility comes with the assurance of the participants that the findings are true to their reality. According to Daymon and Holloway (2002), a member check is the solution to assess credibility. A member check can be carried out at the different stages of the research, starting with the interview itself during which the interviewer will paraphrase the words of the respondent to assess the common understanding between them. At the end of the interview, comments can also be discussed together with the interviewee, and soon after that the transcript can be shown as well. Before carrying out the analysis of the empirical data, a summary and the interpretation of the interview can again be discussed with the respondent, and once the report is finished, another member check can be done.

Transferability is the second sub-criteria to trustworthiness, which is very much the same as the idea of theory-based generalizability. The reason behind this criteria is to help the reader connect the one study to a broader context. In the paper at hand the study of mobile applications is related to that of
relationship marketing, and together to the broader context of using RM strategies with mobile applications. This study is aimed at providing more proof to the relation between the two, and therefore its goal is to help future marketers in using this knowledge. In addition, the research carried out is motivated by previous studies that have a similar problem statement and findings about mobile applications and RM.

The last two criteria are dependability and confirmability. While dependability is assured if the study is consistent and accurate, confirmability will be assessed by the reader if the findings and conclusion are appropriate to the direct link between the sources and the data. Both criteria can be confirmed with an audit trail, i.e. “a detailed record of the decisions made […] during the research and a description of the research process.” By providing a detailed description of the whole research process the reader can easily make the connections between the data and the source of the data, and also check if the research has been consistent and accurate. Such a detailed description is provided in the methodological considerations of the paper, with regards to reflections on the data collection and analysis, as well as reflections on the choice of authors for the literature review presented at the beginning of the literature review.

With the help of the tools described above, the paper at hand is insured to provide a trustworthy and authentic research.

As a method for reaching the goal of the research question the interview is proposed. According to Daymon and Holloway (2002), “Interviews are the appropriate method to use when you wish to understand […] their [the interviewees’] opinions and beliefs about a particular situation.” The interview is a qualitative method that is very flexible and allows for the one conducting it to understand the perspective of the interviewee (ibid). The respondents can give their view on the subject through expressing their thoughts on the matter and having the freedom to reformulate and clarify what they mean until they feel they get it right. With the interview as a method there is also the possibility to follow up on the answers on the spot and allow for more clarity on words and thoughts.

One of the more flexible type of interviews is the semi-structured one which requires only an interview guide, i.e. a list of questions on the subject at hand, but which do not have to be all included in the interview and the sequence can be changed as well according to the interviewee. However, the interview guide is important since it is there to make sure that all the important issues
are touched upon and all the interviewees provide the same type of information (ibid). The researcher can also ask further questions based on the respondent’s answer in order to further clarify the issue and provide as much information as possible following along the lines of the given subject. The one-to-one form of interview, the most common form of interviewing will be set into practice in order to reach the research goal.

Different type of questions will be utilized for the purpose of this paper. At the beginning of the interview, the participant is asked to think of one particular mobile application that will guide the interview from then on. The first – opening – question:

Could you tell me about the relationship you have with the company/brand based on the use of the mobile application?

This is a broad question aimed at setting the tone and giving the opportunity to the respondent to talk freely. This question is at the same time useful in finding out more about which type of relationship the consumer has with the brand (Fournier, 1998), but the typology will also be clarified after issues such as trust, commitment and emotional bond are discussed. In addition, subquestion 1a:

Does the company/brand help you in expressing yourself?

The above probing question seeks further reason for the basis of the relationship. At the same time, it also assesses Fournier’s (1998) theory of brands as self-affirmation tools and Holt’s (1999) cultural epicenter concept by which a company/brand should help in self-affirming the consumer. The next subquestion:

Does the mobile application play a role in this?

This question comes only to address the issue at hand, i.e. the role of mobile applications in the relationship, and will answer if the app is considered to build a hyperreality (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Questions 2, 3 and 4:

- Do you feel that dialogue between you and the company/brand is an important part of your use of the mobile application?

- Is your contact with the company/brand via the mobile application mainly satisfactory or dissatisfactory?
- Do you feel the company/brand is providing you with something extra with the mobile application?

The previous are aimed at assessing the relationship from Grönroos’s (2004) point of view, namely if they feel the company is providing room for dialogue, how do they assess the episode value, and if the mobile application can be seen as an added value; and they are direct questions. Subquestion 3a:

If you think back in time, is there a memorable experience that you had with the company/brand that you find interesting/special (pre-, post- or during purchasing)?

The goal is to find out more about the consumer’s experiences with the company – are they provided with exceptional experiences according to Caru and Cova (2003)? If so, in which stage of the purchase does that take place? The probing question Why? in this case will be asked until the reasoning behind it is clear – has the experience been engaging? consistent? emotional?

Subquestion 3b:

Could you tell me what the company/brand could improve about the mobile application in an unpleasant situation?

As this is an idealization question, the respondent is asked to think of how a poorly managed situation could have been managed ideally from their point of view. Question 4 sums up everything that has been accounted of so far in seeking to view the relationship the consumer has with the company as an added value. According to Grönroos (2004), interaction, dialogue and the contact with the company would theoretically add up as an added value. Holt (1999) also holds the view that today’s consumers see the company as a cultural epicenter if the company provides added value. Questions 5-11:

- Do you feel you are taking any risk when buying the product/service of the company/brand?

- Do you feel that the product/service is very important to you?

- Is the decision of buying the product/service purely rational or also emotional?

- Do you feel that the company/brand is trustworthy?

- Do you feel committed to the company/brand?
- Do you feel close with the company/brand?
- Are you satisfied with the company/brand?

These questions are aimed at assessing the relationship from the relationship drivers’ perspective (Egan, 2001). The purpose is to first identify the existence of the drivers in relation to the company, and only then relate them to the mobile application. The relationship drivers are risk, salience and emotion; trust and commitment; closeness; and satisfaction. Questions 5-11 can also be viewed as feeling questions due to their emotional side of the question for which the respondent will answer according to what he/she feels is true.

In addition, the values represented by the relationship drivers are difficult to assess due to the subjectivity of the asserted meaning of each individual. The relationship drivers are defined in the theory by Egan (2001), but during the interview the respondents will construct their own definitions of the values. In order to arrive to specific values, probing question such as Why? or Could you expand upon that? will be asked according to the laddering technique (Arnould et al., 2004). As a second step, it is the researcher’s responsibility to weigh the values presented by the subjects in their own words and interpretations against the definitions given by the theory, with the end purpose of identifying the mobile application as a potential part of an RM strategy.

In providing interviewing techniques for the research of consumer motives, Arnould et al. (2004) identify a tool that appears to be very useful when dealing with consumer interviews. The technique is called the means-end chain and laddering, and consists of asking the question Why? in succession until the underlying motive is identified. It works in a way that the respondent first has to narrow down the list of important factors/benefits based on a question (potentially a hypothetical-interaction question), so he/she can then explain why that particular benefit/factor is important. This is where the laddering process begins and does not stop until the respondent narrows it down to a specific value or product-attribute. Naturally, the process also stops once the respondent can no longer answer. The purpose of the laddering technique is to arrive to a certain more specific value at the end of the means-end chain.

Some types of questions that are detrimental for the purpose of any research will be avoided. These types of questions include ambiguous questions, double questions, leading questions. In order to avoid ambiguous questions all questions should be phrased very clearly; double questions include two questions in one, and are to be separated in order to ensure clarity; leading questions are prone
to lead the interviewee in a predetermined direction, and therefore can be avoided by not including opinions or adjectives within a question.

Qualitative studies require purposeful sampling rather than random sampling due to the nature of the research (Daymon and Holloway, 2002). They are also less rigid and tend to develop during the interviewing process. In the case of the paper at hand the sample is not previously established; a purposeful and opportunistic sampling is applied in order to find individuals using different types of mobile applications, with differing demographical values. Each participant will be chosen based on how different he/she is from the other participants according to age, nationality, gender, occupation. The purpose is to provide a varied range of mobile applications and subjects, to ultimately provide a varied range of motivations as to why people use mobile applications in relation to RM.

The relationship between the researcher and the interviewee is one that is important due to the influence it has on the quality of the interview. In the present research, all the interviewees are approximately the same age as the researcher (22-27 years), and they are all acquaintances of hers. Consequently, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewees is based on mutual trust and equality; however, the issue of objectivity has to be discussed under such circumstances. In Steinar Kvale’s book on interviews (1996) the issue of objectivity is broken down into three further conditions: freedom from bias, intersubjective knowledge, and reflecting the nature of the object. The existent relationship between the researcher and participant could potentially lead to biased results, but clarifying this issue from the beginning and being conscious about it will help in overcoming it; in addition, the member check carried out throughout the research will also provide objectivity in this sense. Intersubjective knowledge refers to coder reliability – the systematical tracing of the same procedures by any other interviewer that lead to the same findings. This issue can be addressed with the help of a detailed record of the steps taken in the research by the interviewer. Finally, reflecting the nature of the object comes from the use of the interview as a research method, alongside with the social constructivist stance, which are both, according to Kvale (1996), objective in a way that they give the possibility for self-expression of the subject.

The researcher will try to secure objectivity through the following: the researcher will kindly ask each participant to disregard the relationship between the two of them and focus solely on their own input. Furthermore, they will be asked to not feel forced to answer the questions in accordance to their preconceptions of what the researcher might want to hear, as well as feel forced to find an
answer to a question that is not relevant to their case. During the interview, the researcher will sustain a casual formal tone, without any personal comments or informalities.

The recording of the interviews will be carried out by recording it on the phone with the purpose of being able to get back to the data at any needed time during the interpretation of the data for further clarifications and information. Accordingly, notes will also be taken during the interview in order to capture all potentially valuable information.

The time of the interviews will be put in the first half of the day in order to work with the fresh minds of interviewees’ and to not be in a hurry. The length of the interviews can vary from one respondent to another, but will not be more than forty minutes. The reasoning behind the choice of time is not to override the interviewee with questions and test their patience, and forty minutes is the right amount of time the participants are willing to give as part of their day in providing valuable information about how and why they use mobile applications. Should a particular respondent need more time to express his/her opinions, more time will be given for that particular interview, but not exceeding one hour.

**Interview guide**

Please think of the most important mobile application that you use created by a specific brand/company.

1. Could you tell me about the relationship you have with the company/brand based on the use of the mobile application?
   a. Does the company/brand help you in expressing yourself?
      i. Does the mobile application play a role in this?
2. Do you feel that dialogue between you and the company/brand is an important part of your use of the mobile application?
3. Is your contact with the company/brand via the mobile application mainly satisfactory or dissatisfactory?
   a. If you think back in time, is there a memorable experience that you had with the company/brand that you find interesting/special (pre-, post- or during purchasing)?
b. Could you tell me what the company/brand could improve about the mobile application in an unpleasant situation?

4. Do you feel the company/brand is providing you with something extra with the mobile application?

5. Do you feel you are taking any risk when buying the product/service of the company/brand?
   a. Does the mobile application support this feeling?

6. Do you feel that the product/service is very important to you?
   a. Does the mobile application support this feeling?

7. Is the decision of buying the product/service purely rational or also emotional?
   a. Does the mobile application support this feeling?

8. Do you feel that the company/brand is trustworthy?
   a. Does the mobile application play a role in making the company/brand more/less trustworthy?

9. Do you feel committed to the company/brand?
   a. Does the mobile application play a role in this?

10. Do you feel close with the company/brand?
    a. Does the mobile application play a role in this?

11. Are you satisfied with the company/brand?
    a. Does the mobile application play a role in your view?

Ask Why? continuously until arriving at a value that cannot be deconstructed further, or the respondent cannot answer anymore.

**Data analysis**

In order to draw a clear picture of the experiences of each interviewee with their mobile application in the light of consumer and relationship marketing, but at the same time to fulfill the research question of whether mobile applications can become a substantial part of relationship marketing, two types of analysis will be implemented – an idiographic analysis and a cross-person analysis (Fournier, 1998).

The idiographic analysis is sought to identify characteristics of brand relationships the respondents have with the company and brand, respectively this relationship expressed through their mobile
applications. The mobile application will be analyzed from the perspective of relationship marketing based on the relationship drivers (Egan, 2001) and relationship pillars (Grönroos, 2004); but also an introduction to Fournier’s (1998) relationship typologies will be included. A consumer marketing perspective will also be utilized in order to discuss how consumers today relate to brands and companies, from the perspective of experience, hyperreality and consumption culture (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Caru and Cova, 2003; Holt, 1999). All the signifiers abovementioned will be analyzed individually and afterwards collected into a cross-person analysis. In the cross-person analysis the individual results will be crossed in order to identify recurring patterns, if any, in order to have a broader picture of mobile applications in the context of relationship marketing. The relationship drivers according to Egan (2001) and the three relationship pillars by Grönroos (2004) will be analyzed extensively in this part of the research from the perspective of the mobile application, as well as some considerations regarding the mobile applications alone, adding the new possibilities and threats identified in the interviews. Last, but not least, Fournier’s (1998) typology will also be included in the cross-person analysis, as well as the consumer marketing perspective on experience, hyperreality and consumption culture (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Caru and Cova, 2003; Holt, 1999). Finally, based on the answers of the respondents there will be an evaluation of the mobile applications as well according to the mobile value framework provided by Balasubramanian et al. (2002), Deans (2005), May (2001), Anckar and D’incau (2002), and a presentation of the mobile application according to Varshney and Vetter’s (2002) classification of mobile applications.

**Literature review**

**The chosen authors**

All authors have been chosen after a careful review of the specific subjects, i.e. relationship marketing, consumer marketing and mobile commerce. Furthermore, many authors share the same view on the subjects, and in such cases the most overarching and relevant ones were chosen to represent the complete view.

In relationship marketing (RM) many authors agree on the fact that RM represents an added value stemming from interaction and communication that creates a shared meaning. Therefore, Grönroos (2004) who combines these into a process view on RM was chosen as a representative. When it
comes to what ensures these three processes, Barnes (2003) reinforced the importance of meaningful relationships. Egan (2001) was one of the few authors that provided in-depth knowledge on relationship drivers, including many of them to create a complete picture. Besides Egan, Buttle (1996) and Payne et al. (1995) share the same views on valuable relationships.

Consumer marketing is focused around four main pillars, i.e. relationships, hyperreality, consumer culture and experiences, adding the fact that these are matching with the goals of RM. When it comes to brand relationships, Fournier (1998) is one of the authors that has extensively researched on the subject, and therefore provided much insight into why consumers engage in relationships with companies. Fournier was a complementary part to the research as well due to the typology she has provided on brand relationships, and which comes only to enrich the paper at hand. The other main authors to discuss hyperreality, experience and consumer culture were the only ones that presented them in detail – Firat and Venkatesh (1995), Caru and Cova (2003) and Holt (1999).

The short introduction about RM and mobile applications is based on an extensive research on the topic of the paper in order to find out what has been done so far in regards to this direction, and it represents the main ideas discussed so far in the theory around the relation between RM and mobile commerce.

Finally, mobile commerce is summarized in a relevant elaboration on mobile commerce’s matching characteristics with RM which are known as mobile value (Balasubramanian et al., 2002; Liljander et al., 2007; May, 2001; Anckar and D’incau, 2002), respectively a typology of mobile applications (Varshney and Vetter, 2002). These authors were chosen due to their relevance to the research as well as the clarity of their ideas. As a definition Swilley and Hofacker’s (2006) definition was chosen due to its appropriateness to the paper regarding the marketing perspective it carries.

**Consumer marketing**

Short-term perspectives have been gradually replaced with relationship – long-term – perspectives throughout the last decade in marketing literature and practice (Fournier, 1998). Due to the innovativeness of the approach, there is also a lack in research in terms of consumer behavior in RM (ibid). From a brand literature perspective, Fournier (1998) contributes with a framework in order to better understand the relationships between consumers and brands by discussing a typology of consumer-brand relationships forms, reducing them to 15 types; but nonetheless, she starts out from the perspective that consumers engage in relationships with the companies, no matter how
wide the range of reasons for this is. Consumers show no difficulty in consistently assigning personality qualities to brands” (Aaker, 1997 ap. Fournier, 1998) “[…] or in assuming the perspective of the brand in order to articulate their own relationship views (Blackston, 1993 ap. Fournier, 1998). In Fournier’s article (1998) it is shown how brands are used as powerful tools to build meaning for self-affirmation purposes.

The list of types of consumer-brand relationships includes a wide variety of relationships, ranging from casual ones, to tighter ones, to ones that are forced on someone by a third party or by lack of other choice. Some of the most interesting forms are casual friends/buddies, committed partnerships, enslavements and even secret affairs. When a person has a casual friendship with a brand, the relationship is characterized by infrequent engagement, intimacy and affect are not the goals, and expectations regarding reciprocity and reward are low. For a committed relationship there would have to be a long-term commitment that is voluntary and is characterized as such feelings as love, intimacy, trust and a commitment to the brand despite external influences. It is also most likely an exclusive relationship. Enslavements are a different type in which the relationship is involuntary because of circumstances, and is characterized by negative feelings. A secret affair is a private relationship due to its perceived riskiness, and it is characterized by emotiveness. There are 11 more types of brand-consumer relationships, and they will be included as an appendix (Appendix 1).

In addition, postmodern consumer research has been focused very much on new forms and needs of consumption, such as hyperreality, experience and cultural consumption (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Caru and Cova, 2003; Holt, 1999), with a special focus on new electronic media. A new form of reality – hyperreality – is created through electronic media, which is in continuous making, and which only intensifies the true reality. Such developments would most certainly include the cyberculture constructed through computers and computer-mediated environments. New developments in technology have led to new ways of consumption and identity building for consumers.

The development of cultural epicenters is another way of engaging consumers. A brand that develops an ongoing relationship with its consumers will have the benefit of becoming part of a community in which it will be perceived as a valuable member. This membership comes with the responsibility of producing a brand based culture for the consumers. Therefore, if a company weaves its consumers into a cultural epicenter, it gains power and control over it. Whether it is used
for the purpose of building added value for the consumer, or as a means by which to reaffirm the self, strategically the development of the company as a cultural epicenter will create value for the consumer.

A strongly engaging cultural experience is most beneficial from an experiential point of view as well. Consumers seek for great experiences in everything they do with companies, which are required to provide flow, or peak experiences. An experience is first of all a personal occurrence, most of the times with an emotional significance created after an interaction with the product or service (Caru and Cova, 2003). A flow experience is created when both the skills of the consumers and the challenge are at a maximum. In their search to avoid the ‘commodity trap’, consumers search for engaging experiences in their interactions with a company. A good marketing experience would be one in which the consumer gets the opportunity to exploit all his/her senses (Schmitt, 1999 ap. Caru and Cova, 2003). According to Chan and Lam (2004), consumers are more prone to use mobile applications which provide more consistent and engaging content. Contemporary consumers are seeking for ‘immersion into varied experiences’. The experience can then be created in the pre-purchase, purchase or post-purchase period, as according to Caru and Cova (2003). The pre-purchase experience involves searching for, planning, day-dreaming about, foreseeing or imagining the experience. The purchase experience is derived from choice, payment, packaging, and the encounter. The core consumption experience would then include the sensation, the satiety, the satisfaction/dissatisfaction, the irritation, the transformation (ibid). Reflecting upon these different stages of the purchase, it can be derived that a complete experience could involve interaction on all three levels.

**Relationship marketing**

The RM perspective was developed after it became clear that a paradigm shift in marketing was urgently needed (Egan, 2001). The outdated version of transactional marketing (TM) was being criticized from every side as being too quantitative and based on short-term outcomes. The change in marketing mix became a part of this when the 4Ps were switched into the 4Cs: from Price to Cost to customer, from Place to Convenience, from Product/Service to Customer needs and wants and finally, from Promotion to Communication. TM was seen as oriented to single sales, having a discontinuous customer contact, focused solely on product features, with little emphasis on customer service and only a limited commitment to meeting customer expectations (ibid).
With this paradigm shift in marketing came a shift from one-way communication to interactive communication (Schultz, 1993). In this new way of communication between companies and consumers the consumers had more power than before, and the flow of communication had switched from one-way, company-consumer to a reversed system, from consumer to company. Schultz (1993) goes on to say that this new flow of information and communication has radically changed the marketing programs, in which a new trend is that companies are forced to continuously communicate. Schultz (1993) also stresses that the channel of this new type of communication has become more electronic.

The RM perspective came to be the new form of marketing according to which consumers have new needs, mainly that they want highly customized service and product solutions, and that they want to be more involved in this process of customization and purchase. In this regard, RM offers a stable competitive advantage because the relationship a customer has with a company is not easily copied (Buttle, 1996; Grönroos, 2004). While in TM the product is at the center of the transaction between the customer and the company, RM joins the product with the service and regards them interconnected and part of one whole relationship the customer develops with the company (Grönroos, 2004).

There is no one clear definition of RM as it has been difficult to define by researchers, and a more general definition that encompasses the different sides and the essence of RM in a very clear and relevant way is by Grönroos (1994, p. 9 ap. Egan, 2001, p. 23), who wrote that RM has „the objective to identify and establish, maintain and enhance and, when necessary, terminate relationships with customers and other stakeholders, at a profit so that the objectives of all parties involved are met; and this is done by mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises.“

This definition is suitting for the purpose of the paper at hand for several reasons. First, it becomes clear from this definition that RM should be focused on the different stages of relationship, and for the purpose of the paper at hand, the focus will mainly be laid upon relationship enhancement and maintenance. Second of all, the definition points out that interaction is an important part of RM, and that at its core it is designed to fulfill both parties’s needs. As Payne et al. (1995 ap. Egan, 2001, p. 24) further present RM as being different from TM in its core, RM is oriented towards customer retention instead of customer acquisition, which also implies that long-term relationships are developed rather than short-term ones. Third, in the same line of thought, the focus is on creating
customer value rather than product attributes, and keeping contact with customers on an ongoing basis, making sure that expected customer service levels and customer expectations are met.

Seen similarly, but from a process perspective (Grönroos, 2004), RM consists of three key processes, namely communication, interaction and value. Communication provides a two-way channel in order for a dialogue to form where ultimately the creation of a common knowledge platform is possible. In this sense, communication ultimately facilitates the development of meaning based on consumers’ personal experiences. The idea of shared meaning is proposed by other theorists as well, such as Barnes (2003). The various types of messages accumulate with time in the customers’ minds, and together with interaction they form the relationship. The interactions mentioned happen due to the dialogue. The interactions include as much the interaction with the product as the interaction with the company. As interactions – contact with the company – accumulate over time the relationship is formed. Many theorists call them episodes. As another definition (Buttle, 1997, p. 148 ap. Egan, 2001, p. 100) reaffirms this, “RM is the sum of meaning-filled episodes which relational partners co-produce”, dividing the contact up into specific episodes which are very meaningful. Not all episodes carry the same weight of course, some will have more meaning than others, and some will influence the relationship more than others. Long-term relationships are made up of a string of episodes, some of which will be critical ones – the more meaningful ones – while others will be routine episodes. The transition from a routine to a critical episode is marked by high satisfaction or dissatisfaction. During an episode customers experience a range of interactions that are part of the service provided. Depending on how the experience goes, it will eventually turn into a routine or critical episode.

According to Grönroos (2004), once the company has succesfully aligned its resources with the internal processes of the customer, it has succesfully created customer value. Loyal to the RM theory, value is created both through the core product and the additional services. In a relationship perspective, the customer is prone to suffering some costs due to the existence of the relationship. These can be psychological costs as loss of trust towards a company. Another way of looking at value is also by distinguishing between the core and added value of a company. As a conclusion, Grönroos (2004) summarizes that episodes, communication and value – the three processes – have to be taken into account in order for RM to ultimately result in value for customers.

In order to confirm that there is an actual relationship between the parties, Barnes and Howlett (1998, p. 16 ap. Egan, 2001, p. 31) put forward two characteristics that must be valid: that the
relationship is mutually acknowledged and accepted by both parties, and that the contact between the two parties extends to more than just occasional, being perceived as something special.

Leading towards the creation of a relationship, i.e. communication, interaction and value, there are certain ‘drivers’ that can promote RM, and these drivers are risk, salience and emotion; trust and commitment; closeness; customer satisfaction and inertia. The definitions of these concept will be further detailed as it is crucial in order to be able to understand consumers’ approach to RM.

Risk, salience and emotion are all psychological aspects, and their meaning in a marketing context must be clear. Risk is how likely the consumer thinks loss is in relation to a product/service, salience is how much importance the consumer attributes to the exchange, and emotion is the human response that the exchange brings out of the consumer. High risk, salience and emotion will usually be valid in a situation where the customer enters the encounter with the company with high expectations and therefore would be potentially seeking for reassurance and reduction of risk. In turn, such situations would benefit from RM because during a relationship the consumer learns about the company and arrangement, gets to know the company, and consequently lowers the perceived risk value. RM can also be succesfull in situations where the future conditions are continually redefined by the people in the relationship (Cumby and Barnes, 1998 ap. Egan, 2001). Low risk, salience and emotion exchanges on the other hand don’t benefit from RM, whereas personalized services, such as clothing, hairdressing and such could potentially report high on salience and emotion and therefore relational strategies could help in this sector.

Trust and commitment are most often paired together in RM theory and they are seen as having a big impact on the success of RM strategies (Morgan and Hunt, 1994 ap. Egan, 2001). Trust is a psychological state in which the vulnerability of the consumer regarding his/her expectations about the company’s intentions and actions is accepted to some degree (Rousseau et al., 1998 ap. Egan, 2001). Consequently, trust is seen to deliver well on risk acceptance and the reducing of risk perceptions. Trust can be seen as the outcome of trusting situations, which can be defined by the probity, equity, reliability and satisfaction of the consumer regarding the company. A trusting situation involves the probity of honesty and integrity based on the company’s historical trustworthiness, i.e. reputation. Equity will lead the consumer to believing that the company is caring, benevolent and sincere, all of which values can be experienced through the company’s cause-related promotions. Reliability requires the company to deliver effectively and reliably – such values are further on emphasized by dependability, quality and consistency, and which can be
experienced through guarantees and warranties the company makes towards the customer. Satisfaction is the end-result of the above mentioned values in much the same way as trust is, being built up through the consumer’s personal experience. Whereas satisfaction is induced by the perceived value of delivery, the whole mix of probity, reliability, equity and satisfaction will lead to a line of positive experiences, which will ultimately build trust between the consumer and the company.

Commitment is the end-result of the relationship and RM strategies. It requires that both parties involved in the exchange are willing and desire to continue the relationship including the occasional investments they have to make in order to sustain the relationship. Whether trust stems from a commitment to a company, or if trusting relationships induce consumers’ commitment is not quite clear (Egan, 2001), which makes one of the reasons as to why these two notions are inseparable in RM theory. There are however a list of precursors to trust and commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994 ap. Egan, 2001). Relationship termination costs are one of them, which states that the value of such costs, which can include the lack of comparable alternatives, relationship termination expenses or other switching costs, will inevitably influence the customer’s trust and commitment towards a company. In the same way, relationship benefits will only increase the commitment of consumers’ being regarded as superior value to competition. Shared values between the company and consumer are highly influential in terms of the relationship. The communication on behalf of the company that is timely and relevant will likely boost the commitment and trust in its activities. Opportunistic behaviours such as taking advantage in any way of the relationship will adversely only cripple the relationship between the company and consumer by damaging the trust and commitment invested.

Perceived need for closeness will involve physical, emotional or mental proximity and can potentially entice the security the consumer has in the relationship. When the distance between the parties is bigger, more superficial relationships are bound to develop – conversely, when the distance is shorter, the parties tend to engage in a deeper relationship (Pels, 1999 ap. Egan, 2001). Closeness is also believed to develop more easily between parties where the frequency of two-way communication is high (Barnes, 1997 ap. Egan, 2001).

Customer satisfaction is an important value because it is believed to effect customer retention and long-term performance, and customer retention is one of the main focuses in RM (Buttle, 1997 ap. Egan, 2001). Satisfaction can and has been defined in many ways, but at its core it is a psychological process whereby the consumer weighs the performance of the company based on pre-
established expectations. Some drivers of satisfaction can help in accounting for the satisfaction level in the consumer; these are first of all the core product or service which is the basic object of the exchange. The second driver introduces the support services and systems that surround the basic product or service, like staffing levels, delivery, technical support etc. Technical performance will also greatly influence satisfaction as the consumer is satisfied with the result of the promises made by the company in light of the performance of the exchange. There are certain elements of customer interaction such as the interaction between the consumer and the company on an interpersonal level which will greatly affect the satisfaction ultimately, but besides this aspect there will also be some affective dimensions to the service which are little things the company doesn’t even notice, and which can be inquired upon via RM strategies. These little things could potentially involve episodes, which only reaffirms the importance of episode value. The only flaw in trying to measure customer satisfaction is not confusing it with loyalty. Satisfaction will only be present if there is a strong attitude towards the company.

Inertia is a fallback of satisfaction, because inertia is a neutral satisfaction with the company, whereas a really satisfied consumer feels a positive satisfaction. If the consumer falls into a comfort zone, inertia is present, and any service improvements would be pointless because the consumer only decides to continue the exchange with the company because he/she doesn’t perceive any better choices.

In addition to Egan’s perspective, the RM literature speaks in quite the same way about RM. Buttle (1996) reinforces concern, trust, commitment and service as characters of RM, while Payne et al (1995) really focus their RM theory around value. As mentioned before, Barnes (2003) stresses the idea of meaningful relationships between the brand and the consumer, while delimiting between emotional and functional value. In the same way, Barnes specifies that reliability is important in terms of functional value, which can be assured through convenience, access, timeliness, product quality; whereas the emotional value is about trust, commitment, shared interests and goals, etc.

**Relationship marketing and mobile commerce**

The goals of RM and the possibilities that mobile applications have to offer fit in a number of ways. RM is focused on long-term relationship development with the customer, for whom a customized and personalized marketing mix is created when offered a product or service with the purpose of creating value.
According to Egan (2001), IT shows potential for relationship building. Other researchers attest this by stating that the mobile channel could be used with the purpose of building relationships with customers for mainly four reasons: it allows companies to personalize the content and services, it tracks users over a longer time period, it provides content and service right in the moment of need, and it engages customers (Chan & Lam, 2004). In the same line of thought, Kanaan et al. (2001 ap. Deans, 2005) put forward the same four reasons to the development of mobile channels as RM strategies.

Personalization of services has been mentioned as a value adding characteristic of m-commerce by a number of authors (Carlsson and Walden, 2001; Müller-Versee 2000; Ropers 2001 ap. Anckar and D’Incau, 2002). Further on, in May’s book (2001) on mobile commerce the theme ‘personal connection’ is present at all times. The author argues that the emotional connection consumers have with their time and money is translated unto the mobile commerce arena. Anckar and D’Incau (2002) too regard the personalization of mobile services as a value-adding feature in m-commerce.

Further on, customization as another crucial characteristic of RM is announced as a possibility with mobile channels through which customized solutions can be provided to consumers (Deans, 2005).

According to Kalakota and Robinson (2001 ap. Anckar and D’Incau, 2002), all companies that enter the mobile channel have the goal to create customer value in their minds. Seeing that m-commerce applications provide unique services and benefits (Tsalgatidou and Pitoura 2001 ap. Anckar and D’Incau, 2002), the search for value ends there.

A number of companies practice RM through the development of specialized mobile applications. A special interest has been expressed in the service sector, where companies are applying strategies that build close and long-term relationships with customers. Their reason for practicing RM is customer retention (Buttle, 1996). Airlines, due to the nature of their business, can potentially gain a great deal with the usage of mobile applications for the purpose of RM. In terms of customization and personalization, flier details can periodically be recorded in order to provide a variety of promotional and operational offers and information (Bejou and Palmer, 1998).

**Mobile commerce**

As mobile commerce is still in the infancy of its lifetime, finding a straight-forward definition for the term demands a more thorough process. Mobile commerce, or m-commerce very often is

In order to set up a general marketing definition for mobile commerce, Swilley and Hofacker (2006) start out by approaching mobile marketing due to the fact that they view m-commerce as a subset of mobile marketing. They further on go to define mobile marketing as “an organizational function and set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value and for managing customer relationships, all using mobile devices.” (ibid) The definitive concept they assign to m-commerce suits the purpose of this paper due to the ‘relationship’ perspective they manage to transfer to their definition: “mobile commerce refers to the ability to offer value through virtual transactions that allow for location-specificity and time-sensitivity, as well as the ability to build personalized relationships with the customer.” Further on in the paper there will be an attempt to define what the value offered through mobile commerce is or can potentially be.

In the view of Balasubramanian et al. (2002), accepted by many other authors (Liljander et al., 2007; May, 2001), as space and time are the limited resources a person has to do with from an economical point of view, the world in which mobile technologies are available is greatly affected in terms of these two resources. Of course, not all activities will be influenced, but those that are can potentially be influenced on one resource, or both. Some activities become more flexible due to mobile technologies only on the spatial dimension, when the location of the person is irrelevant to the activity to be carried out. Other activities will only gain flexibility in terms of time, when a certain activity that takes place at a certain time can be revisited anytime by the user. A smaller number of activities will then be influenced on both dimensions, when both the time and location of the user are irrelevant to the activity he/she wants to carry out due to mobile technologies.

May (2001) adds that the emotional relationship consumers have with their money also has a major impact on their actions in the mobile commerce arena. He further elaborates that due to this emotional bond, the individual’s willingness to interact with a mobile service is the main determinant in the effectiveness of mobile commerce strategies.
Mobile value stems from basically the user’s location, his/her situation and his/her mission (Anckar and D’incau, 2002). Based on these parameters, there are 5 main values stemming from the mobility of applications. First of all, time sensitive issues benefit foremost in situations where urgency and immediacy is important and the user’s action has greatest value if it is timely. Second, spontaneous needs can be immediately satisfied through mobile devices. As opposed to time sensitive issues, spontaneous needs arise internally and not externally. Hennessy (2001 ap. Anckar and D’incau, 2002) believes that mobile applications will most importantly influence with spontaneous activities. Third, entertainment needs benefit just as much from mobile value. The combination between entertainment and spontaneous needs is highly attractive due to the many instances where consumers just need to kill some time over waiting time. Entertaining mobile applications are seen as a great complement to mobile devices by Kalakota and Robinson (2001, ap. Anckar and D’incau, 2002). Forth, mobile applications will also make many things more efficient. In fact, mobile applications are believed to have been developed in order to increase productivity while mobile at the same time (Peters, 2002, ap. Anckar and D’incau, 2002). The search for efficiency is as much in everyday activities as in ones more complex. Last, but not least mobile value can in itself be the only value represented by a mobile application, meaning a value that will only be relevant once the person is on the move, like with location-based applications.

In terms of mobile application classifications, a helpful framework has been developed by Varshney and Vetter (2002). They have organized mobile applications into 7 different categories: mobile financial applications, mobile advertising, mobile inventory management, product location and search, proactive service management, wireless business reengineering and mobile auction, entertainment and other services. In short, mobile financial applications are ones which include mobile banking, money transfer and micro-payments applications. There have been a number of papers (Singh, Srivastava, & Srivastava, 2010; Darsow & Listwan, 2012; Chung & Kwon, 2009) on the subject of mobile banking transactions, and there is certainly a need to discuss this type of mobile applications in more detail due to the need for attention to issues of security. Secondly, mobile advertising applications are quite spread as well, including advertisements performed via SMS or short paging messages. In this case, interaction is at a 0 level, being only a one-sided communication. The third type of mobile applications, mobile inventory management involves the tracking of goods, services and people. Even though it can be viewed as a B2C m-commerce activity, it is only so because of the end-beneficiary is the customer. But, since the goal is to focus on the communication between the customer and the company, and not the end result, this type of
application will be disregarded in the paper, due to the fact that mobile inventory management only involves communication between the company and the supplier. The fourth mobile application type is similar to this one, only it involves the search and location of products on behalf of the customer. This application can be used in a particular area or location to find out if the specific product is available or not. In case the product can be provided by several companies, the companies can compete for the customer by price discounts for instance. The customer then can also purchase the product online. Proactive service management applications are the fifth type of mobile applications, and they serve as information collectors about current or future user needs on products or services. As they do not involve communication between customer and company, they will not be of primary importance either. As a sixth type of application there is the wireless business re-engineering which similarly does not enable communication between customer and company, and rather add to the bottom line of a company by faster service, and some wireless services that other companies might lack, such as location-tracking devices. The seventh type of mobile applications will receive more attention in this paper as they provide entertainment and other services to customers which include communication. It is due to many mobile situations that people have higher needs for entertainment or business services. These include mobile auction/reverse auction, video-on-demand and other entertaining services. As an important issue to be raised here is continued connectivity which is sometimes needed for the quality and enjoyment of these services.

**Analysis**

**Idiographic analysis**

Case 1

Mobile application (App): Nikon Learn and Explore

Company: Nikon

User: Hasan Jensen, male, 25, Malaysian-Danish, unemployed

The app is used for getting tips on photographic solutions, based on three different user levels: amateur, mid-range and professional, and it also includes the manual of the camera. As an app category according to Varshney and Vetter (2002), Nikon’s app can be regarded as an
entertainment app due to the services it provides for photographers that want to improve and find a source for inspiration.

The relationship with Nikon. Hasan’s relationships with Nikon has started when he decided to buy his first camera brand at the advice of his friends and relatives. Since then he considers he’s gone the ‘Nikon way’, and will continue buying Nikon as a DSLR camera until the end of time. He considers this relationship a long-term one, and identifies with the brand values – creativity and individuality – as he considers himself a photographer. He thinks of this relationship both as a rational and emotional one.

The app as an expressive tool. Hasan views that downloading this app was a natural consequence of his relationship with Nikon, and believes that it helps in expressing himself in quite the same way as the company itself does: in terms of inspiration and as a learning guide. As Hasan considers himself a photographer, and the app helps him in expressing this side of his personality, the app can be regarded as an entertaining one (Anckar and D’incau, 2002).

The app as a tool for dialogue. As Hasan thinks that dialogue requires more engagement on his part, he sees the app as merely a one-way communication from the company towards him, and considers Facebook as a place where he could enter into a dialogue, although he values other photographers’ opinion more than a dialogue with the company alone.

The app as contact with the company. The user views the Nikon Learn and Explore app as satisfactory, with special mention to the fact that Nikon has been improving it ever since it was launched. In addition, Hasan considers all his experiences with Nikon to be a part of a long-term relationship with the company, and doesn’t mention one that stands out. When asked if the company could improve on something in relation to the app, nothing important is mentioned.

The app as added value. The app is considered an added value by Hasan in the sense that it is a ‘rich source for inspiration’, ‘helps improve the technique’, and it also provides a digital copy of the camera manual, so it becomes ‘useful on the go’. All these characteristics make the app so useful that it would be missed if suddenly cancelled. The app being ‘useful on the go’ creates the location-related mobile value (Balasubramanian et al., 2002; Liljander et al., 2007; May, 2001; Anckar and D’incau, 2002).
The app and associated risks. Hasan regularly follows Nikon’s product launches, so even when there are small issues with new products, as they are solved quickly, he doesn’t regard them as risks, and he doesn’t regard the app as any kind of risk.

The importance of the app. Hasan regards the company as an important one due to its quality products and the emotional attachment to it. Furthermore, he feels the app is also an important part of the product, and he will continue using it, as he already uses it on many occasions.

The app as a rational or emotional choice. Nikon represents both an emotional and rational choice to use their products, but the app itself is merely a rational choice as it helps in the process of taking photos.

The app as trustworthy. Hasan views trustworthiness as quality, in both terms of physical and image quality, and he states that he wouldn’t have bought the products if it were not for trustworthiness. As far as the app goes, he thinks it adds trust, because by it ‘Nikon goes beyond just being a manufacturer’, and ‘looking out for the photographic community’.

The app and commitment. As a loyal consumer of Nikon, Hasan will always choose Nikon products unless the company does something inappropriate – thus, he considers himself committed, but when asked if the app adds to this feeling, he answered that it considers it only a supplementary feature, and doesn’t make him more or less committed.

The app and closeness. If closeness refers to loyalty, then Hasan thinks of himself as being close with the company, with which he engages on social media; and even though he doesn’t view the app as an engaging feature with the company, he considers it adds to the relationship in the sense of the ‘cyber net relationship’.

The app and satisfaction. Hasan is ‘100% satisfied’ with Nikon, for all the above mentioned reasons, but doesn’t consider the app to have a ‘definitive role’ – it only has a ‘supplementary role’.

Consumer marketing – experience, hyperreality and consumer culture

Experience When asked if Hasan experienced anything special in regards to Nikon, his answer is that there is no specific moment that he can recall, and that it’s rather been a long-term relationship, and it’s the creation of the sentiment of emotional value that he regards as an experience.
Hyperreality      At one point in the interview Hasan calls the app as a part of a ‘cyber net relationship’ that the company is building with its consumers. He also claims that the application helps him express himself.

Consumer culture      In terms of a consumer culture, Hasan considers Nikon as caring for its photography community through the creation of this app because they ‘go beyond just being a camera manufacturer’, and provide means to ‘improve technique’ and a ‘source for inspiration’. He also thinks being able to share some parts of the product with others and share opinions with fellow photographers is important, which is facilitated by Nikon through their Facebook page and their products’ compatibility with others. Hasan also thinks of the mobile application as an added value, which at the same time helps express himself.

Fournier’s brand relationships typology

Hasan’s relationship with Nikon is a voluntary one, which was backed up a long time ago when he first bought his camera brand with the support of friends and family – since then, he has only been using Nikon, and according to his words, he will always choose Nikon. Thus, the relationship is supported by friends and family, but also fellow photographers, who also use Nikon, and with whom Hasan swaps lenses and exchanges opinions. He also feels that he shares Nikon’s brand values, and the manufacturer helps in expressing himself. He trusts and feels close with the company, he feels it’s an important part of his identity as a photographer, and feels the relationship has an emotional side as well. As a result, due to the voluntary, long-term, socially supported, trusting, congruent in values and common interests and exclusive characteristics of the relationship between Hasan and Nikon, according to Fournier’s brand relationship typology the relationship can be termed as a mixture between a committed relationship and a best friendship.

Case 2

App: Net banking

Company: Danske Bank

User: Mia Voldum, female, 26, Danish, student
The app is used to perform financial transactions and check one’s financial situation on a mobile device. For all these functions, the app can be regarded a mobile financial app.

The relationship with Danske Bank. Mia’s relationship with Danske Bank is purely technical, and it has been less close since technology came into use. She doesn’t feel connected to Danske Bank, and she doesn’t feel it represents her in any way – she thinks of the bank as old-fashioned and conservative. In addition, she doesn’t think the relationship should be closer as ‘going to the bank when you’re a student and you don’t have much money is not always nice’. Instead, she thinks of the app as personal, a platform where she can deal with her own finances, while ‘nobody is watching over’ what she’s doing. ‘It’s personal rather than connected to the bank.’ Even though this has not changed her relationship to Danske Bank, she enjoys it as it is – the use of the app.

The app as an expressive tool. Mia’s opinion of the bank is that it’s a bit old-fashioned and conservative, and does not represent her. She adds that if she wanted a bank to represent her, she would probably switch to another one. The app, on the other hand is something that she enjoys using because ‘nobody is watching over’ and she feels connected to it. The emotional connection she has with her finances is translated to the relationship with the app, which ultimately influences her relationship with the bank as well (May, 2001).

The app as a tool for dialogue. The app is not regarded as a tool for dialogue, although Mia adds that it could be the case if the company ‘pushed messages’ towards her and ‘put out information’ that she needed. Based on this comment on behalf of Mia, it becomes clear that the lack of customization (Deans, 2005) is something she regards as a weakness of the app, and which could be improved on.

The app as contact with the company. Although Mia’s contact with the company, including the app has been mostly satisfactory, she does however mention one experience which left her affected. When she had a loan and she was traveling, at the point when she started spending more money than supposed to her counselor tried to desperately get in touch with her, and that had made Mia feel that suddenly the bank didn’t trust her. They could’ve improved the experience by using a more friendly tone – and Mia adds: they could have done it through messages via the app, ‘it could’ve been less intimidating’. From her answer it shows that she’s connected with the app. Since Mia hasn’t been to the bank since technology came into use, the mobile value she enjoys is much related to space-sensitive issues (Balasubramanian et al., 2002): the service she uses can now be accessed.
through the app, and does not necessitate physical proximity. It is also time-sensitive (ibid), since she can also access the services when the bank is closed. This also covers Mia’s spontaneous need to check her balance of buying something online (Anckar and D’incau, 2002).

The app as added value. Mia considers the app to be an added value in terms of convenience, which she appreciates a lot since she thinks it’s ‘really a big step to do that’, but it would also be fatal not to do so, since technology is advanced, and young people have the need for these sort of apps. The convenience she experiences in relation to the app can be translated into the efficiency of the app, which is one of the main mobile values (Anckar and D’incau, 2002).

The app and associated risks. Mia trusts the company and doesn’t see any risk associated to it, especially because of the bank’s history, which shows no signs of weakness. Furthermore, she also trusts that the app works. She goes on to add that the app has a professional image, is user-friendly, so it is risk-free in this sense, too.

The importance of the app. ‘It’s one of the apps I would never delete’ is what Mia thinks about the importance of the app. Whereas there are those types of apps that one deletes after 2-3 weeks, ‘this is an app I would stick to’. The company, however, is not one she would remain with: ‘I wouldn’t say I wouldn’t change to another company’.

The app as a rational or emotional choice. Mia describes her relationship to Danske Bank as being a rational one, as she doesn’t feel emotionally attached to them, although she does feel so to the app, while having it is also a rational decision.

The app as trustworthy. Danske Bank’s history makes them trustworthy, and the app is in line with that, it doesn’t make them more or less trustworthy.

The app and commitment. Mia feels committed more to the app than the company itself, and she likes using the app. She does mentioned the fact that she has never used the services of another bank, which according to her could potentially make her a bit ungrateful for what Danske Bank is offering. But if there wasn’t for the app, she would probably look around for other offers.

The app and closeness. As elaborated above, Mia does not feel close with the company, although the app plays a positive role in terms of closeness. When asked if Danske Bank could potentially create an app that would bring her closer, she answers that the app should then be more interactive, but no too much, because ‘there is so much social media around’ as it is.
The app and satisfaction. As the discussion showed, Mia is satisfied with Danske Bank in general, although she misses some personality in their service line, and also an extra effort. However, the app ‘improves their image a little bit because it works so well’, which makes her in the end more satisfied.

Consumer marketing – experience, hyperreality and consumer culture

Experience Danske Bank hasn’t provided Mia with any memorable experiences; on the contrary, they have made her feel uncomfortable at a certain point, after which she felt she ‘didn’t want to see them again’.

Hyperreality The netbanking app doesn’t provide a platform to create a cyber identity, but Mia enjoys her virtual contact with the company more than a physical one. She likes to use the app, and appreciates the fact that ‘no one is watching over’ what she’s doing. She feels more connected to the app than to the company.

Consumer culture Although the net banking app does not help express Mia, she does however view it as a need for the young generation; she furthermore considers it an added value as far as convenience goes. ‘It was fatal if they couldn’t do it’, she says. The long-term relationship she has had with the bank – ‘I’ve never had another bank’ – and with the app – ‘it’s one of the app I would never delete’ – as well as her closeness to it all add to the consumer culture, where by definition the company becomes part of the community by engaging in a long-term relationship (Holt, 1999).

Fournier’s brand relationships typology

Mia has made it clear on several times during the interview that she does not feel close to Danske Bank, rather than to the app itself. In fact, Danske Bank is the first (and last, so far) bank that she has used, and she considers them trustworthy and having a good image, but at the same time conservative and old-fashioned. Even though it is a voluntary decision to choose Danske Bank, Mia does not exclude the idea that she will change to another bank. She is also satisfied with Danske Bank, but thinks there is room for improvement. For all the reasons above, Mia is engaged into a marriage of convenience with Danske Bank according to Fournier’s brand relationship typologies, where the long-term relationship is mostly influenced by the context and less by a deliberate choice, and is governed by satisficing rules.
Case 3

App: H&M

Company: H&M

User: Katrine Friis Østergaard, female, 26, Danish, student

The app is used to purchase clothing from H&M online, based on tips about special offers and fashion trends. Due to the one-way character of the app via the pushed messages it sends out to user, it can be regarded as a mobile advertising app.

The relationship with H&M. Katrine believes she has a ‘really strong relationship’ with H&M, making up 80% of all the clothes she buys. She has had a long-term relationship with the brand, starting from when she was a child, until she started buying her own clothes. She also believes that it is ‘sensible’ to buy from the company, and thus thinks of it as nothing ‘amazing’, ‘it’s something that everyone uses’. As for the app, she expresses that downloading it was a natural consequence of buying from H&M, and that she had deleted it after some weeks because it had started to ‘annoy’ her due to some unnecessary updates. She ‘only downloaded it to get a discount’, which she did, and afterwards deleted it because it had served its function, but it had done nothing to her relationship to the brand.

The app as an expressive tool. Katrine elaborated on why she buys the brand, as she agreed that H&M helped her in expressing herself: she thinks of the brand as being cheap, but with a ‘pretty good quality’, and fashionable at the same time. The app helped her express herself in a way that it helped buy a dress that Katrine thinks expresses who she is, at a discount. Therefore it was an indirect expression of who she is, but other than that it didn’t really make a difference’.

The app as a tool for dialogue. Katrine complains that there was an information overload in terms of communication, and she felt the notifications were not customized for her, instead they were random and ‘annoying’, which ultimately made her quit the app. As opposed to this one-way communication, she regards the buying of the dress as the only dialogue that occurred via the app.

The app as contact with the company. As opposed to other interviewees, Katrine doesn’t expect any special experience from H&M, ‘because it’s cheap’. The company only has to provide her with products that she likes, without any kind of service. Although she does mention an experience that
occurs several times a year, and that is the time she gets the H&M catalog. She considers that to be ‘nice’ in a world where everything is digital and no other company does this. She enjoys the feeling of looking through it, the freedom of location and being able to see what is in fashion. From the perspective of the app, however, she does not feel it was satisfactory, because the updates were not addressed to her specifically – if she had the opportunity to choose what to read about in a customized way, she would have kept it. As an extra use, she talks about the app as being suitable to spontaneous situations when she is not busy with anything and she could use a distraction. She speaks about this function as for spontaneous situations for reasons of entertainment ‘to kill time’, in line with Anckar and D’ineau’s (2002) remark on the same issue. Last, but not least, she adds that her relationship with the brand has been a long-term one, and it is a ‘strong brand’ in her head.

The app as added value. The app is considered to be an added value in terms of providing a discount; otherwise Katrine thinks she could’ve gotten more out of it probably, but she didn’t give it a chance. Furthermore, the app also allowed for Katrine to buy the dress, and any other item, without any space and time limits, which only employs the space and time related mobile value according to Balasubramanian et al. (2002).

The app and associated risks. The only risk Katrine sees with the company is that when she shops online, there is the risk that the item will not fit, in which case she has to return it with a return stamp of 40 DKK. Apart from considering this ‘annoying’, she also thinks it’s a good thing, otherwise she will probably buy more. In this sense, the app does encourage the risk because it only give discounts for online purchases, but it does not provide additional risks.

The importance of the app. Katrine believes H&M is an important part of her life, and if the company didn’t exist, she would probably buy less clothes. She also finds it important due to size issues, and in this sense she feels comfortable that she can fit the clothes, and that they are fashionable and worn by everyone else as well. As far as the app goes, if it would have been important, then it would have had to allow for more personalization. As with other interviewees, Katrine also considers the lack of customization of the app as something to be improved on (Deans, 2005).

The app as a rational or emotional choice. Even though buying H&M is rational because of the cheap prices, it is also emotional because Katrine thinks the right item of clothing can ‘make you
feel good about yourself”. Whereas H&M combines both sides, the app represents only the rational side, as it was downloaded only for the discount.

The app as trustworthy. First of all, Katrine admits that she has never really thought about how trustworthy H&M is, but that this dimension definitely has two sides for her. On one hand, the brand lives up to her expectations ‘90% out of the time’, but on the other hand she would expect H&M to be one of the ‘big sinners in using third world manpower’. The app, however, does not have any effect on any of this.

The app and commitment. Katrine considers commitment to refer to loyalty, and she considers herself loyal to the brand as she keeps coming back to it, and has been buying it ever since a child, with her mother. For having good prices, good quality, fashionable clothing and suitable sizes, she doesn’t see why she would quit using the company. The app has done quite the opposite – there was no purpose having it, but it didn’t do anything negative in terms of the relationship either.

The app and closeness. She considers the whole relationship with H&M more of a rational one, due to the functions it serves. The emotional part is a smaller part, and thus Katrine doesn’t feel close with the company. The app has supported the feeling of rationality as it provided a discount for a purchase.

The app and satisfaction. Katrine is satisfied with H&M, and other than smaller issues, such as the return fee, she cannot think of other problems. Even though she was satisfied with the function of the app as well, she was dissatisfied with it at the point where it became useless and ‘annoying’.

Consumer marketing – experience, hyperreality and consumer culture

Experience Katrine appreciates the effort on behalf of H&M to provide her with a catalog four times a year, which engages her in the experience of going through the catalog, seeing what is in fashion, in the garden or on her couch, without having to make the effort to go to the shop. Katrine appreciates this in a world where everything is digitalized, and not many companies would go this extra mile.

Hyperreality In terms of a cyber identity, the app from H&M did not provide a platform for Katrine to create one, although for those weeks she had the app she was ‘aware of any new styles and good deals’, so it affected her in the real life.
**Consumer culture**  
Katrine has had a long-term relationship with the H&M brand, it helps her in expressing herself emotionally and rationally as well, and the app has also helped express herself indirectly. Furthermore, the app is seen as added value in the sense of a discount.

**Fournier’s brand relationships typology**

Katrine has a long-term committed relationship with H&M, fueled by her decision as well as a support from her mother from when she was a child and her mother bought their clothes from H&M. It is also a socially supported relationship according to Katrine, as she mentions that everyone uses H&M, and her friends do, too, to whom she talks to about the brand – ‘it is a brand that doesn’t really need promotion’. She trusts the company, and she is committed to using it in the future. An adverse circumstance could be that she does not however trust the brand from a social responsibility point of view – yet, she continues the relationship. In the end, Katrine engages into a committed partnership with H&M due to the characteristics of the relationship.

**Case 4**

**App: Rejseplanen**

**Company: Midttrafik**

**User: Pavel Volgarev, male, 25, Russian, employed with Dynamicweb A/S**

*Rejseplanen allows for checking the bus schedules within Aarhus regardless of time, in addition to location and preferred routes. In terms of the classification by Varshney and Vetter (2002), it is difficult to include this type of app into any of the framework’s provided by the authors; it is, in the terms used by the authors an app that allows for location of services, providing more detailed information in regards of time and connections, if the case.*

*The relationship with Midttrafik.*  
Pavel doesn’t reveal much about his relationship to Midttrafik, he only mentions that he uses it quite a lot and that it is useful. Throughout the interview it becomes clear that Pavel thinks highly of the company because it is a governmental institution, and he feels he can trust it. The same is true for the app as well, it’s useful and practical.

*The app as an expressive tool.*  
The app doesn’t help Pavel express himself, but he adds that he prefers using practical apps, because he doesn’t like ‘things where you share everything that you do’, he wants the app to have a specific function.
The app as a tool for dialogue. Pavel doesn’t consider himself to be in a dialogue with the company, and he thinks he could potentially enter one if there were issues with the app – but so far, he hasn’t had any.

The app as contact with the company. Pavel is mainly satisfied with both the company and the app. As a special experience he describes the time Midttrafik changed scheme for all buses, and for that they gave away a free book with the schedule and routes. Pavel thinks this was a good step ‘to let people know what is happening’. As for the app, he would improve it in terms of user-friendliness because he thinks user-friendliness is a key point in the apps that let you express yourself – although he doesn’t require it himself, he feels Rejseplanen shouldn’t be ‘fancy’.

The app as added value. Rejseplanen isn’t considered of much value because if it should be deleted, Pavel would just use the website on the PC, he explains. When asked to compare it with other such companies’ apps, he considers Rejseplanen to be much better; and when asked if without the app would he feel the company is less, he answers that he doesn’t think it would change anything, because the status of the company is very good.

The app and associated risks. Rejseplanen does not present any risk for Pavel, as with a net banking app would be. Even if the app is not accurate in some cases, he believes that is normal, and accepts it.

The importance of the app. Pavel considers the app important, especially in some cases where he is visiting other cities in Denmark. There is a space-related value that stems from the app that is appreciated by Pavel (Balasubramaniam, 2002).

The app as a rational or emotional choice. Pavel considers the app a completely rational choice to download.

The app as trustworthy. Both the app and the company are trusted; the company especially because it’s a governmental institution, so if they failed, that would be a ‘big thing’. He also trusts the app because he has never experienced any problems with it.

The app and commitment. As Pavel thinks about Midttrafik that ‘it does its job well’, and ‘the buses are clean and always on time’, if they introduced another transportation system, he wouldn’t change to it, even if it were supposedly cheaper and better.
The app and closeness. Pavel doesn’t feel close with the app, and he would not miss it if they suddenly monetized it. Then he goes on adding that he would probably buy the app because he needs it, but only if it were a fair price and they also improved something about it. In addition, he would feel disappointed if they suddenly put a price on it, because he doesn’t think the government should be experiencing any troubles financially.

The app and satisfaction. The company is satisfactory because it is dependable and well organized, and the app is as well, because ‘it does its job’. The efficiency of the app is appreciated by Pavel, according to Anckar and D’incau (2002).

Consumer marketing – experience, hyperreality and consumer culture

Experience Pavel talks about the experience that Midttrafik provided to people when they changed the scheme for the buses, and they gave away free books with the schedule and routes to people, and treasures this because he thinks it helped many people.

Hyperreality Rejseplanen is not an app that necessitates that one creates an identity through it, and Pavel agrees with this saying that it is just a practical tool.

Consumer culture As Pavel doesn’t use the app to express himself, and the app is not considered an added value, Middtrafik is not part of the consumer culture, and is not creating one.

Fournier’s brand relationships typology

If Pavel’s relationship to Midttrafik should be defined by Fournier’s typology, it would be the casual buddies, due to its low affectivity and low engagement on behalf of Pavel, who wouldn’t really miss the app if it were gone, and does not feel close to it in any way, and instead regards it as just a practical tool which could easily be replaced by the PC website. Besides this, Pavel also has few expectations from Midttrafik, and that is mainly to not monetize the app, which he doesn’t actually think will ever happen.

Case 5

App: Foursquare

Company: McDonald’s

User: Laura Brown, female, 24, Canadian, student
The Foursquare app is a second-party app that enables users to get information based on their location; this information is put out by companies that want to participate, and in the end it is a competition between the companies to get the attention of the user through discounts and other offers. The user chooses to check in or not, and go to the specific companies or not. In this specific case McDonald’s sent out a notification based on Laura’s check in inviting her to purchase a menu and get a free upgrade for it. For the reasons above, Foursquare is a mix between a mobile advertising and a product location and search app that allowed for sending one-way messages based on the location of the user.

The relationship with McDonald’s. According to Laura, her relationship with McDonald’s has been a long-term one, even though right now she is not consuming McDonald’s because of her new year’s resolution. But she is perfectly aware of the fact that she will eat McDonald’s again. Her relationship is related to both her nationality (“I’ve used McDonald’s before – I’m a Canadian!”) and her past, when her mother took her to McDonald’s in the morning, or when she spent Sunday afternoons there with her family. Despite her close relationship to the company, she believes everyone has a relationship to McDonald’s in this world in some way. The app, or rather the notification she received from McDonald’s through Foursquare shocked her, because she didn’t understand why McDonald’s would be driving business when they are ‘obviously one of the world’s biggest companies’, and because providing discounts through a mobile app is a ‘hip and niche thing to do’, which McDonald’s is not. As she was surprised by the notification and the gesture, her view of the company has changed, but not her relationship.

The app as an expressive tool. Laura believes McDonald’s has expressed who she was more when she was a kid, spending time there with her friends and family. At present, the company is also helping her express herself by eliminating it from her life, towards the goal of a healthier life, but she also believes that again, McDonald’s can be applied to anyone. The app she thinks does not help her express herself, mostly because it’s a ‘second-party app’.

The app as a tool for dialogue. There was more dialogue than Laura would have expected, since she didn’t expect any dialogue from McDonald’s; it was also a valuable exchange which she sees as a good dialogue, but not in the traditional sense. Furthermore, it has also encouraged ‘post-dialogue’, which Laura had with her friends and classmates about the incident she experienced.
**The app as contact with the company.** The contact with McDonald’s via the app was satisfactory, and it could have been improved if they would have communicated something after the check-in was completed, to see if the app is working and to ‘blow people out of the water and make them want to do it again’. The way the notification was done has only surprised Laura, and if McDonald’s would have communicated something after the check-in, she would have been impressed. Experience-wise, Laura doesn’t mention one specific one, and only continues to argue that her relationship with McDonald’s has been long-term, and she has many memories with them.

**The app as added value.** She considers the added value in both terms of monetary and image value – she got a discount, but her conception was also adjusted because they went the extra mile she wouldn’t have expected them to go. The fact that she was approached when she did not expect to is an issue related to space, and that is where this app’s mobile value stems from (Balasubramanian et al., 2002; Anckar and D’Incau, 2002).

**The app and associated risks.** Laura believes that there are considerable health risks to eat at McDonald’s, and that’s exactly why she has stopped eating there. But at the same time she also thinks that ‘it has become such a staple that it’s almost unavoidable’. ‘McDonald’s is an easy target to everyone’, so she has become to accept it. In terms of the app, it doesn’t add to this initial risk.

**The importance of the app.** Laura believes the company is important to her in a nostalgic way, but also because she has felt the need to acknowledge it in her new year’s resolution. ‘But not eating McDonald’s has more to do with the new year’s resolution’, than with McDonald’s. The app underlies this importance because it made her think about McDonald’s when she wasn’t.

**The app as a rational or emotional choice.** Laura admits that her decision to purchase McDonald’s is completely emotional – when she does – and that is partly because it’s one of the things she ‘grew up with’. As for the app, it adds a rational side to it, because it makes her think about value, and solidifies the choice to go to McDonald’s. In this regard, as Laura was planning on going to McDonald’s anyway, the app turned out to be efficient (Anckar and D’Incau, 2002) due to the discount it implied.

**The app as trustworthy.** Laura thinks of McDonald’s as a trustworthy brand, oddly enough. ‘What they are about is pretty clear’, ‘they are trying, they acknowledge their reputation and they own it’. They are doing what they can to be ‘ethical and sustainable’. And even though the app has changed her perception of the company, it doesn’t make it more or less trustworthy.
The app and commitment. Laura feels she’s committed to ‘not being committed’ to the company, but she also knows she will eat McDonald’s again. The app doesn’t make her more committed, because in this one year when she’s not eating McDonald’s she will not be tempted in any way.

The app and closeness. Again, Laura mentions that she can only get as close to McDonald’s as anyone else – and even though she didn’t expect the company to communicate to her, they did and that added a ‘personal touch’ and it was unexpected. As the app facilitated this surprise, she considers the app to have brought her closer to the company, physically and emotionally.

The app and satisfaction. She is satisfied with the company, and she believes they do what they can, although her perception improved due to the app, because she got to see how such a big company can still get involved with social media, and make an extra effort, which ultimately improved her satisfaction.

Consumer marketing – experience, hyperreality and consumer culture

Experience Laura recalls many memories at McDonald’s, which ultimately make up into a long-term relationship, which she admits to be a close and significant one. Seeing how she experienced her encounter with McDonald’s through the notification she got it seems the usage of the app itself has been an experience because it was personal and emotional, and she recalls it as pre-purchase experience that helped her foresee the purchasing experience, and then has talked to other people about it as something out of the ordinary.

Hyperreality Foursquare is a second-party app that has allowed McDonald’s to get into contact with Laura, so in this sense it doesn’t offer a platform to create an identity, but it does however offer a place for purchasing, as Laura got a discount from it.

Consumer culture As stated before, the app does not allow to create an identity, but Laura considers it as an added value, to which her long-term relationship to the company only adds. Additionally, Laura also feels that through this app McDonald’s is showing that it cares for its consumers, by following the ‘trend of social media and getting involved with it’, which she finds very ‘commendable’. Last, but not least, as Laura expressed as well, the experience with the app has started a discussion for Laura with her friends and classmates, and she thinks other people might have been surprised in the same way, too. As for the negative part about McDonald’s, Laura has
stated that she does think the company is doing what it can in terms of sustainability and ethics, and that they are a family business, in the end.

*Fournier’s brand relationships typology*

When Laura used to purchase from McDonald’s, she was in a committed partnership with the company: it was a long-term relationship that was voluntarily chosen, it was socially supported by her parents, and everyone else as Laura believes everyone has some sort of relationship to the brand, it was a trusting relationship, because Laura trusted that the company was doing what it could, it was intimate due to the multitude of memories related to McDonald’s, and lastly, Laura decided to stick out next to the brand despite circumstances according to which McDonald’s has a ‘bad reputation’. However, in the year when Laura is not purchasing from McDonald’s she is in an avoidance-driven relationship with the company in which she decided to move away from McDonald’s exactly because she felt attracted to it, so in order to yield a new identity about herself, she chose McDonald’s to do that, but in a negative way.

*Cross-case analysis*

The following cross-case analysis will be focused on the dimensions of RM identified as important in the theory, and which were researched upon through the interview, which are the three dimensions of RM seen as a process (Grönroos, 2004) – dialogue, the episode value and added value – and the drivers of relationship (Egan, 2001) – risk, salience and emotion; trust and commitment; closeness; satisfaction. These dimensions will be discussed from the mobile app’s point of view, how the app is related to each dimension. This part will be followed by a consumer marketing perspective according to which experience, hyperreality and consumer culture will be discussed across the five cases.

RM seen as a process: dialogue – episode value – added value

According to Grönroos (2004), dialogue occurs when the company provides a two-way channel in order for a dialogue to form, which will ultimately create a shared meaning. The app created by Nikon, Nikon Learn and explore is considered more of a one-way communication by its user Hasan, because it doesn’t require any engagement on his part, it is only communication from the company to him. Mia, the user of Danske Bank’s net banking app also considers that there is no dialogue between her and the company, but she goes on to add that the company could potentially engage into a dialogue with her through ‘pushed messages’ that present information she needs, which
ultimately translates into mobile advertising – one-way communication that is aimed at advertising services or products (Varshney and Vetter, 2002). Contrary to Mia, Katrine regards pushed messages that were not customized to her via the app as one-way communication, which due to its randomness became annoying. However, buying the dress that she wanted prior to the downloading of the app is considered a valuable dialogue by Katrine, which can be regarded as efficiency of the app (Anckar and D’incau, 2002) in terms of getting the desired product at a discount and buying it online, conveniently. Pavel is also not engaged in a dialogue with Midttrafik through Rejseplanen. As for Laura’s use of Foursquare to get a discount with McDonald’s, she finds that there was more dialogue than expected in the first place, and there was also a valuable exchange which she regards as dialogue, but not in a traditional way. Furthermore, Laura has also expected a feedback from McDonald’s after the check-in has been made, but she didn’t receive one.

Episode value is difficult to discuss in the context where not many interviewees have provided mentionable experiences with the company, and have rather talked about their long-term relationships with it. But as Grönroos (2004) states, these episodes ultimately create the long-term relationship, and some episodes – contacts – with the company will be more important than others. Based on the usage of the app, all users have rated their contact with the company satisfactory/mainly satisfactory. In addition, Hasan also appreciates the fact that Nikon has been improving its app ever since it launched it, and considers all his experiences with Nikon, including the app, as a build-up to the long-term relationship he now has with Nikon. Thus, Hasan has only had satisfactory contact with the company through the app. Mia, however, besides having a mostly satisfactory contact with the company including the app, does have an unpleasant story to tell about her contact with Danske Bank, regarding a situation which left her feeling she didn’t want to go back to the bank. But Mia also sees a solution in the app, through which the bank could have engaged in a more friendly tone and could have been 'less intimidating’. Therefore, event though this one episode has been unsatisfactory, Danske Bank could improve on it via the app, which otherwise does not present any negative experiences. Katrine is also satisfied with her contact with H&M, and she also has a pleasant experience that H&M provides for her, through the fashion catalog they send out four times a year. This episode is particularly special for Katrine, because it creates a personal and intimate experience, but as for the contact through the app, she is not very satisfied, because it became ‘annoying’. Even though the function was served, it became useless afterwards mainly because it was sending out random notifications, without any choice to personalize them. This refers to the personalization and customization issues, which mobile apps
should be able to provide if successful (Deans, 2005; Anckar and D’Incau, 2002). Pavel is satisfied with both Rejseplanen and the company, Midttrafik. As something that could be improved on, he mentions that the app could be made more user-friendly, as that is a characteristic which engages users. Laura has the same long-term relationship with McDonald’s as some other interviewees with their own brands, and therefore claims that all experiences make part of this relationship to form satisfaction. In relation to the app, the contact was satisfactory, and it could have only been improved if McDonald’s would have provided feedback to the user that has checked in via the app, because then it would have made her want to check in again.

Added value is created through communication, episode value and interaction (Grönroos, 2004). It is the difference between the core value and that which is considered extra. Hasan considers the Nikon app as an added value because it is ‘a rich source for inspiration’, ‘helps improve the technique’ and provides a digital copy of the manual. So as it becomes useful on the go, it can be rated as an app that is sensitive to space, according to Balasubramanian et al. (2002). Mia also thinks of her net banking app as an added value due to its convenience, and she appreciates this a lot. The characteristics are sensitive to space and time, as she can log in any time, without having to go to the bank. Besides, she believes this is a big step to take on behalf of the company. Katrine thinks of added value only in terms of the discount that she received through the H&M app, which she might have been able to improve, but didn’t give it a chance. As for Pavel, he considers Rejseplanen easily replaceable with the website on PCs, and its does not make any difference, because Midttrafik has a very good status as a governmental institution. Laura perceives the added value of the app as both monetary and as image value – besides getting a discount, the use of the app also changes her perception of McDonald’s as a company that still cares for its consumers, even though it is a big company.

Egan’s relationship drivers

Egan’s relationship drivers (2001) that help create RM are risk, salience and emotion; trust and commitment; closeness and satisfaction.

According to the same author (ibid) risk is the perceived likeliness of loss in relation to the product/service, salience is how important the product/service is, and emotion is what the consumer might feel about the product/service. As an avid user of Nikon, Hasan is highly emotionally related to the brand, it regards it as important, but doesn’t perceive any risk with buying the product. The
app is also regarded as an important part of the product, and doesn’t incur any risks, but it represents the rational part of the relationship as it helps taking photos and thus is only supplementary. According to theory (Egan, 2001), as salience and emotion are both high, Hasan would be prone to be engaged with RM strategies because it would help reassure him due to the strategy’s character where the consumer gets to know the company and get close with it. Mia trusts the company, and she trusts that the app represents no risks because of its professional image and its user-friendly interface; and although she would not necessarily stick to her bank, she views the app as one she ‘would never delete’. As for her emotional attachment to the bank, there is no emotional bond between her and Danske Bank, as it is only rational, but she does however feel emotionally related to the app. Mia has an emotional relation to her finances, which brings her close to the app as well, without creating a real connection to the bank – and according to May (2001) this emotional bond will be the main reason for the mobile commerce strategy’s effectiveness. As again salience and emotion is high in relation to the app, RM strategies would be effective for Mia’s relationship to her app, and ultimately to her bank. The next subject, Katrine sees online shopping as the only risk she takes when buying from H&M because of the return fee she has to pay in case the clothes do not fit. As the app is created only for online shopping, it reinforces the same risk, but not more. H&M is an important part of her life, and if the app would have provided more personalized notifications, it could have been as well. From an emotional point of view, Katrine does feel emotional with the brand, but not with the app, as the app was more of a rational choice because of the discount it provided. For the fact that the H&M brand is important for her and she feel emotionally connected with it, while also experiencing a small amount of risk related to the purchase, Katrine would also benefit from a RM strategy via an app that is more customized to her specific needs. Pavel has the most rational relationship to Midttrafik, which he doesn’t regard as any kind of risk, neither the app, and he regards the choice to use the company and the app as both rational decisions, but sees the app as an important part of his use of Midttrafik. With both low risk and emotion to the company and app, Pavel might not be eligible for a RM strategy, as it could only be a useless effort on behalf of the company. According to his words, he also prefers practical apps to apps that help in self-expression. Laura feels McDonald’s is important for her, she feels emotionally attached to it, and it represents an important health risk to eat there. Although the app does not add extra risks, it underlines the importance because it made her think about McDonald’s when she wasn’t, and it is a rational app because it solidifies the choice to go to McDonald’s in terms of value. In addition, due to the situation in which Laura finds herself now as not eating...
McDonald’s because of the risk it represents and how this choice also helps Laura express herself during this year when she will not eat McDonald’s, Laura is an adequate candidate for RM strategies to reassure her and help her get to know the company more.

Trust and commitment are two inseparable drivers, which influence one another and are by far the most complex drivers. Trust is a state in which the consumer accepts the vulnerability of his/her own expectations in relation to the company, whereas commitment stems from a trusting relationship – or a committed relationship creates trust – and is represented by the willingness on behalf of both parties to continue the relationship with one another despite occasional investments. Hasan, the first subject, trusts Nikon and is committed to it. He views trustworthiness in terms of quality, and believes the app adds to this trust because through it Nikon is looking out for its photography community. In this sense, Hasan appreciates reliability and equity on behalf of the company via the app. As for commitment, even though he is very committed to the company, the app does not add to it. Mia views trustworthiness more in terms of historical trustworthiness – Danske Bank has not been talked about negatively in the media, therefore it is trustworthy. As the app doesn’t add to it, it doesn’t affect it. Commitment is something she feels for the app more than for the company, and she wouldn’t mind changing the bank if the app was deleted. In Mia’s case, commitment as well as emotional attachment are directed towards the app, which ultimately has a positive effect on her use of Danske Bank. Katrine has had a bad experience with the app in terms of commitment, mainly because it became ‘annoying’ quite soon after downloading it, and she had to delete it. She trusts and is committed to H&M as a company, but the app has not done anything positive in this sense, and has not influenced it in a negative way either. The user of Rejseplanen, Pavel, trusts both the company and the app – the company due to its status, to its historical trustworthiness, and the app because he hasn’t experienced any problems with it. Laura trusts McDonald’s, despite the fact that they have a bad reputation – she thinks they ‘own it’ and they are doing what they can to become more ethical and sustainable. Laura too sees trustworthiness as an issue related to equity; but the app does not add to it, nor does it from a commitment perspective, which Laura feels toward the company, even in the present time when she is not buying from McDonald’s for a year.

Closeness can be regarded as physical, emotional or mental proximity, and usually it develops easier in the case of two-way communication (Egan, 2001). When asked about closeness, Hasan views himself close with the company because he is loyal to it. The app only adds to this closeness
by the development of a ‘cyber net relationship’. As a user of Danske Bank’s net banking app Mia does not consider herself close with her bank, although she does feel close with the app. She furthermore thinks that an app that were more interactive could potentially bring her closer to the company, although not too interactive because it can end up a social media channel. Katrine touches on the issue of emotions by claiming she is not close with H&M because it is not an emotional relationship, it’s a rational one. In terms of rationality however the app has played a role due to the discount it provided. Pavel’s app also serves a rational purpose and thus feels no closeness to it. As for Laura, she thinks she is as close to McDonald’s as anyone can get, but in terms of the app, she believes it brought her closer to McDonald’s emotionally because it was an unexpected contact, and they added a personal touch through it.

Satisfaction is the result of a company’s efforts, and it can be defined as the weighing of the pre-established expectations of and the actual performance of the company (Egan, 2001). As far as satisfaction goes, Hasan is 100% satisfied with Nikon, in which the app has a supplementary role. For Mia it improves the whole experience as she likes the app more than the bank, and the app improves the bank’s image, which in the end makes her more satisfied with Danske Bank. Katrine is well satisfied with H&M, and she was also satisfied with the function of the app, but when it came to the random messages she kept getting, it became ‘annoying’, and at that point she deleted the app. For Pavel both the company and the app are satisfactory, the reason being because the company is dependable, and the app works well. Laura’s satisfaction with McDonald’s has improved due to the app because she witnessed how a big company can still make some effort for its consumers, which changed her perception of the whole company.

Consumer marketing

Self-expression through the app

As short-term perspectives are gradually being overtaken by the relationship perspective (Fournier, 1998), consumers form relationships with brands in order to re-affirm themselves. Hasan’s relationship to Nikon is a self-expressive one, to which the app only adds by helping him express himself in terms of inspiration and as a learning guide. According to Fournier’s brand relationship typology, Hasan can be considered to have a committed and best friendship to Nikon. The second subject, Mia, even though she likes to use the net banking app mainly because she feels ‘nobody is watching over’, she doesn’t gain anything from it in terms of self-expression. Her relationship to
Danske Bank is characteristic to a marriage of convenience which is mostly due to the circumstances of Mia’s experience with banks – Danske Bank is the first bank she has ever used. Katrine believes the app for getting a discount with H&M helped her express herself indirectly because she managed to buy a dress that she really wanted with a discount. Her relationship to the brand is a committed partnership according to Fournier’s typology. Pavel prefers apps with a practical use rather than with self-expressive features, and believes Rejseplanen provides just that. Therefore, even though the app does not help him express himself, the choice of the type of app does represent who Pavel is. Pavel is also the interviewee with the least attachment to the brand which can be included into the casual buddies typology. Lastly, Laura, who believes McDonald’s does express her by the choice she made not to buy from the company for a year, states that the app does not help her express herself only because it’s a second-party app. Due to the special circumstances, it can be said that Laura used to be in a committed relationship with McDonald’s, and can potentially enter into a new one once she finished her new year’s resolution; but in the present, she is in an avoidance-driven relationship in which she avoids McDonald’s as part of an identity building.

Experience

Hasan regards as the building up to the long-term relationship he has with Nikon as an experience, or rather full of experiences, and there is no one that he recalls as being more special than the others. Mia can’t recall a nice and special experience at all with Danske Bank – she also doesn’t believe it’s necessary, because it’s a bank – and she does however remember an unpleasant experience which left her scarfed. Katrine is the first interviewee who can talk about a special experience that H&M provides her with, but it is besides the app. She regards the experience as an extra mile from behalf of the company. Pavel speaks about an experience during which Midttrafik gained the value of equity in his eyes by being helpful towards society. As far as the relationship between the experience and the app goes, Laura seems to be the only subject that has lived the use of the app as a personal and unique experience which she then shared with other people and recalls very well. It is a pre-purchase experience which contributed in foreseeing the purchase, and which Laura experienced as a personal touch on behalf of the company and which surprised her.
Hyperreality

Hasan is building a hyperreality through the app in two ways: he believes the company is engaging into a ‘cyber net relationship’ through the app, and he also feels the app helps express himself. Although Mia’s net banking app does not provide the same, Mia enjoys her virtual relationship to the bank and to her finances more than a physical one and appreciates that this way ‘no one is watching over’. In much the same way, Katrine’s H&M app has helped her in the real life to ‘be aware of any new styles and good deals’ for that time while she was using the app. Pavel uses Rejseplanen just as a practical app, and does not consider it to be helpful in self-expression in any way. Laura’s app used to buy McDonald’s at a discount does also not offer a platform to express a cyber identity.

Consumer culture

Hasan believes the app helps him in expressing himself, to which his long-term relationship to the company only adds. Furthermore, he thinks of the app in terms of added value, and believes that through it Nikon is ‘going beyond just being a camera manufacturer’, and shows care for its photography community. Hasan also appreciates sharing opinions and lenses with other photographers, and is satisfied that he is able to do that with Nikon products. Mia has had a long-term relationship with her bank as well, because it’s the first one she ever used, and the app only brings her closer, even though she feels more connected with the app than with the company. It is not an app that helps her express herself, but she thinks of it as added value because it is convenient, and she enjoys using it, while also being of the opinion that it is necessary for the younger generation. Katrine also enjoys a long-term relationship with H&M, and the app has helped her express herself indirectly. The app is seen as an added value as well. Pavel, on the other hand is not using a self-expressive app, which is not considered an added value, and therefore Midttrafik is not creating a consumer culture according to Pavel’s perception. Last, but not least, Laura is engaged in a long-term relationship with McDonald’s, and considers the app an added value. She additionally thinks that this strategy is a ‘commendable’ action because it shows that a big company like McDonald’s can still care for its consumers. She furthermore thinks of McDonald’s as a sustainable and ethical – to a certain degree – company.
Discussion

In light of the research question:

- Can corporate mobile applications help in building, maintaining and enhancing a relationship with the consumer, according to relationship marketing theory?

The interview was employed in order to study five cases in which the mobile application could potentially help in a RM strategy. The RM theory in the present paper is constructed through two perspectives on RM by Grönroos (2004), who talks about RM as a process, and Egan (2001), who subdivides RM into further relationship drivers. These two perspective are supplementary, and it is the researcher’s view that not all drivers or dimensions of the RM theories need to be present in each relationship at the same time via the mobile application due to the supplementary character of the channel – the mobile application. Therefore, it is up to the company, the user and the relationship between the two to set the tone for the relationship via the mobile application concerning RM.

In order to put the findings into perspective, the relationship typologies will be presented according to Fournier (1998). The relationships are all committed in one way or another – Hasan has a committed and best friendship with Nikon as a photographer who chose to go ‘the Nikon way’; Mia is in a marriage of convenience with Danske Bank who’s mobile application she enjoys using, but she wouldn’t mind changing the bank, as Danske Bank is the only bank she has ever used, and she is not completely satisfied with it. Katrine is also in a committed relationship with H&M that has started long time ago, she will continue buying because there is no reason not to. Pavel has a weak bond with Midttrafik, and his relationship can be categorized as a casual buddy relationship, even though the application is regarded as important by Pavel. Finally, Laura has a committed relationship to McDonald’s that has also started since her childhood, and which will probably continue after her engagement of one year when she doesn’t consume McDonald’s.

In summary, all relationships, with the exception of one are committed, whether it is a voluntary or a less voluntary decision. In the light of the relationship types RM will be further discussed, first with attention to Grönroos’s (2004) process view.
Grönroos (2004) talks about dialogue, episode value and added value. In the traditional sense, dialogue is not expressed in the use of the mobile application, because all the communication between the users and the companies is one-way, from the company towards the user, or non-existent. Therefore, in the traditional sense, dialogue was not a part of the relationship between the user and the company via the use of the mobile application. But dialogue was also seen as a valuable exchange as in helping the user reach his/her goal. In this sense the app was seen as useful. Another important issue is that users might await for a feedback after the use of the application, as a dialogue where the interaction is acknowledged by the company. In terms of episode value, the findings showed that the relationship with the company itself was more accounted for than the episodes that it consists of – and when the use of the application was seen as an episode, the users were satisfied with it. The cases where there was dissatisfaction was either because of lack of customization and personalization of the app, or due to the need of user-friendliness of the app, which according to the user engages people more. As a result, the app is considered generally satisfactory as an episode, and it adds to the value of the long-term relationship – in Mia’s case, it creates the relationship instead of the company. When it came to viewing the applications as added value, all users with the exception of one agreed on its value, and they all had the argument as to why they thought of it as added value. Whether it was for entertainment reasons, or for monetary or convenience reasons, or even for changing the perspective the user had on the company – it is regarded as added value.

As a conclusion to Grönroos’s process view on RM, it can be said that there is potential for RM to be created through mobile applications, with special attention to the fact that all users, with the exception of one declared the application as an added value – which, according to Grönroos is the ultimate goal with RM. The implementation of dialogue through these five applications was unsuccessful, but the fact that some users did not feel the need for dialogue with the company via the application, or they viewed it as a valuable exchange shows that the application might just not be the place to create the dialogue with the consumers. Furthermore, the application seen at its episode value is satisfactory as well.

Egan’s relationship drivers go more in depth in terms of what builds a relationship between the consumer and the company. Concerning the five respondents that took part in the research, risk did not show as an important issue as far as the application goes. The importance of the application was clear in most instances, except in the case of Katrine who would have regarded it as important if it
would have provided for a customized function. As for emotion, the applications were mostly rational choices, which supplemented the relationship in this way. Mia was the only case in which the application meant more emotional attachment than to the company, due to Mia’s emotional attachment to her finances. When only looking at the relationship between the company and the consumers specifically, it becomes clear that due to high salience and emotion the consumers are prone to benefit from RM strategies due to its potential to bring the consumer and the company closer. Except Hasan, all respondents believe the application did not add or affect in terms of commitment and trust, even when it was dissatisfactory. Hasan regards the application as an extra offering as far as trust goes due to the extra mile the company goes to show it cares about its photographic community. Mia also feels more committed to her application than the bank, which eventually has a positive influence on her perception of the bank. The applications have also brought their users and the companies closer. Hasan feels close with Nikon via the application as in a ‘cyber net relationship’, while Mia considers herself to be close with the app as opposed to the company. Closeness for her to the bank would mean more interaction via the application. Both Katrine and Pavel consider the relationship with the application a rational one, so they don’t feel close with it, while Laura believes the application has brought her closer to McDonald’s because of the personal touch it represented. Satisfaction was even in some cases increased by the use of the application, as with Hasan, who thinks about it in a supplementary way, Mia who’s use of the application improved the image of the bank, and Laura as well, who’s perception of the company has also improved. If the application did not have a positive effect, it certainly did not have a negative effect either – both Pavel and Katrine are satisfied with the function of the application as something that is only a part of their relationship with the company.

What consumers seek in companies in the 21st century is more engagement and relationship drivers. According to consumer marketing theory they are able to do so through experience, hyperreality and consumer culture via the mobile application. The five respondents in the present research have reported poorly on the issue of experience. Most respondents couldn’t recall any special experience, and the ones that did talked about an experience outside the mobile application. Laura is the only respondent that experienced the use of the application itself as a pre-purchase experience which left her impressed and with a different view on the company. Hyperreality as an electronic form of reality has potential with mobile applications. Hasan experiences his relationship with Nikon via the application as a ‘cyber net relationship’, and expressed himself through the application. Mia enjoys her contact with the bank virtually more than physically because of its
characteristic that ‘no one is watching over’. Katrine was also helped by her application to be more fashion-aware. Pavel and Laura, however, were not able to express themselves through their mobile applications, because in Laura’s case the application was a second-party application. When creating a consumer culture, Nikon is ahead with making Hasan feel as its going beyond its specific activity and reaching out to its photographic community. Hasan expresses himself through the app and regards it as added value. Mia’s emotional connection to the app preceds her connection with the bank, and she views it as an added value, and consequently there is a culture around the app as she admits it is an important part of young people’s relationship with their bank. In perspective, there is potential to create a stronger consumer culture around the netbanking applications that will ultimately create a consumer culture around the bank as well. Katrine’s application is likewise seen as an added value, which indirectly helped her express herself, and therefore there is potential to build a consumer culture around her company, H&M, too. Pavel finds little value in his application Rejseplanen, and does not consider it a platform where he could express himself. Laura too believes McDonald’s’s action to enter into the social media channels shows that it cares for its customers, being able to provide a personal touch as well which will ultimately bring the consumer emotionally closer to the company.

Another research sub-question was:

  - Do consumers perceive the usage of corporate mobile applications as beneficial to the relationship between themselves and the company?

The answer to this question in the case of the first respondent is in his reflections on how the use of the mobile application has influenced the view on the company and how important the application is. Hasan considers Nikon Learn and Explore to be a supplementary part of his use of Nikon, one that maintains the present relationship. It is also considered to add trust to the initially trustworthy relationship Hasan has with Nikon. In addition, Hasan uses the application on several occasions, and it’s one he will ‘definitely continue to use’. If they were to cancel the application, Hasan admits he would miss it. While Mia’s relationship with the bank is pure technology, she feels attached to the application. It is one of the applications she ‘would never delete’, and if it were cancelled, she would probably look for another offer of bank, which leads to the conclusion that the application is having an important impact on her relationship to the bank, in a very positive way – it is the added value that makes her choose the bank. Katrine has had an unsatisfactory experience with the application itself due to it being useless and irrelevant for her after some time, even though she was
satisfied with the function it served. In the end, she deleted the application, but according to Katrine this has not had any effect on her relationship with H&M. Pavel isn’t really engaged in a relationship with Midttrafik, and if the application was cancelled, he wouldn’t think any less of the company because of the status it already has. But it is an important application, and Pavel would pay for it if they decided to monetize it, but this would have a negative influence on his perception of the institution, due to its status, once again. Pavel’s words lead to the conclusion that the application can influence his relationship with Midttrafik, even though it doesn’t influence it in the present moment. Laura’s perception of McDonald’s, on the other hand, has been changed after using the application. Laura was surprised to even find out that McDonald’s was present on such a channel, and furthermore the functionality of the application also encouraged her surprise. Laura’s relationship with McDonald’s was not influenced, but her perception of the company was.
Conclusion

The findings of the research show positive empirical evidence in relation to the possibility to incorporate RM into mobile applications.

Therefore, the development of RM strategies does have potential in the mobile application’s arena. From a RM perspective based on theory, users already appreciate some mobile applications as part of RM efforts. In many cases the application was seen as adding trust, changing the perception of the user of the company, and in both cases the respondents viewed the application as a sign on behalf of the company that it is interested in its consumers, and it is willing to go the extra mile with this new mobile channel. In conclusion, the existence of the mobile application itself is appreciated by the users. The function performed via the application can also be expressed as a valuable exchange. Furthermore, the application is considered an added value by the majority of the respondents.

As for risk, salience and emotion, the perception of these values in relation to the company shows high potential for RM strategies; when looking at these via the mobile application, the situation shifts in the sense that risk is not an issue with the mobile application, and most applications, even though they are regarded as important, they represent the rational part of the relationship with the company, with the exception of Mia’s case. Sometimes the application will add trust, because it works well or it is regarded as an extra effort on behalf of the company. On the issue of commitment, the application does not influence much. As for closeness, applications have a high potential as it can represent the ‘cyber net relationship’, or with the use of the application the consumer get closer with the company. In the light of the above mentioned characteristics, the application will be regarded as satisfactory.

According to consumer marketing theory, companies might also want to consider mobile applications as a channel. As the application always serves as an expression for one side of the user, self-expression represents a high potential via mobile applications, due to the possibility to intensify the side of the user that he/she feel is being expressed through the application. However, none of the applications, excluding Laura’s experience with Foursquare, provided a consistent experience, even though the mobile application as a channel presents itself as well-performing on many senses such
as visual, audible, touch, in order to create a flow experience. Hyperreality is likewise not thoroughly explored, even though in many cases it is viewed that the cyber reality magnified the reality, improving one side of the user – photographer side or fashionista side, or the one that requires intimacy. Consumer culture also shows high potential especially in the case where many respondents have long-term relationships with the company, and they also view the application as an involvement in the consumer community, or view the application as a requirement due to developments in technology and the needs of the new generation.

If the applications are viewed separately, they all manifest some strengths in relation to RM – and weaknesses – that could be learned from. Nikon’s application is seen to add trust to an already trustworthy relationship because the application’s development shows that the company is willing to go the extra mile and represent the interests of its consumers. It furthermore gives the possibility for self-expression to all its photographic community. H&M’s weakness is also something to learn from, which is already suggested in theory (Deans, 2005), and is about the fact that users require customized and personalized mobile applications, instead of randomized ones that do not address them personally. Rejseplanen’s weakness has to do with its user-friendliness, which according to Pavel is lacking, and which, if improved upon, will engage its users more. This is a remark that has also been addressed in theory, where according to Chan and Lam (2004) consumers seek to engage with more consistent and engaging content. The net banking application used by Mia comes to show how an emotional attachment to one’s finances can be backed up by an emotional bond with the application; furthermore, Mia also talks about how net banking has become a requirement for today’s generation in its relationship with the bank. The use of Foursquare to check in at McDonald’s shows how a second-party application can be viewed as a weakness, but also how an application can change the perception of the user on the whole company. Foursquare also reminds that some users will need a feedback on behalf of the company after using the application in order to complete the experience.

When looking at the respondents’ perception on how the mobile application has influenced their relationship with the company, it shows that the application has an influence one way or the other: it can add trust, and thus improve the perception and image of the company. It can also have a neutral effect, whether it is a useful application or not, but the findings show that even though the app is seen as a supplementary part of the relationship, a bad experience with it, or cancelling it will not necessarily have a negative effect. Therefore, in managerial terms, this might give freedom to the
company to explore the possibilities of mobile applications without any risk, although it can be discussed whether the attitude of the users is due to their relationship with the company which is already strong, or the mobile application’s relative importance.

A side note in relation to the typology of mobile applications developed by Varshney and Vetter (2002) is that the present research has raised the need to complete and further develop the typology which was proven to be inadequate in Laura’s and Hasan’s case. Laura’s application showed signs of different type of applications at the same time, while Hasan’s application during the member check was criticized to be more than an advertising application.

As a concluding remark it can be said that even if the mobile application does not influence the relationship with the company in a good way, it will certainly not damage it either. It didn’t in Katrine’s case, and it only improved the perception of the company in Hasan’s, Laura’s and Mia’s case.
Limitations

Most of the limitations presented by the paper at hand are related to the research process, and are considerations that can be improved upon in a future research. A significant issue could be regarded during the interviewing when the respondents were not given the definitions of relationship dimensions with attention to objectivity. Even though the definitions of the relationship drivers provided by Egan (2001) were given according to theory, the respondents had to construct the values according to their own beliefs which were sometimes incoherent with the theoretical definitions. This represents a limitation in the analysis process where the data was confronted with the literature and which can be imprecise therefore, altering the findings on relationship marketing.

Another limitation regards the age of the respondents which was in a very small range (22-27), and which could be improved to include consumers from older generations. Due to this fact the findings of the research at hand are limited to the Y generation.

Last, the findings of this paper can be regarded as very specific to these 5 cases, which limits the possibility to generalize the conclusions. Nonetheless, the research provided more in-depth information rather than statistical one, which can still be used as a guideline for future companies to choose to engage with consumers via mobile applications after understanding them better.