

**Mediating Role of Satisfaction between Relationship Marketing and Business Performance of Paddy Farmers in Bangladesh**

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**Abstract** Nowadays, many firms/individuals are moving toward business relationships, becoming closer and developing business ties with their business partners in the supply chain. Relationship marketing could underpin strategic marketing to minimize economic problems and enhance performance. However, there is little emphasis on how relationship marketing constructs influence paddy farmer's business, specifically theory-based empirical research. Therefore, this study examined a conceptual framework to explore the mediating role of satisfaction between relationship marketing components (trust, commitment, communication, and power) and paddy farmer's business performance in Bangladesh. A validated survey instrument was used for data collection, and 356 paddy farmers were interviewed from the district of Mymensingh in Bangladesh. Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used in data analysis. The findings revealed that relationship marketing components such as trust and communication had direct relationships with business performance. Satisfaction had a direct influence on business performance. It was also a key mediator in the indirect relationship between

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trust and performance, commitment and performance, as well as power and performance. In enhancing farmer's business performance, this study suggested that it would be beneficial to practice a long-term relationship marketing strategy instead of a traditional marketing approach in the agriculture context.

**Keywords** Business performance; commitment; communication; power; relationship marketing; satisfaction; trust

## **1. Introduction**

Bangladesh has a population of 161 million people, making it the world's most populous country (World Bank [WB], 2018). Agriculture is one of the major pillars of the Bangladesh economy, contributing substantially to national revenue income, export earnings and remittance. In Bangladesh, about 77% of people depend on agriculture directly or indirectly for their livelihood (Islam et al., 2018). Paddy production area is about 75% while the remaining 25% of cultivable land is covered by other agricultural products, such as fruits, vegetables, tea, jute, sugarcane and other crops (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS], 2018). Bangladesh produced about 33.86 million metric tons of rice in the year 2016/17 (BBS, 2018). In 2018, Bangladesh secured fourth position in rice production in the world (Shahbandeh, 2019). Total farm holdings in Bangladesh are 15,183,183 farms, where small farm holdings accounted for 12,812,373 farms, the medium 2,136,415 farms, and large-size farms are 234,396 (BBS, 2018).

Unfortunately, the paddy farmers suffer numerous difficulties that weaken their bargaining power in marketing channels, such as a long chain of intermediaries taking the largest share of consumers' prices (Rahman et al., 2005). Most paddy farmers do not have the relevant

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knowledge, skills, and abilities to bargain over their buyers about marketing decisions (Jahan, 2011). It is often observed that farmers are not efficient in getting a fair price. Production expenses have risen, and to make matters worse, middlemen and paddy traders have formed a syndicate to rob farmers of a fair price (Hoque, 2019; Ray, 2018). Farmers also suffer severely from the lack of storage, transport facilities and access to credit (Ahmad, 2017; Sultana 2012). Since most paddy farmers are illiterate and poor, they tend to take loans from local intermediaries at high interest (Siddique, 2015). A critical shortage of harvesting labours, poor transport, lack of threshing and drying facilities are all obstacles to the smooth operation of production (Ray, 2018). According to Saleh et al. (2016), farmers are facing with problems because they are not aware of the appropriate farming techniques, management skills and relevant programs available by extension services. In Bangladesh, most farm size is small, which caused the major impediment for the new technology application in agriculture (Rahman, 2017). Market structure, transaction cost, lack of information and expertise, transport and storage facilities, low use of better seed and fertilizer are the problems for small farmers to get to the market, and they begin to depend on the powerful buyers (WB, 2007; Osmani and Hossain, 2015).

Different types of middlemen are involved in agricultural marketing in Bangladesh. They are farias, beparis, wholesalers, commission agents/aratdars, contract-buyers, millers, and wholesaler-retailers (Ahmed et al., 2019; Murshid, 2011). Farias are part-time and non-licensed traders in the villages. Beparis are larger traders than faria; aratdar is basically a commission agent and a bigger rice trader than bepari. Local buyers or rice millers are usually ready to buy a large volume of paddy at a time. Therefore, the buyers visit the farmer's home directly and buy a great

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quantity of paddy. Thus, selling at home was prevalent for large farmers. Bangladeshi farmers sell their product directly from farm to local faria, bepari, or the rice miller and aratdar. Sometimes, they gather their paddy to the nearby village markets and sell them to local itinerants, rice millers and local processors (Murshid, 2011; Ahmed et al., 2019). In the paddy market, exchange relationships among the farmers and buyers are based on their interaction. While many relationship marketing has been built over the years, their domain is largely transactional exchange rather than value creation. Such relationships do not provide mutual for the members and, as a result, are unlikely to enhance the chain's competitive edge (Mujeri, 2019). Marketing constraints faced by farmers due to lacking essential market information. Unfortunately, market information is scarce and difficult for the farmers to access (Quddus and Kropp, 2020).

In Bangladesh, the exchange relationship is significantly influenced by factors such as power and dependence, especially for the paddy market. Moreover, due to the traditional marketing method (Miah and Moniruzzaman, 2020), and oligopolistic market structure and the absence of a farmer's strong organization, the individual marketing practice for farmers creates high transaction cost with low bargaining position (Mujeri, 2019). However, difficulties cause many of the farmers to face some problems in achieving an economic return. Farmers can regard relationship marketing as a critical success component in business. Undeniably, the transformation from transaction to relationship marketing has disputably been one of the most powerful developments in a business environment (Egan, 2011; Brennan et al., 2003). Thus, economic research and practice are highly involved in a long-term business that balances the traditional marketing method (Brodie, 2017; Finch, O'Reilly et al., 2015; Grönroos, 2017; Saath et al., 2018).

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Numerous researches have been done on marketing functions and the farmers and buyers' activities in paddy production. However, research on farmer and buyer relationships that would influence farmers' business performance is largely ignored. Relationship marketing can accelerate the capabilities of a firm to achieve its goal. Developing relationships between buyers and sellers can increase a product's quality, reduce inventory, establish a system like just-in-time and decrease time to the consumer during the exchange process (Ndubisi, 2004).

Relationship marketing is an instrument that creates a network between buyer and seller in a friendly way that will benefit them in realizing each other wants and services better (Karadeniz, 2010). Furthermore, relationship marketing is considered a company's or farm's activities that create and maintain clients by enhancing loyalty, satisfaction, trust, and commitment. (Kumar and Reinartz, 2002). In fact, it is argued in the previous literature that serving a new customer is five or six times costly than serving a regular loyal customer (Ndubisi et al., 2009). This is because committed buyers and sellers would return to their trusted service provider, particularly when they feel that their service provider satisfied their wants and services; thus, they will not switch to a new client or service provider. Alternatively, it is not often that a loyal buyer or seller get priced sensitive; instead, they become a part of the firm's service marketing to promote the service to the friends and family by extending positive word-of-mouth (Bojei et al., 2012). Therefore, relationship marketing is essential in business to business, especially for the paddy farmers who struggle to profit from selling their paddy in the market.

The study emphasizes farmer's business performance, which can be described as either short or long term, or in terms of economic, financial or organizational benefits. Previous literature,

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however, viewed performance from two angles, notably subjective and objective concepts. Subjective is primarily associated with firm performance in comparison to its competitors (Golden, 1992). Other scholars, on the other hand, viewed objective performance from absolute measurement (Chakravarthy, 1986; Cronin and Page, 1988). In this study, the key persons are the farmers; thus, adopting the subjective concept would be easier for them to understand the concept of the study and therefore produce an appropriate answer. The economic or financial performance consisted of selling volume, profitability and company growth, and these are applied in a business-to-business relationship (Setyawan et al., 2014; Ramaseshan et al., 2006; Kim, 2000; Ruiz, 2000). However, business performance is viewed by some scholars as both financial and economic performance that uses identical measurements, such as sale growth, profit growth, market share, return of investment (ROI), and cash flow relative to the competitors (Lobo et al., 2013; Kavak et al., 2016). For instance, Megicks (2007) proposed ROI growth in measuring economic performance. According to Sin et al. (2006), sales growth, profit growth, return on investment, market share relative to competitors are the main aspects of measuring business performance.

This study focuses on several components of relationship marketing that can influence farmers' business performance. Notably, trust (Kam and Lai, 2018; Lobo et al., 2013; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Villena et al., 2019), commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Palmatier et al., 2006; Yen and Abosag, 2016), communication (Bich et al., 2016; Sin et al., 2006; Yen and Abosag, 2016), and power (Batt, 2003; Cacciolatti and Lee, 2016; Setyawan et al., 2014). This paper attempts to determine the mediating role of satisfaction (Aji, 2016) between relationship marketing (trust, commitment, communication, and power) and paddy farmers' business performance in

Bangladesh. It also investigates the direct relationship between relationship marketing and farmers' business performance, and between satisfaction and farmers' business performance. The objectives of this study are, therefore:

- 1) To determine the direct relationship between trust, commitment, communication, power, satisfaction and business performance
- 2) To examine the indirect relationship between trust, commitment, communication, power and business performance mediated by satisfaction.

### **1.1.Relationship Marketing**

Relationship marketing is the ongoing process of engaging in collaborative activities and programs with immediate and end-user customers to create or enhance mutual economic, social and psychological value profitably (Sheth et al. 2015). Servicing and selling existing customers are equally critical to long-term marketing success as acquiring new customers (Berry, 1983). Therefore, relationship marketing is widely recognized as an essential issue for academicians. Contemporary relationship marketing is currently present in the literature branches of research in marketing. Relationship marketing is, in essence, a set of interactions and networks in business. Cooper et al. (1997) argued that the study of relationship marketing is not limited to theories but rather of many aspects. Scholars have expressed different points of view and emphasized the various presentations of relationship marketing which may appear in different descriptions of relationship marketing. Grönroos (1994) defined relationship marketing as establishing, maintaining, and enhancing profitable relationships with customers and other partners to achieve the parties' objectives. It has been proven as a process-oriented and value-creating model for

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organizations/industries, customers and consumers (Kushwaha et al., 2020). Relationship marketing is an introduction between a customer and a company which creates a closer two-way communication by handling a mutual and beneficial relationship (Tiasih, 2014). Such a relationship is not merely a simple relationship between buyer and seller; it is a partnership that leads to a closer relationship (Kencana, 2018). Relationship marketing is an interpersonal relationship that is not tangible, and it can only be perceived through the effects of its presence (Mandjak and Szanto, 2010; Saath et al., 2018).

A long-term relationship is highly required to attain market access and trustworthy market information (Low, 1996). Growers anticipate higher economic outcomes because they expect equitable and fair treatment from their preferred buyers (Batt, 2003). In addition, better offers from buyers to farmers, i.e., a reasonable price, keep farmers tied to their buyers and develop a high level of trust in their buyers (Axalan et al., 2012; Bich et al., 2016). Farmers, too, have focused on the sustainable or long-term business relationship, which they consider an essential ingredient in businesses, and have high trust and loyalty toward their preferred buyers, especially in terms of trustworthiness, fairness and transparency in pricing (Boniface, 2011).

Among the various factors that influence the success of relationship marketing, there are 50 constants and prominent factors (Agariya and Singh, 2011) widely regarded as essential to relationship marketing, notably trust, commitment, communication, power, and satisfaction. Researchers have also identified, at the same time, the mediating role of relational constructs that affect the outcome of relationship marketing efforts. Indeed, some constructs are regarded as most important and have been tested in relationship marketing studies, e.g., commitment, trust,



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communications, satisfaction, bonding, shared value, empathy, dependence and reciprocity (Sin et al.,2002; Wetzels et al.,1998; Sin et al., 2005). Similarly, to understand relationship marketing adequately, one has to determine its dimension (Berry 1983; Gummesson 1994; Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995). Surprisingly, the Western perspective has confirmed all the essential and most cited variables of relationship marketing. Nonetheless, cultural differences influence the applicability of relationship marketing dimensions in a different context (Abdullah and Kanyan, 2013). Based on previous literature, five dimensions of relationship marketing were employed in this study, as discussed below.

**1.1.1. Trust**

In relationship marketing studies, trust is perhaps the most extensively cited dimension (Heirati et al., 2019; Villena et al., 2019; Ferro et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2015; Palmatier et al., 2007). It is reflected as a necessary ingredient (Ganesan, 1994) to establish a fruitful relational exchange. Trust stems from one party's belief in the reliability and trustworthiness of another (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Expectation and obligation can be extended when one party is reliable to the other in retaining a business relationship (Chung et al., 2006). Here, trust is the confidence in an exchange of the partner's reliability and integrity (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). It is conceptualized in many ways (Lu et al.,2016; Amin et al.,2013), with a considerable argument on its significance, scopes and backgrounds in a business relationship (Baumann and Meunier-FitzHugh, 2014; Ekici, 2013; Toufaily and Pons, 2017). Moorman et al. (1993) offer two ways of defining trust. Firstly, the person who has knowledge, reliability and intention to believe and has the confidence to trust his partners. Alternatively, the person's intentional behavior demonstrates his trust in the face of

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uncertainty and vulnerability. From these statements, Doney and Cannon (1997) and Moorman et al. (1993) expound that trust is simply pertinent in an uncertain situation and at the same time, it shrinks the uncertainty in which situation a person feels vulnerable (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

Trust is classified into two elements known as benevolence and credibility. Benevolence, on one hand, seeks to believe in oneself, intentions and motivations that are advantageous to another (Cater and Zabkar, 2009). Credibility, on the other hand, is meant to allow one's belief that the promise and the words of another one would be trustworthy (Fullerton, 2011). Trust encourages firms to work at preserving relationship investments by cooperating with exchange partners and resisting short-term alternatives in favor of expected long-term benefits (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Anderson and Narus (1990) view trust as the belief that the partner will perform actions that benefit the firm. Setyawan et al. (2014) demonstrated the positive effect of trust on the supplier's economic performance. Meanwhile, Milford (2002) attributed the lack of trust between growers and harvesters to poor performance in business.

In relationships, trust is shown to reduce opportunistic behavior (Morgan and Hunts, 1994), lower the costs of transaction (Sartorius and Kirsten, 2007) and most importantly, improve business performance (Sako, 1997). According to Palmatier et al. (2006), trust influences directly or indirectly the performance of the seller. Counter-productive outcomes rise and outweigh the constructive outcomes in the relationship between trust and performance (Villena et al., 2019). Trust promotes cooperation and higher performance and facilitates the exchange of information and independencies. It also reduces control and increases efficiency (Ghazinejad et al., 2018). Lobo et

al. (2013) examined the farmers' business relationships with buyers and found *xinyong* (personal trust) had a positive relationship with farmer's financial performance. Based on the above discussion, it can be said that trust has a direct and significant relationship with farmers' business performance. Therefore, the following hypothesis is established.

**Hypothesis 1a (H1a).** *Trust is positively related to farmers' business performance.*

### 1.1.2. Commitment

Commitment is an essential element with a significant role in maintaining the marketing relationship between firms and customers (Chai et al., 2015; Fullerton, 2005; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Commitment and trust are the most significant constructs of successful relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Morgan and Hunt (1994) defined commitment as the confidence of an exchange partner who has a relationship to permit maximum efforts in maintaining it. Likewise, Moorman et al. (1992) state that commitment is an aspiration to maintaining a valuable relationship with their exchange partner. Jones et al. (2008) viewed commitment as a psychological inspiration that emphasized a person keeping a relationship with a certain objective. Chenet et al. (2010) described commitment as an emotional bonding with anticipation of obtaining greater benefits of continuing a relationship. Also, Chai et al. (2015) conceptualized commitment as a reflection of different psychological conditions for retaining and enhancing the long-term relationship with an exchange partner. Thus, an individual or a firm underpins a shared commitment and enhances their ability to sustain a long-term relationship (Curras-Perez and Sanchez-Garcia, 2015). There are different types of commitment in a relationship, all of which are necessary to developing a shared relationship (Andaleeb et al., 2016;

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Sharma et al., 2015). They include affective, calculative, and normative commitment (Fullerton, 2011 and Sumaedi et al., 2015). Positive psychological attachment for exchange partner in sustaining a long-term relationship is an affective commitment, and it will increase emotional bonding between two parties who have the feeling of relationship, friendship and confidence (Cater and Zabkar, 2009; Sumaedi et al., 2015; Morgan and Hunt, 1994 and Sharma et al., 2015). On the basis of this context, Shukla et al. (2016) suggest that individuals are effectively dedicated to having strong bonding and morality in developing a relationship. Normatively committed to having a relationship is termed normative commitment (Cater and Zabkar, 2009; Fullerton, 2011; Sharma et al., 2015). Commitment, in its essence, is the desire to work on having a relationship to ensure future continuation. This desire is to be implicated or explicated pledge between the two parties (Dwyer et al., 1987).

Commitment is an instrument to encourage firms to work together and preserve relationships through cooperation with exchange partners; it favors long-term benefits instead of nurturing short-term alternatives (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Thus, commitment is an essential component for performance and a channel of survival (Anderson and Weitz, 1992; Morgan and Hunts, 1994). Basically, commitment is a single instrument that resulted from the positive evaluation of another party considering the association between the relationship and the current benefit and cost (Dwyer et al., 1987). Performance (sales, share, sales effectiveness, profit, and sales performance) is influenced the most by relationship quality (a composite measure of relationship strength) and the least by commitment (Palmatier et al., 2006). According to Palmatier et al. (2006), commitment influences directly or indirectly the performance of the seller. Commitment demonstrates a positive

and significant impact on financial performance (Yen and Abosag, 2016). Ahmady et al. (2013) found commitment brings farmers' financial benefit. Therefore, based on the above discussion, it can be agreed that commitment has a direct positive effect on farmers' business performance. Thus, the following hypothesis is established.

**Hypothesis 1b (H1b).** *Commitment is positively related to business performance.*

### 1.1.3. Communication

Communication is acknowledged as one of the central dimensions of the business relationship (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Rashid 2003; Sin et al., 2005; Bojei et al., 2012). Communication in the marketing context can be seen as formal and informal exchanging and sharing meaningful and timely information between buyers and sellers (Etuk, 2018). The influence of communication appears equally well documented in maintaining long-term marketing relationships (Doney et al., 2007; Palvia, 2009). Palmatier et al. (2006) highlight the importance of communication as a prominent dimension of relationship marketing, which is a frequent occurrence and involves quality information shared by a business companion. Sin et al. (2002) defined communication as a meaningful and timely information exchange involving formal and informal sharing between the exchange partners. However, the most widely cited and accepted definition of communication is by Anderson and Narus (1990). According to the authors, communication is a timely information sharing, both formally and informally, and meaningful between two exchange partners. It also includes mutual expectation from both parties engaging in a business relationship by proactively providing and sharing information with the exchange partner, specifically that benefits business performance (Heide and Miner, 1992). This proactive attitude also contributes to avoiding conflict

and resolves the problem that arises in the relationship (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Specifically, communication enhances innovation capabilities and opens up the exploration of market opportunities which ultimately results in a positive outcome on the firm's performance (Zaefarian et al., 2017).

Sin et al. (2006) found well-acquainted theoretical reasons to assume a positive association between communication and business performance. When assessed, a significant association with business performance meant that communication had established logical validity. Communication and information sharing improve the firm's business performance when it is measured by cost (D'Amours et al., 1999), sales, time, product design, and quality (Krause et al., 2000). These studies documented the indirect influence strategy from the buying firm's perspective. Suppliers understanding a firm's expectations can efficiently carry out their business activities to fulfil the firms' business needs and specifications of the firms (Prahinski and Benton, 2004). Indeed, Sin et al. (2006) had found that, along with several other dimensions of relationship marketing, communication positively influence business performance. Bich et al. (2016) who discovered flower producers' reliance on the wholesaler price information, emphasized the importance of communication in helping them increase sales volume. Therefore, it can be agreed that based on the above discussion, communication has a direct positive effect on farmers' business performance. Hence, the following hypothesis is established.

**Hypothesis 1c (H1c).** Communication is positively related to business performance.

#### **1.1.4. Power**

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Power is an important dimension of relationship marketing (Kasabov, 2007). In previous literature, power is associated with an influence strategy or a source of bargaining capability against their partner (Kim, 2000; Ramaseshan et al., 2006). Cox (2001) described power as the heart of a trans-organization relationship. Gaski (1984) characterized referred power as the ability of channel members to influence other's behavior and decision. The power of a participant is established by the differential advantage such as the short-term relationship that focuses on perceived power whereas the apprehension of actual power in a long-term relationship partner. Hence, power can be utilized as a reward or a punishment mechanism (Thorelli, 1986). Accordingly, power can be classified into five categories that are commonly used in supply chain management studies, notably reward, coercive, legitimate, referent and expert power (Benton and Maloni, 2005; Terpend and Ashenbaum, 2012). Also, power is often grouped mainly into two categories, mediated and non-mediated power (Brown et al., 1995; Ke et al., 2009; Maloni and Benton, 2000). Mediated power refers to deliberate efforts to emphasize specific actions from the goal and depends on motivation (Brown et al., 1995; Benton and Maloni, 2005; Handley and Benton, 2012). Reward and coercive are the two constructs of mediated power that have different effects (Chae et al., 2017).

In contrast, non-mediated powers depend on the inherent inspiration of the target rather than the specific actions from the goal (Brown et al., 1995; Handley and Benton, 2012). Maloni and Benton (2000) conclude that different types of power affect differently on the business relationship, i.e., coercive and legal power has a negative influence on business performance; reward, expert and referent power, on the other hand, positively influence business performance. Accordingly, the

firm seems to be more reliant on its business partner when the outcomes are derived from the existing relationship, indicating their values (Heide and John 1988). Dependency is amplified with higher sales and increased profits in the business exchange, and the individual expects higher sales and profit in the future. Cacciolatti and Lee (2016) found that power moderates between marketing capabilities and firm performance, while Sai and Yip (2003) demonstrated a significant relationship between non-coercive power with economic satisfaction. Similarly, power has an indirect and significant correlation with suppliers' economic performance (Setyawan et al., 2014). Therefore, it can be agreed that based on the above discussion, power has a direct positive effect on farmers' business performance. Hence, the following hypothesis is established.

**Hypothesis 1d (H1d).** *Power is positively related to business performance.*

#### **1.1.5. Satisfaction**

Satisfaction is described as the good feeling experienced by an individual that derives from a positive evaluation of the buyer-seller relationship (Geyskens et al., 1999). Customer satisfaction develops the customer-company relationship (Roberts et al., 2003). Earlier satisfaction has been typically defined as a post choice evaluative judgment concerning a specific purchase decision (Churchill and Suprenant, 1982; Oliver, 1980). According to Naurozi and Mogadam (2015), satisfaction is an emotional state of mind in evaluating goods or services consumed or offered by the buyer or seller. This evaluation is a subjective form depending on whether it can fulfil customers' wants and demands. Scholars have argued that customer satisfaction comes from the cognitive process, and the affective process provides substantial expectation and justification of satisfaction (Fornell and Wernerfelt, 1987). Others viewed satisfaction as a judgmental process



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grounded on past experience of a particular product or service, instead of on the transaction process (Anderson et al., 1994). Yi (1990) stated that satisfaction is a multidimensional construct in relationship marketing. In many studies, satisfaction has gained huge attention in the process of selling (Marr and Crosby, 1992; Ramsey and Sohl, 1997) that focuses on the inter-personal relationship between sales personnel and customer. Improved satisfaction will possibly lead to sales growth in both short and long term (Tarigan and Hatane, 2019).

Previous empirical works on marketing supported the positive association between supplier performance and supplier satisfaction. Inter-firm trust, commitment and relationalism support the effect of relationship strength in attaining positive outcomes, e.g., satisfaction and performance. Satisfaction is the customer's overall or inclusive judgement considering the service that matches their expectation (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993). Reichheld and Sassar (1990) argued that a reflection of customer satisfaction is shown in a firm's economic returns and profitability. Both operational and relational performance impact satisfaction (Stank and Goldsby, 1999). Benton and Maloni (2005), in fact, attempted to find a relationship between supplier performance and supplier satisfaction but found no significant relationship between them. Satisfaction works as a measure of the firm's outcomes in the exchange relationship and provides insight into the overall performance of a relationship. Satisfaction has been used in research in BTB exchange as an operationalization of the success of the exchange relationship (Lambe et al., 2001). According to Palmatier et al. (2006), satisfaction influence directly or indirectly the performance of the seller, along with trust and commitment. Thus, this study

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intends to determine the relationship between farmers' satisfaction and farmers' business performance. Based on the above discussion, therefore, the following hypothesis is established.

**Hypothesis 1e (H1e).** *Satisfaction is positively related to business performance.*

## 1.2. Satisfaction as a mediator

Benouakrim and Kandoussi (2013) consider satisfaction as a mediating variable in the literature of relationship marketing. Caliskan and Esmer (2019), on the other hand, found that trust and commitment enhance the performance of customer relationships, and consequently, financial performance. Trust can lead to a higher relationship performance (Zaheer et al., 1998). Likewise, trust commitment and relationship satisfaction directly contributed to the seller's objective performance, i.e., sales, share, profit, and sales performance (Palmatier et al., 2006). Findings by Nauroozi and Moghadam (2015) demonstrated that trust, commitment, and communication have a direct positive relationship with customer satisfaction. Both groups of researchers, Cacciolatti and Lee (2016) and Setyawan et al. (2014), established the strong influence of power has on firm performance. Sin et al. (2006) also highlighted the positive influence of communication on business performance. Kavak et al. (2016), on the other hand, showed that trust has a significant positive relationship with satisfaction, and satisfaction has a positive effect on performance.

Satisfaction is an outcome of a process where prior expectations are compared with the actual performance. Batt (2003) found that grower's satisfaction increased when trust is built between farmers and buyers. Channel partners are highly satisfied with the economic benefits that stream from their relationship perception and their partner advancing their goal attainment. Accordingly, Boniface et al. (2010) found that the price satisfaction of milk producers is associated with their

trust. Findings by Berenguer-Contrí et al. (2020) stated that commitment had relationship with social satisfaction and economic satisfaction. Mbango (2017) and Nauroozi and Moghadam (2015) found that satisfaction was significantly influenced by communication. Michie and Shibley (1985) found a relatively positive effect of non-coercive power on satisfaction and a negative effect of coercive power on satisfaction. Earlier, Wilkinson (1981) suggested that non-coercive power heightened satisfaction with other channel members. Satisfaction indeed is amplified when non-coercive power is employed (Frazier, 1983). Ultimately, Palmatier et al. (2006) proposed that the seller's performance is influenced directly or indirectly by trust, commitment, satisfaction, and relationship quality. Therefore, based on the above discussion on relationship among the variables, the following hypothesis is established.

**Hypothesis 2a (H2a).** *There is an indirect relationship between trust and performance mediated by satisfaction.*

**Hypothesis 2b (H2b).** *There is an indirect relationship between commitment and performance mediated by satisfaction.*

**Hypothesis 2c (H2c).** *There is an indirect relationship between communication and performance mediated by satisfaction.*

**Hypothesis 2d (H2d).** *There is an indirect relationship between power and performance mediated by satisfaction.*

### 1.3. Business Performance

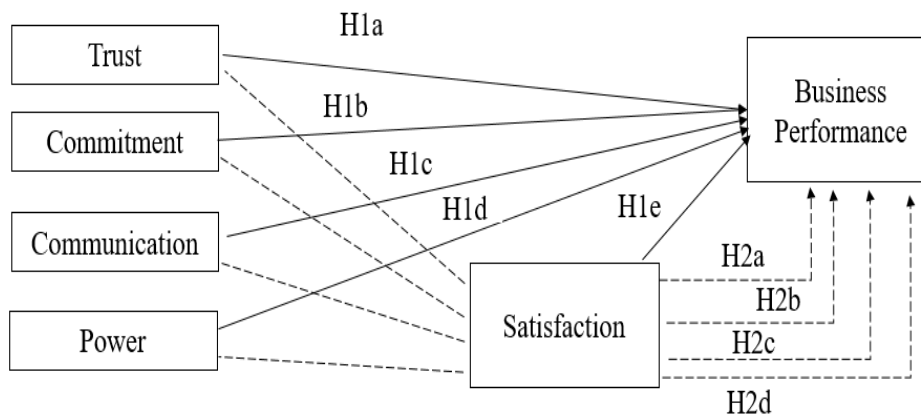
The ultimate goal of relationship marketing in a business relationship is to improve business performance (Setyawan et al., 2014). Generally, the firm uses economic performance, defined by

sales volume, profitability, and growth in business to a business relationship (Kim, 2000; Ramaseshan et al., 2006). Other measures of business performance include consumer's loyalty and satisfaction (Hallowell, 1996; McDougall and Levesque, 2000). Specifically, the change in sales volume (Keiningham et al., 2006). That is an increased satisfaction favorably enhance business performance that has made a change in sales volume. Some studies have shown that the primary outcome of relationship marketing is an economic benefit, which is based on cost and profit (Heide and John, 1988; Noordewier et al., 1990). For instance, Setyawan et al. (2014) employed economic performance to measure business performance using selling growth, profit growth and market share growth. Sometimes, the perception of an individual's firm also accounted for performance. Also beneficial is non-financial performance outcomes. Brown et al. (1995) stated that a high level of commitment to the source member could result in a higher level of performance from the target member. Performance is, thus, the outcome that can be gained from the relationship of the channel members since it is the ultimate objective and the outcomes from the collaboration between more than one firm (Perry, 2001; Kavak et al., 2016).

#### **1.4. Proposed Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual model is proposed that integrates all the hypotheses established earlier (see Figure 1). As demonstrated in Figure 1, relationship marketing consists of five constructs, notably trust, commitment, communication, power and satisfaction. The present study uses business performance as an outcome of relationship marketing between farmers and their preferred buyers.

However, it is important to note that this study considers the mediating effect of satisfaction in explaining the indirect association between relationship marketing and business performance, alongside the direct influence of relationship marketing and satisfaction on performance.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework and hypotheses

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Study Sample and Procedure

Data were collected from the Mymensingh district of Bangladesh. The district was purposively selected based on ample paddy production and a large number of farmers. To prepare a population frame, the list of farmers obtained from the Agriculture Extension Department was used. According to McQuitty (2004), the sample size should be minimum to attain the desired level of statistical power. Earlier, Roscoe (1975) argued that the sample size should be larger than 30 and lesser than 500 for social science research. However, the most suggested sample size is in the range

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of 150 to 400 (Hair et al., 2006). In terms of analysis, PLS-SEM is suitable for both small sample sizes (Goodhue et al., 2012) as well as large data quantities (Akter et al., 2017).

In this study, a total number of 356 farmers were interviewed from the selected areas. Previous agriculture-related studies used systematic sampling (Mostafa and Ahmad, 2017). Systematic sampling works best when the population is homogeneous, i.e., most people share the same characteristics (Mukherjee, 2019). Systematic random sampling was employed considering the homogeneity of the socio-economic conditions among the farmers. However, keeping in mind that most farmers are illiterate, which might pose a difficulty in understanding; therefore, a questionnaire with open and close-ended questions was developed. Data was collected by block supervisors of the Agriculture Extension Department as enumerators who know about farmers' activities. Face to face survey was conducted from February to April 2020.

## **2.2. Measures**

The survey instrument contains 23 items measured by a seven-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree). The simplicity and shorter response time of Likert scales in measuring all the constructs justify their usage in this study (Frazer and Lawley, 2000). Adaptation of the items to measure business performance is as follows: three items – the increase of sales, increase of profit and cash flow from Kavak et al. (2016) and Lobo et al. (2013); three items of trust, which refers to the reliability, credibility, and benevolence from Batt (2003); four of commitment, which is the desire and intention, from Alrubaiee and Al-Nazer (2010) and Ndubisi and Chan (2005); four items of communication, which aims to convey trustworthiness, frequent and sharing influential information from Alrubaiee and Al-Nazer (2010) and Ndubisi et

al. (2009). For power, four items were adapted from Sai and Yip (2003) and Batt (2003), and satisfaction has five items adapted from Batt (2003) and Ndubisi et al. (2009). Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed in this study to test the hypothesis. In general, PLS-SEM has two models – the inner (measurement model) and the outer (structural model).

### **3. Results**

The demographic profiles of 356 respondents using descriptive analysis indicated that the majority of the farmers were male (98.0%), and most of them were aged 46 years and above (59.0%). In terms of educational background, 29.0% of the respondents completed primary education, while 27.0% had completed high school level. In terms of the farm size, most farmers had a small-sized farm (58.1%) and a medium-sized farm (41.3%). For the annual income, most of the farmers earned TK50,000 and below (45.5%).

#### **3.1. Measurement Model Assessment**

In PLS-SEM, the measurement model consists of internal consistency (composite reliability), indicators reliability (factor loading), convergent validity and discriminant validity. Following the establishment of the measurement model is the assessment of the structural model. Internal consistency is applied to measure the consistent effect across the items of the same variables (Hair et al., 2013). It also determines the variables similarity in terms of the scores of the items. Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) measures the reliability of indicators of a variable, and 0.7 is regarded as the acceptable value. In this study, the value of  $\alpha$  was above 0.7 (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ), Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

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Latent Variable	A	CR	AVE
Commitment	0.819	0.881	0.649
Communication	0.845	0.896	0.684
Business Performance	0.760	0.862	0.676
Power	0.771	0.852	0.590
Satisfaction	0.858	0.899	0.641
Trust	0.760	0.861	0.674

Similarly, the Composite Reliability (CR) value should exceed 0.708, which is recognized as internal consistency (Table 1). These refer to the extent to which a measure correlates positively with alternative measures of the same variable (Hair et al., 2013). Convergent validity is measured by calculating the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and indicator reliability. The acceptance value of AVE is more than 0.5, and the AVE of this study exceeded the acceptance level (Table 1). It means that the measures of all reflective constructs had a considerable level of convergent validity. Indicator reliability states that a variable can explain the variation in an item (Hair et al., 2013). Factor loading is used for the assessment of indicator reliability. Higher factor loadings of a variable indicate the presence of a commonly associated measurement measured by the variable (Hair et al., 2013). The factor loading achieved in this study exceeded 0.7, which according to Hair et al. (2013), should be taken into the analysis (Table 2). Therefore, it can be said that convergent validity has been established.

**Table 2.** Factor loadings of the items

Item	Factor loading
<b>Trust</b>	
1 I have confidence in my most preferred buyer	0.854
2 I trust my most preferred buyer as he keeps his promise	0.780
3 I believe the market information provided by my preferred buyer	0.827
<b>Commitment</b>	



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1	I feel that my buyer is looking out for my interest	0.769
2	I have a strong sense of loyalty toward my preferred buyer	0.780
3	My preferred buyer offers personalised services to meet my needs	0.829
4	My preferred buyer is flexible when his services are changed	0.843
Communication		
1	My preferred buyer communicates frequently	0.762
2	Information helps to provide better service	0.849
3	My preferred buyer provides timely and trustworthy information	0.862
4	Information provided by my preferred buyer is always accurate	0.832
Power		
1	My preferred buyer undermines or punishes me when I do not follow his guidelines and recommendation	0.795
2	If I do not follow what my preferred buyer wants, he provides poor services and becomes difficult to work with	0.750
3	My preferred buyer has all the power	0.742
4	My preferred buyer controls all the information	0.782
Satisfaction		
1	My preferred buyer treats me fairly and equitably	0.887
2	My preferred buyer often meets my expectations	0.834
3	I feel I am adequately rewarded by my preferred buyer	0.826
4	My preferred buyer is quick to handle complaints	0.715
5	I am satisfied with the interactions that I have had with my preferred buyer	0.728
Business Performance		
1	The relationship with my preferred buyer helped to increase my sales	0.781
2	The relationship with my preferred buyer helped to increase my profit	0.828
3	My business performance is much better than the competitor in cash flow	0.856

Fornell & Larcker score and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio were used to assess the discriminant validity. Table 3 shows that the square roots of AVE of all latent variables exceeded the inter construct correlations in Fornell & Larcker criteria. In Table 3 and Table 4, performance refers to business performance.

**Table 3.** Fornell and Larcker criterion

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	commitment	communication	performance	power	satisfaction	trust
Commitment	0.806					
Communication	0.746	0.827				
Performance	0.638	0.665	0.822			
Power	0.276	-0.209	-0.194	0.768		
Satisfaction	0.740	0.626	0.644	-0.338	0.801	
Trust	0.697	0.562	0.601	-0.295	0.701	0.821

Table 4 presents the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, and all HTMT ratios of the variables were lower than the acceptance level of 0.90. Therefore, discriminant validity has been established.

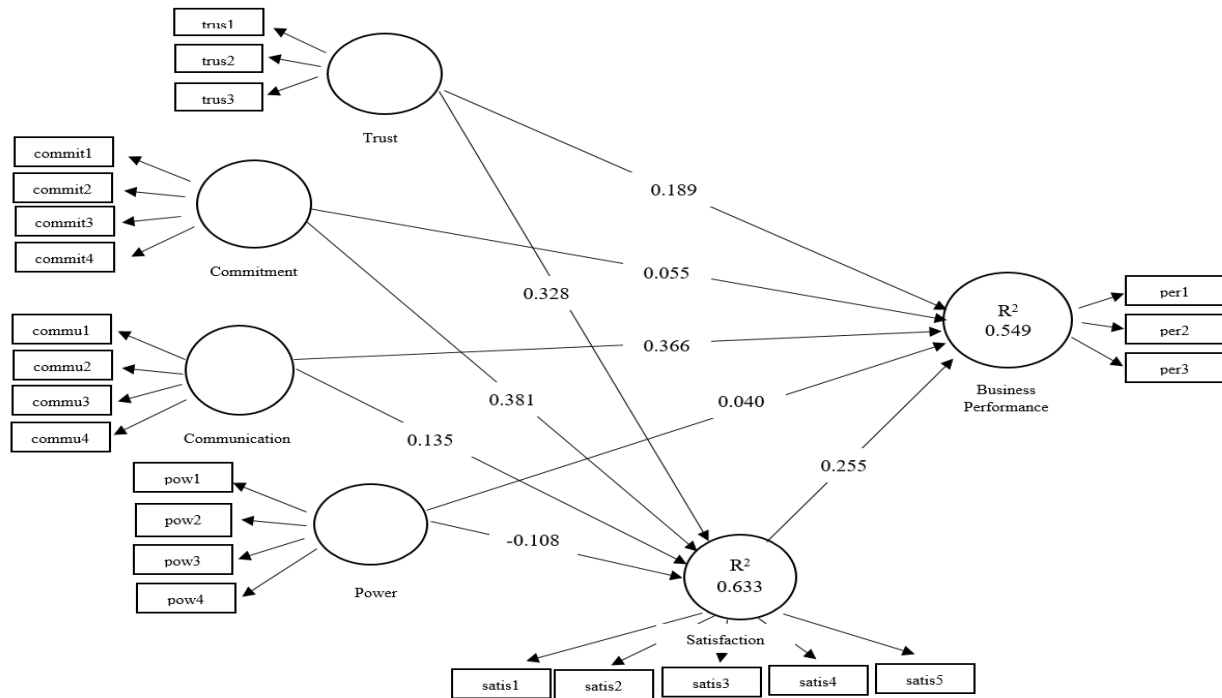
**Table 4.** Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	commitment	communication	performance	power	satisfaction	trust
Commitment						
Communication	0.897					
Performance	0.804	0.824				
Power	0.339	0.261	0.243			
Satisfaction	0.879	0.731	0.787	0.403		
Trust	0.858	0.679	0.769	0.370	0.857	

### 3.2. Structural Model Assessment

After establishing the measurement model, variance-based PLS-SEM was employed to test the hypothesis in the structural model. The path coefficient and coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) were assessed in the structural model (Figure 2). It corresponds to the amount of variance in the endogenous variable explained by the exogenous variables associated with it (Hair et al., 2013).  $R^2$  values of satisfaction and performance were 63.3 % and 54.9% respectively. Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is the measure of the goodness of fit model in PLS-SEM. In this

study, SRMR was .078, below the acceptance level of 0.080. These values indicate the relevance of the structural model development of the present study.



**Figure2.** PLS Algorithm Results with Path Coefficient and R<sup>2</sup> Values.

Note: trus=Trust, commit=Commitment, commu=Communication, pow=Power, satis=Satisfaction, and per=Business Performance.

Table 5 and Table 6 describe the path coefficient of the model that shows the relationship between performance and other constructs. Trust, communication, and satisfaction established a strong positive relationship with performance, thus supported H1a, H1c and H1e (Table 5). However, there was no direct relationship between commitment and power with performance and hence, cannot support H1b and H1d (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Path Coefficient ( $\beta$ ) and direct effect for structural model

Hypothesis	Path	$\beta$	t-stat	Std Error	P Value	Decision
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H1a	Trust → Business Performance	0.189	2.897	0.065	0.002*	Supported
H1b	Commitment → Business Performance	0.055	0.681	0.081	0.496	Not Supported
H1c	Communication → Business Performance	0.366	4.958	0.074	0.000*	Supported
H1d	Power → Business Performance	0.040	0.833	0.048	0.405	Not Supported
H1e	Satisfaction → Business Performance	0.255	3.541	0.072	0.000*	Supported

(\* Significance  $p < .05$ )

In terms of direct relationship, the findings demonstrate that trust ( $\beta=0.189$ ), communication ( $\beta=0.366$ ) and satisfaction ( $\beta=0.255$ ) had a significant positive correlation with farmers' business performance (Table 5). The positive correlation indicates that if the respondents account for high scores for trust, communication and satisfaction, it means the respondents favorably perceived the influence of trust, communication and satisfaction in business relations. They also account for a high score for performance, meaning that the respondents had a positive attitude toward the business performance being more functioning in maintaining business relations. This result is similar to Lobo et al. (2013), where they identified the positive relationship between trust and financial performance. Sin et al. (2006) also found that, along with several other dimensions of relationship marketing, communication positively influence business performance, while Palmatier et al. (2006) found satisfaction has a positive relationship with financial performance.

On the other hand, commitment and power had no direct contribution to farmers' business performance (Table 5). It indicates that commitment ( $\beta=0.055$ ) and power ( $\beta=0.040$ ) were not significantly correlated with farmers' business performance. The absence of correlation suggests that if the respondents report a low score for commitment and power, they poorly perceived the influence of commitment and power in business relations. They also account for a low score for performance, meaning that the respondents did not have a positive attitude toward the business

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performance being more functioning in maintaining the business relations. The result for commitment contradicts Luo et al. (2009) and Palmatier et al. (2006), where they found commitment influences directly or indirectly the business performance of the seller. The result for power also contradicts Cacciolatti and Lee (2016) and Setyawan et al. (2014). Both groups of researchers established that commitment and power positively influence the firm's performance and the suppliers' economic performance.

The present study also tests the mediating role of satisfaction (Table 6). In the presence of satisfaction, there was a significant indirect correlation between trust and performance, commitment and performance, and power and performance (Table 6). Thus, H2a, H2b, and H2d were supported. Communication had no indirect and significant effect on performance in the presence of satisfaction. It indicates that satisfaction has no mediating role in the indirect relationship of communication and performance and thus did not support H2c (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) and indirect effects for mediation models.

Hypothesis	Path	$\beta$	t-stat	Std Error	P Value	Decision
H2a	Trust → Satisfaction → Performance	0.084	2.600	0.032	0.010*	Supported
H2b	Commitment → Satisfaction → Performance	0.097	3.402	0.029	0.001*	Supported
H2c	Communication → Satisfaction → Performance	0.034	1.884	0.018	0.060	Not Supported
H2d	Power → Satisfaction → Performance	-0.028	2.549	0.011	0.011*	Supported

(\* Significance  $p < .05$ )

These findings show that trust ( $\beta=0.084$ ) and commitment ( $\beta=0.097$ ) had indirect and significant effects on performance in the presence of satisfaction. It indicates that satisfaction has a mediating role in these two indirect paths. These results are similar to Berenguer-Contrí et al. (2020), Chenet et al. (2010) and Palmatier et al. (2006). They found that trust, commitment, and satisfaction have direct or indirect relationships with performance. It is also consistent with Kavak et al. (2016) that trust has an indirect relationship with performance that is mediated by satisfaction. Meanwhile, communication ( $\beta=0.034$ ) had no significant indirect effect on the performance in the presence of satisfaction. It indicates that there is no mediating role of satisfaction in the indirect path of communication and performance. This contradicted Krause et al. (2000), where communication is indirectly related to firm financial performance. Power ( $\beta= -0.028$ ) had a negative and indirect effect on the performance mediated by satisfaction. It indicates that if the power decrease, the performance will increase. In this study, the farmers have indeed confirmed that power is a negative issue in improving their business performance. A similar finding is also reported by Ramaseshan et al. (2006) where they found power asymmetry has a negative effect on the level of satisfaction. It is also similar to the study of Pelau (2008) in which power increases satisfaction, which gives customers a sense of security, success, large market shares and sales value.

#### **4. Discussion**

Bangladesh is the world's fourth-largest paddy producing country. Most of the Bangladeshi paddy farmers are small in size, reflecting the size of their land. They perform their business of

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selling paddy with market agents, e.g., bepari, aratdar, faria and miller. Therefore, their business performances depend on the relationship with their paddy buyers who showed cooperation and sympathy toward the farmers. This study aims to identify the mediating role of satisfaction between some of the components of relationship marketing and farmers' business performance. Therefore, it is crucial to observe the direct relationship between independent and dependent variables. Farmers emphasized great importance on trust, communication and satisfaction in providing a direct relationship to boost business performance. The farmers also emphasized greatly on satisfaction in terms of an indirect relationship between trust-performance, commitment-performance and power-performance.

This study found mixed results for the relationship between relationship marketing (trust, commitment, communication and power) and performance. The H1a outcome may be attributed to the positive assessment of Bangladeshi farmers with their preferred paddy buyers. That is, they believed that their preferred buyer meets their expectation, such as fair price. As with the finding on H1c, Bangladeshi farmers generally had the feeling and attitude to receive trustworthy information from the buyers. It encourages closer communication, which ultimately, leads to increased profit in paddy selling. On H1b, the findings proposed the importance of commitment as one of the critical aspects of relationship marketing, especially in Bangladesh, which appears to be lacking in sharing the same values and goals in business relations. This is a surprising outcome because most previous studies have established the direct relationship between commitment and performance. Also, the findings indicate that paddy farmers did not view commitment as critical to their business relationship with their preferred buyers. The H1d outcome, on the other hand,

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suggests that Bangladeshi farmers were not ready to accept power as an influential mechanism and therefore placed less emphasis on business improvement. It may be because of an exploitative business relationship that prompted farmers to re-evaluate their business relationship and even consider switching their business partners.

The findings of H1e suggest that Bangladeshi farmers assessed their preferred paddy buyers positively. They believed that their preferred buyer meets their expectation, and they were happy to maintain the existing business relationship. The present study has demonstrated that trust, communication, and satisfaction positively contributed to farmers' relationship outcomes, specifically business performance. Bangladeshi paddy farmers communicate well with their preferred buyers, trust them, and are satisfied with their business relationships. However, commitment and power have no direct impact on farmers' business performance.

Nevertheless, the study found the key mediating role of satisfaction. Specifically, between trust and performance, commitment and performance, and power and performance. Although communication has directly contributed to performance, there is no indirect effect of communication on business performance in the presence of satisfaction as the mediator between the two variables (H2c). The outcomes of H2a, H2b, and H2d suggest that farmers utilize the benefit of business strategy using the components of relationship marketing, notably trust, commitment, and power. Since they are satisfied with their preferred buyers to solve the business problem, it ultimately promotes farmers' business performance. Similarly, although it is a surprise that the path between communication and performance in the presence of satisfaction is insignificant, it is not unexpected. In the critical evaluation of the coefficient of hypothesis testing,



it is found that promoting business performance follows three direct and three indirect paths. Direct paths involved from trust to performance; from communication to performance; from satisfaction to performance; whereas indirect paths involved from trust to satisfaction to performance; from commitment to satisfaction to performance and power to satisfaction to performance. These show the farmers' bonding with their buyers, specifically in terms of psychologically, informally, and socially. Most importantly, the bonding enhanced farmers' intention or desire to keep the relationship as well as on friendly terms to extend business relationship, thus, creating social and financial satisfaction.

#### **4.1. Implication**

This study investigates the influence of relationship marketing in business performance, focusing on paddy farmers and demonstrating a B-to-B relationship context. The findings depict which theoretical components of relationship marketing are the most and least important. This study also provides a substantial contribution to the theoretical aspect by demonstrating direct and indirect influences of relationship marketing strategy on business performance. Nowadays, farmers are not only bound to practice mixed marketing strategies or traditional marketing. Farmers may seek to adopt relationship marketing to maximize social and psychological values and establish a long-term strong business relationship with their paddy buyer, rather than traditional marketing that is less effective in achieving business output. Based on the findings of this study, practitioners such as farmers should be aware of the importance of trust, commitment, communication, power and satisfaction as the essential dimensions to successful relationship

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marketing. All of which have an impact on business performance in terms of profit and sales growth, and cash flow that can keep them competitive in the market.

#### **4.2. Limitation and Future Study**

There are several limitations to this study. First, the focus is mainly on farmers' perception rather than the perception of paddy buyers along the supply chain. It is an avenue for future research, which will be conducted on buyer-seller perceptions in the paddy supply chains in order to analyze their business performance. Secondly, this study employed a subjective definition of business performance with financial measurement. Non-financial measurement is absent here. Therefore, further studies can use both financial and non-financial measures for a broader perspective. Thirdly, this study did not examine the perception of government officials who can potentially influence both buyer and seller to practice relationship marketing in a business network. This is because government policy certainly plays a critical role in enhancing the buyer-seller business relationship in the paddy supply chain. Hence, future research should examine the role of relationship marketing with the government in assisting paddy farmers and paddy buyers. Finally, an extensive research design might be favorable to investigate the role of relationship marketing and satisfaction of business performance in the paddy supply chain in Bangladesh.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The main purpose of this study is to examine the interrelationship between relationship marketing and satisfaction and their influence on the business performance of the paddy farmers in Bangladesh. The study found that trust, commitment, and power contribute to increased satisfaction. Similarly, trust, communication, and satisfaction have a direct and positive

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contribution to performance. Paddy farmers in Bangladesh may utilize trust, commitment, and power in efforts to reduce transaction costs, enhance efficiencies, make joint decisions, share better information and increase repeat sales which ultimately leads to business performance. On the mediating role of satisfaction between relationship marketing and farmers' business performance, the outcomes indicated that satisfaction is the key mediator between trust and performance, commitment and performance, and power and performance. It can be said that farmers can follow one of the two strategies. The first strategy is that farmers can follow the path from trust to performance, from communication to performance, and from satisfaction to performance. They can also follow the second strategy, which is in the presence of satisfaction the indirect paths between trust and performance, commitment, and performance, and also power and performance. Overall, these findings produced valuable insight into relationship marketing and farmer's business performance. They also offer a step forward to developing a unified theoretical framework for understanding the role of relationship marketing and satisfaction on farmers' business performance. Therefore, continuous research is beneficial to understand the various relational components and their role in the business performance in the paddy supply chain.

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