

# Relationship marketing in Golf retail

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## Abstract

Relationship marketing is getting more focus from researchers today. The idea of earning the trust and loyalty of customers by engaging in relationships has been put to practice in many retail areas. Retailers and researchers are stressing the importance of establishing relationships with their customers and are in many ways focused on the physical service encounter. Literature often suggests that relationships occur during a service encounter with the idea that a good service encounter leads to satisfaction and loyalty. This is suggested to be achieved with a friendly, helpful and knowledgeable frontline employee and an added value to the core product. Technology is not often recognized as relationship driver, it is rather seen as something essential to operate the store or perform the service.

The purpose for this thesis is to critical investigate relationship marketing in golf retail and examine how technology are involved in the relationship process through an actor-network approach. By both critical examine relationship marketing and how technology is involved in the relationship process; this thesis aims to provide new possibilities in relationship marketing.

This thesis is built on a qualitative case study design of a Swedish golf retailer Dormy and its' customers. The investigation has been made with interviews and participants observation. Findings in this theses suggests that technology is seen as something essential to buy golf products, it is also seen as important in transformation of feelings from the store to the golf course. The result also show that technology is more involved in the relationship process in golf retail than a friendly employee is, which is often overlooked in the literature and at the retailer. Findings also suggests that the time and place dimensions in golf retail is not bounded but can move and shift over time, and that satisfaction can increase or be achieved a long time after the visit to the store.

Key words: *Relationship marketing, Technology, Actor-Network Theory, Service Encounter, Golf retail*

## **Preface**

The author of this thesis would like to thank a number of persons whom without their participation this thesis would not have been completed. I would like to thank the two store managers at Dormy, to the participants in the interviews, and Brigitta Olsson who has supervised this thesis. I would also like to say thank you to fellow classmates and friends for their support and encouragement.

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## Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a background to the research area followed by a discussion of the research problem. Further on a presentation on this thesis aim, research questions, limitations and outline will be presented.

## Background

Golf is one of the most popular sport in Sweden with 498 000 active practitioners ([www.golf.se](http://www.golf.se)) and except for football golf is the most popular sport in Sweden in terms of active practitioners. When golf was introduced as a sport it was regarded as a sport for wealthy and high educated people ([www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se)). Recent years the sport of golf has become a more open sport for people from all types of classes ([www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se)). According to SCB 12 % of the male population in Sweden and 5 % of the female population plays golf at least one time each year. Although golf has become more popular as a sport in Sweden over the past 25 years it has experienced a decrease in active players the last five years ([www.golf.se](http://www.golf.se)).

Although a decrease in active players, the market for golf products can be argued to be fairly large with 498 000 active practitioners who need equipment to play golf. Golf products have historically been sold since the sport was introduced, mostly at local golf clubs, where relationship between customer and provider tended to be of more friendly character. This due to the fact that golf was fairly new and the persons playing golf was of certain character and the golf clubs and shops was aware of this ([www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se)).

The interaction taken place at the golf course created relationships between golfers and golf shops at the golf course, which may be one reason why golf retail has not experienced much growth into the city shops or malls. Interactions with customers may (if done correctly) encourage customers to develop a relationship with a retailer (Grönroos, 2007, p. 25). Engaging in relationships may create a long-term profitability relationship which may have its advantages for both parties and has become more popular for many companies today (Hunt et al., 2006, p. 72). Engaging in relationship with retailers as a customer may offer security, a feeling of control and reduced purchasing risk (Grönroos, 2004, p. 99). Engaging in relationship is often referred to as relationship marketing. The term relationship marketing is relatively new term in marketing, the phrase occurred for the first time 1983 (Berry, 1995, p.

236). Although the phrase relationship marketing is fairly new the meaning behind it has been around since the first business deals were made, earning the favor and loyalty of customers by satisfying their needs and wants (ibid).

## **Problem discussion**

Although the phrase relationship marketing, was given a name in 1983 researcher began to look upon the phenomena in the late 1970s (Takala and Uusitalo, 1996, p. 45). Relationship marketing was created as a counter reaction to the 4Ps and the view of marketing. Establishing, strengthening and developing customer relations were the key terms that were stressed (ibid). Relationship marketing have by Gummessons (1998, p. 16) been defined as “*Relationship marketing is marketing who puts relations, networks and interactions in center*”. Berry (2002, p. 61) states that “*Relationship marketing is attracting, maintaining and –in multi-service organizations-enhancing customer relationships*”. Simply that focus is rather on customers than transactions.

Earning the favor and loyalty of customers is argued to change the marketing activities from attracting customers to activities involving current customers and how to keep customers (Jobber, 2007, p. 172). The key idea of relationship marketing is relations, in other words the maintenance of relations between a company and suppliers, market intermediaries, the public and the most important actor, the customers (Grönroos and Ravald, 1996, p. 19). The first principle is to create customer loyalty so a profitable and long-term relationship occurs (ibid). In relationship marketing value is considered to be an important constituent and the ability to provide customers with superior value than competitors are regarded as one of the most successful competitive strategies (ibid). When adding more value to the core products companies want to enhance customer satisfaction in order to strengthened the bonds between retailer and customer and achieve customer loyalty (ibid). Customer satisfaction is supposed to be strongly linked with customer loyalty and perhaps the most important criteria for customers’ satisfaction (Heskett et al. 1994, p. 120).

The discussion above suggests that relationship marketing can be a useful tool for retailers in order to keep customers. As mentioned earlier traditionally golf retail was concentrated to the local golf shops convenient located at the golf course but has nowadays tried to find their way into malls and sport retailers stores. Research regarding relationship marketing has been focused on how customer loyalty may be developed and has in many cases been focusing on

the service retail sector (Payne and Frow, 2006). According to Hamlin and Chimhundu (2007, p. 180) most of the literature regarding relationship marketing have been concentrated on applications of relationship marketing to marketing management and marketing managers. Many researchers stress the importance of building and establish relationship with customers in the service retail sector (Grönroos, 2004; Duncan and Moriarty, 1999) and describing how relationship marketing may be done, in theory and practically. Relationship marketing is based customer retention and relationships (Takala and Uusitalo, 1996, p. 45) with the notion on that a satisfied customer is more likely to talk well of a service provider if the experience are perceived as satisfying and repurchase effect (Ng et al. 2011, p. 134). Grönroos (2004, p. 103) mentions that one core element of relationship marketing is interaction between customer and retailer, where customers is most likely to create a perception about the retailer. Further on Grönroos (2006, p. 100) argues that in order to implement relationship marketing there are three vital areas for a successfully execution of relationship strategy. The three areas are:

- An interaction process as the core of relationship marketing
- A planned communication process supporting the development and enhancement of relationship
- A value process as the output of relationships.

The possibility to implement relationship marketing via customer relationship management are according to Ryals and Knox (2001, p. 535) depending on the development of software. Gummesson (2002, p. 326) mentions customer relationship management system is a good tool to store customer information though the relevant customer information will stay within the company if an employee quits. However a customer relationship management system is a software program where customer information is stored is not the same as how to use the information stored. For companies to use customer relationship management insight on how to use the information and create a strategy where relationship marketing is essential. A lot of the study literature regarding relationship marketing suggests that relationship marketing is often a solution for all customers (Grönroos, 2006, p. 110). How come then the retail chain Stadium had to close their attempt to build up a large golf section within their stores ([www.mynewsdesk.com](http://www.mynewsdesk.com))? One can argue that Stadium is a fairly successful sport retailer which was well-known for a lot of customers. Why could they not build up a large section for golf? Today at Stadium one can find a small section for golf products but it is not as extensive

as the plans were to be. Grönroos (2004, p. 110) says that research regarding relationship marketing do tend to generalize that it may work in every case for every customer and every business (Grönroos, 2004, p. 110). Could be the case for Stadium and other large sport retailers or is this the problem of the generalization from relationship marketing theories where the roles are decided as a customer – buyer relationship and tends to look the same for every business. Research regarding golf has mainly focused on marketing through golf tournaments (Ray and Ray, 2006), golf tourism (Marwick, 2000) however not relationship building in golf retail.

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2008) companies has to understand the needs their customers has in order to be successful. Golf is an activity which is performed on the golf course, even though the course may be the same, weather conditions change the course of the game and difficulty of the game (Farrally et al. 2003). Golf may be argued to be a not standardized sport due to the course and weather conditions changes the game. Relationship marketing theories tends to be a narrow view, based on what everyone would appreciate when buying products, such as a smile or get good service (Grönroos, 2004, p. 110). Grönroos (2006) mentions three vital areas for relationship marketing to be successful, however these three vital areas (interaction process, communication process and value process) do not take into the account under which circumstance the products are sold or are intended to be consumed. Grönroos (2007) mentions that technology is also essential for the interaction process, however Grönroos (2007) are talking about technology which in many cases is taking for granted such as the checkout works or other machines relevant to perform the service. This is relatively easy evaluated by customers, since most customers take it for granted that the checkout works when purchasing products.

Can golf be argued to be an ongoing evaluation of the products for each stroke, hole and round? For me as a golfer I evaluate all. When I buy a new golf club I try the golf club with golf simulator machines at a specific golf retailer or at the golf club, I evaluate the advice and knowledge of the staff, and, how I perform on the course based on these facilities. As I try the golf club the technology is more involved in my relationship process with the provider rather than a friendly smile. This kind of technology is not often recognized as a relationship driver in service marketing theories; they are rather seen as essential to perform the service. Eldh (2005) argues that technology now has become more important and more closely related to relationship building and purchase process than before. Eldh (2005) is referring to hotel

evaluation in the service sector, where technology enables interactions before, after and during the hotel stay. From this point of view an interesting question occurs, can relationship marketing process in golf retail also contain of different series of acts where technology is more prominent than described? Suggested by the discussion above, relationship marketing may be a useful tool to keep customers; however it is also suggested that it works for every customer, market and product. Relationship marketing today does tend to generalize all markets and customers as the same and be too generic. Therefore the relationship marketing theory could be flesh-out with more empirical case based studies. The empirical case based studies would show differences in the relationship marketing theory. In this case golf retail will be in focus to explore how relationship marketing works in that particular field and discuss new possibilities with technology in mind. In this discussion other possibilities to shed new lights on technology appears, instead of taken technology for granted, it could be given an active role in the relationship process. This may be done by critical exploring the existing relationship marketing theories and explore Actor Network Theory where humans and nonhumans interactions forms a network.

## **Purpose and research questions**

The purpose for this thesis is to critical investigate relationship marketing in golf retail and examine how technology are involved in the relationship process through an actor-network approach. In order to accomplish the purpose, the following research questions have been put up:

- *What is considered as important factors and flaws in relationship marketing in golf retail?*
- *How is technology involved in the relationship process in golf retail?*

## **Outline**

*Chapter 1, Introduction:* Chapter one provided the reader with an introduction and background. This is followed by a problem discussion which leads to the purpose and research questions for this thesis.

*Chapter 2, Theory:* The second chapter will provide the reader with a theoretical framework where previous research is presented in relation to this thesis purpose.

*Chapter 3, Methodology:* In the third chapter the reader is presented with the methodological choices for this thesis.

*Chapter 4, Empirical analysis:* In the fourth chapter the reader is presented with the findings from the conducted interviews and participant observation together with a combined analysis. The findings are presented in relation to the theoretical framework.

*Chapter 5, Discussion and conclusion:* In the fifth chapter the reader is presented with a discussion and conclusion. Also in this chapter limitations and further research is presented.

## Theory

This chapter will provide the reader first with an overview of theories and research regarding the given purpose of this thesis in order to get context to the problem. The chapter will start with an overview of relationship marketing, the drivers of relationship marketing and explore other drivers for relationship building. Further on an overview of Actor-Network Theory will be presented and the chapter will end with a theoretical synthesis.

### Relationship marketing

Relationship marketing is often explained as the relationship between suppliers and customers (Jobber, 2007, p. 171). According to Jobber (2007, p. 171) this type is the core of relationship marketing and are externally oriented. According to Echeverri and Edvardsson (2002, p. 47) successes is measured in long term customer satisfaction. Relationship marketing is a relation oriented view on marketing to be seen in a more long term perspective. Relationship marketing changes the perspective from classic transaction marketing according to Echeverri and Edvardsson (2002, p. 47). In the figure below the shifts from transaction oriented marketing compare to relationship oriented marketing are displayed.

<i>Transactional focus</i>	<i>Relationship focus</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Orientation to single sales</li><li>● Discontinuous customer contact</li><li>● Focus on product features</li><li>● Short time scale</li><li>● Little emphasis on customer service</li><li>● Limited commitment to meeting customer expectations</li><li>● Quality is the concern of production staff</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Orientation to customer retention</li><li>● Continuous customer contact</li><li>● Focus on customer value</li><li>● Long time scale</li><li>● High customer service emphasis</li><li>● High commitment to meeting customer expectations</li><li>● Quality is the concern of all staff</li></ul>

Figure 1: Transactional focus vs Relationship focus. Source: <http://www.propertyandcasualty.com/doc/Relationship-Marketing-What-It-Is-and-What-It-0001> - 2013-08-01

What may be seen in the figure is that the customer satisfaction and long term profitably relations with the customer are more of focus in relationship marketing. In differences from transaction marketing, relationship marketing is more individual focus on the customer (Grönroos and Ravald, 1996, p. 20). According to Harwood and Garry (2006, p. 107) the reason for shifting the marketing activities from transaction towards a relationship view was:

- Not all customers are the same in terms of their profitability to the organization.
- Retention of customers, rather than the acquisition of new customers could be more profitable.
- The importance of supply chain management systems, such as just-in-time concept, leading toward greater openness between buyers and sellers.
- Move from transactions to specialty business and high value product. (Harwood and Garry, 2006, p. 107).

According to Grönroos and Ravald (1996, p. 19) value is considered as the one important component in relationship marketing and the ability to provide more value than competitors has been considering as successful strategy. Grönroos and Ravald (1996, p. 19) argues that adding more value to a core product (product quality, supporting services, etc.) suppliers try to improve customer satisfaction which in turn should strengthened the relationship between supplier and customer loyalty.

However is this view a bit narrow and holistic? Grönroos and Ravald (1996, p. 20) argue that when adding more value to the core product the satisfaction increases but also the costs and sacrifice too. How much value and specific what value for which product and segment? This reasoning did Grönroos and Ravald (1996, p. 20) also discussed while more companies adds more value to their products, the value added may meet the actual needs of the customers. Grönroos (2004, p. 110) mentions that relationship marketing do tend to generalize that it may work in every case for every customer and every business. Harwood and Garry (2006, p. 108) sums up that relationship marketing circles around adding more value to a core product throughout a purchase process as Grönroos and Ravald (1996) mentions. However Harwood and Garry (2006, p. 108) argues that other factors may actually lead to that relationship occurs which are depended on kind of product and market. According to Harwood and Garry (2006, p. 108) reasons for failure in relationship marketing often depends on a misunderstanding of different roles of relationship marketing and the variability of the types of marketing, thus the view on relationship marketing and how it looks may be questioning.

### **How relationship occurs in relationship marketing**

According to Gummeson (1996, p. 33) there are four types of different relationships. The first two of these types relationships are market relationships between suppliers and customers, which makes up the core for relationship marketing, other relationship are on a so

called mega level. According to Grönroos (2006, p. 100) there are three areas which are important for a successful implementing relationship marketing strategy. These three areas are:

- An interaction process as the core of relationship marketing
- A planned communication process supporting development and enhancement of relationships
- A value process as the output of relationships marketing. (Grönroos, 2006, p. 100).

Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt (2000, p. 78) suggests that loyalty and relationship building occurs from perceived service quality experienced by customers. Parasuraman et al. (1985) states that quality of services is not easily evaluated by customer due to services often are abstract. Hence according to Grönroos (2007, p. 77) the service marketing, that the quality of a service is rather measured by customers perceptions of quality. Further on Grönroos (2007, p. 77) argues that the perceived service quality is a customer evaluation were the customer reflects upon the expected quality and the actual experienced quality. According to Wong and Sohal (2003, p.250) the quality of a service perceived by customers has two dimensions, which are referred to as a technical- or an outcome dimension and a functional dimension. The two dimensions, technical- and functional dimensions, can be referred to *what* (technical) customers receive and the functional quality dimension to *how* customers receives it (Wong and Sohal, 2003, p. 250). Positive critical incidents in the technical and functional dimensions are suggested to foster customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and repurchase behavior whilst negative incidents are suggested to lead to complaints, reduced willingness to visit the retail store and negative word of mouth (Wong and Sohal, 2003, p. 259). Further on researchers has emphasizes on the development of relationship marketing and in this field researcher has emphasized that service encounter has become more important than before (Sergeant and Frenkel, 2000, p. 19), though service encounters plays a major role in the development and maintenance of customer relationship and enhance customer value (Beatty et al. 1996, p. 226). According to Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt (2000, p. 78) service quality is the far most important when customer evaluate a retailer and perceived value.

However it is not only the quality dimensions which determines if the experiences are perceived good, neutral or bad (Grönroos, 2007, p. 76). Wong and Sohal (2003, p. 259) argues that it is not only the experienced quality that serve as a base for when customer

evaluate a service it is also the expected quality which are how customers' expectations meets the experienced quality. The expected quality is according to Wong and Sohal (2003, p. 259) have its roots from classic marketing such as: PR, Word Of Mouth, customers' values and needs and price.

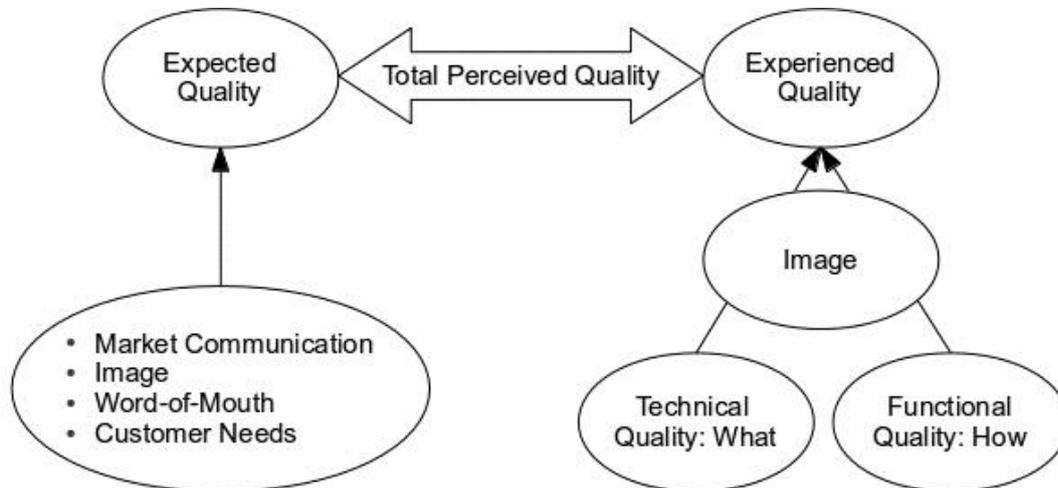


Figure 2: Total perceived quality, Grönroos (2007, p. 77)

The figure says that if the experienced quality meets the expected quality the perceived service quality is considered to be good (Grönroos, 2007, p. 77). If the expected quality are too exaggerated and creates an unrealistic expectations of the service the perceived service quality will be low, although the experienced service quality is good. The discussion above suggests that relationship marketing is built up by different factors but interactions have been expressed as the core for relationship marketing, which occur when customer meets with the supplier.

### Relationships activities in the store

Thus gives an indication that there need to be some interaction process which Grönroos (2004) has identified as the core of relationship marketing. Gummesson (1996, p. 33) argues that the market relationships, classic market relationships and special market relationships, involves a physical interaction with the supplier. Interactions are often referred to as a service encounter. Service encounter is a term that is widely used to indicate that there is an existence of a contact between a customer and a service provider. The service encounter has often been referred to as moment of truths; moments of truths are described by Chandon et al. (1997, p. 66) as the period of time a customer directly interacts with a service. Services which are produced with the presence of the customer will undisputable involve the customer with

contact with the service provider, the service received will influence customer perceive the quality of the service given (Bearden et al. 1998, p. 795). According to Wong and Sohal (2003, p. 249) higher satisfaction from a service encounter is depending on how customers experience surprise, delight and other positive emotions. According to Wong and Sohal (2003, p. 249) the role of service contact employees and the level of service delivered is one important element in the field. Therefore the frontline employees have a mayor part in creating a positive impression, satisfying needs and fulfill customers' expectations (Wong and Sohal, 2003, p. 249). Frontline employees can increase the level of satisfaction customers experience by understanding and responding to the needs and concerns customer may have (Zeithaml et al. 1988, p. 43). In order to understand and response to the needs and concerns, frontline employees should emphasize the emotional mechanism underlying customer delight formation (Wong and Sohal, 2003, p. 249). According to Ng et al. (2011, p. 135) the higher perceived satisfaction for customers may affect and increase the repeat buying behavior and increase a positive word of mouth. Brogowicz et al. (1990, p. 38) suggests that the functional dimension of a service encounter depends on the service mindedness of frontline employee, attitude and behavior, and the physical appearances of the facilities. Thus the functional dimensions are suggested by Lloyd and Luk (2009, p. 182) to be on a personal level with the customers. This is emphasized by Mattila and Enz (2002), Pugh (2001) and Luoh and Tsaur (2009). The functional dimension strives to attract the feeling of comfort for customers as Luoh and Tsaur (2009, p. 1018) argues and that customer evaluate kind of body language and facial expressions (Matilla and Enz, 2002, p. 270). Whilst the functional dimension are suggested by researchers to emphasis the feeling of well-being for customer the technical dimension are suggested by Brogowicz et al. (1990, p. 38) to be the outcome quality of a service. Brogowicz et al. (1990, p. 38) argue that the technical dimension are fairly objective evaluated by customers. The technical dimension consists of machines necessary to perform the service or technology necessary to operate the store argues Brogowicz et al. (1990, p. 38). Hence not much activity is given to the technical dimension overlooking the service marketing area. The technical dimension is distinguished in the service marketing (Brogowicz et al. 1990, Grönroos, 2007) as necessarily to operate the store, like checkouts, and not as an active in the relationship process. Although the technical dimension is given the purpose to enhance customer satisfaction, this is mainly done by ensuring that the machine works (Wong and Sohal, 2003, p. 255). The discussion above suggests that interactions are considered as the core in relationship marketing, does this work every time and for every product?

## **Interactions only in the store?**

Chandon et al. definition may cause some definition problems of what a service encounter is. Though a service is an intangible term and when can it be said that one service starts or ends and another begins? Bitner et al. (1990, p. 72) states that the view of Chandon et al. (1997, p. 66) definition of the service encounter may include all aspects of a firm which a customer may interact, including its personnel, its physical facilities and other visible elements. The service encounter may be an ongoing process which there is different factors affecting customers' perception of the retailer (Bitner et al., 1997, p. 66). However this view makes the time space limited to services which only occur during customers are actively visiting a store. It can also be argued that the interactions or moments of truths indicate that customer only evaluate a retailer when customer directly interacts with a service as Chandon et al. (1997) argues. Holmlund (1996) argues that the interaction process is a series of acts which are the smallest units of the interaction process which may include phone calls, service calls or registration in a hotel. Further on Holmlund (1996) argues that acts may relate to any interaction elements such as physical goods, services, information, financial or social contacts. Although Holmlund (1996) focus the interaction process as just acts from when customer interacts with services provided from the company like a visit to the store, interactions with the frontline employee or a phone call which all, are directly related to a direct contact with the supplier. However Bäckström and Johansson (2005, p. 173) mentions that social factors may also affect how customers evaluate a retailer. Further on Bäckström and Johansson (2005, p. 173) argues that the culture we are living in and the people we surround us with affects our behavior and purchase behavior. Social factors, Bäckström and Johansson (2005, p. 174) mentions may be personnel, other customers, reference groups and culture affecting customer evaluation. With Bäckström and Johansson (2005) argument regarding culture often relate to clothing purchase. Bringing golf into the discussion, the social factors and surroundings may involve fellow golfers, the golf course and during which circumstances golf is played and thus affecting the evaluation.

## **Adding a dimension to Relationship Marketing**

Some thoughts regarding this headline have already been presented in the section above. Many researcher emphasizes on relationship marketing core is the interaction process which many have associated with a physical interaction between a customer and a retailer such as the interaction between customer and frontline employees, the physical attributions of the

store, or small acts like phone calls (Bäckström and Johansson, 2005, p. 174). Many researchers in relationship marketing like Grönroos and Gummesson has stressed the importance of the interaction between customer and frontline employees. With this section the importance of the surroundings and culture regarding golf will also be introduced.

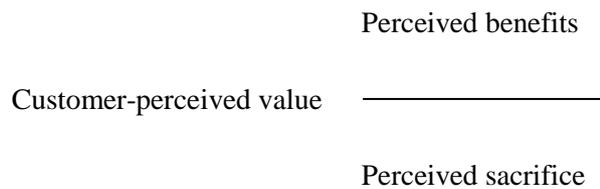
### *Golf course as an extension of the servicescape*

Golf is an activity which is mostly performed on special place and can be played as a sport, friendly activity, and business arrangement or as a way to get out of the office (Farrally et al., 2003). The game may change depending on weather condition or foundation which affects the result of the game (Farrally et al., 2003).

Ek and Hultman (2008, p. 224) studied the golf tourism in the Skåne region from a landscape ordered perspective were a certain sets of economic, political, ecological or social practices. Although the field of study is tourism the idea of a regional servicescape or golfscape as the authors expresses it, are interesting overlook in in this thesis. Golf which may be seen as any of these landscapes ordering, and depending on what view a researcher would like to explore it may be different landscapes. The interest this thesis however lies on small economic scale (customer – supplier) and golf as a social practice, in which you need golf clubs in order to practice golf. Either you buy used golf clubs or you buy them in a store. It is of course the second scenario which is interested in this thesis. Ek and Hultman (2008) build there golfscape from a landscape ordering and is built on mobility, bio power and technology. Ek and Hultman (2008) uses a rhetorical question to a golfers dream scenario “Does life get any better than this?” Ek and Hultman (2008) build on the mobility of golfers and technology, to create freedom to be able to play at any golf course. Thus, the interest in the rhetorical questions for this thesis, “Does life get any better than this?” lies rather with the stroke, and happiness from using the right club and the process to get that golf club.

### **Customer value**

Value are according to Grönroos and Ravald (1996, p. 21) often used in the context of values of customers. Grönroos and Ravald (1996, p. 21) argue however that when discussing the value or utility the consumers receive when purchasing a product, the meaning of value changes. Further on Grönroos and Ravald (1996, p. 21) argues that the value concept frequently appears in service marketing literature and uses Monroe (1991) definition of customer-perceived value as:



According to Grönroos and Ravald (1996, p. 21) perceived sacrifice includes all costs such as: purchase price, acquisition costs, transportation, installation, order, handling, repairs and maintenance, risk of failure or poor performance. The perceived benefits are according to Grönroos and Ravald (1996, p. 22) physical attributes, service attributes and technological support. Zeithaml (1988, p. 38) concludes that perceived value is subjective and individual and perceived value would therefore be different from different customers.

The value concept seen in transaction marketing has been transferred to an ongoing process where the relationship itself may create value argues Grönroos (2004, p. 108). Grönroos (2004, p. 108) argues that in relationship marketing the adding of value to the core product, the role of the product becomes blurred. Further on Grönroos (2004, p. 108) argues that in a relationship context the total offering for the product includes both a core solution and additional services of various kinds. However the view of value from researchers like Grönroos are adjustable to any product and service and tends to be a generic view of what creates value. Building on this argument Farrelly et al. (2003) article “*Golf science research at the beginning of the twenty-first century*” highlights some interesting facts which would be relevant to add to this discussion. Farrelly et al. (2003, p. 754) discuss the technology advancement in golf in relation to the human factor. The technology development regarding golf clubs, golf balls, have made golf companies to develop more individual products targeted different kinds of golfers (Farrelly et al, 2003, p. 755). Hence for every golfer there may be argued that there is a specific golf product adjusted after their capability and swing (Farrelly et al., 2003, p. 756). Further on, to come to a conclusion of what products is suitable for each golfer Farrelly et al. (2003, p. 56) ads biomechanics analysis. Biomechanics are addressed in this sense as technical machines in which a golfers swing speed, ball hit, and ball path can be detected and give golfers a definition of the product (Farrelly et al. 2003, p. 756). Hence if a golfer’s goal is to buy a golf club, the value process may be argued to derive from the technical dimension. Further on it may be argued that the customer value is experienced when the golfer is at the golf course and shoots his stroke with the golf club. The Monroe (1991)

value model presented earlier may serve for this sake, however the benefits and sacrifices may be seen in different lights and derive from other causes than an added value to the core product.

Hence relationship marketing tends come from different sources and causes. The discussion above suggests that existing relationship marketing literature is too generic and to handle the service encounter as the core of the relationship process. Hence it has been argued that the relationship process may contain other factors important for customer satisfaction. Thus value may be created within the golf society network from biomechanics or other technological enhancements. This refers to the human and non-human interactions which are explained with actor-network theory.

### Actor-Network Theory

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) was founded in 1980, Latour is one researcher associated with ANT. Latour (2005, p. 24) argues that the world is a composition through humans and artifacts combined work and that ANT sees the world in this sense. ANT is often described in a technical way as a material-semiotic method which Latour (2005, p. 24) argues to show relations between both material things and semiotics things. Further on Latour (2005, p. 25) argues that ANT is a tool to understand both the social and the technological development which occurs together in a society and also the technical innovations and science creation knowledge. Central in ANT is to describe interactions and development between actors which creates a network to actors-network (Latour, 2005, p. 25). What characteristics ANT is the idea of symmetry between the natural and the social, hence not everything can be explained socially (Latour, 2005, p. 26). According to Latour (2005) ANT strives to present an analysis of one action, activity are linked to factors which influences the action or activity, hence the purpose is to consider the action or activity with all the influencing factors. Bringing in relationship marketing in ANT Gummesson (1996, p. 33) argues: *“Relationships are contacts between two or more people, but they also exist between people and objects, symbols and organizations. Networks are sets of relationships and interaction refers to activities performed within relationships and networks”*

ANT has often been described as an approach rather than a theory (eg. Neyland, 2006), ANT rather focus on the nonhuman actors and in what sense these help explain relational

constitution (Neyland, 2006, p. 26). The central concepts in ANT: Actors and Networks will be further explained.

## **Actors**

Actors have been defined as “*entities that do things*” (Latour, 1992, p. 241), which can be humans both individuals and a group of people, non -humans such as organizations, companies or money, or actants. Within ANT the term actants, are often used to show that not only humans are associated with the term actor and hence influences the network (Latour, 2005). According to Latour (2005) there are no pre decided rules of what an actor is or can be it is rather a question of what actions an actor does in a process. Thus actor may rather be a discussion of what focus the study has and are therefore decided by the author rather than a pre decided list. In this thesis the term actor will be used, hence actors may be everything which influences a relational constitution. As mentioned earlier actors are not only humans, it could also be a technical artifact (Latour, 1992, 49), which the focus of this study strives to investigate the value creation. Thus ANT refers to actors as creators of a network, actors may be nonhumans and humans in which the interaction between enables a network.

## **Network**

Networks are defined as unspecified relations between units which represent a group (Latour, 2005). Within ANT two different alliances are displayed, they are described as social and technological alliances (Holmström and Stalder, 2001, p. 188). The social alliances is argued to contain all actors involved in an invention, construction, distribution or the use of a product (Holmström and Stalder, 2001, p. 189). The technical alliances are argued to be alliances where all the parts already exist or are created to connect people (Holmström and Stalder, 2001, p. 189). Latour (2005) argue that it is not likely to just investigate on of this alliance though they are strongly linked with each other.

## **ANT in the relationship marketing process**

To put ANT in context to this thesis, some operationalizing needs to be made. Thus ANT sees the world as a composition between humans and nonhumans artifacts combined work (Latour, 2005, p. 24). Thus relationship marketing often recognizes physical interactions as the core of the relationship marketing process, it has been argued in this thesis that other factors may be as important or more prominent in the process.

Relationships are created between the interactions taken place between humans and nonhumans (Holmström and Stalder, 2001, p. 200). Thus each actor is linked in a web with other actors which then are an actor-network (Holmström and Stalder, 2001, p. 201). The focus on new network lies on technical artifacts, existing humans and nonhuman elements connects and frame each other (Holmström and Stalder, 2001, p. 201). Thus technology are important part of the network process, hence technology are seen as an actor in which the network is created on. Thus argue Holmström and Stalder (2001, p. 202) technology actors influences humans actors, however the interests has to correspond between the two actors.

Hence value is created through interaction between actors within a network, thus interaction are not only in this sense seen as only a human interaction. Thus the technology actors, using credit cards, machines, are in this sense seen as equally important in the relationship, thus physical human interactions are not exclusive seen as the major relationship marketing core.

### **Theoretical synthesis**

The theoretical synthesis aims to provide the reader with how the author will operationalize the theoretical framework and how the theory will be used in the further investigation.

The theoretical framework starts with an overview of relationship marketing and how the focus has shifted from transaction marketing view toward a more customer oriented marketing view (Echeverri and Evardsson, 2002, p. 47). Thus this view would be interesting starting point of the investigation, is golf retail more focused to relationship? Further on is literature regarding how relationships occur, where focus on interactions tends to be in focus (Grönroos, 2004, p. 100). Interaction is often described in relationship marketing theory as a physical interaction between customer and a supplier (Chandon et al. 1997 p. 97).

Further on relationship marketing activities in a store is explained with the focus on the service encounter (Bearden et al. 1998, p. 795) and much focus regarding the relationship process are emphasizes much on the service encounter and how the service given is more likely to affect a relationship (Lloyd and Luk, 2009, p. 182). Thus this will be the focus in the next step in the investigation, due to this tends to be the natural order in relationship marketing. Furthermore the service encounter is argued to contain of two dimensions, the functional and technical dimension, hence much literature emphasizes the functional as the core whilst the technical dimension are rather seen as essential to deliver the service. Further

on a discussion regarding the culture customer are in (Bäckström and Johansson, 2005) which lead to the notion that interaction may not only occur in the store but also throughout when consumes the product. The certain culture settings which are discussed are likely to affect the behavior and thus the loyalty or relationship which is why this will be the third step in the investigation. Though it is tends to be easier to start investigate the “known” for customer, such as the service encounter, and break it down to the possible extension of the servicescape.

The discussion regarding value brings to the notion that it is primarily the core product which creates value (Grönroos and Ravald, 1996, p. 21), with perceived benefit and perceived scarifies. Thus this lead to ANT where the actors are seen in this thesis as value creator and that the actors interactions creates a network and hence a relationship. Thus, this will be the final step during the investigation. The investigation will therefore follow the steps that the theoretical framework is built up on. The order of the investigation is because the author thinks it would be easier to extract data by choosing to go with the more common known like the service encounter and continue the investigation further on when ideas and thoughts have already been revealed. The next chapter will provide the reader with which course of action this thesis has and how the investigation will proceed.

## Method

This chapter intends to motivate the research strategy for collecting and analyzing data and to describe this thesis' course of action. The chapter intends to provide the reader with a detailed outline of the methodology conducted in this thesis and to motivate advantages and disadvantages with the method choices.

## Research approach

When conducting research in relation with theory there are two main strategies to approach the research with namely deductive and inductive approaches (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 9). Choosing which approach to steer the research forward, it can be said that in deductive research approach the theory steers the research whilst in inductive the research steers the theory of choice (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 9). Further on deductive is argued by Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 10) to be the most common research in the field of social sciences. The research process in deductive research are in most cases followed by a logical order but may in some cases be changed due to facts such as new research has been conducted and published before the researchers own work (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 11). As mentioned inductive approach, the research steers the theory which can be put as to the gathered material decide what theory the research contains (Bryman and Bell, 2003, 10).

At first deductive method seems to be the most suitable method to choose for this thesis. This research begins from the general and goes to the specific which deductive method is. However the nature of this research has taken different shapes during the research process, first the theory were written and interviews conducted, after this the research has been restructured, theory rewritten and participant observation has also been conducted. This would indicate that the research is inductive, thus is this research really a choice between the two methods or a mix of the methods to perform the best research for this thesis? True is that the course of action for this thesis has been driven by an interest and research field, from the general to the specific and that both the theory and conducted research has driven this thesis forward. Tough this research is not a clear choice between deductive or inductive but rather a mix between the two of them.

## Research design

Due to this thesis' focus, a case study design allows the researcher with the opportunity to investigate and analyze a specific group of people and company (Robson, 2002, p. 178). Further on Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 53) argues that case study allows the researcher to a close study of one specific case. Yin (2003, p. 9) argues that case study are suitable when questions of the kind of "how" and "why", though these kinds of questions are explanatory questions. According to Flick (2009, p. 134) a "case" in a case study may be different, it may be an organization, person, institutions or a group. This thesis has the focus on golfers and the focus lies in golfers and a golf retailer, thus as Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 53) argues case study, is concerned with complexity and particular nature of the case. Hence the complexity regarding golf retail as put up in the problem discussion makes case study suitable for this thesis.

Further on Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 54) argues case study may be used through different method approaches, most commonly method in used when conducting a case study are qualitative research. Further on, case study design tends to favor qualitative methods, such as participant observations and interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 54). Though these methods are according to Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 54) helpful of an intensive, detailed examination of a case. In this thesis the collection of data included interviews (unstructured and semi-structured) with golfers and golf retailers and participant observation through the authors own knowledge. Although it is not argued that the whole picture of relationship marketing in golf retail is displayed. Through this view, a small part of relationship marketing is revealed and other is excluded. According to Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 55) in case study design the result cannot be generalizable for other cases, hence the possibility to findings in this case makes the application on other cases limited.

## Actors in the case

The group of people I have selected to work with is golfers and the company I have chosen to work with is Dormy which is a golf retail chain and are owned by Dormy Invest AB ([www.allabolag.se](http://www.allabolag.se)). Dormy has nine stores located in cities mostly in the south of Sweden ([www.dormy.se](http://www.dormy.se)). Reason for choosing Dormy as the company is that at Dormy the technological enhancements discussed in the theoretical framework exists and thus the author has previous knowledge regarding the retailer.

## Literature review

In order to gain knowledge about relationship marketing and ANT a literature review on previous research has been conducted. The literature review has created the opportunity to identify ANT and relationship marketing and what dimensions there is in relationship marketing. The literature review has been withdrawn from textbooks and scientific articles. Databases used to search for scientific articles have been LUBsearch and Google Scholar.

Articles have been evaluated under consideration and care, as well as textbooks and they have been strengthened by that the articles have been published work. The search for literature has been made by using different key words such as; relationship marketing, service encounter, service quality, technical quality, functional quality, emotions in service encounter, ANT, technology in retail. The study literature is relatively new research from 1980 until today.

## Qualitative methods

As mentioned earlier, qualitative research is the method of choice in this thesis. Examples of qualitative methods are in-depth interview, observation or field study. Qualitative research can provide me with the advantage to get an understanding of the certain qualities of my purpose. In order to set up a successful qualitative research it is important to get an understanding of the whole picture or problem (Bjereld et al., 2007, p.114).

When choosing to work with qualitative research method the researcher collect data themselves by observations, examining documents and interviewing participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 38). Choosing qualitative research will give me the opportunity to learn the meaning the participants hold to the given purpose, through interactions with the participants. Qualitative research will provide me with the opportunity to explore the purpose in a more complex matter than quantitative research would have, though I want an understanding of the phenomena (Creswell, 2007, p. 39).

As mentioned earlier, qualitative research approach will let me collaborate with the participants and hear the participants' stories, thoughts and their saying in the phenomena. In order to achieve this I need to talk to the participants directly and let them be allowed to talk comfortable regarding the given purpose. Further on qualitative research is preferable to use when examine interactions between people because it is hard to measure interaction with

numbers by using qualitative research. By doing this it will let me to get a deeper conception of people's attitudes, value and perception. (Creswell, 2007, p. 40)

## Data collection

Data collection in qualitative research can be collected through different sources such as interviews, observation or field study (Bjereld et al., 2007, p.114). One of the most popular data collection measures to use is interviews. Interviews can be made different depending on the case the researcher seeks an understanding or answer to (Creswell, 2007, p.130-132). In this thesis I will work with three different kinds of interviews, semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews and focus group. This is to find ideas and thoughts regarding the topic on a more formal way. As mentioned earlier case study design enables the author to also use participant observation (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 54). Participant observation has been chosen due to it allows me to move and act natural in the environment this thesis focus has in an informal way were many of the stories may be told. To act and in the study environment gives the opportunity to go deeper with the study subject and through conversation get peoples actual thoughts.

## Authors pre-understanding

Pre-understanding of the author refers to previous knowledge and experiences. This can be referred to the *“lived experiences of individuals are thus the source of understanding”* (Smith, 1998, p. 161). The lived experiences do in turn refer to the hermeneutic circle which shows the collaboration between what is meant to be interpreted, previous knowledge and the social settings where the research is conducted (Bjereld et al. 2002, p. 70). The research is seen as constant movement between parts or details and the whole picture, between what is meant to be interpreted and previous knowledge (Smith, 1998, p. 161). In order interpreted the parts or details is depended on how the whole picture is interpreted and the whole picture is depended on how the parts or details are interpreted (Molander, 2003, p. 167). The author of this thesis is a golfer who has knowledge and lived experiences. The author has played golf for 18 years, competed in small tournaments and is interested in golf in general, such as products, golf courses and the development of the game. Due to the nature of this research this is seen as a strength, since there is an understanding and knowledge regarding golf retail (Molander, 2003, p. 167). The author's insight in parts and details; such as the process for buying golf clubs, how the weather affects the game and the social settings in golf, provides knowledge

and understanding to interpret the whole picture. A considerable strength from the authors pre-understanding is that it enables participant observation in the store, on the golf course and to interact in the social setting surrounding golf which contributes to interpreting the whole picture. Although it is seen as strength some things needs to be taken under consideration. Due to the previous knowledge it may be that the interpretation of some parts or details may be overseen, this is taken under consideration throughout the research process.

### **Participant observation**

Participant observation has its roots from the field of ethnography, in which the researcher seeks to understand how social order is created through talk and interactions (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 281). Participant observation assumes that the researcher personal lives in the culture society and the social society in which the focus for the study lies (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 385). Participant observation assumes that the interest of study is of a larger field of knowledge in social categorizations (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 385). The social categorizations in this thesis are golf, which is seen as a social interaction form. Due to the nature of participant observation there are some questions a researcher has to take under consideration while conducting the research, who benefit of the research?, Is it morally viable?, Which research is important to deny individuals consent?. To answer these questions, benefit from this research is of concern in the relationship marketing field, golf retailers and golfers. Since the nature of this study is not seen as a morally grey zone issue, the research is viable. To deny consent is not regarded as negatively, whilst interviews had been held (see above) participant observation allows the author of this thesis to go deeper into the topic and also be able to test the data collected. Hence participant observation enables the possibility to actual observe that golfers actual do what they say, although to take under consideration, sometimes researchers customizing to the group to much and are therefore no longer objective (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 386). However this view tends to be in focusing where is a question moral or ethical principle, which the author of this thesis is considered as low. Main advantages to use participant observation are to hear stories which may not come up in an interview or were the settings are too formal. Also to be present at the golf course and in the store gives the advantage to follow up in real live what and how people act and react. As for the participant observations has taken place at golf courses, with fellow golfers, unknown golfers which the author has played with, visit the store, and visited the store with people which bought golf club and later play with them. Thus data are real live facts and not only memorized thoughts from interviewee's participants.

However as mentioned, although participant observation enables a lot of possibilities, to conduct interviews as well can confirm observations, hear stories in a more formal way and too seek and understanding from two views.

### **Unstructured interviews**

As mentioned earlier one of the interviews of choice was unstructured interviews. Reason why unstructured interviews were chosen was because I had a general area of interest and concern and wanted to bring a conversation about it (Robson, 2002, p. 271). Unstructured interviews can be completely informal, and this was seen as an advantage. Although the interviews were unstructured the area of interest steered the conversation which is one of the differences from the participant observation conversations. The primary concern with the unstructured interviews lies in the interviewees' perception about a particular situation (Robson, 2022, p. 272).

### **Sample selection and approach**

The sample selection for the unstructured was made from convenient sample selection, thus the limitation of the area of interest (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 497). The respondents chosen for the unstructured interviews were made from two criteria; namely playing golf actively and had visit a golf retailer in the last six months. Although the interviews were in an informal way the respondents was introduced to the topic and what my area of interest was. Since there was two criteria's I wanted to be fulfilled a convenient sample was preferable (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 497). Since I wanted the unstructured interviews to be as informal as possible no tape recorder was used, however after the conversation I took notes of what I found usefully from that interview. The unstructured interviews were with golfers and were nine in total and lasted around fifteen minutes. Respondents were from ages 22- 57. The informal interviews were held at Öresunds GK in Häljarp and at 130507 and at Landskrona Gk in Landskrona 130508.

### **Focus groups**

With the information from the unstructured interviews, I decided to conduct a focus group though I wanted a deeper knowledge and understanding of the topic. Since focus groups require a lot of work in the recruitment process and analyzing the numbers of groups were kept down in this thesis to one (Bloor et al., 2002, p. 28-29). Focus groups bring me the advantage that the participants interact with each other and I felt that one on one interviews

would not provide me with enough information. According to Bloor et al. (2002, p. 8-9) there is a tendency when using focus groups that not all the stories will be told because of the group settings. When using focus groups as a data collection method, the researcher have to take under consideration to encourage participants so that all the participants in the group are engaged and interact with each other (Creswell, 2007, p.132-133). With this in mind I acted as a moderator during the focus groups and could enter the discussion and encourage people to talk when I felt someone did not contributed to the conversation. The idea behind using focus groups as a method was to learn and create a deeper understanding of what dimensions in relationship marketing are drivers, which are not and how the relationship may occur and continue.

### **Sample selection and approach**

In order to set up a successful focus group Bloor et al. (2002, p. 19) argues that there are a range of issues that needs to be taken under consideration. Such issues may be the participants characteristics in relation to the topic, whether to use a group of strangers or a preexisting group and how many there should be in the group (Bloor et al., 2002, p. 19). Selecting participants for a focus group there are some issues who need to be considered like bringing diversity in the group in order to encourage discussion, although a too heterogeneous group may lead to conflicts. It is important to have in mind that the participants' allegiance lies with the researcher and not have conflicting interests. Conflicting interest may lead to conflict within the group with no data collected as a result. As Bloor et al. (2002, p. 20) mentions, focus groups are a social situation and the result can never be foreseen.

In this thesis I used a preexisting group. The use of a preexisting group when conducting a focus group has been argued both positively and negatively. Bloor et al. (2002, p. 22) mentions that preexisting group may be less likely to express opinions, views and experiences. Kitzinger (1994, p. 105) argues that preexisting groups are to be preferred because it will provide information of the social context within where ideas, perception and decisions are made. Other benefits by using preexisting groups are according to Bloor et al. (2002, p. 23) that the group can use previous knowledge about one another and reduce the recruitment time for the researcher. The importance of get a deeper understanding of the purpose for this thesis, I wanted the participants to be able to express their opinion and use previous knowledge and the use of preexisting group was seen as preferable for this purpose.

According to Bloor et al. (2002, p. 26) a focus group between six to eight participants is to prefer for a focus group discussion. If a researcher conducts a small focus group it may lead to a limited discussion or cancellation if one or two participants do not show up. However if the researcher is involved with experts or the topic is considered as very complex a small focus group is to prefer if they feel they do not have the time to express their opinion. I have decided to have four participants in the focus group due to the focus group will be conducted with participants who plays golf and have visit the golf retailer multiple times. I want to have smaller focus groups because I want every participant to be able to express and elaborate their opinion. Also too large focus groups may be hard to moderate and could be frustrating for the participants if they feel that their time is limited (Bloor et al., 2002, p. 26-28).

### ***Focus group***

The focus group was held at Landskrona GK in Landskrona. Landskrona GK was chosen because the participants were active players at that golf club and gave me the opportunity to gather every participant and be able to sit in a controlled and familiar environment for the participants. The focus group was held the 9<sup>th</sup> of May and started at 12 o'clock and was 43 minutes in total. The focus group contained four participants, three males and one female. All of the participants were golfers.

### ***Semi-structured interview***

As mentioned one method of choice is semi-structured interview. The idea behind using a semi-structured interview is that I wanted to have suggested questions and themes but be able to change the order if the interviewers may find the questions invidious (Robson, 2002, p. 270). I wanted the interviewees to talk about their own work and experiences as much as possible and therefore chose to let the interview run as a conversation with an interview guide. Use of semi-structured interview will also bring me the advantage to be able to change wording, add questions and give explanations to my questions. I saw this as an advantage though to be able to follow up interesting responses and investigate underlying motives.

The focus of the interview is to seek an understanding and find explanations on what the employees in golf retail know, what they do, what they think and feel (Robson, 2002, p. 272). These kinds of questions may be related to concerns of behavior, beliefs and attitude and are according to Robson (2002, p. 271) difficult to get a truthfully picture of. To avoid not getting

answers I have selected to have some multiple question related to the topic of certain issues where self-reporting may tend to favorable themselves as Robson (2002, p. 271) suggests.

According to Robson (2002, p. 272) change wording and adding questions may affect the response from the interviewee. When conducting the interviews I have not followed the interview guide to its full and are regarded as one of the advantages to use semi-structured interviews in this thesis. According to Robson (2002, p. 273) leading questions is something the interviewer has to consider before and during an interview though leading questions may give a misleading answer. When conducting the interviews some leading questions occurred, although the leading questions were to get the interviewee to talk about their own experiences and not to answer what was expected from them.

### **Sample selection and approach**

Though I wanted to identify how a golf retailer works, I decided to have qualitative interviews with employees at Dormy in Ängelholm and Dormy in Malmö. According to Robson (2002, p. 271) qualitative interviews gives me the opportunity to let the interviewee to mediate their situation and feelings with their own words.

The interviews were conducted with two store managers at Dormy. Interviewing the store managers were made to see how the store works with relationship marketing. Interviewing the store managers gave me the opportunity to get information from persons with a comprehensive overview of the company's strategies.

To prepare the interviews contact had been established with the interviewees through email. In both cases I presented the thesis and why I wanted to interview them, in none of the interviews the interview guide was sent in advance. This was because I wanted to get as truthfully, personally and spontaneous answers as possible. The place of the interviews was at the Dormy stores in Ängelholm and in Malmö and the interviews were recorder with a sound recorder in order to let me focus on the interview and the conversation.

Interview with Mikael Vaak, store manager at Dormy in Ängelholm, was conducted 130514 at 10.00 – 11.05. Has been working in golf retail since 2002 and at Dormy since 2009

Interview with Steven Dillman store manager at Dormy in Malmö was conducted 130515 at 10.00 to 10.55. Has been working at Dormy since 2010.

## Data analysis

Krueger (1998, p. 9) mentions some critical ingredients from analyzing the data in qualitative research. When conducting the analysis I have used some of these ingredients, the analysis has been systematic, it has followed a prescribed consequent process as Kreuger, (1998, p. 19) mentions. The analysis has been conducted by process of comparison with finding patterns and comparing of the data collected (Krueger, 1998, p. 17). Comparison and finding patterns in this case is to the theoretical framework. For the semi-structured interviews and the focus group a tape recorder was used. After the interviews were conducted the recorded material was transcribed though as Flick (2009, p. 295) argues that it is important in order to analyze the material. Using a tape recorder may influence the participants to feel unease and affect their answers according to Flick (2009, p. 295). My experience when conducting the interviews was that there state of comfort was not affected by the use of tape recorder and the setting was perceived as comfortable. The interviews were held in Swedish and transcribed in Swedish and in the analysis translated carefully to English. Before conducting the interviews I put aside my own thoughts and feelings in order not influence the participants. By setting aside my own opinions made it easier to separate the participants' response during the interviews and during the analysis. Thus the same mentality was used in participant observation, personal thoughts and values are taken under consideration before analyzing the material. Hence in participant observation the analysis is more focus on the conversation that has occurred (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p .387). Three basic assumptions are taken under consideration for the analysis, talk is structured, talk is forged contextually and analysis is grounded in data which is suggested by Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 387). The data was written down in notes after and is analyzed to the settings and to what had been said but also to what has not been said.

## Reliability and validity

Validity and reliability and generalizations are important terms when conducting research. Reliability are according to Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 74) concerned with consistency of measures, and the question if the study is repeatable (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 33). Three measures are suggested by Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 75) as prominent factors when consider if the result is reliable or not. The three measures are referred to as stability, internal reliability and inter-observation consistency (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 76). The concept validity is the measurement whether a concept is really measuring the concept (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.

77). Bjereld et al. (2007, p.108) argues validity refers to in which extent the research investigates what you intend to investigate. However these concepts are primarily of concern when conducting quantitative research, it still needs to be taken under consideration in some form in qualitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 287).

Literature regarding research methodology suggests that the evaluation criteria in quantitative research should be adaptable for qualitative research as well (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 287). Thus the course of action between quantitative and qualitative research are different, the idea that the same evaluation criteria is applicable may seem contradictory.

The concepts reliability, validity and generalization may be difficult to apply on qualitative research. For example, reliability tests are often measured in statistics where a correlation may confirmed the reliability, in qualitative this cannot be done (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 33). Hence other measurements may be more prominent in qualitative research to increase the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 288). Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 288) suggests that trustworthiness are made up from the criteria's credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Credibility are suggested to parallels the internal validity, refers to the findings entails both that the research is carried out according to good practice and submitting the results to the social world (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 289). Transferability which are suggested to parallels the external validity, are suggested that the researcher display the small sample studied or culture in rich detail, this to serve as database for making judgment about the possible transferability findings (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 289). Dependability are suggested to parallels reliability, which are suggested by Flick (2009, p. 386) while conducting interviews and focus group, to increase reliability with interview training, checking interview guide, and training and reflexive exchange of the interpretation. Conformability refers to the objectivity for the study, although as complete objectivity is impossible to achieve the research can be shown to have been conducting in good faith (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 289). Hence due to the nature of this research the personal values are under consideration throughout the whole research process (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 289). In addition to trustworthiness, authenticity of the study is of concern to which degree the research are interesting in the society (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 289). Hence these suggestions are under consideration throughout the whole research in order to increase the trustworthiness of the study.

Qualitative method gives the opportunity to increase the data reliability with an interview guide, recorder and training about reflexive exchange of interpretation. Hence the trustworthiness of the data may be strengthening; however it is hard to reach reliability and validity throughout qualitative research. Thus other measurements as possible options are more prominent in this research. Trustworthiness, authenticity and transparency are of focus for this thesis. Transparency in this sense, is that every step in the research is detailed explained which will be up to each and every one which read this to determine the reliability and validity for this study.

## Empirical analysis

This chapter begins with a short introduction about the company Dormy, further on the empirical data collected through the interviews and participant observation will be presented. The empirical data collected will be presented and analyzed in relation to each other and with the theoretical framework presented earlier in this thesis.

### Dormy

Dormy was founded in 1994 by Lars Johansson and Mats Hedlund. Dormy started with one small shop in the central of Örebro. From 1994 the company experienced growth and have today nine stores located throughout Sweden ([www.na.se](http://www.na.se)). Dormy Golf & Fashion AB who is operating the golf retail stores is owned by Dormy Invest AB ([www.allabolag.se](http://www.allabolag.se)). Dormy Golf & Fashion AB had a turnover of 232 736 (thousands of kronor) in 2011-12. In 2009 Dormy was selected as the best golf retailer in Sweden and the leading words for Dormy is “*Golf for Golfers by Golfers*” ([www.piccolo.nu](http://www.piccolo.nu)).

### Relationship marketing and golfers

Firstly the participants from the focus group had a hard time identify themselves as having a relationship with their local golf retailer or any retailer. The further discussion with the respondents from the focus group regarding what a relationship is and what is not in terms of customer – retailer led to many different answers. The participants did not seem to recognize any relationship with any supplier regarding products or services. When discussing relationships in terms of customer – supplier some participants felt it made them feel silly at first to say that they have a relationship with a supplier. This may be because relationships are often seen as something intimate bound you have with loved ones or close friends. Discussing relationship more “lightly” many of the participants felt it easier to define relationship with a supplier. However it was still hard for many participants to say that they actually have a relationship with a retailer and more specifically with Dormy. Both participants from the focus group and the interviews with golfers have shopped at Dormy and do think of Dormy when they are about to buy golf products. The discussion suggests that the participants do not easily recognize a relationship with Dormy or another retailer for that matter; it is rather seen as a question on what is most suitable and accessible for them as customers. The view Jobber (2007) and Echeverri and Edvardsson (2002) gives regarding relationship marketing is company oriented, but as in any other relationship, it takes two to tango. Further on the

identification problem participants in this case have with identifying themselves with relationship may indicate one of the orientation problems with relationship marketing theory. Interactions and observations with golfers suggests that one goes to Dormy because it is cheap, another because they have the brands he wants, one for the knowledgeable staff, or another because it is the closest golf retailer.

However further investigation and observation regarding on why golfers go to Dormy shows that it is a certain set of criteria's who need to be fulfilled. These certain set of criteria's all have one thing in common. It involved the store and the golf course. Through observation it can be argued that the number on criteria is to transform the golf club from the store to the golf course. When observing this further it was observed that one do not only buy a golf club to use, when buying the golf club you buy curiosity and hope to improve the game. This view was later on discussed with another group of golfers in which many of them shared this view. This may correspond to the view on value which Ravald and Grönroos (1996) mentions. However, it was discussed further that adding value, as Ravald and Grönroos (1996) mentions, is hard to say increases their satisfaction. The discussion led to what value is added and how is it shown, and to what end. Suggested from the discussion by just saying adding value could actually make more damage than good. This came out from that if the added value was something the participants did not want, would that have affected something else, like higher price. Interactions through focus group, interviews and observation with golfers suggest that Dormy do a good job when it comes to their customers, many golfers has only good things to say regarding Dormy. Although it seems as a relationship is hard to outstate for golfers, there is an indication that unconsciously there has established a relationship.

### **How relationships occurs**

When discussing relationships and how they may occur with the participants in the focus group and through observation different answers may be displayed. Discussing the suggested theories with two services as the primary way to satisfaction, different views and thoughts regarding this is shared. There is no recognition of two different kinds of services from the participants as Wong and Sohal (2003) argue it is seen as all is evaluated as one service. Of course this can be because the participants do not think of service as divided and have theory in back of their heads. Discussion regarding service with the participants in the focus group also displayed that surely it would affect them how they perceive the service but they are not so affected by this when buying golf products than when buying for example clothes. Wong

and Sohal (2003) statement regarding positive incidents in the two dimensions are marginally displayed from the discussion. However it is not seen as important according to the participants from the focus group and interviews that it would lead to loyalty in this case. Further discussion in the focus group regarding what they expect when entering a store and what they receive which Grönroos (2007) state would be the total perceived quality, is only depended on their needs. A discussion regarding what the participants in the focus group have heard from friends regarding the service they received was not displayed as very important. This was explained by one of the participants as:

*“Every golfer has a different kind of game and need and depended on how your swing is you need different kind of service and help.”*

This expression was agreed by the other participants in the focus group. Further on the participants in the focus group stated that what they heard from friends regarding Dormy would not affect them so much in terms of perceived service. This does not correspond to Grönroos (2007) view regarding total perceived service quality.

### **Relationships activities in the store**

The store managers interviewed both stressed the interaction process with their customer to establish relationships. This is supported in theory by Grönroos (2002), Wong and Sohal (2003) and Beatty et al. (1996) to be one of the most important criteria in relationship marketing. When discussing relationship activities in the store with the store managers the focus they concentrate on is to respond to customer needs and wants which correspond to Zeithaml et al (1988) argument. When discussing with one of the store managers how frontline employees at Dormy try to do this he answers:

*“We try to give the customer a feeling of comfort, we smile, we show that we are open and that we care for their problem they have as golfers”*

Much focus in the interaction process lies in how they receive their customer and try to create comfort which corresponds to Luoh and Tsar (2009) and Matilla and Enz (2002) statement regarding comfort generates satisfaction which could be achieved from facial expression and body language. Through the focus group and observation it can be argued that this is not so close to the truth in this case. In the focus group a discussion regarding how frontline

employee presents themselves and approach them as customer was one of the themes. One citation from this discussion was:

*“Well it’s always nice to get a hi and smile”*

This was expressed as being nice but not essential for him to achieve satisfaction or buying a product. Further discussion regarding frontline employees approach in the focus group tended to show that it would affect them more if someone were being annoying than friendly. The discussion regarding the frontline employees showed two important factors, knowledge of the staff and being able to try a golf club. One golfer argued that when he goes to buy a new golf club, he knows which kind of golf club he wants and wanted to get the feeling of the golf club and not meet a friendly employee. It was also discussed to try and feel the golf club was similar to when buying a sweater. You want see how the sweater looks on you in a mirror and how it feels and in golf you want to get the same feeling when trying a golf club and hit some balls with it. Further on from observation and interactions with golfers it is displayed that the ability to try a golf club is essential for buying the golf club in the first place. Hence focus for participants in this case is not what Luoh and Tsaur (2009) argues comfort from frontline employee, it is to create comfort for themselves how it would actual look on the golf course. Displayed from the focus group and from participant observation, that even if frontline employees act accordingly as Lloyd and Luk (2009), Mattila and Enz (2002), Pugh (2001) suggest, if the possibility to try the golf clubs is not present there will not be purchase at all.

The possibility to try the golf clubs was discussed in the focus group as essential for buying the product. Were none of the participants in the focus group felt that they could not buy a golf club without testing the golf club. This indicates that although the research regarding how frontline employee should meet customers and respond to their need as Wong and Sohal (2003) argue, without one factor it would not matter how friendly or nice a frontline employee is. If one were to open up a golf store and educate all the frontline employees from school book examples and they are the friendliest persons in the world. The participants in this case would not go from that store satisfied with a golf club from a store if the possibility to try the golf club were not present. The possibility to try the golf clubs in the store refers to in this case to the trackmans. Trackmans could be argued to be a part of the technical dimension which Brogowitz et al. (1990) mentions. However opposite too what Brogowitz et al. (1990) states, in this case it is not only seen as a part necessary to perform the service. It is seen as something essential for the whole buying process and thus is more likely in this case

to affect satisfaction. The essential of trackmans have been displayed from the participants in the focus group and from observation, however the store managers also argues that it is essential when it comes to give customers service in the store:

*“The trackman is very important, it gives both us and the customer knowledge how fast swing he has, how hard he hits the ball and we can project the ball path which makes it possible to see if it goes left or right”*

Although this citation is showing how important one of the store managers thinks trackmans are, it did not come up until it was asked of him in a direct question. When talking about how to meet customers the discussion was on how the frontline employee should act to increase satisfaction not how important the trackmans are. This could indicate that trackmans are seen as essential already for the store managers as a natural part of the store which every customer should expect or take for granted. Neither the less, trackmans provide valuable information not only for the frontline employees but also to the customer on how the stroke went with a specific golf club. Also opposite to Brogowicz et al. (1990) this is not so easy evaluated by customers.

From participant observations in store when someone trying a golf club, first the customer hit around five balls looks back at the computer and either himself/herself or with a frontline employee evaluates how fast the swing speed was, how far the stroke went and how far left or right the stroke went. From the result on the computer screen, a perception about the golf club occurs and the golf club is evaluated from the results on the screen. This could go on with a customer trying five or even ten different golf clubs in order to find the one he thinks is the most suitable for him or her. When customers feel the golf club is right for them after having evaluated both how it feels in their hands and how the stroke went. The decision on buying the golf club was made. In the observed situation involved trackman, the trackman computer which simulates the stroke on the screen in front of the customer and a frontline employee which interpreted the data. Opposite too what Brogowicz et al. (1990) and Grönroos (2007) mention regarding the technical dimensions, in this case it is present and a factor throughout the whole purchase process and the most important factor. Why it is like this is further investigated when exploring the nature of golf.

## The nature of golf

It has been displayed in the sections above that the suggested activities in relationship marketing are not as prominent or active in golf. Through the participant observation and the pre-understanding of the author has enable to explore this in more detail. As argued by Farrally et al. (2003) golf can be played in different forms, the participant observations in this case is mostly the form as a friendly activity. Typical for this kind of games are friends going out to have a good time and maybe had a small competition between one and other. Further on golf can be argued to contain of formal and informal rules and informal and formal ways of behavior and language. These formal and informal ways affects how the game is played and how interactions on the golf course are formed. It also constructs a form of culture and social settings which surrounds the golf course. This culture and social settings is argued by Bäckström and Johansson (2005) to affect customer evaluation. This can be argued both true and false in this case. It is further explored that evaluation and relationships cannot only be explained by explaining the social settings, like Latour (2005) argues. To further explore this argument the nature of golf will be explained.

When golfers go to tee (start of the hole) on many holes they meet this view:



Figure 3: Picture 1 view from the tee

In this picture above we can see two golfers on their way to start the whole and play the first stroke. This particular whole is a pair of three which indicates it is a short whole around 130 meters long. We can see the two golfers standing and looking to the green. Since the author was playing golf with these two golfers we can display their thoughts at this moment. When

approaching the tee and putting down the bag, an evaluation process begins, which club should be used to get as close to the hole as possible. Club number nine or a pitch or club number eight? It is not only a personnel evaluation; they take help from each other and discuss what kind of club could be right.

A golfer who has been playing with his or her golf clubs for several years may already know exactly which club to use. It could be a problem for him or her to decide if the weather conditions are uncertain (heavy rain or wind) as Farrally et al. (2003) argues. But if you have recently bought new golf clubs and are out playing and never used the new golf clubs on the golf course this hole or any another may become a hard evaluation process. How will the stroke be? Will I embarrass myself? Will the stroke go straight up to green? Should I aim to the right or to the left? The reasoning could be different and on different levels, such as how close to the hole is considered as a good stroke. Other situation which also could lead to some confusion is the typically water hole:



Figure 4: Picture 2 view from tee: water hole

Here the situation is not related to special length. This is a pair of four hole, around 410 meters which means that you cannot hit the green in one stroke. The first stroke should take you as long as possibly but as can be seen there is water to the left and a grove to the right. If the ball goes out to the left or the right you have lost your ball. This will cause you to hit a new ball and your third stroke, and the hole in terms of points is pretty much ruined. Both holes create an uncertainty and confusion for golfers.

These uncertainties are created in the social factors in golf, and are as Bäckström and Johansson (2005) argues a part when of golfers overall satisfaction. Further on these uncertainties are shown to be carried on when buying new golf clubs. Observation suggests that when for example the golfers in figure 3 are considering to buy a new club. They can relate to how they want the stroke to be. The same goes for figure 4, a driver cannot go far left or right because the hole will be ruined. When entering the golf shop to buy a new golf club the uncertainties of how a stroke will be, to what cost and to what end comes in place. Hence to when buying golf club there are some general concerns which have occurred on the golf course. It was earlier in displayed that the possibility to try the golf club was essential to even buy a golf club. The trackman is here given an active role in the purchase process and the relationships process. This and other things have been observed to be an important part when it comes to satisfaction and relationships. Since these things are an active role in this case they are viewed as actors because they are “*entities that do things*”, as Latour (1992) argued. These actors will be further explored and discussed in the next section.

### **Entities that do things**

As discussed above, the nature of golf creates moments where golfers may feel uncertain. In this section we will go further to discuss and explore the actors and how the golf course becomes alive and active in the store.

### **Try out policy**

One observed actor which is a part on connecting golfers, the golf store and the golf course is the try out policy. The try out policy allows golfers who have bought a new golf set to try them for 30 days. The try out policy lets golfers to bring the golf store to the golf course and explore how the game changes, for better or worst. One observation made from the participant observation was when the author was golfing with another golfer who had used this policy after 25 days because he was not sure of if he wanted to keep his new golf clubs. He played 11 times with the new golf clubs. He changed his new golf clubs after 25 days and played four times with the second new set and was really happy and satisfied with the new ones.

Thus satisfaction actually occurred after 25+ days and was not evaluated by the service given at the store rather the service extended from the store. Hence this particular customer, likelihood for word of mouth is timeless because he still plays with the golf clubs. This observation is therefore opposite to Wong and Sohals (2003) argument regarding the service

encounter as the primary occasion to create satisfaction. Further on the view Chandon et al. (1997) presents regarding the service encounter are not present in this case, it is rather as Latour (2005) argues the combined work of the try out policy, golfer, the golf course and the golf store which generates satisfaction. The combined work also contains of perhaps the most important actor in this case; the trackman. The author of this thesis knows that the golfer in this example above did try his golf clubs in a trackman before he bought the new golf set. Even though he changed the first golf set, the trackman has been observed to be an important actor in this case.

## Trackman

Trackman has been discovered earlier in this analysis to be essential for the purchase process. Here we will discover how the composition of golfers and the technical actor, the trackman, combined work. If we look back to the nature of golf and picture one and two. These pictures contained some difficulties a golfer may experience at the golf course. The uncertainty these obstacles creates is one explanation on why golfers want to try golf clubs before purchasing them. Let say one of the golfers in picture one decide to buy a new pitch. He arrive to the store and talks to a frontline employee that he wants a new pitch. He is presented to three options and goes to the trackman. And start to test the golf club, which the picture below displays:



Figure 5: Picture 1 of the trackman

Here we can see the golfer is on his way to hit the ball. He can get the feeling of how the club feels how soft/hard the shaft is and how it feels to hit the ball. From here the feeling of actual

standing on the tee is simulated. The relation between the material and the technical is fully present, as the social were the action is similar to standing on the tee. This corresponds to the view Latour (2005) presents the social and technological development which occurs in a society. The society is golf as a sport, which also can be seen as a landscape ordered perspective like Ek and Hultman (2008) argued. The golfer continues the stroke and looks up to the projection screen and can see this view:



Figure 6: Picture 2 of the trackman

This picture displays how the stroke went. In this particularly stroke we can follow the ball path out to the left. If we go back to picture one, this stroke would probably not hit the green. The stroke would rather end up to the left of the green forcing the player to hit the number two stroke off the green and “loosing” one stroke on the hole. Thus the transformation between places is possible and experienced. When looking at this picture and see how the ball path went, the stroke could be analyzed and evaluated. If we look in the left bottom corner we can see were a line of boxes begins. Each of these boxes contains information about how the stroke went. From these numbers and the projection screen you can analyze if the golf club is a fit for you. In this picture the shot was way out to the left which indicates that golf club is not perfect for this golfer. With these numbers a new golf club can be tried out which suits the golfer better. However, the numbers in the box may be abstract for you if you are not known to the terms and what they mean.

There are a total of seven boxes which we will name one to seven from left to right and explain why it sometimes do not makes sense for a regular golfer. Number one to four boxes shows the ball speed, in what angle the ball is hit, what the club speed is when the ball is hit and how hard the impact is between the ball and the golf club. These four boxes helps to indicate what kind of shaft is most suitable and what angle and degree it should be on the golf club. For example: a high ball speed indicates that the swing speed is high, this can also be observed in the number three box the smash factor. The smash factor determine how fast the impact is between the golf ball and the golf club. From this one can suggests that this golfer requires a golf club with a stiff shaft because of the high numbers in these boxes. To be more secure one can look at the impact between the golf ball and the golf club, if this number also is high it is a clear indication that a stiffer shafts is to prefer. This is often analyzed with a frontline employee because of the sometimes abstract numbers. Observing how golfers behave in the trackman suggests that a golfer hit five strokes look at the computer and then ask a frontline employee what it means. One golfer can say: I have a 1.34 smash factor what does that means? Another I have a 7.0 vertical launch degree, what does that say? For regular golfers it do not say much, but a frontline employee can read this numbers and give suggestions on what type of club a golfer needs.

Further on the number five to seven boxes displays the balls carry: how far the ball travels before touching the ground, the total meters of the stroke which is the carry plus how far the ball rolls and the land angle of the ball. This is so one can observe how far carry it is on the ball and how high the ball path is. It has been observed on the golf course that the carry has importance for golfers. A golf hole for example can have water 100 meters from tee and stretch to 200 meters from the tee. In this example it has importance for golfers to know if the driver can reach over the water and land safely on the fairway or will end up in the water. If a golfer has bought a driver and used the trackman then the golfer probably have an idea on how the far the driver will go and can decide if it is worth the try or not when facing this obstacle and thus connecting the golf store with the golf course.

Further on it has been observed that the trackman does not only serve to ease golfers uncertainty from obstacles experienced at the course. It has been observed that golfers bring the opinion the have regarding the golf club from the trackman to the golf course.

*“What the ..... this club is not supposed to go this far left”*

This statement was observed at the golf course. The statement refers to a golfer who did a stroke which he did not expect to do. The statement is from a golfer which has been at a trackman and tested the golf club, seen the projection of the stroke and formed an opinion on how the golf club should behave at the course. Thus satisfaction and not satisfied can both come from the use of the trackman. Clearly satisfaction occurs when a golfer did not buy a golf club which he or she would not be able to play with. But with the use of a trackman the feeling to stand on the golf course can be achieved in the store and how it would feel to play with the golf club.

**Golf club evaluation through the cell phone**

It has also been observed that golfer does not only evaluate just right after buying a product. Golfers in this case evaluate how the round went and how the different clubs worked. One golfer spoken with on the golf course had bought a new driver for this season with the hope to lower his score. He can of course evaluate this after each stroke, which he does. But with the development of apps for mobile phones he evaluates each round, each month and each season. Down below is one picture which displays how the mobile app looks:

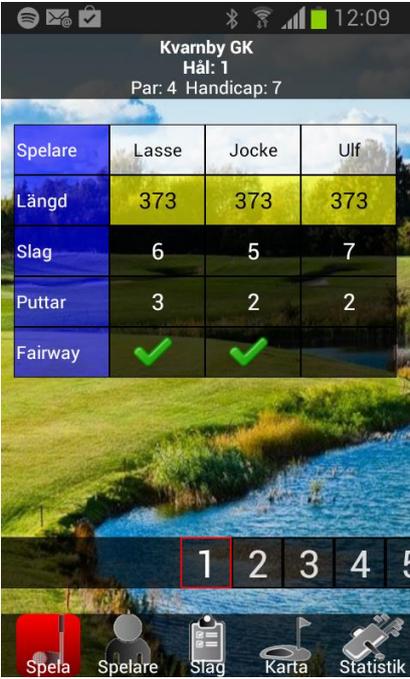


Figure 7: Picture 1 mobile app

Figure 7 displays the active screen when playing golf. For each hole the number of strokes, number of putts and if it was a fairway hit from the tee. For each hole these three boxes are

filled out which takes us to the picture to the left side. It can provide the golfer with knowledge on how long the hole is. It also allows golfer to open up a map which allows the golfer to see how the hole is turning or how far it is to certain points on the hole. When playing the full 18 holes the app provides an analysis to the golfer on the round. The picture below display how the analysis looks like:



Figure 8: Picture 2 mobile app

Figure 8 displays the analysis screen. The analysis shows the results of the round. GIR stand for green in regulation, which means the player, has hit the green in two strokes on a pair of four, three strokes in a pair of five and in one stroke in a pair of three hole. The GIR gives an indication on how well the player has succeeded in the short game. The fairway hit percentages indicates how well the player performs from tee and putts per hole indicates how well the player succeeded on the green. For the really inveterate golfer the result can be transferred to excel and further analyzed in relation to other golf rounds. This means golfers can buy a new putter or driver and analyze in detail how or if his or her game has changed for better or for worse with the new golf club. Thus technology enables golfers to evaluate the golf club and the purchase during a round of golf, after a round of golf or comfortably at home. Depending on the goal of the golfer, satisfaction could therefore occur after one season when analyzing how it actually went.

## The entities and network

The entities enable golfers to be mobile in terms of evaluation, satisfaction and with the golf game. With the mobility a new servicescape takes shape. This servicescape can be likened with Ek and Hultsmans (2008) golfscape. The actors bind the golf store, golfers and the golf course together and make them active in the relationship process. Thus the relationship process in this case can be seen as human interactions and non-humans artifacts combined work, such as Latour (2005) argues. Without the technology the transformation from store to golf course and back would not be possible. Further on the try out policy, trackman and mobile devices connects the other actors: golfers, golf course, golf store and the frontline employees. Thus the technical artifacts connect golfers and the golfers connect with the technical artifacts with mobility and frame each other as Holmström and Stalder (2001) argues.

It has been observed that the technical artifacts influence golfers, by choosing golf club, when evaluate, when playing golf such as Holmström and Stalder (2001) suggests. ANT acknowledge the technological development to a broader perspective than Brogowicz et al. (1990, p. 38) argued regarding the technical dimension. Latour (2005, p. 26) states not everything can be described socially and that all factors which influences an action has to be taken under consideration. By exploring the technical artifacts and how it connects the social a new reasoning for satisfaction could be in focus. As Latour (2005) argues, ANT focuses on the nonhuman factors and to what extends these help explain relational constitution. Technology in this sense gives a meaningful relation to golfers, though it provides the opportunity to see the game in the store.

Further on technology enable the opportunity to evaluate how it actually went with the new golf club in a longer perspective. Thus technology enables free mobility in time and space though what golfers can explore before a purchase, during a purchase and after a purchase. Further on technology enable golfers to a deeper relationship with the store though the store experience can be felt on the golf course and what is experienced at the golf course can be experienced in store. Using the tryout policy, mobile app or trackman golfers becomes part of a small actor-network, though golfers can now experience the servicescape in a broader dimension where mobility and the golf course are present. Through the trackman golfers can feel what their golf game has to offer them in the future and creating excitement for the users.

## Customer value

Relationship marketing researchers such as Wong and Sohal (2003), Grönroos and Ravald (1996) often stresses the importance of value. But what is value in golf? From observation and conversation, value may though be difficult thing to understand. Suggested from conversation, value is to get the right product which are the most suitable for them, value are to get a good product cheap, value is to not look stupid in front of friends by hitting the ball 20 meters instead of 200 meters, value is to get a straight stroke. In this case value can be all possible types of things or reasons, although common denominators, it occurs on the golf course. Grönroos (2004, p. 108) argues that the relationship itself may create value for the customer, and by adding value to a core product, satisfaction for customer are likely to increase. However the relationship itself is abstract, thus value is in this case rather a concept of a process with actors influences each other and is continuously. In this case value is not what you get in the store; it is rather a question on what you can take with you from the store to the golf course.

Further on it can be observed that value is not time decided or space decided; a golfer can go in to a store with the expectation to buy a new golf club. However the golf club has a purpose for each golfer, to improve the game, to avoid that water on hole three, to not be in the ruff from each drive or to have fewer putts. Value has shown to be in this case on the mobility of these expectations to be fulfilled. Thus value is not something you can create by training your staff (it could facilitate the value process), it is not something you can offer with an extra pair of golf balls when buying a golf club, it is something that has to corresponds to what the golfer have or can experience on the golf course. Thus the network which is created is rather the one thing which generates value.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter will provide the reader with a discussion from the analysis, where the mayor findings will be presented and the research question will also be answered. The discussion will be followed by a conclusion and followed by further research suggestions.

### Discussion

The problem discussion led down to critically investigate relationship marketing and examine how technology is involved in the relationship process through an actor-network approach. The problem discussion shed light on that relationship marketing tends to be generic and technology is rather viewed more essential to operate a store than as relationship opportunity. In order to accomplish this purpose, two research questions were put up. The first research question was “*What is considered as important factors and flaws in relationship marketing in golf retail?*” This research question was put up to explore relationship marketing in theory and how it corresponds to golf retail. The second question which was put up was “*How is technology involved in the relationship process in golf retail*”. This research question was put up to explore technology in relationship marketing. The discussion will present the most important findings from the analysis and answer the research questions. Further on a conclusion will be given were the result will be discussed more in detail and in relation to the purpose of this thesis.

### Important factors in relationship marketing in golf retail

The important factors in golf retail are the obstacles that are created at the golf course. Obstacles which create uncertainties golfers takes with them to the golf store when buying golf products. It is important for golfers that these uncertainties can be roofed. These uncertainties can be referred to Farrally et al. (2003) mentions, which may be argued to not been taken under consideration in relationship marketing theory. Grönroos (2004) mentions that engaging in relationships may offer a feeling of control and reduced purchasing risk. This could be argued to be true in this case. However to overbuild the uncertainties there has to be some factors present, and those factors are not what Grönroos and Ravald (1996) suggests. Knowledgeable frontline employees are one important factor for golfers which may correspond to the tree areas Grönroos (2006) argues to be important in relationship marketing. However the most important factor in golf retail discovered in this case is the ability to try the golf clubs, to feel how it is to play with the golf clubs and see how they would behave on the

golf course. To create the feeling of standing on the golf course golfers can experience and feel how the game will be and to become. As well as the possibility to play with the golf clubs on the course and return them if they are not happy, eases the uncertainty felt.

### **Flaws in relationship marketing in golf retail**

Flaws in relationship marketing have been explored during the analysis. Relationship marketing theory has been discovered to be generic as argued in the problem discussion in golf retail. Where much of the focus in relationship marketing is given to the service encounter from researchers such as Grönroos (2004, 2006), Takala and Uusitalo (1996) and Ng et al. (2011); other factors are more prominent in golf retail. These researchers stress the importance of creating satisfaction for customers by listening and answer to customers need. This can of course generate satisfaction, however how this is done are different than just being friendly frontline employee in golf retail. Further on much focus is also given to the service encounter with friendly frontline employee and other factors are overseen. Grönroos (2004) statement regarding relationship marketing tends to treat customers and business as one and the same is one of the major flaws discovered in this case. Though in this case the service encounter is important to some extent but the actual relationship occurs out on the golf course. The emotions and feelings is transferred on the golf course and the time and place is not bounded which is often not recognized in the theories regarding relationship marketing. Further on the view on technology presented on technology by Grönroos (2007) is also one major flaw. In relationship marketing theory technology is often overseen and taken for granted. When not overlooking what technology can actively contribute to the relationship process the relationship process will be hard to explain or could not be explained at all.

### **Technology in the relationship process**

It has been displayed throughout the research that technology is very important in golf retail, even essential in many cases to even consider to buy golf clubs. Technology enables golfers to transform the feelings and thoughts from the store out to the golf course which is important for the relationship. Further on technology is the number one factor for an actor-network to be established. Hence technology enables golfers can transform the golf club in the store to the golf course. Thus creating a network, where all the factors influence each other. Hence technology enables mobility and space for golfers, and stretching the relationship process through time and space. The technology enables golfers to evaluate a golf retailer and the process regardless of time and space. Thus technology is the factor to ease uncertainty and

create a feeling of control for customers. Suggested by Grönroos (2004) enhance feeling of control for customers are done through an interaction process, this is true but it is not one factor that is in play. It is rather the circle or network of factors that are presents in golf retail that enables relationships and technology is the factor which enables the network to be created.

## Conclusion

By critically investigate relationship marketing in golf retail and examine how technology are involved in the relationship process through an actor-network approach opens up new possibilities. Possibilities to reevaluate what actual creates relationships and how they occur. To critically examine the view of how relationships occur presented by Grönroos (2004, 2006) has been explored that the traditional service encounter is not as prominent or contain of the same dimensions in golf retail. In the problem discussion an argument that relationship marketing to tend to be generic was presented. This case shows that the argument is true. By only exploring relationship marketing as presented in theory, answers on how or why relationships may not be answered. Relationship marketing is in many cases based on what everybody would like when entering a retail store and thus overlooking if relationships really are established. Assumption made by Heskett et al. (1994) that satisfaction leads to loyalty, is viewed differently in this case. This case has shown that satisfaction can occur after a service encounter but loyalty derives from the golf course and the store visit. Relationship marketing have been focused on applications of relationship marketing to marketing management (Hamlin and Chimhundu, 2007) which may be explained why much focus lies in educate frontline employees. By building on Eldhs (2005) argument on technology enables a deeper understanding of the importance of technology. By exploring technology through an actor-network approach allows to investigate how the social connects with the technical and how a network is established. Further on it allows the social to be explored into other actors. Thus by exploring the social and other actor's helps to explain the nature of relationships in golf retail and how this is built up. The important factors in this case show that the store has to be connected to the golf course. This is not able to do if relationship marketing is followed as Grönroos (2004) suggests. So if rather view what the technical and social contributes to the relationships than adding more value to a core product as Ravald and Grönroos (1996) argues, it becomes more clear and concrete what relationships in golf retail is. By technology the important factors can be experienced in an early stage in the store and the excitement can become reality. In this case the importance of technology has been explored, not only

important before or at the actual purchase moment but also after. The relationship could therefore be seen as ongoing processes where the actors all work together and it is in the network the value is created and that the value is dependent on the symbiosis between the actors.

In this case the involvement of technology in the relationship process is very much at hand. Technology are seen as a necessary to actual buy golf products in this case. Further on it allow golfers to evaluate the golf club bought a long time after the actual purchase moment. Thus satisfaction can come and go during this period of time depending on what kind of goal the golfer has and how determine he or she is to fulfill it. With the trackman golfers can ease their uncertainty and feel satisfaction on the golf course. However if the golf club behave differently on the golf course than in the trackman, the miss satisfaction is increased. It is therefore extremely important that the numbers the trackman can provide is correct interpreted and choices are made from these numbers. So the trackman, frontline employee, golfers and the golf course has to work in symbiosis in order to fulfill the purpose they have.

Relationship marketing tends to view that relationships is built by creating satisfaction through a physical interactions between a frontline employee and customer (Wong and Sohal, 2003). This is explored to be one of the mayor flaws in this case. By only looking at the service encounter as the one relationship marketing activity many details are missed. Resources invested in relationship marketing could therefore be misdirected in golf retail if only looking at service encounter. In this case it has been discovered that even though the service encounter is perceived with satisfaction, in golf retail other factors needs to be met for an actual relationship to occur. If only letting customers evaluate the service encounter the results may be very good but the results of sales may not increase. Thus it can be argued in this case that the assumption made in the problem discussion regarding relationship marketing to be true. The market for golf products is huge; it is the second most popular sport in Sweden ([www.golf.se](http://www.golf.se)), it could be interesting for retailers to invest in selling golf products. However by following the steps suggested by Grönroos (2006), (Ryals and Knox (2001), Ng et al. (2011) the investment could mean a mayor loss for the company instead.

## Further research and Limitations

The research in this thesis hopes to create more understanding and knowledge regarding the area of relationships in golf retail and relationship building in general. Though little research has been conducted in golf retail this thesis hopes to have serve as a foundation for further research, were research can be concentrated to certain set of actions in the relationship process. Interesting may be to investigate how mobile app building can increase the overall value for golfers. Further on, the view of technology as a relationship driver may be interesting to explore in other areas where the service encounter is considered as very important. Such areas may be the flight industry where much focus is given to how customers are treated on the airplane and at the airport. Here lays a possibility to investigate how technology such as mobile apps, internet check in etc. affects relationships.

The limitation of qualitative case study research is that the results cannot be generalization for other cases. In this thesis geographical limitation is to the west side of Skåne and to the two studied stores, thus if other geographical areas or other stores were to be investigated the result may be different. Although these limitations, this thesis hope to bring new light to how relationships may occur and how technology can be involved in the relationship building process.

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## Appendix 1

### Interview guide focus group

Tell the topic and the area of interest for the thesis. Also give an explanation of what a focus group is. The question will be put in you form, but the meaning is to have a discussion around each question, so feel free to “jump” in at any time.

First of all thank you all for participating in this focus group, do anyone have any question regarding this focus group?

I would like to start off by you telling me a little about yourselves and for how long you have played golf, how often you play and how often you might buy new golf clubs.

### Service encounter

When will you say a service starts in a store?

Is service any different from a clothes store and golf retail store?

Is there any state of mind change perception of going to a golf store?

What is the definition of service in a golf store?

What could a service be for you?

Service quality, functional and technical quality

What is your view of a frontline employee at a golf store?

Can frontline employees create satisfaction for you?

Are there any differences for a frontline employee in golf and in clothes?

What is the most important with a frontline employee?

What services may you take part of when buying golf clubs?

What is the most important when buying golf clubs?

What is the least important?

Is it important with personnel service even though you all know golf?

Why? Or Why not?

What makes you feel at comfort in a service encounter in golf retail?

How do you view product quantity and quality?

Is price important?

Does the physical appearances of the frontline employee's matters?

Are there any differences from buying clothes?

Are any policy's affecting your state of mind when buying golf clubs?

Which? And how?

Do you want to feel seen in a golf store?

Is product knowledge important for the frontline employees to know?

Why? Because of?

## Appendix 2

Interview guide for the semi-structured interviews

At first a presentation of the thesis topic and why it was interesting to interview the persons I had chosen to interview.

Can you please tell me a little about yourself and how started at Dormy?

What does your work duties involve?

What does Dormy stands for? / What is Dormy?

Why do you think your customers come to this store?

Do you think your customers mostly come here to look around or to shop?

What do you want the customer to feel when they enter the store?

How do you work to interact with customers in the store?

What is the definition of service for you?

What is the primary to offer service in the store?

When would you say service starts at you store?

How do you work to fulfill customer expectations they may have when entering the store?

How do you work to secure the competence with the employees?

How do you want the frontline employees to act towards customers?

Do you have any set of rules regarding the physical appearances in your store?

How do the frontline employees here work to feel the customers' emotions in your store?

During an interaction, what do you want the customer to feel?

If a customer is standing in the store, are you letting the customer be by himself or approach him?

How?

Is the time important during a service encounter?

Do you have any customer policy's you work with during a service encounter?

Can you please tell me about these policies?

What do you want to achieve with these policies?

What do you think is the most important to avoid when a customer visit your store?

How do you secure the product knowledge?

What kind of technical equipment do you have and how to you use them during a service encounter?

Does the frontline employee get any education regarding the equipment?

How?

What is you view regarding the product quantity?

Important or less important in a service encounter?

What is you view on the product quality?

Important or less important in a service encounter?

Do you decide the store layout?

No: Would you like to? And what may you change?

Yes: How do you reasoning when changing the servicescape?

For Dormy outlet Ängelholm only:

This is an outlet, how do you “play” on the price?

Outlets are often known for being low price – low service, would you say your store differs from other outlets?

How?