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**ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF INFIDELITY IN CROSS-BORDER
BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS**

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ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF INFIDELITY IN CROSS-BORDER BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

ABSTRACT

The volatile, complex, and distant nature of the international business environment inevitably gives rise to incidences of infidelity among interacting exporters and importers. The authors propose and test a theoretically anchored model of the antecedents and consequences of infidelity in exporter-importer (E-I) working relationships. The findings confirm that *importer's* infidelity incidences are higher in those cases where trust, satisfaction, commitment, and cooperation are low in the relationship. In fact, the association between poor relationship quality and infidelity becomes stronger when the relationship is at a declining stage and is relatively young. The existence of infidelity in the relationship will lead to either punitive actions or reassessment measures on the part of the exporter, which are moderated by the degree of long-term orientation and social bonding that exists between the interacting parties.

Keywords

Exporting; exporter-importer relationships; infidelity; relationship quality.

Infidelity has often been described as one of the darkest sides of inter-firm business relationships and the worst form of betrayal, mainly because it can have destructive consequences on the smooth development and even the mere existence of a relationship (Shackelford and Buss 1996). In a dyadic relationship, infidelity represents a partner's violation of the rules, norms, and expectations regulating the relationship with the other party by seeking an illegitimate, parallel collaboration with other partner(s) (Drigotas and Barta 2001). Infidelity is a specific form of opportunism where the interacting parties have an explicit or implicit contract of exclusivity, and then one of the parties violates that contract in order to reap the benefits of multiple partners (Weiser and Weigel 2014). It demonstrates that the offending party promotes its own interests and serves its own needs at the expense of the other party or the relationship as a whole (Fitness 2001). Infidelity provides a form of severe humiliation and devastation for the cheated party, mainly because the latter is treated in a dishonorable, disrespectful, and disloyal way by the offending partner (Rachman 2010).

As opposed to other issues characterizing the dark side of inter-firm relationship atmosphere, like coercive power, conflict, and relationship termination, that have attracted a lot of research, infidelity has received scant attention. However, this is surprising because infidelity is a key construct that has deleterious effects in the relationship and can reduce relational performance (Leonidou et al. 2014). This is because: (a) due to the limited resources of the firm, it is impossible for any existing business relationship not to be affected by a new parallel relationship; (b) social bonds are broken, because emotionally the boundary spanners are hurt; (c) tangible and intangible resources invested to the relationship cannot be taken back and can even be disseminated to competitors; (d) conflict is provoked as a result of dealing with various partners with different goals, using limited resources at the same time; and (e) negative emotions may prompt revenge and retaliation, creating a strained relationship

atmosphere (Ford et al. 2011; Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995; Håkansson and Snehota 1995; Johnston and Hausman 2006).

Infidelity among inter-firm business partners is more likely to occur in cross-cultural relationships, because the uncertainty, complexity, and volatility of the international business environment gives rise to opportunities for breaking relational norms and violating expectations (Katsikeas, Skarmeas, and Bello 2009). Moreover, the high geographic distance between international business partners makes detection of infidelity actions a formidable task (Li and Ng 2002). Furthermore, the psychological distance between sellers and buyers in international markets may cause misunderstandings about relational expectations and meanings assigned to the nature of infidelity (Mattingly et al. 2010). Finally, as opposed to the domestic market, the foreign market has an abundance of alternative business partners, which may attract attention to become involved in infidelity actions (Leonidou 2003).

The literature repeatedly refers to relationship quality as a tool against relationship stressors, such as infidelity (Johnston and Hausman 2006). Indeed, relationship quality has been cited to act as a mobility barrier (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987) and to build invisible fences, which third parties cannot transcend (Alajoutsijärvi, Eriksson, and Tikkanen 2001). On the other hand, as indicated in social psychology research, infidelity may lead to various consequences, such as the use of punitive actions (e.g., ignoring the partner, threatening the partner with break-up, and separation (Shackelford, Goetz, and Buss (2005)) or the adoption of reassessment measures (e.g., constructive discussions, clarification of conflicts, and forgiveness (Hibbard, Kumar, and Stern 2001; Weiser and Weigel 2014)).

Our study aims to shed light on this critical issue of inter-firm relationships, by trying to understand the antecedents and consequences of importer's infidelity in exporter-importer (E-I) working relationships seen from the perspective of the exporter. The specific objectives of the study are fourfold: (a) to evaluate the influence of four dimensions of relationship

quality, namely trust, satisfaction, commitment, and cooperation, on the emergence of importer's infidelity episodes in E-I relationships; (b) to test the effect of importer's infidelity on punitive and reassessment actions taken by the exporters; (c) to explore the moderating role of relationship status and relationship age on the link between each of the relationship quality dimensions and infidelity; and (d) to analyze the contingent effects of long-term orientation and social bonds in the formation of punitive versus reassessment actions against infidelity incidents.

The study contributes to the international marketing literature on four major grounds. First, it illustrates how concepts, theories, and ideas explaining interpersonal relational transgressions could be applicable, with some modifications, to the inter-organizational level. Second, it examines the infidelity problem within an international business setting, which provides fertile ground for business infidelity. Third, it builds and tests a unified conceptual model that explains the mechanism of how relationship quality influences the emergence of infidelity and how the affected party responds to infidelity incidents. Finally, it demonstrates the conditions under which the instrumental role of poor relationship quality on infidelity weakens, as well as how certain relational factors can change reactions to infidelity.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. First, we provide a review of the literature on the dark side of buyer-seller relationships. We then examine the various theoretical underpinnings of infidelity, present the conceptual model of the study and develop the research hypotheses. The methodology adopted for the purposes of this study is subsequently explained. The next section analyses the data collected and presents the results obtained. The final sections are devoted to a discussion of the research findings, put forward theoretical and managerial implications, describe the study limitations, and suggest directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since its inception in the late 1980s, research on the dark side of buyer-seller relationships has demonstrated a modest, but steady, increase in studies which fall into six broad categories. The first category centers on the negative aspects of business relationships which, because of their damaging effects on the relational parties and the dyad, merit as much attention as the positive side. For example, Schmitz, Schweiger, and Daft (2016) unveil the way buyer-seller relationships evolve into lock-in status through convincing, tying, and complementing, while Hunter, Gassenheimer, and Siguaw (2011) deal with suspicion, arguing that relationships are harmed by both extreme and low levels of suspicion. The extant literature also examines a number of diverse negative issues, ranging from partner misalignment (Corsaro 2015) and relational damage (Hammervoll 2011) to relationship unrest (Good and Evans 2001) and denial of cooperation (Griffith, Zhang, and Cavusgil 2006).

The second group of studies deals with the phenomenon that close working relationships might, over time, become susceptible to destructive behavior. This is because, paradoxically, the relational characteristics, which once set the ground for well-functioning relationships, become the very reason for a dark side to arise (Anderson and Jap 2005). For example, close relationships can increase vulnerability to opportunism (Kim and Choi 2015), run the risk of divulgence of confidential information (Gligor and Esmark 2015), and turn into a burden (Håkansson and Snehota 1995). In international relationships, Ling-Yee (2004) reports the negative influence of cooperative norms on foreign market knowledge creation. However, contrary to the findings in the domestic dark-side literature, Pressey and Tzokas (2004) find that in exporter-importer relationships, only commitment and contractual trust (and no other relationship dimensions) display a slight decrease over time, concluding that long-term relationships are not adversely affected by the side-effects of relationship length.

The third stream of research focuses on the devastating effects produced by negative incidents in the relationship. For example, breach of contract is found to reduce performance, decrease satisfaction, and encourage exiting from the relationship (Lusch, Brown, and O'Brien 2011), as well as decrease business volume between partners and lower fairness perceptions (Eckerdt et al. 2013). Similarly, Hibbard, Kumar, and Stern (2001) report that, as the intensity of destructive acts from the business partner increases, the likelihood of the exposed party to respond negatively increases. In alignment with domestic buyer-seller relationships, literature on foreign business relationships repeatedly reports the negative influence of opportunism and conflict on relationship quality variables such as trust (Katsikeas, Skarmeas, and Bello 2009; Leonidou, Talias, and Leonidou 2008), commitment (Leonidou, Barnes, and Talias 2006; Skarmeas, Katsikeas, and Schlegelmilch 2002), satisfaction (Griffith, Hu, and Ryans 2000), and cooperation (Leonidou, Barnes, and Talias 2006).

The fourth line of research highlights contingency effects of certain variables on the link between various positive relational dimensions, thereby pointing to a dark side. For example, strong relational norms are found to decrease the positive effect of transaction-specific assets on relational performance, which is ascribed to the role of relational norms in preventing the firm from making wise investment decisions (Brown, Crosno, and Dev 2009). Selnes and Sallis (2003) also show that trust diminishes the positive effect of organizational learning on relational performance, because it may create unnoticeable costs like reduced objectivity. In addition to relational factors, market conditions are also effective in producing similar dark-side effects. For example, Heirati et al. (2016) reveal that both competitive intensity and environmental turbulence negatively moderated the collaboration-service performance relationship, arguing that competitive intensity might limit the commitment of

parties due to concerns about opportunism, while market turbulence forces firms to obtain quick results, even if it calls for opportunistic actions.

The fifth set of studies concentrates on the termination of buyer-seller relationships due to dark-side problems. Based on the findings of this stream of research, causes of the ending of a relationship lie in lack of satisfaction (Ping 1993, 1999), breach of contracts (Lusch, Brown, and O'Brien 2011), failure to resolve conflicts (Purinton, Rosen, and Curran 2007), availability of attractive alternative partners (Ping 1993), perceived unfair treatment (Tuusjärvi and Blois 2004), and mutual ignorance and weak interdependence (Hallén and Johanson 2004). On the other hand, some factors such as commitment, cost of exit, and economic and social value obtained from the relationship deter business partners from exiting the relationship (Gassenheimer, Houston, and Davis 1998; Ping 1999; Tsiros, Ross, and Mittal 2009). Within an international context, Pressey and Selassie (2007) reveal that the most important reasons causing the relationship to come to an end are related to competitor factors (e.g., better prices offered by a competitor) and relationship factors (e.g., lack of importer commitment, unsettled conflict initiated by the importer, and opportunistic behavior by the importer).

The final category centers on precautions to be taken to prevent dark-side episodes, as well as the alternative therapies that can heal dark-side relationship issues. The major preventive measures cited in the literature include evaluation and control (Anderson and Jap 2005; Gligor and Esmark 2015), making relationship-specific investments (Anderson and Jap 2005), goal congruence (Anderson and Jap 2005), and setting clear relational expectations and conflict management mechanisms (Dant and Gleiberman 2011). Notably, in E-I relationships, both relational and cultural factors are effective in protecting parties from the dark side. In this sense, E-I relationships involving trust (Wu et al. 2007), cultural similarity (Saleh, Ali, and Julian 2014), and cultural sensitivity (Skarmeas, Katsikeas, and Schlegelmilch 2002) are

found to be more immune to opportunism. In cases of a dark-side episode, on the other hand, the remedies proposed in the literature encourage open and constructive dialogs concerning goals, conflicts, suspicions, and alternatives (Dant and Gleiberman 2011), as well as reconfiguration of the relationship by redefining expectations and/or changing boundary spanners (Anderson and Jap 2005).

The review of the literature on the dark side shows that: (a) although a number of diverse negative relational aspects have been examined in the literature, infidelity, despite its relevance, has received no research attention; (b) although the various elements of relationship quality (e.g., trust, commitment, satisfaction, cooperation) have been systematically examined in various studies, their specific impact on infidelity is negligible; (c) although all relationships face a serious risk of experiencing a dark side, there is a definite lack of research on the phenomenon in an international business setting; and (d) research on the subject relies to a great extent on conceptualizations and qualitative research (e.g., case studies), while the testing of comprehensive models involving antecedents, outcomes, and contingencies of dark-side phenomena is less frequently conducted.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND, MODEL AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Infidelity is an issue that has attracted significant theoretical attention within the sphere of social psychology, with the major theoretical explanations being the normative approach, the equity approach, the investment model perspective, and the social exchange theory. A summary of these theories and their relevance to infidelity is presented in **Table 1**. Although these theories were developed within the realms of inter-personal relationships, they could equally be applied in the case of inter-firm business relationships, with some slight modifications.¹

...insert Table 1 about here...

Our conceptual model consists of ten constructs categorized into four groups (see **Figure 1**). Relationship quality constructs (i.e., trust, satisfaction, commitment, cooperation) are antecedents of importer's infidelity.² In turn, the latter leads to certain actions by the party affected, namely the exporter, either punitive or reassessment. The link between relationship quality dimensions and infidelity is moderated by the status (declining versus growing) and the length of the E-I relationship. Also, the link between infidelity and punitive or reassessment actions is moderated by long-term orientation and social bonding. Altogether, there are six direct hypothesized paths and four moderating hypotheses, which are explained in the following.

...insert Figure 1 about here...

Direct Effects Hypotheses

Trust is the belief that one party is reliable, honest, and acts with integrity to help enhance positive outcomes and avoid negative results in his/her relationship with another party (Anderson and Narus 1990). Trust is at the heart of any business relationship, since it harnesses a sense of duty and responsibility among the interacting parties that is based on benevolence, truthfulness, and fairness (Anderson and Narus 1990; Morgan and Hunt 1994). It is expressed in terms of positive expectations that the other party's motivations, conduct, and behavior will be beneficial for the relationship, as well as being sufficiently credible to effectively and reliably carry out the various tasks needed (Wu et al. 2007). It denotes the faith or confidence of one party in the relationship that the other will perform its duties in a reliable, integral, and honest manner (Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995; Morgan and Hunt 1994). According to social exchange theory, when the ability to meet the expectations of the trustor deteriorates and/or when a feeling of goodwill toward the trustor is distorted, a situation of instability, insecurity, and lack of confidence is likely to appear that favors the

development of aversive behavior, like infidelity (Armstrong and Yee 2001). Indeed, the latter is a signal of undermined stability and distorted smoothness in the relationship, previously safeguarded by trust (Eggert and Ulaga 2010). The violation of relational expectations caused by lower trust will result in the high cost of engaging in aversive behavior, with a possible loss of future business (Doney and Cannon 1997). This is more likely to occur in E-I relationships, due to the uncertainties, complexities, and distances (both geographic and psychic) characterizing the international business environment. Hence, we may hypothesize that:

H₁: The lower the level of trust in the E-I relationship, the greater the likelihood of infidelity.

Satisfaction is defined as the positive emotional state indicating the extent to which the expectations of one party in the relationship are met (Anderson and Narus 1984). Satisfaction is determined by the rewards received and costs borne in a relationship, as well as the extent to which the relationship exceeds the expectations of partners concerning the quality of close relationships (Rusbult 1980). Rewards received give the parties the impetus to maintain the relationship, with alternatives losing their attractiveness as replacements for the current partner (Frazier 1983). Enjoying a satisfactory relationship helps to instill inter-organizational mechanisms and procedures that will facilitate the better coordination and more efficient execution of the various business tasks, which are particularly crucial in international business (Leonidou, Katsikeas, and Hadjimarcou 2002). In contrast, low levels of satisfaction may lead to relationship-destructive behavior, if the potential benefits derived from the relationship do not outweigh the costs. This is the case with infidelity, whereby a party may seek to obtain rewards from a parallel relationship, if there is a perception that s/he does not receive adequate rewards from the primary relationship to compensate for the costs suffered (Buunk and Dijkstra 2006). According to the equity theoretical approach, a feeling

of low satisfaction will gradually reduce the energy, attention, and effort put into the existing relationship and lead to the transference of these to another more enjoyable and rewarding relationship. This is even more pronounced in cross-cultural relationships, where both parties are more susceptible to temptations to form alternative relationships, due to the plethora of opportunities and requests received from foreign partners (Leonidou 2003). Notably, dissatisfaction with an existing partner will increase further in the case of suspecting an infidelity in the relationship, because any rewards provided to the cheated party will lose much of their meaning, since similar rewards are provided to another party outside the relationship (Buunk 1991). Thus, one would expect that:

H₂: The lower the level of satisfaction in the E-I relationship, the greater the likelihood of infidelity.

Commitment is the belief by one party in a relationship that the other is so significant that it deserves maximum efforts, and even the sharing of sacrifices, costs, or restrictions, in order to maintain the relationship (Anderson and Weitz 1992). It indicates a strong voluntary action and desire to stay in the relationship for a long time and reap long-term benefits from it (Wilson 1995). Commitment is important in that it reduces the risks associated with the relationship, because the committed parties accept various strategic and operational burdens that in many cases constitute sunk costs (Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpandé 1992). For commitment to be constructive for a relationship, it needs to be irrevocable, binding, and mutual between the parties involved (Fichman 2003). Commitment is more difficult to maintain in E-I working relationships, because of the numerous obstacles (e.g., cultural diversity, geographic distance, environmental volatility) encountered when crossing national boundaries (Leonidou 2004). According to the investment model perspective of infidelity, the existence of high levels of commitment in an inter-firm relationship reduces the likelihood of being unfaithful because: (a) it makes the option of cultivating other alternative

relationships less attractive, due to the many sacrifices made in the existing relationship; (b) it signifies serious investment in resources brought into the relationship over time, which would run the risk of being lost if this were terminated; and (c) it stresses the potential long-term harmful effects of engaging in destructive behavior, such as losing significant gains (Drigotas and Barta 2001; Drigotas, Safstrom, and Gentilia 1999). On the contrary, a low level of commitment increases the frequency with which external temptations arise, as well as the possibilities of exploiting short-term opportunities outside the relationship, instead of realizing its long-term benefits. Empirical evidence in channel research also supports that commitment feeds the development of relational norms in the relationship and acts as a social safeguard against destructive acts (Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995), while also increasing the likelihood of receiving exclusive contracts (Sengupta 1995). Thus, we may posit that:

H₃: The lower the level of commitment in the E-I relationship, the greater the likelihood of infidelity.

Cooperation is the joint effort by members of a working relationship to promote mutual interests and achieve goals that will be mutually beneficial (Anderson and Narus 1990). In doing so, one party concedes advantages to the other in anticipation of more balanced, equitable, and reciprocal future actions (Frazier 1983). Cooperation is expressed in terms of joint efforts, team spirit, and mutual collaboration, which are essential to shared problem-solving, coordination of activities, compromised gestures, and other common actions that are essential in safeguarding the efficient running of the relationship and ensuring its long-term continuation (Frazier 1983). Cooperation has a positive effect on the value of the whole relationship, because it demonstrates that working together confers more benefits to parties in a relationship, than if they were working independently (Lages, Lancastre, and Lages 2008). In addition, cooperation increases the willingness of business partners to make

short-term sacrifices in the relationship in favor of long-term gains (Holm, Eriksson, and Johanson 1996). From a social exchange theory perspective, relational parties are expected to cooperate as long as the benefits of cooperation are higher than the costs (Smith, Carroll, and Ashford 1995). These benefits originate from the material (e.g., warehouse) and intangible (e.g., technical assistance) resources transferred from one partner to the other in order to attain joint goals. Without cooperation, there is a high potential for each party to work in its own self-interest and engage in unscrupulous activities like infidelity. Denied collaboration may mean that the non-cooperating partner no longer values the relationship (Fitness 2001) and creates question marks about the future of the relationship. In this case, the abandoned party may reciprocate by transferring resources to the competitor. The high complexity and large geographic distances between exporters and importers provide fertile ground for such activities (Leonidou 2004). It can be asserted that:

H₄: The lower the level of cooperation in the E-I relationship, the greater the likelihood of infidelity.

As noted, infidelity is a violation of the norms and expectations regulating the relationship with another party by seeking an illegitimate (or unethical) collaboration with other partners (Drigotas and Barta 2001). These norms and expectations are important in describing the values, rules, and priorities shared by the exchange partners regarding what is considered appropriate, correct, and ethical in the relationship (Tangpong, Hung, and Ro 2010). They touch upon such issues as mutuality, solidarity, role integrity, harmony, and ethicality (Brown, Dev, and Lee 2000). Infidelity in a business relationship can be expressed in various ways, such as contacting another firm outside the relationship (which can sometimes be a direct competitor of the current business partner), in order to develop possible business and negotiate for better trade terms, or by actively doing business with other companies outside the relationship, without the consent of the partner in the existing

relationship (Atkins and Kessel 2008; Mattingly et al. 2010). The discovery of partner infidelity evokes negative emotions, such as humiliation, anger, anxiety, and suspicion for repeated extra-dyadic involvement (Fitness 2001). Depending on the seriousness of the infidelity incident, this can lead to either aggressive or mild responses from the cheated party, which aims to restore fairness in the relationship. Aggressive responses may take the form of punitive measures, such as denial of rewards, passive separation, or even disengagement (Hammervoll 2011). The latter may not necessarily be motivated by causing harm or inconvenience, but by a desire to avoid a future negative experience. Such aggressive reactions may intend to: (a) control the behavior of the partner and bring him/her back into conformity; (b) regain destroyed dignity and lost self-esteem; (c) restore fairness as a mechanism allowing enforcement of relational norms (Finkel et al. 2002; Fitness 2001). Mild responses may include reassessment measures, such as constructive discussions, compromise agreements, business behavior improvement, and conflict resolution processes (Weiser and Weigel 2014). Some of the motives behind the restoration (and not the termination) of the relationship after infidelity is revealed include: the high cost of handling the ending process, prohibitive exit barriers, the high risks and costs of developing a new relationship, and the unavailability of suitable alternative partners (Tähtinen and Vaaland 2006). Hence, the following hypothesis can be made:

H₅: High levels of infidelity in the E-I relationship will lead to: (a) punitive actions and/or (b) reassessment measures.

Moderation Hypotheses

Relationship status refers to whether the relationship between two parties is experiencing a declining or a growing tendency. In growing relationships, relational parties become more interdependent, set the norms and values that will govern the relationship in the long run, increase the extent of information sharing, and become more involved in each other's

activities (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987; Jap and Ganesan 2000). Declining relationships, on the other hand, are characterized by the dissatisfaction of one or both parties and the serious consideration of terminating the relationship (Jap 2001). We argue that the influence of low levels of each of the components of relationship quality on infidelity will be stronger in declining, as opposed to growing relationships. In fact, in the declining stage, firms are characterized by short-term thinking and have a greater tendency to violate relational norms (as in the case of infidelity) (Jap and Ganesan 2000), because partners feel that they no longer derive benefits from fulfilling their partner's expectations (Kang, Oh, and Sivadas 2012). Moreover, the expectation that the relationship will soon come to an end will encourage them to search for new partners, even before its termination (Elangovan and Shapiro 1998; Jap 2001). In contrast, in growing relationships, parties are not geared toward infidelity actions because of high goal congruence and relationship-specific investments (Jap and Anderson 2007). Hence, we may posit that:

H₆: The influence of low levels of each of the elements of E-I relationship quality on infidelity is more likely to be stronger in declining than in growing relationships.

Relationship length is the period of time that the interactive parties have been together. A long-lasting relationship indicates that the relationship has survived difficult times, partners know each other's characteristics better, and have already gained a profound impression of each other as a result of a long-term learning process (Parkhe 1993). In line with research on inter-personal relationships, which reports that, in general, partners in the early years of marriage are more susceptible to infidelity (Allen et al. 2005), we would expect that low levels of relationship quality in older E-I relationships will have a weaker effect on infidelity. This is because a long-lasting relationship generates confident expectations for both interactive parties that their partners will fulfill their promises and obligations, rather than engage in aversive behavior like infidelity (Parkhe 1993). Moreover, as the relationship

evolves, the partners become more dependent on each other (Buunk and Dijkstra 2006) and deploy relationship-specific investments, which are of no use outside the current relationship (Kim, Oh, and Swaminathan 2006), thus making alternative partners less attractive. Furthermore, employees from both parties may develop friendships that will make them feel part of a single organizational link, and thus resistant to the temptations of searching for alternative partners (Kim, Oh, and Swaminathan 2006). We may hypothesize that:

H7: The influence of low levels of each of the elements of E-I relationship quality on infidelity is more likely to be stronger in younger than in older relationships

Long-term orientation is defined as the disposition of business partners to develop long-term relationships with each other, as well as their emphasis on attaining future goals with concern for both current and future outcomes (Ganesan 1994). It is more evident in relationships based on collaborative, rather than transactional, exchanges, where both parties are dedicated to the relationship and seek to align their interests and motives by keeping the relationship ongoing well into the future (Noordewier, John, and Nevin 1990). Rationally speaking, to develop a mutually beneficial relationship, it should be expected to be of long duration, in order for the short-term inequalities to balance out at some point in time (Axelrod 1984). Hence, a desire to continue and maintain the relationship by the interacting parties is an inherent characteristic of long-term orientation (Yang, Zhou, and Jiang 2011). When there is long-term perspective in the relationship, incidences of infidelity are treated in a milder, rather than an aggressive, way. This is where the existence of long-term orientation will help: (a) to reduce uncertainty in interactions and discourage future damage to the relationship; (b) to overcome any temporary problems that obstruct the smooth functioning of the relationship; (c) to avoid taking quick and hostile actions under the pressure of stress; and (d) to preserve the continuation of the relationship in a longer time horizon (Fang, Chang, and Peng 2011; Saini 2010). This is because long-term orientation requires partners to establish norms of

reciprocal cooperation by foreseeing future interactions (Van Lange et al. 1997). Similarly, in channel research, Ganesan (1993) notes that business partners with a long-term orientation tend to solve their conflicts using the problem-solving strategy, while business partners with short-term orientation prefer aggressive strategies. In brief, long-term orientation will lean toward greater use of reassessment, rather than punitive actions, to preserve the future continuation of the relationship. We may hypothesize that:

H₈: High levels of long-term orientation in the E-I relationship make: (a) the link between infidelity and punitive actions weaker, and (b) the link between infidelity and reassessment actions stronger.

Social bonding is the degree of mutual personal friendship, likeability, and amicability shared by business partners in a working relationship (Wilson 1995). This is important in nourishing and maintaining the relationship, because the interacting parties know each other better, interact in a more open and frequent way, and develop a better understanding of each other's desires and goals (Ramström 2008). Social bonds take a great deal of time and energy to develop, and can take various forms such as familiarity, friendship, personal confidence, and socialization of boundary-spanning employees (Rodriguez and Wilson 2002). They mirror the historical records of learning and socialization among interacting parties and represent strong ties, which can lead to the maintenance of the current relationship and avoidance of other alternative relationships (Seabright, Levinthal, and Fichman 1992). Such bonds may even resist the termination of the relationship between two firms (Havila and Wilkinson 2002). This kind of emotional connection between the interacting parties helps them to remain together, even if an infidelity incident occurs for various reasons. First, the relational investments (e.g., social, personal, psychological) made in developing the bonds in the relationship would be lost if the relationship is broken (Seabright, Levinthal, and Fichman 1992). Second, pleasant feelings about the relationship will make the victim believe that the

transgression is temporary (Hibbard, Kumar, and Stern 2001). Third, if there are feelings of unity, the offended party will tolerate and pardon the transgression and make efforts to maintain the relationship (Kaufmann and Stern 1988). As a result, the offended party is more likely to adopt reassessment, as opposed to punitive, actions to settle the negative situation created. The following hypothesis can be made:

H₉: High levels of social bonding in the E-I relationship make: (a) the link between infidelity and punitive actions weaker, and (b) the link between infidelity and reassessment actions stronger.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sampling Procedure

Our study was based on data collected from Greek exporters of manufactured products. A random sample of 1,000 firms was derived from the Exporters' Directory of ICAP (2014), which has more than 10,000 entries of firms throughout Greece. We focused on exporters of indigenous origin operating in different industries within the private sector, producing either consumer or industrial goods. The unit of analysis was the export venture, namely the exporter's relationship with a specific import buyer. The person responsible for the export operations in each company in the sample was contacted by phone, informed about the purpose and importance of the study, and asked for participation in the survey. Of these, only 595 accepted to take part, with those not accepting to participate attributing this to lack of available time, company policy against divulging information to outsiders, or the discontinuing of export operations. Export firms agreeing to take part were offered the option of using either mail or electronic means of receiving the survey instrument.

Scale Development

Constructs were operationalized using established and proven scales found in the pertinent literature (see **Appendix**). With regard to the relationship quality constructs, scales were mainly extracted from relationship marketing literature within a business-to-business context. Specifically, trust was based on an eight-item scale by Doney and Cannon (1997), satisfaction was a five-item scale derived from Leuthesser and Kohli (1995), commitment contained five items extracted from the studies of Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer (1995), and cooperation was also measured with five items taken from the works of Sibley and Michie (1982) and Morgan and Hunt (1994). With regard to the moderating variables, long-term orientation was based on a six-item scale by Ganesan (1994), social bonding was measured with five items adopted from Mavondo and Rodrigo (2001), while relationship status was based on Jap and Ganesan (2000).

Due to the pioneering nature of the study regarding infidelity, we had to transfer scales developed in the social psychology literature and adjust them to a business relationship setting. Specifically, the infidelity scale was based on the work of Atkins and Kessel (2008), Kumar, Stern, and Achrol (1992), and Mattingly et al. (2010). The punitive actions scale was derived from the factor “punishment of mate infidelity threat” of Mate Retention Inventory scale developed by Shackelford, Goetz, and Buss (2005). The reassessment measures construct operationalization was a six-item scale derived from Ohbuchi and Tedeschi (1997) and Hibbard, Kumar, and Stern (2001). A panel of academics with extensive expertise and experience in the field refined these three scales for the purposes of this study.

Survey Instrument

Data were collected with a structured self-administered questionnaire, which contained six parts. The first part investigated the extent of the firm’s export involvement and contained questions relating to the length of time the firm had run export operations, the number and type of countries to which the firm exported its goods, and the amount of export sales realized

in the previous year. The second part included questions concerning the relationship quality variables, namely trust, satisfaction, commitment, and cooperation. The third part focused on the infidelity construct. The fourth part incorporated questions referring to the outcome variables of the model, that is, punitive actions and reassessment measures. The fifth part centered on the moderator variables of long-term orientation and social bonding. The final part included questions seeking information about the firm's demographics, such as foundation year, number of employees, and sales turnover. In completing the questionnaire, respondents were requested to have in mind the third most important business relationship with a foreign business customer. A basic prerequisite to select the latter was for the exporter to have the exclusive right to sell its goods (and therefore the importer's infidelity to imply a breach of the contract of this exclusivity).

Individual items in each construct were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7), while relationship age was gauged as the number of years the firm had had a relationship with the specific foreign buyer and relationship status was measured based on whether the relationship was at the exploration, build-up, maturity, decline, or deterioration stage. With regard to the latter, as the number of cases in some stages was low, we had to reclassify relationship status into two broad categories, namely growing and declining. The questionnaire was first designed in English and then translated into Greek, while any linguistic problem was resolved in the back-translation process. The face validity of these scales was evaluated by five academics with extensive knowledge and experience in the international business field. The scales were further refined with the input and feedback received from a panel of export managers.

Data Collection

We sent the questionnaire, through mail or electronic means, to all 595 exporters who had expressed their willingness to take part in the study. The questionnaire was accompanied by a

cover letter informing the respondents of the objectives, usefulness, and confidentiality of the study. To promote participation, we sent reminder letters and contacted the firms by telephone and/or personal visits. As a result, we received 268 questionnaires (i.e., 26.8% response rate), of which six could not be used because of missing data, inconsistencies in the answers given, or unsuitability of the key informant. Non-response bias was controlled by comparing the answers of early and late respondents (Armstrong and Overton 1977), which revealed no statistically significant differences between the two groups concerning the study variables. To control for key informant bias, we added a group of questions to the end of the questionnaire, which measured on a seven-point scale the extent of familiarity, knowledgeability, and confidence of the respondents to supply the information required, with these always exceeding four (the mid-point) (Cannon and Perreault 1999).

On average, responding firms had been in business for 25.3 years, had been running export operations for 15.2 years, had 64.7 full-time employees, and 14.5 full-time employees mainly involved in export operations. Their last year's total sales on average totaled €21.7 million, while export sales on average reached €8.7 million. The average number of their export markets was 8.6 countries, with the primary targets being European Union members, particularly Germany, Italy and Bulgaria. The majority of respondents (47.7%) exported consumer products, 38.8% sold industrial goods, and the remainder (13.6%) offered a combination of both consumer and industrial products.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

We analyzed the data with structural equation modeling (SEM) based on the EQS program. First, we ran a confirmatory factor analysis on the main study constructs, in which each item was restricted to load on its a priori set factor, but the underlying factors were allowed to

correlate (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). To estimate the measurement model, we used the elliptical re-weighted least-square (ERLS) procedure, revealing a very good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 1536.25$, $p = .000$, $df = 824$; NFI = .91; NNFI = .95; CFI = .95; RMSEA = .06) (see **Table 2**).

Measurement Model

The data purification process indicated that the convergent validity was confirmed, since the t-value for each item was always high and significant, all standard errors of the estimated coefficients were very low, and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was equal to or above the threshold level of .50 (Hair et al. 2010). Discriminant validity was also met, as the squared correlation for each pair of constructs never exceeded their AVE (Fornell and Larcker 1981) and the confidence interval around the correlation estimate for each pair of constructs examined never included 1.00 (Anderson and Gerbing 1988) (see **Table 2** and **Table 3**). Construct reliabilities were above the recommended threshold levels, with Cronbach's alphas for each construct being greater than .70 and composite reliabilities over .60.

We also evaluated the possibility of common method bias using two complementary tests. First, we employed a confirmatory factor approach, in which all items included in the measurement model were restricted to load on a single factor (Venkatraman and Prescott 1990). The model fit indices displayed very poor values, well below the commonly acceptable cut-off points (i.e., $\chi^2 = 3072.97$, $p = .000$; $df = 464$; NFI = .63; NNFI = .64; CFI = .67; RMSEA = .16). Second, we used a post hoc identification of a marker variable by selecting the second smallest positive correlation between the constructs of our model (Malhotra, Kim, and Patil 2006). We then adjusted the correlation matrix using this correlation. A comparison between the original and the adjusted correlation matrix revealed that the differences were small and the patterns of significance remained the same ($p < .05$,

two-tailed). These results suggest that common method bias may not be an issue of major concern in this study.

...insert Table 2 and Table 3 about here...

With regard to endogeneity, we followed the procedures recommended by Antonakis et al. (2010). Based on Durbin-Wu-Hausman tests, we found that the endogeneity of relationship quality variables to infidelity and endogeneity of infidelity to reassessment measures and punishment actions is not an issue. Specifically, we tested for endogeneity to reduce the likelihood of omitted variables by using a two-stage least squares estimation. We employed four instrumental variables (i.e., total sales from the importer, percentage of product categories sold to the importer, export experience, export sales intensity), one for each relationship quality variable as those instrumental variables are theoretically associated with each relationship quality variable. We also used an instrumental variable for infidelity (i.e., reliance on legal contracts). All instrumental variables were strongly correlated with their respective endogenous explanatory variable but uncorrelated with the error terms. The strength of instrumental variables was measured with F-tests (Stock and Watson 2011) and an efficient model and a consistent model were computed. The results of the Durbin-Wu-Hausman test revealed that relationship quality variables are exogenous to infidelity and infidelity is exogenous to reassessment and punitive actions. In fact, the estimates of all instrumental variables produced F-statistics higher than 10 (Stock and Watson 2011).

Structural Model

We tested the research hypotheses by estimating the structural model using the elliptical re-weighted least squares (ERLS) technique, which is proven to provide unbiased parameter estimates for both multivariate normal and non-normal data (Sharma, Durvasula, and Dillon 1989). The analysis produced an acceptable model fit, manifested by the ratio of Chi-square to the degrees of freedom (χ^2/df)= 2.23 and the results of the alternative fit indices (NFI = .90;

NNFI = .94; CFI = .94; RMSEA = .09). The difference in chi-square and the differences in the degrees of freedom between the measurement and the structural model containing the same variables is $\Delta\chi^2$ (df)= 268.67(240), which is significant at $\alpha = .10$. The standardized (and unstandardized) path coefficients, together with the corresponding t-values of the structural model are displayed in **Table 4**.

...insert Table 4 about here...

With regard to the direct effects, our findings confirm a negative link between trust and infidelity ($\beta = -.27$, $t = -4.97$, $p = .00$), giving support to H₁. Data analysis reveals a negative association between satisfaction and infidelity ($\beta = -.15$, $t = -2.97$, $p = .00$), thus H₂ is also supported. As expected in H₃, study findings demonstrate a negative relationship between commitment and infidelity ($\beta = -.12$, $t = -1.95$, $p = .05$). H₄ is also supported as the analysis shows that a decrease in cooperation in the relationship raises the likelihood of infidelity episodes ($\beta = -.20$, $t = -3.18$, $p = .00$). It was also confirmed that high levels of infidelity can lead to either punitive actions ($\beta = .19$, $t = 2.25$, $p = .02$) or reassessment measures ($\beta = .16$, $t = 2.37$, $p = .02$), lending support to H_{5a} and H_{5b} respectively.

To assess possible moderation effects, we have used the interaction approach, where we examined the effect of the cross-product between each moderating variable and the hypothesized link (Ping 1995). With regard to relationship length (H₆), we confirm a weaker link between low levels of trust and infidelity ($\beta = -.36$, $t = -7.40$, $p = .00$), satisfaction and infidelity ($\beta = -.12$, $t = -2.55$, $p = .01$), commitment and infidelity ($\beta = -.26$, $t = -5.32$, $p = .00$), and cooperation and infidelity ($\beta = -.10$, $t = -2.36$, $p = .00$) for older as opposed to younger relationships. In the case of our second moderator, data analysis lends support to H₇. Specifically, as expected, in growing relationships the associations are weaker between low levels of trust and infidelity ($\beta = -.24$, $t = -5.93$, $p = .02$), satisfaction and infidelity ($\beta = -.10$, $t = -2.07$, $p = .02$), commitment and infidelity ($\beta = -.28$, $t = -6.33$, $p = .02$), and cooperation and

infidelity ($\beta = -.37$, $t = -8.52$, $p = .00$). With regard to our third moderator, it was confirmed that a long-term orientation weakens the link between infidelity and punitive actions ($\beta = -.42$, $t = -5.39$, $p = .00$), but strengthens the association between infidelity and reassessment measures ($\beta = .36$, $t = 6.08$, $p = .01$), thus giving support to H_{8a} and H_{8b} respectively. Similar results were also found in the case of social bonding, which also weakens the effect between infidelity and punitive actions ($\beta = -.23$, $t = -3.02$, $p = .00$) (H_{9a}), but strengthens the impact of infidelity on reassessment measures ($\beta = .19$, $t = 2.66$, $p = .01$) (H_{9b}).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A central conclusion that can be drawn from the study findings is that poor relationship quality (expressed in terms of low levels of trust, satisfaction, commitment, and cooperation) plays an instrumental role in increasing infidelity incidents in the E-I working relationship. This situation worsens when the relationship is relatively young and has a declining developmental tendency. It is also confirmed that the existence of infidelity in the relationship can lead to punitive actions (which may eventually end the relationship) or to reassessment measures (that could prolong the relationship). Compared to the former, the latter is more likely to be applied in the case of relationships characterized by high long-term orientation and strong social bonding.

The negative effect of trust on infidelity shows that the absence or decrease of trust in one relational partner may denote that s/he ignores the good of the other, as well as that s/he may desire to perform such aversive behavior when engaging in the search for alternative business partners (Eggert and Ulaga 2010; Elangovan and Shapiro 1998). The results also highlight the role of satisfaction in protecting international business partners from infidelity actions. This shows that if the interactive parties are content with the outcomes and benefits of

their relationship and if they meet each other's expectations, other potential partners will look less attractive (Skarmeas, Zeriti, and Baltas 2016; Wathne, Biong, and Heide 2001). The negative impact of commitment on infidelity emphasizes the role of motivation and willingness to continue the relationship by retaining the partner's loyalty (Čater and Čater 2010) and reducing his/her tendency to leave the exporter (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Indeed, commitment denotes that both parties like each other and are content with their joint work (Cater and Zabkar 2010). The study findings also suggest that in relationships involving close cooperation, each party makes significant contributions to the other's business, making actions such as infidelity a non-viable option because of its potential to threaten their mutual interests (Tangpong, Hung, and Ro 2010).

Our study demonstrates that, even though the E-I relationship is characterized by low relationship quality, longer duration may inhibit searching for alternative partners. This illustrates the fact that longer relationships with a history of learning of idiosyncrasies, resolved relational problems, and fulfilled expectations make seeking alternative partners a less attractive option. This finding is in line with the results of earlier studies, which report that as the length of the relationship increases, relational parties: (a) demonstrate a greater willingness to continue the relationship (Liu et al. 2010) and (b) have stronger beliefs that their business partner will enhance positive and avoid negative outcomes in their relationship (Liu et al. 2008).

Growing relational status also reduces the vulnerability of E-I relationships to infidelity actions. This finding is in accordance with Jap and Anderson (2007) reporting that, compared with declining relationships, growing relationships generate continuity expectations. Moreover, in growing relationships, the number of seriously considered alternatives is lower compared to those in declining ones (Jap and Anderson 2007). In

contrast, the lack of desire for continuity in declining relationships motivates business partners to focus on their self-interest and deny collaboration (Kang, Oh, and Sivadas 2012).

The continuity of the relationship in the aftermath of infidelity depends on how the parties solve the issues associated with extradyadic activity. Our results suggest that the affected party may choose to react either in an aggressive or an easygoing way. However, if the exposed business partner displays a willingness to continue the relationship and acts accordingly (e.g., avoiding extreme immediate reactions), s/he will give the instigator and the relationship another chance. This finding confirms the argument that partners with a long-term orientation tend to preserve their relationship, while transient relationships are characterized by the questionable involvement of parties (Kim and Choi 2015). It also supports the fact that a long-term perspective in the business relationship denotes how much value the partners place in the relationship, as well as how ready they are to maintain the relationship by making some adjustments to align with the changing conditions (Ivens 2005).

Finally, study findings indicate that the existence of social bonds between exporters and importers will make the affected party more understanding and motivate him/her to reconsider the issue. In fact, close friendly interactions between exporters and importers represent considerable investments in social capital and reinforce the tendency to maintain the relationship (Wathne, Biong, and Heide 2001), particularly because of the emotional bonds linking boundary spanners of both firms (Cater and Zabkar 2010; Mavondo and Rodrigo 2001). This result corroborates the findings of Zhuang, Xi, and Tsang (2010), who reported that emotional bonds between parties increase the likelihood that they will use non-coercive, as opposed to coercive, strategies to influence their partners. Extant research also reports that the existence of social bonds between buyers and sellers ultimately changes their perception about an unfavorable outcome (Ho 2012).

Theoretical Implications

The results of the study have several theoretical implications. First, we have shown how various concepts, theories and ideas developed within the sphere of social psychology (and particularly marital studies) can be transferred, with some modifications, to the business level. Although infidelity has hitherto been examined from the perspective of inter-personal relationships, we have demonstrated that it can also apply to inter-organizational relationships. This implies that infidelity is a concept that can be found in any kind of relationship, which can affect its continuation or termination. In light of the fact that the field of social psychology has given considerable attention to the study of infidelity, as well as its antecedents and outcomes, more input can be borrowed from this discipline by inter-organizational researchers. For example, from the antecedents side, we could borrow new constructs like relational investments, dominance, and situational factors, whereas on the consequences side, new constructs will refer to relationship distress, insecurity, and increasing own attractiveness.

The study has brought to the surface a new construct, namely infidelity, which has been hitherto unknown in inter-organizational research. However, infidelity is a key construct that has harmful effects on the inter-firm relationship and can seriously reduce relational performance. Our study has also ascertained the crucial role of relationship quality (expressed in terms of trust, commitment, satisfaction, and cooperation) in influencing inter-firm infidelity, as well as the consequences of infidelity actions (namely reassessment measures and punitive actions). These results are in line with findings in inter-personal research (see, for example, Drigotas, Safstrom, and Gentilia (1999), and Shackelford and Buss (1997)), which give credibility to the parallel that we have drawn between marital research and inter-organizational research.

Our study has also shown that infidelity is a dynamic phenomenon, which is affected by the age of the relationship and the stage it is at. With regard to relationship age, this was found to reduce infidelity problems caused by poor relationship quality, due to greater familiarity with the other partner and a greater willingness to continue the relationship. As regards the stage of the relationship, firms at a growing stage are less vulnerable to infidelity actions as a result of low relationship quality, compared to firms experiencing a declining stage, because of greater continuity expectations and a reduced number of relationship alternatives. These findings are in harmony with those in the social psychology literature, where relationship length and stage was also found to moderate the effect of infidelity in inter-personal relationships (e.g., Allen et al. 2005; Blow and Hartnett 2005).

In similar vein, long-term orientation and social bonding were found to play a moderating role on the effects of infidelity and on various consequences of it. This gives support to the prevailing notion that long-term orientation acts as a safeguard to preserve the relationship, increases the tendency to be faithful to the other party, and instills a mechanism of adjustment during difficult times. Moreover, the role of social bonding as a catalyst to infidelity can be justified by the investments in social capital made in the relationship, the non-coercive way of approaching inter-organizational problems, and the positive alteration of perceptions toward an unfavorable outcome. Similarly, variables which can be adopted from marital research, such as investment size (Guerrero and Bachman 2010), perceived partner uniqueness (Dillow, Afifi, and Matsunaga 2012), and perpetrator amendments (Hannon et al. 2010), could also moderate this relationship.

Managerial Implications

Our findings have serious implications for export and import managers. First, they need to maintain and enhance a high level of relationship quality, in order to avoid incidences of infidelity. Since trust has the highest role in setting a switching barrier, it is imperative to find

and work with trustworthy business partners, as well as to foster trust in the working relationship. Developing trust in the relationship is a long process, and this is particularly true in international markets, where it is difficult both to establish trust in culturally diverse territories and control the business partner's behavior in geographically distant places (Li and Ng 2002). In this sense, it is extremely important to train and control the boundary personnel (i.e., sales and purchasing employees) in order to instill such corporate values, as honesty, credibility, and benevolence (Anderson and Narus 1990). In addition, it is necessary to ensure cross-functional coordination and integration, empowerment of boundary spanners, and making sales and purchasing teams work together.

They should also keep their business partners satisfied by ensuring that the relationship yields rewards and reduces costs. This can be done by dedicating valuable resources to their overseas partner, which will make the parties attractive to each other and detract from other alternatives. In order to provide satisfaction, each other's expectations (particularly concerning relational norms) should be learned from the business relationship. This is both critical and challenging in E-I relationships, because of the physical and psychological distance keeping the parties apart. In particular, in the case of large cultural differences, parties may act with self-reference criteria and believe that they meet the expectations of their business partners, although this may not be so.

They should also make a genuine commitment to the relationship by working hard for each other. Although it may be too optimistic to expect both parties to be equally committed to each other, they should keep in mind that decreasing commitment gives a signal to their partner that resources, which once used to be devoted to them, are no longer available (Jones and Burdette 1994). This, in turn, degrades the latter and gives him/her a motivation to search for alternative business partners. In order to demonstrate commitment, international business partners should consider making idiosyncratic investments, avoid doubts about working hard

for their partner, and make short-term sacrifices (Anderson and Weitz 1992). These actions all show a willingness to continue the relationship, as opposed to terminating it.

Because cooperation is also highly conducive to the prevention of infidelity, export and import executives should foster collaboration in their activities and ensure that joint goals are well understood and internalized by both partners. They should understand that their performance depends on their partner's performance, because they conduct complementary activities linking two firms. In this sense, the exporter should contribute to the importer's business and the importer should reciprocate. They should also be ready to help each other in difficult times and solve problems together. Building cross-organizational teams for some projects, such as new product development, marketing research, and promotional campaigns, could also foster collaboration.

Although the lack of relationship quality leads to infidelity episodes, the status and longer duration of the relationship act as barriers to partner mobility. With regard to relationship status, export and import managers should devote attention and care to growing relationships and prevent them from declining (Jap and Anderson 2007). In this sense, they are urged to increase relationship-specific investments, contribute to their partner's performance, and express their interest in future business. They are also urged to assess their relationship status frequently, and if there are symptoms of decline, to openly discuss the reasons with their partners and take any necessary action. With regard to relationship length, extra efforts should be made to retain established relationships by giving special treatment and making sacrifices.

Infidelity in an E-I relationship may sometimes be unavoidable. It is therefore important to know what action to take in the aftermath of infidelity. In this sense, exporters and importers should consider many factors before making a decision, such as relationship-specific investments made (and to be lost), quality of new alternatives, and possibilities for

vertical integration. In certain cases, it may be better to punish the business partner by denying him/her some resources or terminating the relationship. Although this may be helpful to re-establish control in the relationship, there is always the risk that this strategy will turn into a “tit-for-tat” cycle (Fitness 2001). Thus, it may be more appropriate to proceed with reassessment measures that will help to make the relationship more constructive and healthy.

Cultivating long-term orientation and social bonding with the other partner will facilitate continuity of the relationship. International business partners should therefore adopt a long-term approach to the relationship, by involving their suppliers or customers in their strategic business plans, making relationship-specific investments, and always delivering the promises they make. Relational transgressions should be treated as an opportunity to handle the sources of problems, improve the relationship, and lengthen its life (Anderson and Jap 2005). On the other hand, social bonds need to be strengthened by joint participation in social events, development of personal friendships, and exchange of visits. These will not only increase affection and friendliness among employees, but will also decrease the cultural distance between them.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings of this study should be interpreted within the context of several limitations, which could also lay the foundation for certain research directions. First, because this study is, to the best of our knowledge, among the first to investigate the issue of infidelity in business relationships (not only within the international, but also within a domestic context), it is important to confirm its external validity by extending it to other geographical, cultural, and relational settings, preferably by adopting a comparative approach. For example, future

studies could test our model in countries at different levels of economic development (e.g., industrial versus industrializing economies), in culturally distant countries (e.g., high versus low context cultures), and in different international relationships (e.g., licensors versus licensees).

Second, although business relationships are of a dynamic nature, this study employed a cross-sectional design, due to time and budget constraints. Although we integrated relationship age and status into our model to test the impact of time, this, without doubt, is a limited attempt. Hence, prospective researchers are advised to test the model by adopting a longitudinal research design. Notably, it would be interesting to examine which specific relationship quality components have the highest preventive effect on infidelity throughout the relationship life-cycle. Scholars could also investigate the long-term effects of infidelity on the exposed party, and explore whether their reactions change over time.

Third, this study was based on the evaluation of infidelity-related phenomena from the exporter's viewpoint, although business relationships involve at least two parties. Hence, having the perspectives of both exporters and importers (and if possible other network members) would lend deeper insight into the infidelity issue within business relationships. This would particularly help to understand the infidelity from the standpoints of the victim and the perpetrator. For example, it would be interesting to integrate in one study the self-assessments of partners, as well as their perceptions about their partners regarding infidelity issues. It would also be useful to shed light on how the offending and the harmed party behaved after the detection of infidelity.

Fourth, we only focused on the relationship quality determinants of infidelity. In addition to relational factors, future research could also explore the antecedent roles of: (a) managerial factors (e.g., conscientiousness, narcissism, risk-taking, attachment avoidance) (Burchell and Ward 2013), (b) organizational factors (e.g., relationship building and retention

capabilities) (Cater and Zabkar 2010); (c) inter-organizational factors (e.g., relative market value of the partner, perceived partner uniqueness, relationship-specific investments) (Dillow, Afifi, and Matsunaga 2012); and (d) environmental/contextual factors (e.g., uncertainty, market dynamism, culture, religion, and institutional dimensions) (Allen et al. 2005).

Fifth, our study involved the outcomes of infidelity at a broader level, centering on two groups of reactions. However, variations in these reactions at a more specific level also warrant scholarly attention. For example, punishment can take such forms as relationship termination, exercise of coercive power, ignorance of partner, and wreaking revenge, while reassessment can be manifested in forgiveness, control adjustments, and constructive communication. Moreover, in addition to behavioral outcomes, infidelity could also have emotional (e.g., anxiety about the future of the relationship), perceptual (e.g., relationship performance), and even financial (e.g., changes in profitability) consequences, which require study. An important issue relating to infidelity is accommodation, that is, a willingness by the victim to constructively respond to the offending party's actions (Fitness 2001). It would be interesting, for example, to discover the reasons behind this accommodation, such as the investments made in the relationship and the existence of promising alternatives.

Finally, since infidelity has various drivers (e.g., those associated with the person, partner, relationship, and the context) (Allen et al. 2005), is bespoken in different ways (e.g., explicit, deceptive, ambiguous) (Mattingly et al. 2010), and centers mainly on interpersonal relationships, it would be advisable to engage in more in-depth investigation of the subject, by complementing quantitative research with qualitative studies. For example, researchers could explore which specific actions in different cultures are considered as infidelity. They could also explore whether extra-dyadic behavior is more or less acceptable in business, as opposed to interpersonal relationships. Another interesting topic would be how the affected party learned about the infidelity and how this, in turn, affected his/her response.

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NOTES

1. Although the construct of infidelity has been developed in social psychology, and particularly in the marital studies literature, it can be equally applicable to inter-organizational relationships for three major reasons: (a) buyer-seller relationships are thought to resemble marriages, which despite their enormous advantages, like reduced uncertainty, exchange efficiency, and social satisfaction, can also suffer from negative aspects like infidelity (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987; Johnston and Hausman 2006); (b) infidelity is a unique form of behavior relating to loyalty, involving unmet needs, irresponsibility, and deliberate deception (Egan and Angus 2004), which can appear in any kind of established relationship, whether inter-personal or inter-organizational (Schützwohl 2008); and (c) business relations, like a couple's relations, are not static but dynamic and can undergo serious and painful transitions, such as allowing the entrance of illegitimate actors, which may try to tempt the parties with better offers and can be decisive with the dissolution or continuity of the relationship (Alajoutsijärvi, Eriksson, and Tikkanen 2001; Johnston and Hausman 2006).

2. Both review articles (e.g., Allen et al. 2005) and individual empirical studies (e.g., Shackelford and Buss 1997) investigating infidelity in couples position relationship quality variables as antecedents of infidelity. Notably, the most commonly examined relationship quality variables include satisfaction and commitment, which are mostly used to explain infidelity, either in the evolutionary approach (Shackelford and Buss 1996) or the investment model (Drigotas, Saftstrom, and Gentilia 1999). In our study, we have extended relationship quality to include two other commonly used constructs, namely trust and cooperation, which – together with satisfaction and commitment – comprise the most frequently cited components of relationship quality in the buyer-seller relationships literature (e.g., Leonidou et al. 2014; Skarmeas et al. 2008).

TABLE 1: ALTERNATIVE THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO INFIDELITY

Theoretical approach	Key features
Normative approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●The likelihood of somebody engaging in infidelity actions is attributable to injunctive or descriptive societal norms (e.g., disapproval of extradyadic relationships, the censure attached to cheating, and a permissive social environment tolerating infidelity) (Buunk and Bakker 1995). ●Injunctive norms refer to perceptions about formal laws and norms that a specific society shares (Buunk and Dijkstra 2006). ●Descriptive norms refer to perceptions of how somebody perceives the behavior of others (Buunk and Dijkstra 2006). ●Descriptive norms are more influential on engaging in infidelity actions, compared to injunctive norms (Buunk and Bakker 1995).
Equity theory (Evolutionary approach)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●Stresses the importance of benefits within a dyadic relationship, that are responsible for keeping the two partners together (Shackelford and Buss 1996). ●Satisfaction derived from the relationship largely depends on: (a) having equitable exchanges that will be mutually beneficial for both parties; and (b) the inexistence of similar alternative relationships from which benefits could also be derived (Drigotas and Barta 2001). ●The motivation to cheat the partner arises when one party is not satisfied with the overall quality of the working relationship and/or the level of quality of alternative relationships is superior to that with the existing partner (Drigotas and Barta 2001). ●Infidelity may signal serious inequities in the relationship that will drive one of the parties (and sometimes both) to seek a parallel relationship with another partner (Shackelford and Buss 1996). This is because in an unfair relationship, the vulnerable party may feel entitled to obtain additional rewards from an extra-dyadic relationship in order to restore the perception of fairness (Buunk and Van Yperen 1993).
Investment model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●The primary force in relationship development is commitment, which denotes a psychological attachment to a partner and, thereby, the motivation to continue the relationship with him/her (Rusbult 1980). ●Factors determining commitment in a relationship include: the amount of satisfaction derived from within the existing relationship, the potential satisfaction provided from outside relationships, and the possible loss of investments if the relationship terminates (Drigotas and Barta 2001). ●Infidelity arises because of the lack of commitment to the relationship, which reduces the psychological attachment to the other party and weakens the willingness to maintain the relationship in the long term (Buunk and Dijkstra 2006).
Social exchange theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●A partner's infidelity contributes to the costs of the relationship that outweigh the rewards gained by the other party (Buunk and Dijkstra 2006). ●The attraction of a rival relationship stems from the fact that the current relationship is unsatisfactory and counterproductive and that more attraction in terms of rewards is now found in the new relationship (Buunk and Dijkstra 2006). ●The offending party loses the motivation to put more energy, time and effort into the primary relationship, and even thinks of its termination (Fitness 2001; Jones and Burdette 1994; Shackelford and Buss 1996).

TABLE 2: MEASUREMENT MODEL AND SUMMARY STATISTICS

Constructs	Scale items	Standardized loadings	t-value	α	ρ	AVE	Mean score	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Item mean	Standard deviation
Trust	TRU1	.68	*	.86	.82	.51	5.46	0.98	-0.63	0.38	6.10	1.00
	TRU3	.77	9.54								5.72	1.13
	TRU4	.70	8.83								5.64	1.32
	TRU5	.73	9.15								4.70	1.50
	TRU6	.75	9.31								4.55	1.48
	TRU7	.67	8.49								6.01	1.10
	Satisfaction	SAT1	.81	*	.89	.82	.66	5.72	1.08	-1.30	2.20	5.14
SAT2		.76	11.89								5.37	1.50
SAT3		.79	12.46								6.34	0.97
SAT4		.88	14.49								6.02	1.17
Commitment	CMT2	.55	*	.73	.68	.51	5.51	1.00	-0.65	0.31	5.43	1.44
	CMT4	.85	5.84								5.68	1.32
	CMT5	.71	5.70								5.46	1.30
Cooperation	COP1	.72	*	.78	.77	.50	5.38	1.09	-0.63	0.34	4.93	1.48
	COP2	.69	7.38								5.66	1.48
	COP3	.69	7.35								5.68	1.55
	COP4	.65	6.95								5.48	1.59
	COP5	.76	9.25								5.13	1.33
Infidelity	INF1	.91	*	.90	.85	.64	3.02	1.43	0.29	-0.80	2.99	1.78
	INF2	.90	19.09								3.37	1.81
	INF3	.73	12.72								2.58	1.44
	INF4	.71	12.21								2.82	1.60
	INF5	.73	12.88								3.28	1.81
Punitive Actions	PUN2	.75	*	.71	.68	.51	3.08	1.36	0.38	-0.58	3.37	1.81
	PUN4	.73	5.93								3.23	1.75
	PUN6	.66	5.34								2.61	1.86
Reassessment Actions	REA1	.56	*	.87	.83	.55	4.87	1.20	-0.68	0.35	5.21	1.57
	REA2	.62	6.92								4.42	1.54
	REA3	.63	7.03								4.23	1.51
	REA4	.90	8.59								4.93	1.51
	REA5	.89	8.56								5.14	1.62
	REA6	.78	8.03								5.25	1.51
Long-term Orientation	LTO1	.80	*	.90	.85	.61	5.58	1.04	-1.13	1.74	5.85	1.21
	LTO2	.85	13.54								5.90	1.15
	LTO3	.80	12.62								5.81	1.22
	LTO4	.67	10.04								4.86	1.39
	LTO5	.71	10.73								5.10	1.41
	LTO6	.85	13.65								5.98	1.17
Social Bonding	SBO1	.74	*	.91	.85	.67	3.62	1.61	-0.02	-0.97	3.55	1.92
	SBO2	.84	12.03								4.08	1.93
	SBO3	.90	12.98								3.22	1.85
	SBO4	.88	12.80								3.73	1.84
	SBO5	.70	9.97								3.56	1.86

* Fit statistics of Model: $\chi^2 = 1536.25$, $p = .000$, $df = 824$; $NFI = .91$; $NNFI = .95$; $CFI = .95$; $RMSEA = .06$

TABLE 3: CORRELATION MATRIX

Constructs	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Trust	1								
2. Satisfaction	.48	1							
3. Commitment	.49	.50	1						
4. Cooperation	.52	.55	.43	1					
5. Infidelity	-.40	-.24	-.12	-.38	1				
6. Punitive Actions	.06	-.02	.01	-.06	-.05	1			
7. Reassessment Actions	.20	.33	.39	.13	.09	.02	1		
8. Long-term Orientation	.57	.58	.55	.47	-.19	-.04	.40	1.	
9. Social Bonding	.43	.34	.29	.26	-.24	-.12	.19	.40	1.

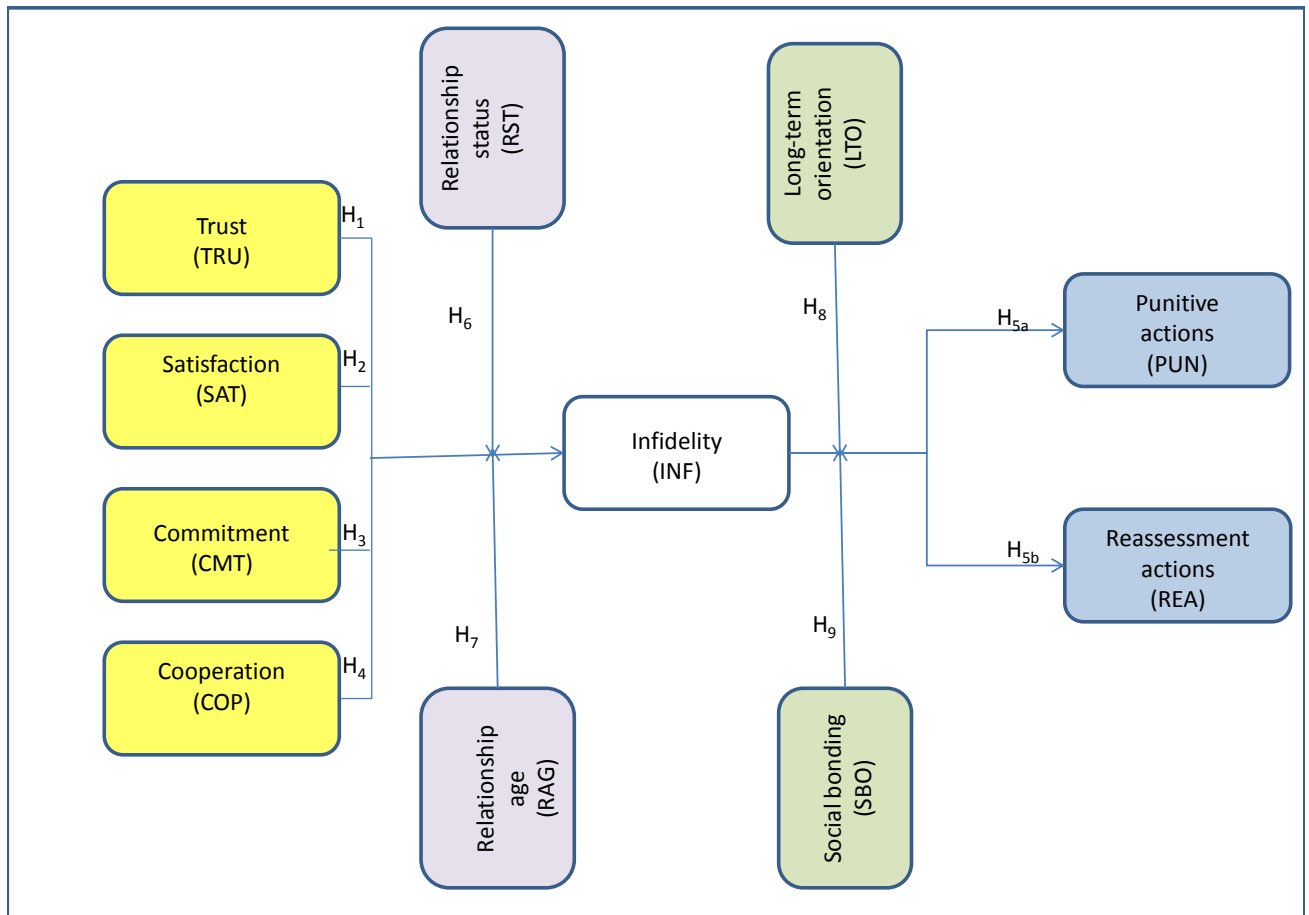
Note: Correlations greater than $|\pm 0.16|$ are significant at the .01 level. Correlations greater than $|\pm 0.12|$ are significant at the .05 level.

TABLE 4: STRUCTURAL MODEL RESULTS

Hypothesis	Hypothesized path	Standardized/ Unstandardized path coefficients	t- value	Standard error	p- value
Direct effects					
H ₁	Trust → Infidelity	-.27/-.17	-4.97	.12	.00
H ₂	Satisfaction → Infidelity	-.15/-.35	-2.97	.12	.00
H ₃	Commitment → Infidelity	-.12/-.86	-1.95	.14	.05
H ₄	Cooperation → Infidelity	-.20/-.61	-3.18	.14	.00
H _{5a}	Infidelity → Punitive Actions	.19/.08	2.25	.03	.02
H _{5b}	Infidelity → Reassessment Actions	.16/.07	2.37	.03	.02
Moderation effects					
	Relationship age → Infidelity	-.33/-.124	-1.74	.15	.08
H _{6a}	Trust × Relationship age → Infidelity	-.36/-.03	-7.40	.00	.00
H _{6b}	Satisfaction × Relationship age → Infidelity	-.12/-.01	-2.55	.00	.01
H _{6c}	Commitment × Relationship age → Infidelity	-.26/-.02	-5.32	.00	.00
H _{6d}	Cooperation × Relationship age → Infidelity	-.10/-.01	-2.36	.00	.02
	Relationship status → Infidelity	-.09/-.30	-2.53	.11	.01
H _{7a}	Trust × Relationship status → Infidelity	-.24/-.13	-5.93	.02	.00
H _{7b}	Satisfaction × Relationship status → Infidelity	-.10/-.08	-2.07	.02	.04
H _{7c}	Commitment × Relationship status → Infidelity	-.28/-.14	-6.33	.02	.00
H _{7d}	Cooperation × Relationship status → Infidelity	-.37/-.20	-8.52	.03	.00
	Long-term Orientation → Punitive Actions	-.10/-.20	-1.68	.12	.09
H _{8a}	Infidelity × Long-term Orientation → Punitive Actions	-.42/-.06	-5.39	.01	.00
	Long-term Orientation → Reassessment Actions	.36/.59	2.47	.19	.01
H _{8b}	Infidelity × Long-term Orientation → Reassessment Actions	.36/.05	6.08	.01	.00
	Social Bonding → Punitive Actions	-.05/-.09	-0.71	.16	.48
H _{9a}	Infidelity × Social Bonding → Punitive Actions	-.23/-.04	-3.02	.01	.00
	Social Bonding → Reassessment Actions	.26/.43	3.49	.12	.00
H _{9b}	Infidelity × Social Bonding → Reassessment Actions	.19/.03	2.66	.01	.01

Fit statistics: $\chi^2 = 2182.00$, $p = .000$, $df = 977$; NFI = .90; NNFI = .94; CFI = .94; RMSEA = .09

FIGURE 1: THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL



APPENDIX: CONSTRUCT OPERATIONALIZATION

Constructs	Items	Item description	Source
Trust	TRU1	This importer keeps the promises s/he makes to our firm.	Doney and Cannon (1997)
	TRU2	This importer is not always honest with us. (R)	
	TRU3	We believe the information that this importer provides us with.	
	TRU4	This importer is genuinely concerned that our business succeeds.	
	TRU5	When making important decisions, this importer considers our welfare, as well as his/her own.	
	TRU6	We trust this importer to keep our best interests in mind.	
	TRU7	This importer is trustworthy.	
	TRU8	We find it necessary to be cautious with this importer. (R)	
Satisfaction	SAT1	We are delighted with our overall relationship with this importer.	Leuthesser and Kohli (1995)
	SAT2	We wish more of our importers were like this one.	
	SAT3	We would like our relationship with this importer to continue in the coming years	
	SAT4	It is a pleasure to deal with this importer	
	SAT5	There is always some problem or other with this importer (R)	
Commitment	CMT1	We feel very little commitment to this importer. (R)	Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer (1995)
	CMT2	We maintain a long-lasting working relationship with this importer.	
	CMT3	We have invested a lot of time in learning the “ins and outs” of this importer.	
	CMT4	We are willing to make any effort to ensure that the relationship with this importer functions well.	
	CMT5	We have dedicated whatever people/resources are necessary to develop our working relationship with this importer.	
Cooperation	COP1	This importer is conscientious and responsive about maintaining a cooperative relationship.	Sibley and Michie (1982), Morgan and Hunt (1994)
	COP2	This importer is willing to collaborate with our firm regarding the smooth operation of the relationship.	
	COP3	This importer always acts in ways that promote mutual interests and welfare.	
	COP4	This importer is interested in assisting our company to achieve its business goals/objectives.	
	COP5	There is a team spirit in tackling common problems in our working relationship with this importer.	
Infidelity	INF1	This importer searches actively for business with other export suppliers of similar goods, while s/he doing business with us.	Mattingly et al. (2010), Atkins and Kessel (2008); Kumar, Stern, and Achrol (1992)
	INF2	This importer contacts other exporters of similar goods to explore mutual business opportunities, while still doing business with our company.	
	INF3	This importer shows greater motivation to engage in business activities with other exporters, rather than developing business with our company.	
	INF4	This importer not only does business with other exporting firms selling similar goods, but also develops social bonds with them.	
	INF5	This importer negotiates with other export suppliers of similar goods to obtain better business terms than what we can offer.	
Punitive actions	PUN1	When this importer wronged us in some way, such as by being disloyal, we were ready to end our collaboration with him/her.	Adapted from Shackelford, Goetz, and Buss (2005)
	PUN2	We punished this importer for any negative action concerning our working relationship as a result of disloyal conduct.	
	PUN3	When we caught this importer deceiving us, this reduced our enthusiasm and motivation to support him/her.	
	PUN4	When this importer dealt with an exporter of similar goods behind our backs, we sought financial and/or other compensation.	
	PUN5	When we caught this importer being disloyal to us, we forced him/her to change his/her attitude and behavior.	
	PUN6	When this importer had a relationship with another exporter of similar goods, we took our revenge by collaborating with another importer.	
Reassessment measures	REA1	When something went wrong in our relationship with this importer, we were ready to discuss ways of restoring it in a positive manner.	Ohbuchi and Tedeschi (1997) and Hibbard, Kumar, and Stern (2001)
	REA2	When this importer engaged in disloyal behavior, we forgave him/her provided s/he promises that it will never happen again.	
	REA3	When we caught this importer behaving in a disloyal/dishonest way we sought to work on a compromise agreement.	
	REA4	When we caught this importer behaving dishonestly, we embarked on a constructive discussion to rebuild the relationship on more healthy grounds.	
	REA5	When we caught this importer being disloyal to us, we tried to clarify and resolve the causes of the problem so that it does not happen again.	
	REA6	When this importer had a relationship with another exporter of similar goods, we tried to find mutually acceptable ways to improve our relationship.	
Long-term orientation	LTO1	We believe that in the long run our relationship with this importer will be profitable.	Ganesan (1994)
	LTO2	Maintaining a long-term relationship with this importer is important to us.	
	LTO3	We focus on long-term goals in the relationship with this importer.	
	LTO4	We are willing to make sacrifices to help this importer from time to time.	
	LTO5	We share our long-term goals with this importer.	
	LTO6	We would like to develop a long-term relationship with this importer.	
Social bonding	SBO1	We often interact with people from this importing firm on a social basis outside work.	Mavondo and Rodrigo (2001)
	SBO2	We openly talk like friends with people from this importing firm	
	SBO3	We consider people from this importing firm as being almost as close to us as family.	
	SBO4	If we were to change business partners, we would lose a good friend in this importer.	
	SBO5	We would consider whether the feelings of people in this importer’s organization would be hurt before we made an important decision.	

Note: Measurement was based on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1: Strongly disagree to 7: Strongly agree. The sign (R) denotes a reverse scale