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What makes a website relational?

The experts' viewpoint

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## **What makes a website relational? The experts' viewpoint**

### **ABSTRACT**

Around the world, there has been a profusion of websites launched by companies to reinforce their links with customers. While these websites include relational features (community and areas for regular visitors, electronic bulletin boards, forums, RSS feeds, etc.), can they specifically be considered to be relational according to the relationship marketing paradigm? To answer this question, we run a qualitative study with 19 Internet experts. The results show that two approaches can be used to define a relational website. The first approach suggests that the relationship proneness of a website is driven by three dimensions: content, exchange and look & feel. The second approach is enumerative: the more eCRM features a website offers, the more relational it is considered to be. Managerial and theoretical implications lie in the complementary relationship between these two approaches.

### **Keywords:**

Relational website, Relationship Marketing, eCRM, eCRM features, qualitative methods

# What makes a website relational? The experts' viewpoint

## 1. Introduction

Almost one billion websites existed worldwide in January 2016, representing an increase of almost six million websites compared to December 2015 (Netcraft, 2016). This rapidly growing context is marked by the coexistence of a multitude of website types: e-commerce websites, community websites, brand websites, corporate websites, informational websites, etc. Whatever category a website may be, companies can use it to easily create links to their customers (Dou & Krishnamurthy, 2007; Eastlick, Lotz, & Warrington, 2006; Keeling, Keeling, & McGoldrick, 2013; Piccoli, Brohman, Watson, & Parasuraman, 2004). Websites offer new challenges to relationship marketing (Bonnemaizon, Cova, & Louyot, 2007) and can provide personalized communication and facilitate relationship development with visitors (Eastlick et al., 2006; Florès & Volle, 2005; Müller, Florès, Agrebi, & Chandon, 2008; Rowley, 2004; Voorveld, Neijens, & Smit, 2009).

Several companies have launched relational websites: *in the US* Huggies (Huggies.com) (Khan, 2005); Amazon (Amazon.com) (Larson, 2009); Coca-Cola (mycokerewards.com) (Choueke, 2009) and *in France* Aigle (espritdefamille.com) (Morel, 2012); Kraft Food and Unilever (mavieencouleurs.com) (Morel, 2011). In marketing research, some authors consider the relationship proneness of a website to be a trait (Toufaily et al., 2010), whereas others consider relational websites to be a category (Boisvert & Caron, 2006; Florès & Volle, 2005). Even if the “relational/relationship website” appellation is commonly used by professionals and academicians, the literature does not offer a clear and detailed definition of what this term means. Can we consider an interactive website that offers personalized services to be relational? Are there one or many approaches to defining the relationship proneness of a website (RPW<sup>1</sup>)? Where would a company website be placed on the relational continuum of websites?

The answers to these questions are important, as relationship marketing must take into account three main changes relating to websites:

*The lack of a contact person:* interpersonal relationships disappear in web interactions; the visitor interacts with a website (Keeling et al., 2013). He/she shops without the physical assistance of salespeople and introduces his/her personal information when sharing his/her opinions and testimonials on the website's forum.

*The advent of Web 2.0:* Web 2.0 tools changed relationship marketing's scope and practices. Blogs and online brand communities have placed the visitor in the center of a triangular relationship that connects him/her to the brand and to other members of the website. The exchange concept between the company and its customers, as developed by Bagozzi (1975), has become larger to encompass the other members of a website.

*The visitor's involvement in the content of websites:* Through witnesses and original ideas corners, bulletin boards, online brand communities/fun clubs, the visitor has become a co-creator of information and value. He/she participates in the website's and the brand's daily life.

This research defines and identifies the dimensions lying behind the RPW concept. The formative dimensions of the concept (the constitutive dimensions and sub dimensions) are identified, and an external dimension playing the role of a mediator is proposed. We study the relationship proneness of company websites (i.e., corporate websites, brand websites, e-

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<sup>1</sup> RPW: the relationship proneness of a website.

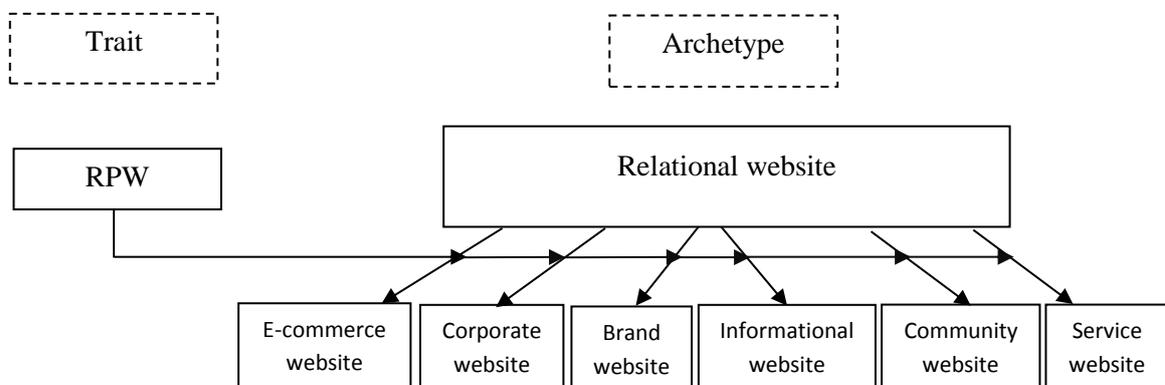
commerce websites); social websites that can be considered to be relational are not examined in this research (i.e., Facebook, Twitter). In the first part of this article, we review the state-of-the-art in research that addresses the RPW. The second part explains the methodological framework of the study based on nineteen interviews with Internet experts. The last part of the article presents the empirical results and the managerial implications.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Taking stock of relationship marketing in the context of websites

Websites are considered to be a very important tool for creating and developing customer relationships (Ab Hamid, 2005; Dou & Krishnamurthy, 2007; Thorbjørnsen, Supphellen, Nysveen, & Pedersen, 2002). Kumar and Benbasat (2002) suggest considering the website to be a social actor and treating the relationship between a website and its visitors in the same way as interpersonal relationships. The authors speak of a parasocial presence, referring to the “extent to which a medium facilitates a sense of understanding, connection, involvement and interaction among participating social entities” (2002:12). The term “para” is used to (meaningfully) capture and cover the emerging interaction between a website and its visitors.

Furthermore, we notice that the term “relational” is employed in connection with different categories of websites: e-commerce websites (Fassott, 2004; Rowley, 2004), brand websites (Florès & Volle, 2005) and corporate websites (Cho & Cheon, 2005). We can consider the relational website to be an archetype that extends the first aim of the website, which is to sell, inform, promote, and entertain. In a similar way, the RPW can be regarded as a trait that can be applied to various categories of websites (see Figure 1).



**Fig. 1.** Clarification of the conceptual status of relational websites

Rowley (2004), for example, considers relationship development to be a suitable application for the e-commerce context. According to the author, relationships are built through communication, customer service, customization and communities. Through the dimensions of interpersonal relationships, Keeling et al. (2013) compare the retail relationships in a human-to-human context to the retail relationships in a technology-based context. Based on four dimensions, equality, intensity, cooperation and socio-emotional, Keeling et al. (2013) find that plain websites show the most similarity to human-to-human relationships on the cooperative dimension compared to other technologies such as 3D avatars and helper robots. They also find that customers have more encouraging perceptions of their relationship with a retail website than that with a door-to-door salesperson.

Other non-merchant websites have high relational potential. According to Florès and Volle (2005), brand websites are tools for creating and developing relationships with a brands' best customers. The authors note that a brand website is visited by less than 5% of the total population. Nevertheless, it allows the brand to remain in contact with 15% of its best customers. Florès and Volle (2005) assign a relational potential to brand websites without deeply explaining its dimensions. Corporate websites also hold relational potential, as they can create and/or develop relationships with different targets (i.e., investors, customers). Leichy and Esrock (2001) distinguish between "static" and "dynamic" corporate websites. They believe that a relationship implies, at a minimum, repeated interactions with the visitor and the ability to use past interactions to configure future interactions. However, Leichy and Esrock (2001) remain unclear regarding the relationship between the "dynamic", "relational" and "interactive" concepts. They note conceptual problems in appreciating the relationship proneness of websites because static websites can hold interactive features whereas other websites can offer the appearance but not the substance of interactivity. This observation reinforces the interest in conducting a qualitative study with Internet experts to better define the RPW concept.

## *2.2. Two approaches for grasping the RPW*

The e-marketing literature presents two approaches to address the RPW. The first approach uses eCRM features/tools (i.e., fan clubs, live chat, FAQs) to describe the RPW. Fassott (2004), for example, suggests classifying eCRM tools (bulletin boards, newsletters, call back buttons) according to their effects on the cognitive, affective and behavioral components of the customer relationship. Feinberg and Kadam (2002) try to check the existence of a relationship between the number of eCRM features and customer satisfaction with e-commerce websites. They show that the more eCRM features a website includes, the more satisfied the visitor is with the website. Based on ninety-one website functions (e.g., site maps, games, financial reports), Boisvert and Caron (2006) identify five categories of websites, including relational websites. According to these scholars, relational websites are "mainly oriented toward the development of relationships with customers, employees, partners and investors" (Boisvert & Caron, 2006, p. 184). This definition is only based on the primary objective of relational websites. In this research, we try to deepen the definition of a relational website and to identify the dimension lying behind the RPW. In addition, eCRM features have largely been examined in an e-commerce context (Anton & Postmus, 1999; Feinberg & Kadam, 2002; Feinberg, Kadam, Hokama, & Kim, 2002), potentially neglecting the potential of other types of websites to create and develop relationships with visitors. This gap in the literature calls for complementary research. Moreover, the literature presents eCRM tools as a generic concept without clearly defined boundaries. Feinberg and Kadam (2002) and Feinberg et al. (2002) suggest that commercial elements (e.g., orders, purchase conditions, etc.) can be considered to be eCRM features. However, can presenting purchase conditions really be considered to be a relational tool for visitors? These questions are not clearly investigated in the literature and lead to gaps in the area of empirical validation. Our expert study will try to clarify which features can be considered to be eCRM tools and which cannot regardless of the type of website.

A more recent literature stream defines the RPW based on/through the website's relational components/characteristics (Toufaily et al., 2010); Patsioura, Malama and Vlachopoulou, 2011; N'Goala and Cases, 2012). Toufaily et al. (2010) define the relational characteristics of websites as "the human and social aspects of websites that have the main role to create a perception of a social presence and a human contact between customers and companies in the virtual word" (Toufaily et al., 2010, p. 195). The authors study the effect of

four relational characteristics (communication quality, social presence, support quality and online communities) on online customers' trust. Their findings show that communication quality and support quality have a positive effect on online trust. However, online communities have a negative effect on online trust. Patsioura et al. (2011) consider the relational components of websites as an operationalization of relationship marketing strategies. They found a positive association between three relational components (communication, feedback and customer service) and the attitude toward the website. N'Goala and Cases (2012) identify eight relational levers: esthetic design, choice, frequency of contact with customers, respect of privacy, site customization, interactivity/ease of browsing, respect of commitments and virtual community. They demonstrate that these relational levers have an indirect effect on buying behavior through the concept of trust and commitment toward two merchant websites. The results show that website design and choice have a positive effect on the first component of trust - perceived credibility. Respect for privacy and for commitments have a positive effect on the second component of trust - perceived benevolence. The results of their study also show that trust partially mediates the effect between some relational levers (contact, choice, customization and interactivity) and commitment toward the two studied merchant websites.

Toufaily et al. (2010); Patsioura et al. (2011) and N'Goala and Cases (2012) study only a subset of relational components/characteristics of websites without defining what a relational website is. They also do not precisely identify the number of characteristics necessary for a website to achieve relational status.

Based on the gaps identified within these two approaches, we try in this article to more deeply define relational websites and to identify their dimensions. This is crucial for both the relationship marketing and the e-marketing literature because more precisely defining the RPW enables extending and clarifying the boundaries of a fuzzy label, i.e., the relational website. The next sections present the methodological framework used to achieve this aim and the obtained results.

### 3. Material and methods

To define the RPW concept, we contacted nineteen Internet experts using snowball sampling (Noy, 2008). We tried to obtain a balance between consultants (working in web agencies) and website managers (working for brands). Nine individual interviews with consultants and ten with website managers were conducted (Tables 1 and 2). The mean experience in the Internet field for the nineteen experts is approximately 7.21 years.

**Table 1**

List of the consultants interviewed for this study

	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Web experience</b>	<b>Company</b>	<b>Sector of activity</b>	<b>Web address</b>
1	General Manager	7 years	Crmmetrix/Metri xLab	Online market research and consultancy	<a href="http://www.metrixlab.com">www.metrixlab.com</a>
2	Chief Executive Officer	10 years	Crmmetrix/Metri xLab	Online market research and consultancy	<a href="http://www.metrixlab.com">www.metrixlab.com</a>
3	Consultant	9 years	Six and Co	Online market research and consultancy	<a href="http://www.sixandco.com">www.sixandco.com</a>
4	Deputy managing Director	9 years	Fullsix	Online market research and consultancy	<a href="http://www.fullsix.com">www.fullsix.com</a>
5	Web Marketing Freelance Consultant	13years	BTCI	Interactivecommunicationc onsultancy	/
6	Vice President Internet Marketing	3 years	Crmmetrix/Metri xLab	Online market research and consultancy	<a href="http://www.metrixlab.com">www.metrixlab.com</a>
7	Internet Marketing Consultant	2 years	crmnetrix	Online market research and consultancy	<a href="http://www.metrixlab.com">www.metrixlab.com</a>

8	MegaPanel Research and analysis Manager	10 years	Nielsen//NetRatings	Online market research	<a href="http://www.nielsen-netratings.com">www.nielsen-netratings.com</a>
9	Consultant	5 years	Fullsix	Online market research and consultancy	<a href="http://www.fullsix.com">www.fullsix.com</a>

The interview guide is structured into three parts. The first part allows the 19 experts to become familiar with and evaluate the definitions of relational and non-relational websites. These two definitions were elaborated for this study and submitted to the evaluation of the nineteen experts: 1) “A relational website aims to create and develop relationships with customers that seek more proximity with the company and/or brand(s). These sites use relational programs (i.e., personalized coaching programs, newsletters) and offer visitors information and interactive services with added value and sometimes personalization. They offer the opportunity for visitors to entertain a more advanced relationship with the company/brand(s)” and 2) “A non-relational website primarily aims to ensure a web presence for the company, maintain brand awareness and offer different information for clients/prospects. A non-relational site is a type of brochure on the web without the direct objective of customer relationship development”. The nineteen experts were asked to read, mark and improve these two definitions.

**Table 2**  
List of the website managers interviewed for this study

	Profession	Web experience	Company	Sector of activity	Web address
1	Research Manager: editorial direction, business unit Online Directory	11 years	Pages Jaunes	Online directory-Services	<a href="http://www.pagesjaunes.fr">www.pagesjaunes.fr</a>
2	Research Manager: Internet and Intranet Media Department	8 years	France Télécom	Telecommunications-Services	<a href="http://www.francetelecom.com">www.francetelecom.com</a>
3	External Communication Manager: Internet and Multimedia Department	8 years	Groupe AMA	Insurance- Services	<a href="http://www.groupama.com">www.groupama.com</a>
4	Head of New Channels - Marketing	6 years	Crédit Foncier	Real estate financing-Services	<a href="http://www.creditfoncier.fr">www.creditfoncier.fr</a>
5	Website Manager	6 years	Intermarché	Distribution-Services	<a href="http://www.intermarche.fr">www.intermarche.fr</a>
6	Marketing Manager	3 years	Ten Mobile	Telecommunications-Services	<a href="http://www.ten-mobile.com">www.ten-mobile.com</a>
7	Website and Relationship Marketing Manager	7 years	Essilor	Glass Industry - Products	<a href="http://www.essilor.fr">www.essilor.fr</a>
8	Corporate Communications - Electronic Media	9 years	Total	Oil industry – Products and services	<a href="http://www.total.com">www.total.com</a> <a href="http://www.planete-energies.com">www.planete-energies.com</a>
9	Website Manager	2 years	Procter & Gamble	Mass-market goods	<a href="http://www.enviedep.us.com">www.enviedep.us.com</a>
10	Internet Communication Manager -Multichannel Communication	9 years	Yves Rocher	Hygiene and beauty	<a href="http://www.les-vegetaliseurs.com">www.les-vegetaliseurs.com</a>

The second part of the guide asks the nineteen experts to classify sixteen preselected websites into one of the two studied website categories (relational/non-relational). Among these sixteen websites, eight were selected to represent the relational website category and the other eight were selected to represent the non-relational website category. We tried to represent different categories of websites in the selected set, particularly corporate, brand, e-commerce and informational websites (Table 3).

**Table 3**  
The selected websites for the experts’ study

Category of websites	Non-relational websites	Relational websites
Corporate websites	www.total.fr www.accor.com	www.suez.com www.psa-peugeot-citroen.com
E-commerce websites	www.michelin-boutique.com www.marmara.com	www.fnac.com www.amazon.fr
Brand websites	www.peugeot.com www.boucheron.com	www.danoneetvous.com www.pourtoutvousdire.com
Informational websites	www.hair-science.fr www.skin-science.com	www.doctissimo.fr www.pharmacorama.com

A corporate website is defined as a website that offers financial and corporate business communication. It is intended for company stakeholders (investors, shareholders, customers, job seekers, providers) and for those who relay opinions (journalists, associations, etc.). The content of a corporate website is generally organized along five themes: financial communication, company policy and strategy, the management of public relationships, human resources and the social life of the company (Author, 2013).

A brand website offers information about the company's products and/or services and their optimal use (i.e., use of wipes, recipes with a food product). It also offers services and advice within the company's field of activity. It offers entertainment (games, contests) to amuse visitors and to collect personal data about customers and/or prospects. A brand website creates a real or imaginary framework around the brand's universe, its values and its products. It is also a sales-support tool because it offers a store locator feature for visitors wishing to acquire the product/service. A brand website can communicate about one brand (mono-branded website) or several brands (multi-branded websites) (Author, 2013).

E-commerce websites aim to promote the products/services of the company by proposing attractive offers and complete information about the product/service prices. They contain promotional offers, facilitate and complete online transactions, and offer pre-sale and post-sale support and customer service. E-commerce websites relieve pressure on the points of sale, reduce management costs and generate qualified leads (i.e., appointment system) (Author, 2013).

An informational website has a pedagogical target. It primarily aims to educate visitors by offering them specific information, i.e., medical, pharmaceutical, sports information. An informational website tries either to inform visitors or to communicate the company's expertise to develop its image. An informational website offers neutral information, as it does not direct visitors to the company's products/services. It can contain links to other specialized websites (Author, 2013).

Each expert was invited to draw at random a small slip with the name of one of the sixteen websites, presented in Table 3. The expert was asked to visit the website and then to classify it. The same procedure was repeated for all sixteen websites. Ultimately, the nineteen experts each visited and classified the sixteen selected sites. This approach offers the opportunity to collect verbal protocols (Ericsson & Simon, 1980). The experts were individually asked to describe their reactions, feelings, and thoughts regarding the sixteen website visits (Ericsson & Simon, 1985). They were also asked to precisely identify the criteria they used when considering whether these websites were relational or not. Beyond reporting their thinking when visiting the site, the experts had to explain the reasons behind their classification of the website. The experts' reports during the first two parts of the interview guide were recorded, transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis.

We conducted the thematic analysis according to the methodological procedures specified by Boyatzis (1998) and Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). Thematic coding corresponded to the basic analytic strategy of our data analysis protocol (Miles & Huberman,

1994). Auerbach and Silverstein (2003: 38) define thematic coding as a way to categorize a set of data into “an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas”.

We also cycled between data analysis and consultation with the marketing literature, using it as a guide for theme development (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We coded each interview separately on the basis of in vivo terms or phrases used by the experts based on the theme analysis techniques suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). This led to the emergence of a list of first-order themes. We then relied on constant comparisons across experts to detect concept patterns. As Nag and Gioia (2012: 427) describe, we tried to identify linkages among these first-order categories “that could lead to the development of second-order themes (theoretically distinctive, researcher-induced concepts, formulated at a more abstract level, albeit with an attempt to apply informant labels if those labels represented theoretical concepts).” Next, we “assembled the second-order themes into aggregate dimensions”. The analysis led to the emergence of two aggregate dimensions, three second-order themes and nine sub-dimensions (i.e., first-order categories). They are presented and discussed in the next section.

To ensure reliability of the results relating to the thematic analysis, the first author started to independently code the data through immersion in the interviews (Boyatzis, 1998) and an iterative review of the literature. A coding template resulted from this first step. In the second step, the second author was instructed to independently code the data by referring to the coding template (Weber, 1990). Although individual totals varied a little, the codes allocated 85% of the interviews to the coding template. The results from the two coders were tested for inter-rater reliability. The percentage of coder agreements to the total number of coding decisions (see Kassirjian, 1977) represent the selected measure of inter-rater reliability.

On a first round, the total number of coding decisions was 52. Based on that number, the percentage of coder of agreements to the total number of coding decisions was 62%. Kassirjian (1977) held that reliability rates above 80% were acceptable. This threshold corresponds to that of Neuendorf (2002), who proposed 80% agreement as the cutoff point. Whereas inter-coder reliability over 90 percent signals high reliability (Kassirjian, 1977), 62% is not sufficient. Thus, in a second round, 10% of the total interview transcriptions were subject to checking and recoding. In total, 8 pages of transcribed interviews were independently recoded by the two authors. Before the recoding, the research team discussed the coding template and all items to be coded, thus achieving consensus. The final overall raw percent inter-coder reliability was 80.8%.

The last part of our methodological procedure consisted of presenting a list of website content features to the experts. This list was elaborated based on the work of Ghose and Dou (1998), Anton and Postmus (1999), Feinberg and Kadam (2002), Feinberg et al. (2002), Jenamani et al. (2002) and Dou and Krishnamurthy (2007). An observation phase offers clarification, completion and an update of the set of content features presented in the literature. The final list was composed of 97 content features. The 19 experts were asked to categorize each feature as eCRM or not eCRM. A feature is defined as relational when it creates and/or develops a long-lasting relationship with the visitor (client and/or prospect). We ultimately considered a feature to be relational if more than 10 experts categorized it as eCRM. The same logic was applied for non-relational features.

#### **4. Results**

The results are presented in two steps. First, we present the two approaches used by the experts to classify a website into the relational/non-relational categories. Second, we present the

expert’s opinions and evaluation of the proposed definition of relational and non-relational websites.

*4.1. Two approaches to determine the relationship proneness of a website (RPW)*

The verbal protocol analysis reveals two approaches to determining whether a website is relational or not. The first is a thematic approach, in which the experts rely on the different aspects/dimensions of the site to make their decision. The second is enumerative, and the experts count the number of eCRM features present on the site. These two approaches are developed further in the next paragraphs.

*4.1.1. The thematic approach: relying on the dimensions of a website:*

Three main dimensions emerged during the analysis: the content of the website, the exchange established and offered by the site, and the look and feel of the site. One advantage of thematic analysis is that it enables the transcription of results, thanks to the specification of thematic occurrences and the frequency of themes developed by the interviewed experts (see Bonnemaizon et al., 2007). These dimensions are presented with their citation frequency in the following table (Table 4). We then discuss these dimensions and their sub-dimensions in the subsequent paragraphs.

**Table 4**

Dimensions and sub-dimensions of the relationship proneness of a website (RPW)

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Citation freq.</b>	<b>Constitutive sub-dimensions</b>	<b>Citation freq.</b>
Content	133	Website added-value	48
		Website customization	34
		Visitor involvement	32
		Website updates	19
Exchange	108	Bilateral communication	49
		Website interactivity	44
		A tripartite relationship	15
Look & Feel	17	Website design	9
		The website’s “editorial line”	8

***The “content” dimension***

The content of the website reveals its relationship proneness. As one expert outlines, “*this is a relational multi-branded website; we can see it through its content*” (Consultant, 9 years of Internet experience). The content was evoked through four sub-dimensions: the perceived value of the website, the website’s personalization, the visitor’s involvement and website updates.

Website added-value:

Thematic analysis shows that the RPW depends on the perceived interest and value of the content offered by the site. This added value can serve a quadruple function: it can be 1) service-oriented, 2) informative, 3) utilitarian, and 4) experiential.

Initially, the RPW is determined through the informative value added of the website. Beyond information, the RPW is defined by the service orientation of the website. As one expert observes, *“I will define this website as relational on the grounds of the services and special offers it proposes”* (Website manager, 7 years of Internet experience). One step further is the perceived utilitarian orientation of the visited website. One interviewee noted that *“There is nevertheless interesting things: I win my holidays, I share my impressions.... In others words, it’s relational”* (Website manager, 8 years of Internet experience). The value added of the content of a relational website lies in the experiences and feelings it offers or encourages in the Internet user. The experiential value of the content is outlined by the experts: *“A young lady or a young man who is a fan of fashion, etc., when she/he visits LVMH websites for instance, l’Oréal website, etc., must experience pleasure because this product info here, it’s sensations before everything else, and the Internet give visual sensations, auditory sensations, it’s important* (Website manager, 8 years of Internet experience). The added value of a website can also include the relational characteristic ‘quality of the support’ studied by Toufaily et al. (2010) and the relational component ‘customer service’ studied by Patsioura et al. (2011).

#### Website customization:

Customized websites adapt their content to fit the targets’ needs. The personalization can be offered for a single visit: the site adapts its content to suit the visitor’s profile (i.e., shareholder, journalist) during one visit. This type of personalization does not lead to the relational status of the website, as it witnessed by one expert: *“Why am I saying it is a website that has the ambition to be relational but it is not relational, because their widget depends on who you are: consumers, journalists, etc. Roughly, this is news that is presented in the other way if you are consumers, shareholders, etc.* (Website manager, 9 years of Internet experience). More advanced personalization requires a website subscription to offer more advanced services throughout the relationship. As one expert reported, *“There is personalized advice, it’s a real relational e-commerce website, there is a membership space, there is my account and then there is personalization”* (Website manager, 8 years of Internet experience). Website customization is a relational characteristic also identified by N’Goala and Cases (2012).

#### The visitor’s involvement:

Moreover, thematic analysis reveals two types of visitor involvement that are necessary for a website to reach relational status. The first type offers visitors the opportunity to participate in the elaboration of the website’s content. This type of involvement can take the form of responses to opinion polls, online questionnaires, and sharing testimonials/posting experiences with the company’s products. Nevertheless, this first type of involvement is not sufficient to define the website as being relational. As one interviewee states, *“No, it is not relational I think: ‘give your opinion on the website’ on the website but not on the product!”* (Website manager, 6 years of Internet experience). A relational website must involve the visitor in the brand’s daily life by testing new products/services or proposing new concepts for products/services, etc.

#### Website updates:

Offering news and updates represent the ABC of a relational website: *“There is a space that is updated every day, every week, etc. We are really on a regular flow that is well perceived and that allows you to say: ok I’ll come back every day”* (Consultant, 5 years of Internet experience). The thematic analysis highlights that updating the website content is a fundamental criterion. When this aspect is missing, it leads to the non-relational status of the website. As one expert asserts, *“I’ll say relational e-commerce website, if the content never changes, by deduction it will be non-relational”* (Website manager, 7 years of Internet experience).

### ***The “exchange” dimension***

Exchanges established and offered by websites are a fundamental condition for managing online relationships: *“We cannot have a relationship if it is not really an exchange”* (Website manager, 9 years of Internet experience). The thematic analysis reveals the existence of three sub-dimensions that define the exchange offered by websites: bilateral communication, website interactivity and the tripartite relationship.

#### **Bilateral communication:**

A relational website must listen to and show interest in visitors’ opinions and feelings. One interviewee told us: *“I’m trying to find a place in which they will speak to me. Instead of giving me information, they will say to me: hey! Come, come and start a relationship with us, give us your opinion, speak with us, let’s exchange, your opinion is interesting for us”* (Website manager, 9 years of Internet experience). A relational website does not merely offer content; it allows the collection of information, especially through bulletin boards, a corner to share testimonials, satisfaction questionnaires, etc. As one expert notes, *“It’s relational because there is an exchange created between the content of the website and visitors’ impressions”* (Consultant, 5 years of experience). The bilateral communication matches the relational characteristic “communication quality” studied by Toufaily et al. (2010). It can also include the relational components “communication” and “feedback” studied by Patsioura et al. (2011).

#### **Website interactivity:**

Website interactivity is a sub-dimension often evoked by the experts: *“This site is relational since from the time when we ask people about things they are looking for, we tell them: we have a solution for you, who are you? Are you a young mum? Do you need to lose weight? We ask them questions, there is already interactivity that takes place at the beginning”* (Website manager, 6 years of Internet experience). The website’s interactivity is not sufficient for the website to achieve relational status because the site aims to interact with the visitor during one visit (i.e., selection of a question among the FAQs, download of files). To be genuinely relational, an interactive website must offer bilateral communication (previous sub-dimension), as the following expert explains: *“A “brochure” site, it is mainly static information, in other terms the visitor cannot carry on a conversation with the company... so we can possibly find some interactivity on the site, there can be an internal search engine or systems that enable automatic research, with possibly some intelligence, but that’s all”* (Consultant, 13 years of Internet experience). The interactivity of the website is a relational lever also identified by N’Goala and Cases (2012).

#### **The tripartite relationship:**

The tripartite relationship is in line with current marketing trends and constitutes one of the main Web 2.0 pillars. The tripartite relationship suggests a relationship between the visitor, the brand and the other visitors. As one expert observes, *“We are not in a bilateral dialog; the site offers a place for a common dialog”* (Consultant, 10 years of Internet experience). According to the experts, the tripartite relationship can be used to pursue many objectives. For example, it can aim at strengthening the visitor’s feeling of membership: *“There is an internal mailing list, so every time when somebody sends something, he/she sends it to the whole list created once. [...], there is a display campaign to say thank you when the guy wins, it’s about creating a feeling of belonging”* (Consultant, 5 years of Internet experience). The tripartite relationship can match the relational characteristic “online communities” outlined by Toufaily et al. (2010) and N’Goala and Cases (2012). It reveals how the rise of Internet platforms has facilitated interactions with and among virtual environment users and consumers, for example through online shopping communities (Kozlenkova, Fang, Xiao, & Palmatier, 2015).

### ***The “Look & Feel” dimension***

According to some experts, the “look & feel” dimension reflects the relationship proneness of a website. The verbal protocol analysis reveals two sub-dimensions: the website design and the website’s “editorial line”. These two sub-dimensions can promote the relational characteristic “social presence”, studied by Toufaily et al. 2010.

#### The website design:

The website design is the first aspect that the visitor sees, and it enables her/him to appreciate the relational proneness of the website. It is not the beauty of the design that reflects this proneness; some websites are beautiful but rigid and imposing: *“Non-relational, these are upmarket websites for luxury goods, I find it empty, it is irritating while browsing, besides it is aesthetically pleasing but impractical”* (Website manager, 6 years of Internet experience). This relational proneness can be shown through the graphic charter and the website’s general organization. As one expert reported, *“I judge the relational aspect, in fact... I judge a website immediately by its design, based on what comes immediately to my eyes when the page is downloaded, and I think that a lot of people do that on the Internet; in other words, they have a second to judge if not, they leave”* (Website manager, 9 years of Internet experience). We should note at this stage that the website design corresponds to a relational characteristic of websites highlighted by the work of N’Goala and Cases (2012).

#### The website’s “editorial line”:

The tone of the text, the structure of the sentences and the way of speaking to the visitor reveal the presence or the absence of the website’s relational proneness: *“The tone is the spirit, the way they speak. Just now on Total website on the shareholders’ section, we had ‘this place is yours, you can have email alerts. Here we have a section for shareholders, but we have only the shareholders’ community, receive our financial publications... Total website, I put it in the relational category. This site I cannot see it there: it has a much more institutional tone, it has a community but the tone...”* (Website manager, 11 years of Internet experience). The tone of the text can be assessed through the titles of the website’s sections (e.g., “your exchanges”, “share your ideas with us”), through the URL of the site (i.e., danoneetvous.com) and also through the content.

### ***The perceived desire to make the visitor loyal to the website***

Another dimension highlighted by the interviewers appears as a result of the “content”, “exchange” and “look & feel” thematic categories. It is the perceived desire to develop visitor loyalty to the website. This theme was cited thirty times.

To achieve relational status, a website must clearly show its orientation and a desire to develop visitor loyalty to the site. This theme reflects a general impression and feeling about the aim of the website: the visitor feels that the website is doing its best to encourage him to come back. This impression can be driven by the three themes previously described: the “look & feel” of the website, its content and the exchange that it establishes. *“(This website) is clearly relational through its aspect (look & feel), I didn’t see it in details, but we have here the whole stuff: we have forums, ‘chats’, we are really trying to have a link with the customers, we develop interactivity (exchange), the screen savers here (content), we are merely looking for loyalty, a desire to return, a desire for affection toward the brand (the perceived desire to make the visitor loyal), so it is really a relational website”* (Website manager, 6 years of Internet

experience). “The perceived desire to make the visitor loyal to the website” appears to be important, as there are websites that offer some aspects of relationship development (forums, newsletters, etc.), but these is not their main purpose: “This website is a little bit relational, there is “post your comment” here at the top of the page, there are private messages, forums, so it is a little bit relational, a little bit, not a lot. I’ll put it more in the non-relational website category than in the relational website category; the purpose is absolutely not the relationship” (Consultant, 13 years of Internet experience).

Some experts evoke “The perceived desire to make the visitor loyal to the website” before determining the RPW; others determine the RPW directly based on the content, exchange and look & feel dimensions. This result suggests that “the perceived desire to make the visitor loyal to the website” be considered a partial mediator between the RPW and the content, exchange and “look & feel” dimensions (see Appendix A).

#### 4.1.2. The enumerative approach: Approach based on the eCRM features of a website

The verbal protocol analysis reveals a second approach to determine whether a website is relational or not and the RPW. It consists of cumulating eCRM features to identify the relational status of the website. The more eCRM features a website holds, the more it is classified in the relational category by the experts: “I will not put it in the relational category, there are coupons, there is not so much of relational there, ah yes, there is here a little bit of relational: practical and interactive, the star of the month... the present of the month, so I will put it in the relational category... take away your “Signal” towel, become the star of the month, submit your tip...” (Consultant, 13 years of Internet experience). As another expert states, “It is relational because of these small services here “tip of the day” “agendas” “download your agenda” “horoscope” “recipe of the day” this is relational” (Website manager, 7 years of Internet experience). Moreover, the results show that the presence of a small number of relational elements is not sufficient to put the site in the relational category. As one expert reported, “I will put it with the non-relational sites. On the site, there is only the newsletter, which is the promise to receive news on products, so there is not at all online services” (Website manager, 9 years on Internet experience). This logic promotes the development of a scale in which the more relational elements a website holds, the more relational it is. Another logic uses a reverse reasoning: it is not the accumulation of eCRM elements that define the RPW but the absence of these elements that leads to the non-relational status of the site: “It is the absence of these elements that is going to lead to a non-relational website” (Website manager, 3 years of Internet experience).

The third part of the interview guide asks the experts to distinguish between the relational and the non-relational features of websites. Table 5 presents the frequency of classification of the content’s features in the eCRM category by the nineteen experts. We count fifty-five relational features that can be offered on a website and propose that the more eCRM features a website holds, the more relational it is.

**Table 5**  
The eCRM features of websites

Relational features (eCRM features)	freq*	%
1. Electronic bulletin board (forums)	19	100
2. Information about the website’s members (election of the best contribution/idea, presentation of recent website members, etc.)	19	100
3. Subscription to participate in tests of new products or concepts	19	100
4. Site customization	19	100
5. Ability to complain (complaints and problems)	19	100
6. Problem solving (online chat with company employees)	19	100

7. Evaluation of website performance (online questionnaire, opinion section)	19	100
8. Voice over IP (i.e., Skype)	19	100
9. Links to the company blog	19	100
10. Links to the company product services blog	19	100
11. Call back button	18	94.7
12. Account information (personal information given by the visitor, postal address, etc.)	18	94.7
13. Chat with website members	18	94.7
14. Community and area for regular visitors	18	94.7
15. Ease of checkout (simple ordering process to better prevent abandonment)	18	94.7
16. Subscription to a mailing list (newsletter)	18	94.7
17. Sponsoring other customers online	18	94.7
18. Personalized coaching programs (personalized follow-up by an advisor or an expert)	18	94.7
19. Personalized electronic card (e-card) (i.e., adding personal pictures)	18	94.7
20. Intelligent agent for questions (responds to questions)	17	89.5
21. Website members list (search for similar profiles and potentially send them messages, etc.)	17	89.5
22. Podcasts	17	89.5
23. RSS feeds	17	89.5
24. Ideas and suggestions to launch new products/services	17	89.5
25. Company's e-mail address	16	84.2
26. Company's postal address	16	84.2
27. Articles, white papers for website members	16	84.2
28. 1-800 (toll-free phone number)	16	84.2
29. Product customization	16	84.2
30. Cross-sell/ up-sell/ add-on sale	15	78.9
31. Gift certificate purchase	15	78.9
32. Witnesses and original ideas corner	15	78.9
33. Customer service page (details on contacting customer service)	15	78.9
34. Games to win a gift or coupon when buying the brand's product	15	78.9
35. Ability to track order status	15	78.9
36. Free sample registration	15	78.9
37. Request for catalog	14	73.7
38. Member benefits (description of benefits for belonging to the website)	14	73.7
39. Carriers area (offer, career profiles, witnesses)	14	73.7
40. Student area (training offers, witnesses)	14	73.7
41. Idea and suggestions for the optimal usage of the product/service (recipes, advice, easy ways)	14	73.7
42. Games with a branded gift	14	73.7
43. Games with a non-branded gift	14	73.7
44. Online purchasing	13	68.4
45. Download of coupons	13	68.4
46. Description of the advantages for loyalty card holders	13	68.4
47. Games with immediate gift or price	13	68.4
48. Quick order ability (Order within three-clicks)	12	63.2
49. Intelligent agent for visits (intelligent programs simulating human being and helping the visitor in his visit)	12	63.2
50. Spare parts ordering	12	63.2
51. Place an order	12	63.2
52. Site tour	11	57.9
53. Introduction for first-time users (introduction page)	10	52.6
54. Contributions to humanitarian activities	10	52.6
55. Privacy policy	10	52.6

\* Frequency of classification in the relational category by the 19 experts

The results also show how to identify the non-relational features of websites. A feature is considered to be non-relational when it is unable to create and/or develop long lasting relationships with visitors (customers and/or prospects). The results are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6**  
The non-relational features of websites

<b>Non-relational features</b>	<b>Freq*</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Product information online (price, characteristics, functionality)	18	94.7
2. Site map	18	94.7
3. Advertising banners about company products/services	17	89.5
4. Purchase conditions	17	89.5
5. Glossary (tool bar with alphabetic letters to simplify the process of searching information)	17	89.5
6. Links to country sites (links to company websites abroad)	17	89.5
7. Legal notices	17	89.5
8. Company history/profile (company background)	17	89.5
9. Quiz game	17	89.5
10. Press releases	16	84.2
11. Information and general services (weather forecast, traffic info, maps, etc.)	16	84.2
12. Company partner list	16	84.2
13. Product highlights (the benefits of a particular product/service are highlighted)	16	84.2
14. TV advertisements	16	84.2
15. Last minute information	15	78.9
16. Practical information	15	78.9
17. New product information	15	78.9
18. Links to brand sites or product page	15	78.9
19. Local search engine	15	78.9
20. Information about the company's financial performances (financial results, activity report, etc.)	15	78.9
21. Use of video	15	78.9
22. Standardized electronic card (e-card)	15	78.9
23. Free articles and white paper for website visitors	14	73.7
24. Daily special focus area	14	73.7
25. Product information online (price, characteristics, functionality)	15	73.7
26. Links to commercial web sites of the company	14	73.7
27. Preview product before buying	14	73.7
28. Fax	13	68.4
29. Sponsorships (sports events, etc.)	13	68.4
30. Check out for products selected for purchase	12	63.2
31. Latest brand events	12	63.2
32. Customer benefits (description of benefits of being a customer of the brand)	12	63.2
33. External links: link to complementary products from other companies	12	63.2
34. Psychological tests (personality, social life, etc.)	12	63.2
35. Recommendations from the brand in its field of expertise (advice, tips, etc.)	11	57.9
36. Description of advantages for shareholders	11	57.9
37. Promotion area	11	57.9
38. FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)	11	57.9
39. Store locator	10	52.6
40. Affinity program (affiliation with philanthropic agencies or organizations)	10	52.6
41. Quick poll (opinion poll)	10	52.6
42. Goodies	10	52.6

\* Frequency of classification in the non-relational category by the 19 experts

#### 4.2. Toward a definition of a relational website

The abundant use of the term “relational” in the marketing field calls for more precision in defining this concept in the context of websites. As one expert says, *“Today we speak about CRM and relational marketing; in some cases, it reaches its limits because currently we put everything in the CRM, so everybody can say that he is doing CRM while it is peanuts, but there is many people who say that”* (Consultant, 9 years of Internet experience).

The nineteen experts evaluated the proposed definitions of relational and non-relational websites. Their evaluations were aggregated through a mean grade. The definition of a relational website obtains a very good grade (9/10). According to some experts, this type of website not only aims to establish relationships with customers but also aims to develop a relationship with every person interested in the company. One expert noted that *“On a corporate website, we have different publics that can be visitors and who are not customers and who will never be customers. So we have the journalists, the politicians, the administration, the students... we can have a relationship with them even so”* (Consultant, 13 years of Internet experience). Moreover, some suggest adding the notion of service delivered by the website: *“The self-care is missing in the definition, the management of my personal account that can be a separate service or when the site holds a relational module, it is an element that allows the management and the administration of my account”* (Consultant, 10 years of Internet experience). The definition of a non-relational website obtains a mean grade of 7.5 out of 10. The experts felt that in addition to promoting brand awareness, such sites can also aim to develop the company’s image and reputation (especially through corporate websites): *“In my opinion, this is a corporate website, but it is not at all relational. It presents the assortment and then the image. It’s a site of “image” for me; there is no place where we can create a relationship”* (Website manager, 11 years of Internet experience). The improved definitions resulting from the experts’ study are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7**  
Improved definitions of relational and non-relational websites

<b>Definitions</b>	
<b>Relational website</b>	A relational website aims at the creation and development of relationships with members of the <u>public</u> that seek for more proximity with the company and/or brand(s). They offer <u>personalized services (e.g., account management, bill payment)</u> and relational programs (i.e., personalized coaching programs, newsletters). They also offer <u>interactive services (e.g., “chat” with salespeople, games, intelligent agent for visits)</u> . Finally, a relational website <u>takes into account the visitors’ contributions through systems for sharing information (e.g., bulletin boards, widgets).</u>
<b>Non-relational website</b>	A non-relational website aims mainly at insuring a web presence for the company, maintaining brand awareness, <u>developing the corporate image</u> and offering different types of information for the <u>website’s public</u> . A non-relational website is a type of brochure on the web without the direct objective of relationship development <u>with different members of the public (customers, prospects, investors, partners, etc.).</u>

\* The underlined parts are those added or modified from the initial definitions.

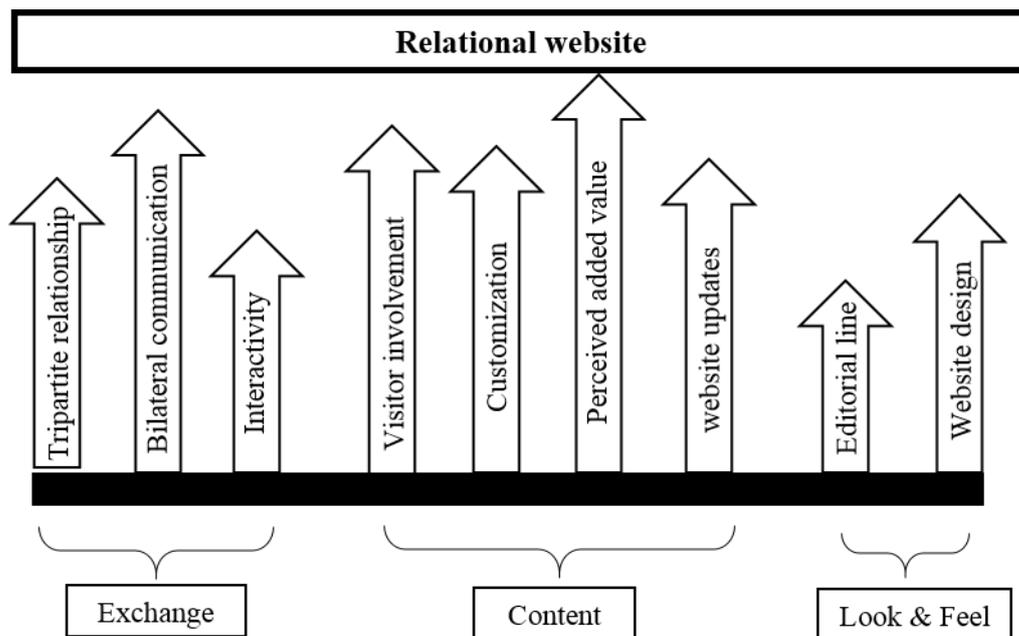
Finally, the verbal protocol analysis reveals that relational practices vary widely depending on the type of website. As one expert witnessed, *“I tend to say that if on a corporate website, I come to find a newsletter, it’s already great”* (Consultant, 9 years of Internet experience). Thus the contextualization of the RPW depending of the category of the website must be noted.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

### 5.2. Theoretical implications

Eastlick et al. (2006) note that most of what is known about online business-to-consumer (B-to-C) relationships has been observed by practitioners and/or examined through descriptive research. They observe limited empirical, theoretical knowledge about the factors that contribute to building and maintaining these relationships. From a theoretical perspective, this research tries to define and conceptualize the RPW and can serve as a first step for the development of a scale that evaluates how closely a website approaches the relational state. The three dimensions and nine sub-dimensions revealed by the study can comprise a multi-faceted continuum of the RPW (Figure 2). Moreover, the results revealed seven sub-dimensions that correspond with the relational characteristics/components studied by Toufaily et al. (2010), Patsioura et al. (2011) and N'Goala and Cases (2012). The conceptual model presented in appendix A includes the three new themes necessary to define and complete the relational status of a website.

Furthermore, eCRM tools are usually discussed in a retail context (Anton & Postmus, 1999; Feinberg & Kadam, 2002; Feinberg et al., 2002). This research offers a broader view of eCRM tools, as it investigates other types of websites (corporate websites, brand websites, etc.).



**Fig. 2.** The multi-faceted relational continuum of websites.

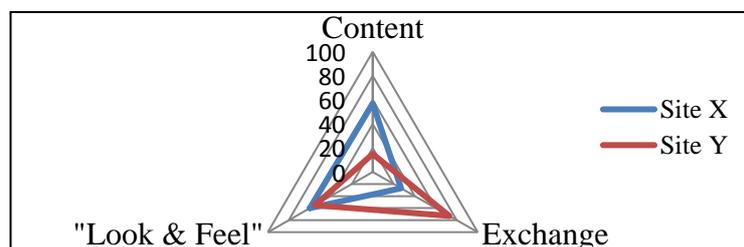
Based on the frequency of classification, ten features are identified as being highly relational. Among these 10 eCRM features, five were already identified by Anton and Postmus, (1999), Feinberg and Kadam (2002) and Feinberg et al. (2002): Electronic bulletin boards, Site customization, Ability to register complaints, Problem solving, and Voice over IP. The other five eCRM features are revealed by this study: Information about website members, Subscription to participate in tests of new products or concepts, Evaluation of the website's performance, Links to the company's blog, and links to the company's product services blog). Moreover, fifteen features – considered to be relational by Anton and Postmus, 1999; Feinberg

and Kadam, 2002 and Feinberg et al., 2002 – are not identified as being relational in this study: Purchase conditions, Site map, Links to complementary products from other companies, Affinity programs, Product information online, Store locator, FAQs, Product highlights, Legal notices, Local search engine, Preview product before buying, Fax, Customer benefits, Promotion area and Company history/profile.

The results show also that some interactive elements (i.e., quiz games, previewing the product before buying) are non-relational features, while some eCRM features are not interactive (i.e., information about the website’s members, postal address). These results show that interactivity is not a synonym for relationship creation and vice versa.

### 5.3. Managerial implications

Few companies evaluate the ability of their websites to create and maintain relationships with their visitors. From a managerial perspective, the results of this research can help website managers and consultants understand the positioning of a site in terms of the three dimensions: content, exchange and look & feel. However, the study notes that relational practices vary widely depending on the type of website. Thus, it is important to identify the category of the website (brand website, e-commerce website, etc.) before benchmarking its RPW (figure 1). This approach can help practitioners to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their sites and to consider the priorities for improvement (i.e., further involve the visitor in site animation; improve the “editorial line” of the site to offer more proximity to the audience). Figure 3 below illustrates the possible positioning of a site in terms of the three dimensions: content, exchange and look & feel.



**Fig. 3.** Dimensions of the RPW

In addition, web agencies can use the list of relational and non-relational features as a catalogue for their clients. Companies can choose which features to offer their visitors, depending on how relationship prone they want their website to be. The results can also offer a framework for website designers who are helping companies to build relationship programs with customers.

In the end, we count fifty-five eCRM features that can appear on a website. The results suggest taking a cumulative approach to determine the relational state of a website: the more eCRM features a site holds, the more relationship prone it is. A score can be calculated for each site from 0 to 55. Thus, the eCRM list can help website managers and consultants to understand and evaluate the relationship proneness of websites and to benchmark between sites, sectors, etc. As explained earlier, benchmarking should be realized between websites belonging to the same category (informational websites, e-commerce websites, for example) because some categories of website (e-commerce websites, for example) tend to hold more eCRM features than others (corporate websites, for example). The eCRM list can also help CRM managers to consider cross-channel on/off actions, for example, how to better manage classic relationship tools (SMS, call centers, etc.) using website relational tools.

#### *5.4. Limitations and further research*

In marketing, the word “relational” has gradually become a common and generic term: relational programs, relational strategies, relational tools, relational features, etc. The application and growth of marketing tools and practices to the Web is also affected by the expansion of the “relational” phenomenon. In this context, this research tries to define the RPW and to mitigate the ambiguity of the concept – as a trait or a type. We consider the RPW to be a trait and the relational website to be an archetype that can cover other categories of websites (e-commerce website, community website, etc.). This research also shows that the relational paradigm should be re-examined in an Internet context to take into account the online characteristics. Finally, this paper highlights the coexistence of two approaches to measuring the RPW. These two approaches are presented separately in the literature. We show that these two approaches can be complementary or used separately according to the user’s needs.

Nevertheless, this research holds some limits and suggests directions for future research. We interviewed Internet experts, as relational programs constitute the operationalization of companies’ strategic choices. However, it could be interesting to understand what the RPW represents to visitors. In the same way, it could be interesting to check whether visitors (customers and prospects) identify the same eCRM features as the Internet experts. We also recognize that the RPW can be assessed during and/or after a single visit, whereas the relationship quality established with the visitor can be evaluated only in the long run (i.e., speed of response to queries, quality of personalized coaching programs, ability of the site to involve visitors in a long-lasting relationship). Both concepts can be complementary in defining a successful relational program on a website.

Furthermore, relationship marketing suggests that customers differ in their relational orientation (Barnes, 1997; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Jackson, 1985; Macneil, 1981). Companies that wish to develop strong relationships with their customers should first identify those who are interested in these relationships (Harrison-Walker & Neeley, 2004; Keeling et al., 2013). Harrison-Walker and Neeley (2004) notice an implicit assumption, made in much of the marketing literature, that customers want relationships. These authors believe that such an assumption is dangerous. In the same way, website managers should consider the coexistence of two types of visitors to relational websites: those with a high and those with a low relational orientation.

In addition, the list of eCRM features presented in this research can evolve with Internet and marketing practices. A relational website should continuously incorporate new eCRM features. Nonetheless, the list presented in this article constitutes a reference base for assessing the RPW. A regular update, potentially annual, is necessary to adapt this list to the market and the evolution of relational practices. We suggest that a thematic approach is more robust to reflecting the evolution of marketing practices on the Internet.

Another path for research relates to studying the relationship between the RPW concept and the online customer experience concept (OCE) (Klaus, 2013; Nambisan & Watt, 2011). Klaus (2013, p.448) defines the online customer service experience as “the customer’s overall mental perception of their interaction with the online service provider and other customers expressed in its dimensions of functionality and psychological factors”. Based on this definition, one avenue of research could be to examine the similarities, the differences and the links between the RPW and the OCE concepts.

Finally, it could be interesting to broaden companies’ relational efforts to take into account other platforms such as social media and mobile applications. Social media constitute powerful tools for fostering relationships with customers (social CRM) (Hall-Phillips, Park, Chung, Nwamaka, & Rathod, 2016). On this subject, two questions could stimulate and extend current research in both relationship marketing and digital marketing: how do companies’

relational websites interact with social CRM activities? And how do brands manage their relational programs within the framework of their digital strategies?

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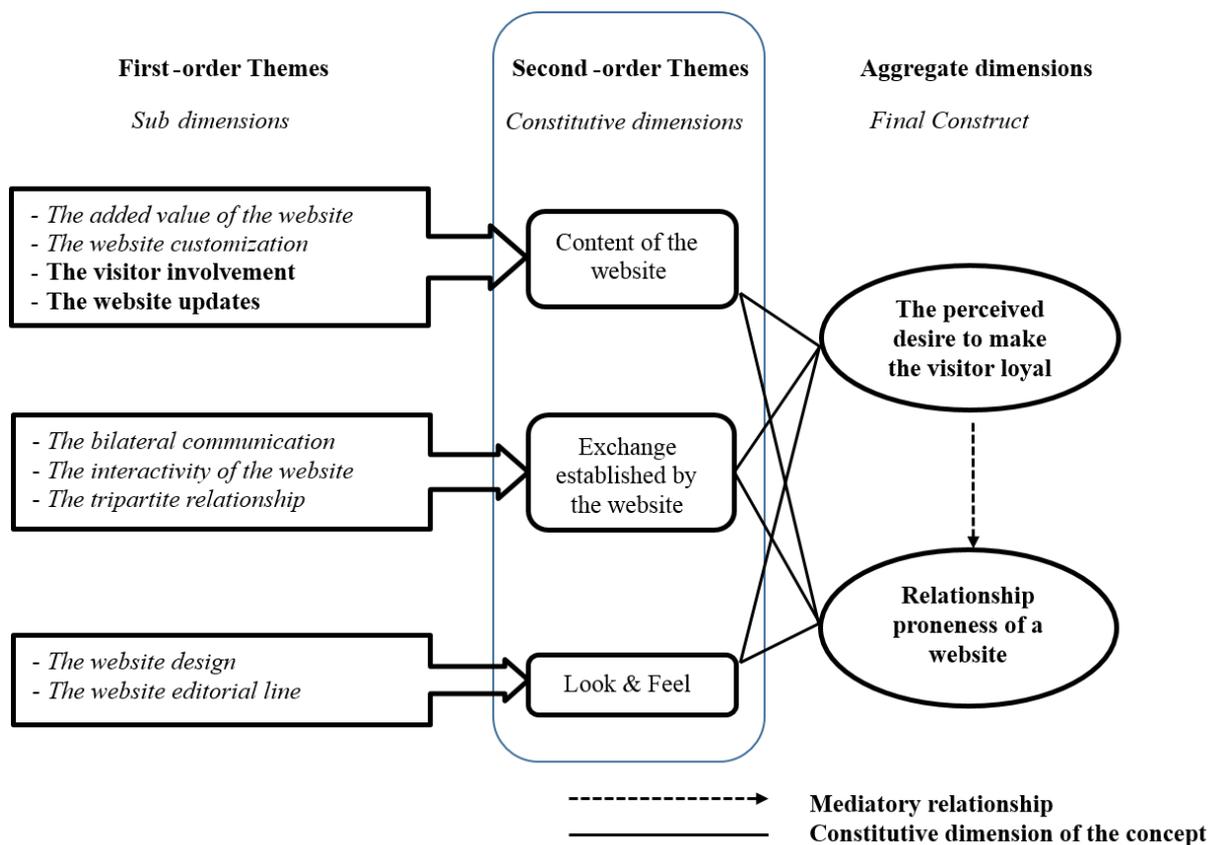
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## Appendix A: Data structure



**Legend:** The sub-dimensions presented in italic are those that can match with the relational characteristics/components studied by Toufaily et al. (2010); Patsioura et al. (2011), and N'Goala and Cases (2012). The sub-dimensions presented in bold are the complementary ones, which are necessary to achieve the relational status of a website.