

Business relationship violation, i.e., violation of rules, norms, and expectations regulating the relationship to seek unilateral goals at the expense of another party, may consist of violating the contract or abusing trust and goodwill, it may be active or passive, open or hidden. No matter what form it takes, relationship violation has a strong influence on the business relationship results and efficiency. The fear of relationship violation by the partner increases the transaction costs. The violating of business relationship leads also to a considerable loss of physical, financial, emotional, and other investments in the relationship and decreases the quality and value of the whole relationship. Furthermore, it may lead to counterattack, to sanctions or to relationship termination and/or losing the market reputation.

SME's resource constraints and the fact that they are small, usually not powerful market players, make them vulnerable to relationship violation, which makes a threat to their survival. Preventing a partner from relationship violation or executing the contract requires intangible and financial resources, which SMEs may lack. Their position may be especially difficult when dealing with large, powerful firms or being exposed to market pressure. Therefore, the growth of SMEs cannot be discussed without considering potential relationship violation.

The relationship violation is more probable in international business, as due to the distance, it is difficult to gather information about the partner's credibility and intentions, monitor his actions and performance, and detect the relationship violation. Moreover, foreign business is often more profitable than domestic one, so the incentives to betray the partner may be higher. Finally, distance hampers communication between partners. It contributes to misunderstandings, conflict, and imputing bad intentions, what may be a trigger or excuse to relationship violation. As the successful relationships of exporting manufacturing SMEs with foreign business partners may be crucial for the further development of the domestic economy, we will concentrate on their relationships with their foreign suppliers and buyers.

Unfortunately, the issues of relationship breach were mainly researched within the domestic business-to-business marketing domain. Although the assumption of relationship violation is present in the discussion of the internationalisation process, it is mostly concentrating on how the managers should behave instead of how they actually behave. Only a few international business studies have examined the conditions under which relationship violation occurs and the consequences of explicit or implicit violation of international contracts. In particular qualitative studies are missing, exploring which specific actions are considered relationship violation in different countries, which behaviours are more or less acceptable in business relationships, and how managers explain relationship violation by themselves or by the others. Moreover, there are no studies considering the role of external events (such as market crisis or new market opportunities) on the tendency to violate the relationship. Finally, there is a lack of comparative research to identify the impact of the environment on the phenomena of relationship violations.

The project is aimed at providing a model of the antecedents, triggers, and reactions to the relationship violation in SMEs' international business activities from the perspective of **Polish and Austrian SMEs**. Moreover, we want to find out, whether companies originating from various countries differ in the approach towards relationship violation and what is the importance of the factors specific to international business (such as distance, high uncertainty, and less face-to-face communication) in the relationship violation process.

The empirical part of the research will start from individual in-depth interviews in 8 Polish and 8 Austrian SME exporters. The interviews will allow us to explore the managerial understanding of international business relationships violation, identify relationship violation behaviours, antecedents, and consequences, and conduct cross-country comparisons. Special emphasis will be put on identifying the influence of crisis on relationship violation. In the second part of the study, the quantitative approach will be applied. We will collect information regarding relationship violation among 300 Polish and 200 Austrian SME exporters with the use of standardized questionnaire interviews with computer assistance (the CATI method). The statistical analysis of the collected data will provide the final model of the relationship violation process.

This project will contribute to inter-organisational theory as well as business-to-business marketing and international business field. The study will also add to the knowledge of SME exporters. Besides, it will explain the role of phenomena observed in the last years but not studied yet in this context, such as crisis and more frequent application of indirect communication. The results will have significant value for practitioners, as knowing the relationship violation processes will help the companies to understand the consequences of relationship violation, better assess the probability of/protect themselves from relationship breach, and therefore make the SMEs' international business more resilient in a turbulent time.