

## **ABSTRACT**

A strong buyer-seller relationship is an essential ingredient of success in the business-to-business (B2B) market. Therefore, exploring the drivers of B2B relationship is important for both academicians and practitioners. Brand loyalty is considered one of the key drivers of such B2B long-term relationships. On the other hand, the brand image also plays a crucial role in B2B relationships. Although both brand loyalty and brand image have received great importance in B2C marketing literature, the role of brand loyalty and brand image in B2B relationships needs a further deep dive to ensure greater clarity on the potential relationships between related constructs. This thesis aims to evaluate available literature on brand loyalty and brand image, and explore new dimensions. The thesis focuses on three distinct but related theoretical frameworks in the context of B2B loyalty and B2B brand image and finally brings out new theoretical and practical implications in the domain of B2B marketing.

Extant literature suggests that B2B brand image has two dimensions- goods or product-based brand image (GBBI) and service-based brand image (SBBI). Though extant literature has identified GBBI and SBBI as drivers of B2B loyalty, their relative importance and their inter-relationship with customer satisfaction remains unexplored. The first research objective tries to bridge this gap using a retrospective sampling-based methodology with data collected from B2B customers via an offline survey with a sample size of 125 purchase managers. The results suggest that GBBI and SBBI have positive relationships with B2B loyalty, with customer satisfaction as the mediator. Using the construal level theory, we argue that B2B purchase term, vendor-customer relationship strength, and the physical accessibility of the vendor are associated with the construal level of the purchase context. The results show that B2B customers give higher importance to GBBI in lower construal and higher importance to SBBI in higher construal. The study also highlights the moderated mediation effect of customer satisfaction in GBBI-loyalty and SBBI-loyalty relationships with construal level as moderator. This essay contributes to the literature on B2B branding and purchases decision-making by bringing in concepts of construal level theory.

The second research objective explores how rational and emotional constructs lead to B2B brand image, goods-based and services based. In this essay, we focus on reliance and trust as relational and emotional constructs. We find the antecedents of reliance and trust and their relative importance for GBBI and SBBI. We use survey data of 135 respondents from different B2B firms

and used PLS-SEM followed by multi-group analysis to validate our theoretical model. The second research objective contributes to the literature of reliance and its role in B2B brand image by providing newer insights about the antecedents and consequences of reliance and its relationship with trust. The results suggest that commitment, management capability, and innovation capability are positively related to reliance, while trust acts as a mediator between commitment-reliance relationships. Moreover, while reliance and trust lead to B2B brand image, reliance has higher relationship strength. Furthermore, reliance mediates the trust-brand image relationship too.

The third research objective explores the role of GBBI and SBBI in reducing time risk, performance risk, and financial risk in B2B markets using survey data of 122 respondents from different industries. The model is validated using PLS-SEM. The study highlights the importance of reliance and brand image for reducing the effects of perceived risk. The results highlight a negative relationship between SBBI and time risk, whereas no effects of GBBI and SBBI on performance risk and financial risk. The results also suggest that performance risk and time risk increase the effects of financial risks, thus contributing to the perceived risk and branding literature.