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Topic: The Impact of Brand related factors of The Buyer Organization on Supplier Satisfaction

Contents

Key Concepts

Supplier Satisfaction; Brand Image; Brand Equity; Brand Awareness; Growth Opportunity.

1. Introduction

Over the past years purchasing and supply management has met an ever-increasing interest[1]. The role of purchasing has become more important since 40%-80% of the turnover in a typical manufacturing firm is spent on purchasing. Strategic purchasing and strategic supply management are key aspects nowadays. Strategic purchasing can be defined as the process of planning, evaluating, implementing and controlling strategic and operating purchasing decisions[2]. In the existing literature, there are three concepts that are central to strategic purchasing[3]. First, it affects the scale and scope of an organization's activities over long term. Second, it is about being responsive to changes in external environment. Third, it is about aligning activities with strategic resources and capabilities. Strategic supply management can be defined as a long-term, planned effort to create a capable supplier base and leverage benefit of supply management[4]. Nowadays, the environment is changing fast and organizations need to respond early in order to keep a competitive advantage. The number of suppliers is decreasing [5], innovative suppliers are scarce [6] and the power of mega-suppliers is increasing[7]. Creating a capable supplier base is a must to keep a competitive advantage and leverage the benefit of supply management. In order to have a capable supplier base, capable suppliers should be found, and strong relationships should be build.

Supplier satisfaction is a necessary condition for gaining and maintaining access to capable suppliers and their resources in this new competitive environment[8]. Buying firms can also gain preferred customer status through supplier satisfaction, which is crucial as a buying firm[9].

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1 See van Weele (2010), p. 15.
2 See Carr and Pearson (1999), p. 499.
3 See Cousins et al. (2008), p. 16.
4 See Yeng (2008), p. 490.
5 See Schiele et al. (2012), p. 1179.
6 See Schiele (2010), p. 138.
7 See Chanaron (2013), p. 320.
8 See Hüttinger et al. (2012), p. 1194.
9 See Vos et al. (2016), p. 4613.

Customer attractiveness can motivate suppliers and increases collaborative relationships along the supply chain.

Supplier satisfaction is measured several times in the past with the help of several contingency factors. The research of Hüttinger et al (2014), identified that factors as reliability, growth opportunity, operative excellence and involvement can impact supplier satisfaction[10]. However, these studies researched how supplier satisfaction can be impacted, there is still a gap in the literature. These studies focused for the most part on tangible assets and less on intangible assets such as brand image, brand awareness and brand equity[11]. Tangible assets are assets that have a physical existence and can be seen. In contrast to tangible assets, intangible assets cannot be seen. Intangible assets are supposed to be very important since these assets are 'the foundation of a firms' motivation to expand into new geographic markets'[12]. Second, 'intangible assets are public goods that can be applied in new markets with proportionally smaller increments in costs'[13]. The intangible assets brand image, brand awareness and brand equity are supposed to be important intangible assets. Organizations can distinguish their self from competitors by having a respectable brand. A respectable reputation and status can lead to more revenue and higher profits.

Brand image, brand awareness and brand equity are assets that need a lot of time to build and can be destroyed in a short time. The past taught us, that reputation damage of an organization can lead to direct contract termination with stakeholders. The contract termination of Nike with Oscar Pistorius is an example of a consequence of reputation damage[14]. There is a moderately strong positive relationship between brand image and customer commitment and between brand image and customer loyalty[15]. Nowadays, 'reverse marketing' has become as important as the classical view of marketing. Reverse Marketing means that organizations need to compete for suppliers besides competing for customers. Therefore, the brand of buying companies should be as acceptable as the reputation of supplier companies. Doing business with organizations with a reasonable brand can satisfy suppliers. Taking the conclusion of Ogba and Tan (2009) and the shift to 'reverse marketing' into account, we can assume that the brand of an organization can have an impact on the perception of a company of various stakeholders. The

[10] See Hüttinger et al. (2014), p. 702.
[11] See De Boer et al. (2001), p. 76.
[12] See Dunning (1993), p. 1.
[13] See Delios and Beamish (2001), p. 1028.
[14] See https://news.nike.com/news/nike-statement-on-oscar-pistorius-february-20-2013
[15] See Ogba and Tan (2009), p. 138.

brand of an organization can thus have an impact on the growth opportunity of the supplier. Because of this relationship it can be expected to have a strong influence on supplier satisfaction.

High reliability, profitability, growth opportunity leads to high supplier satisfaction[16]. As said before, the impact of the intangible assets brand image, brand awareness and brand equity on supplier satisfaction has not been researched yet. The role of a reputation issue such as corporate reputation as an important factor that influences the purchasing decision process, has increased in business-to-business markets[17]. This applies to buying firms, but this research will focus on the reverse: do suppliers take into account relational issues? It is interesting to research if a supplier is satisfied about the brand of the buying firm, but not satisfied about all the other contingency factors. This research will learn us if there is a difference between the potential intangible assets brand image, brand awareness and brand equity.

As outlined in the first section describing the situation and the compliance, the goal of this research will be to access the impact of the brand related factors brand image, brand awareness and brand equity of the buying firm on supplier satisfaction. This research goal leads to the following research question:

What is the impact of brand related factors of buying firms on supplier satisfaction in the Netherlands?

1.2 Research Motivation and Research Objectives

This study is not only relevant for science, but also for buying organizations in practice. Working on the brand related factors could lead to higher supplier satisfaction which is important in the new competitive environment. The goal of this research is to stimulate buying companies to build a strong brand in order to lead to supplier satisfaction. Almost every company in a business to consumer environment finds that developing and maintaining a strong brand is an essential factor for their marketing strategy[18]. As said before, supplier satisfaction is crucial for buying organizations, since organizations become more dependent on each other

[16] See Vos et al. (2016), p. 4620.
[17] See Murray and White (2005), p. 350.
[18] See Aaker (2006) p, 1.

in order to have a competitive advantage[19]. Practisers as well as scholars have identified suppliers as a determinant of success in various industries[20]. Also, there is a shift to open innovation and more there are more collaborative supplier-buyer relationships, which makes supplier satisfaction important to research[21]. In order to achieve this, three research objectives are made. The first research objective is to assess whether and how brand image is impacting supplier satisfaction. In order to assess this research objective, we need to understand what supplier satisfaction is. How can we measure supplier satisfaction and what is the importance of supplier satisfaction? If this is clear, it is important to know what brand image is and what the importance is of an acceptable brand image for an organization. The second research objective is to assess whether and how brand equity is impacting supplier satisfaction. What is brand equity, what is the importance of brand equity and how can we measure brand equity? The third research objective is to assess whether and how brand awareness is impacting supplier satisfaction. Like for the previous two objectives, it is important to know what brand awareness is. What is the importance of brand awareness and how can we measure it? The fourth research objective is to assess whether the brand related factors brand equity, brand awareness and brand image have an impact on the growth opportunity of the supplier. What will be the impact of growth opportunity on supplier satisfaction? The last research objective is to assess whether the length of the relationship between the supplier and the buying firm have an impact on the supplier satisfaction. The expected contributions to the theory is that brand image, brand awareness and brand equity should not only be relevant for selling companies, but should also be relevant for buying companies. Since brand image has a positive impact on customer loyalty[22] and that we nowadays have to deal with reverse marketing[23], we assume that brand related factors have a positive impact on supplier satisfaction. Since buying companies need to fight for qualified suppliers, it is important to for buying organizations to build a proper brand.

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[19] See Terpend et al (2008), p. 43.
[20] See Dwyer et al. (1987), p. 11.
[21] See Chesbrough, 2006; Huizingh, 2011; West & Bogers, (2014), p. 20.
[22] See Ogba and Tan (2009), p. 138.
[23] See Biemans and Brand (1995), p. 28.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 History & State of the Art in Supplier Satisfaction Research: From interacting with suppliers to achieving preferred customer status

In order to answer the overarching research question and the sub-questions, the theoretical concepts must be clear. In the next paragraphs an outline will be presented concerning a sequential review of supplier satisfaction research. First of all, the definition of supplier satisfaction will be given, followed with the history and state of the art in supplier satisfaction research.

Supplier satisfaction is classified as a complex construct which can be defined differently. Supplier satisfaction is defined as a 'supplier's feeling of fairness with regard to buyer's incentives and supplier's contributions within an industrial buyer-seller relationship'[24]. Supplier satisfaction is also defined as 'the feeling of equity with the relationship no matter what power imbalance exists'[25].

For this research, this definition of supplier satisfaction will be used: 'supplier's feeling of fairness with regard to buyer's incentives and supplier's contributions within an industrial buyer-seller relationship'. This definition shows us that the supplier should be treated well in buyer-supplier relationship, which is the common thread of supplier satisfaction. The next paragraphs provide a sequential review of supplier satisfaction research till this moment.

Since the year 2000, scientific authors started doing research on supplier satisfaction. Wong (2000) examined how companies could work together with their suppliers in order to achieve supplier satisfaction and how this could influence customer satisfaction. He stated that 'when the needs of suppliers of a firm are satisfied, the suppliers want to help companies meet the needs of their customers'[26]. He developed a model where he integrated supplier satisfaction with customer satisfaction. According to Wong, there are three major enablers in order to create supplier satisfaction. The first enabler to supplier satisfaction is creating a co-operative culture. Wong stated that in order to commit to satisfying their supplier's needs and to establish some effective ways for interacting with suppliers in order to achieve supplier satisfaction, a co-operative culture should be created. When a company is having a co-operative culture with their suppliers, the company will facilitate all parties to work together in order to achieve their goals.

[24] See Essig and Amann (2009), p. 103.
[25] See Benton and Maloni (2005), p. 5.
[26] See Wong (2000), p. 427.

The second major enabler to supplier satisfaction is commitment to supplier satisfaction. In order to get the full support of suppliers, companies need to commit to satisfying their suppliers' need. The third major enabler to supplier satisfaction is constructive controversy. This means that both firms and suppliers should find a solution that is beneficial for all parties, by taking each other' perspective in account and discuss their opposing views openly. In conclusion, companies and their suppliers need to cooperate well in order to achieve supplier satisfaction and customer satisfaction.

In 2002, Whipple Frankel and Daugherty (2002) researched the perceptions each alliance partner has concerning information exchange and how to measure these perceptions in order to understand to what extent those elements contribute to alliance satisfaction[27]. The first objective of their study was to 'identify the elements of information exchange that have a significant impact on alliance satisfaction'. The second objective of the research was to 'determine whether the elements of information exchange affecting alliance satisfaction vary based on channel position of the alliance partner'. The last objective of the research was to develop conclusions as to the value of using information exchange to predict alliance satisfaction'. Whipple et al. (2002) concluded that buying organizations found that the accuracy of the supplier's information was the most important aspect that influenced their satisfaction with the supplier. In contrast, suppliers found that the speed of information sharing was the most important aspect that influenced their satisfaction with the relationship. Besides this, there is a positive effect on satisfaction of both buyers and suppliers, when the amount of operational information exchange is high[28].

In 2003, Maunu (2003) did research about the antecedents of supplier satisfaction. She found out that communication, quality, innovation, commitment, trust, flexibility, capital, durability of the relationship are the most important elements of supplier satisfaction. These antecedents are divided into two categories: business-related elements and communication-related elements. Business processes are affected by both time and financial aspects, which also directly affects supplier satisfaction.[29]

In 2005, Benton and Maloni researched supplier satisfaction in buyer-supplier relationships. The objective of the research was to test the influences of supply chain power on supplier satisfaction. The categorized power sources into three categories. The first category of power

[27] See Whipple et al. (2002), p. 67.
[28] See Nyaga et al. (2010), p. 107.
[29] See Maunu (2003), p. 1.

sources are non-mediated power sources, which can be expert and referent. The second category of power sources are coercive-mediated power sources which can be coercive and legal legitimate. The last category of power sources are reward-mediated power sources. They found out that non-mediated power source have significant positive effects on supply chain buyer-supplier relationships.[30] They also concluded that coercive-mediated power sources have significant negative effects on supply chain buyer-supplier relationships. Lastly, they found that reward-mediated power have a positive effect on supply chain buyer-supplier relationships.

In 2009, Essig and Amann (2009) researched supplier satisfaction intensively and their objective of the research was to explore the construct of supplier satisfaction as a factor of buyer-supplier. Since supplier satisfaction is a difficult construct, an index is used to operationalize the construct.[31] The measured the determinants of supplier satisfaction through a survey. The index exists out of three dimensions and six factors or indicator groups. The first dimension is the Strategic dimension and its indicator group is the 'Intensity of the Cooperation'. The second dimension is the Operative dimension and the indicator groups of this dimension are 'Order' and 'Billing/Delivery'. The third dimension is the Accompanying dimension and its indicator groups are 'Communication', 'Conflict Management' and 'General View'. All indicators groups contain sub factors which enlarged the index and also made it difficult to use.

In 2010, Nyaga, Whipple and Lynch (2010) examined collaborative relationships in two independent studies with the help of the structural equation modelling. In the first study they examined the buyers' perceptions and in the second study they examined the suppliers' perceptions. The results of both studies are compared with the help of invariance testing. Invariance testing is used in order to determine both relational and economic factors that drive satisfaction and performance from both supplier and buyer perspective. They found that in order to achieve trust and commitment, collaborative activities such as joint relationship effort and information sharing are crucial[32]. The research also showed that suppliers focused on information sharing and joint relationship effort, while buyers firms focused more on relationship outcomes.

Later in 2010, Ghijsen, Semeijn, and Ernstson (2010) examined the supplier reactions as a result of three contrasting influence strategies and two forms of supplier development efforts. They

[30] See Benton and Maloni (2005), p. 14.
[31] See Essig and Amann (2009), p. 106.
[32] See Nyaga et al. (2010), p. 107.

found that there was enough research about influence strategies and supplier development, but the studies did not focus on the effect of both factors on supplier satisfaction and supplier commitment. They found that ‘supplier commitment is affected by both human- and capital-specific supplier development, while supplier satisfaction is affected by indirect, other direct influence strategies and capital-specific supplier development’[33]. In addition to this, they found that promises do not have a statistical effect on supplier satisfaction.

In 2012, Schiele, Calvi and Gibbert (2012) presented a study where they focused on presenting key terms such as customer attractiveness, supplier satisfaction and preferred customer status. They introduced a model of preferred customer ship that uses a social exchange perspective in order to associate the key terms supplier satisfaction, customer attractiveness and preferred customer status. Buying firms should focus on becoming a preferred customer in order to have better access to resources[34]. In order to become a preferred customer, buying firms need to surpass the expectations of the suppliers. Therefore Schiele et al. (2012) stated, that ‘supplier satisfaction is a condition that is achieved if the quality of outcomes from a buyer-supplier relationship meets or exceeds the supplier’s expectations’. The expectations from the suppliers is very important.

Also in 2012, Meena and Sarmah (2012) presented a research where the objective of the research was to develop a model and scale in order to measure suppliers’ satisfaction in buyer-suppliers relationships[35]. They found out that ‘purchase policy, payment policy, coordination policy and corporate image of the buying firm have a significant positive impact on supplier satisfaction in comparison with other aspects. Since only the data of 300 suppliers was used, it is difficult to generalize these findings to other industries and countries. Anyway, there is a method developed in order to measure the level of supplier satisfaction.

Schiele, Veldman, Huttinger and Pulles (2012), did a research in 2012 where they focused on the supplier’ evaluation of customers and how it can be influenced by buyers[36]. They came to the conclusion that there are four factors which influence supplier satisfaction. The first factor is technical excellence which sub factors include also supplier involvement, technical competence and response to supplier requests. The second factor is supply value which includes sub factors as long-term time horizons and devoted investments and profitability. The third

[33] See Ghijsen et al. (2010), p. 17.
[34] See Schiele et al. (2012), p. 1181.
[35] See Meena and Sarmah (2012), p. 1236.
[36] See Schiele et al. (2012), p. 133.

factor is mode of interaction which includes sub factors as commitment, communication, trust and quality of information. The last factor which influence supplier satisfaction is operational excellence, which includes sub factors as support and business competences. These four factors were not tested statistically.

In 2014, Hüttinger et al. (2014) extended the research of Schiele et al.(2012), where she further delved into the antecedents of supplier satisfaction, customer attractiveness and preferred customer status. She found out that there are seven factors which could have a positive impact on supplier satisfaction. These factors are growth opportunity, innovation potential, customers' operative excellence, customers' support of suppliers, customers' reliability, customers' supplier involvement and customers' contact accessibility. After conducting a combination of the world café method (qualitative) and a quantitative survey, they came to the conclusion that these three factors have a positive impact on supplier satisfaction: growth opportunity, customers' reliability and customers' relational behavior.

In 2016, Vos et al. (2016) did the same as Hüttinger et al. (2014), where they extended the study of Schiele et al.(2012), Vos et al.(2016) extended the study of Hüttinger et al. (2014). Where Hüttinger et al. (2014) found already that growth opportunity, reliability and relational behavior have a positive impact on supplier satisfaction, Vos et al.(2016) extended the study by adding the antecedent profitability. Besides this, Vos et al. (2016) tested the model of Hüttinger et al. (2014) for both indirect and direct materials.

The last intensive study on supplier satisfaction was done in 2016 by Pulles et al. (2016). In this research they analyzed the impact of customer attractiveness and supplier satisfaction on becoming a preferred customer. He found that in order to become a preferred customer, the elements customer attractiveness and supplier satisfaction are crucial[37]. They found out that 'the impact of customer attractiveness on preferential resource allocation from suppliers is significantly mediated by suppliers'.

In conclusion, the best possible definition of supplier satisfaction is: 'supplier's feeling of fairness with regard to buyer's incentives and supplier's contributions within an industrial buyer-seller relationship'. Before the year 2000, less research was done about the subject supplier satisfaction. Since then, Wong (2000) started examining how companies could work together with their suppliers in order to achieve supplier satisfaction and how this could

[37] See Pulles et al. (2016), p. 129.

influence customer satisfaction[38]. Over the years the researchers did research about many antecedents that could have impact on supplier satisfaction. In 2012, Schiele (2012), added that supplier satisfaction leads to preferred customer status, which is essential to get access to resources[39]. This research gave supplier satisfaction an important new dimension. Finally, in 2016, Vos et al. (2016) added the antecedent profitability to the model of Hüttinger et al (2014), which is crucial factor in the private sector. We can conclude that the research on supplier satisfaction extended during the years and that supplier satisfaction is crucial for companies. Even though supplier satisfaction research extended since 2000, there was little focus on the impact of intangible assets on supplier satisfaction. Maunu (2003), Nyaga et al. (2010) and Schiele et al. (2012) examined the impact of trust on supplier satisfaction. Hüttinger et al (2014) and Vos et al. (2016) examined the intangible assets realibility and relational behavior. Also Pulles et al. (2016) examined the impact of customer attractiveness on preffered customer status, but we can conclude that we miss the research of the impact of brand related factors on supplier satisfaction.

2.2 Importance of Supplier Satisfaction: gaining and maintaining access to capable suppliers and their resources in this new competitive environment

In this paragraph, the importance of supplier satisfaction will be stressed, including the drawbacks of unsatisfied suppliers. In conclusion, supplier satisfaction is important since it leads to preferred customer status and that will lead to better access to resources.

In the last decades, the number of suppliers in many business-to-business markets have been reduced. This is one the reasons why businesses chose to outsource many activities to suppliers, that were formerly performed in-house[40]. Also, firms are trying to increase the quality of their products by drastically reducing the number of suppliers, in order to increase supplier' control, simplifying management and reduce the costs of communication[41]. Buying firms need to compete not only for customers, but also for suppliers in order to achieve business excellence[42].

[38] See Wong (2000), p. 427.
[39] See Schiele et al. (2012), p. 1181.
[40] See Hamel & Prahalad (1990), p. 18.
[41] See Biemans and Brand (1995), p. 29.
[42] See Wong (2000), p. 427.

Especially buying companies that outsource many activities, should look to satisfy their suppliers[43].

As stated before, supplier satisfaction is a necessary condition for gaining and maintaining access to capable suppliers and their resources in this new competitive environment[44]. Buying firms who can satisfy their suppliers receive the best resources and ultimately a preferred customer status over other buying firms[45]. This means that in order to be a preferred customer, the buyer firm should satisfy the suppliers. According to Schiele et al. (2012), 'a firm has a preferred customer status with a supplier, if the supplier offers the buyer preferential resource allocation. Buying firms can achieve a preferred customer status in several ways. First, a supplier can corporate with the buying firm by dedicating their best employees to joint new product development, in order to develop new products to the standards of the customer. Secondly, 'the supplier might also ensure privileged treatment if bottlenecks occur due to constraints in production capacity'.[46] Once preferred customer status is achieved by buying firms, preferred customer status needs to 'continuously be maintained and re-earned'[47]. This shows that firms need to invest a lot in a relationship with suppliers in order to stay attractive.

Close relationships can only be built if the buyer and supplier are satisfied with the relationship. Closer relationships with a limited number of carefully selected suppliers contribute to the increasing strategic relevance of purchasing.[48] There are many advantages when organizations purchase efficient. On several factors like cost factors, time factors and quality of deliveries, world-class companies achieve better results than average companies. The purchase costs as a percentage of purchases made are lower even as lead times and the number of late deliveries. The reason for this, is that the world-class companies have a lower number of suppliers, with whom they maintain a close relationship. In order to 'assure the attention and the loyalty of the supplier'[49], being an interesting customer to the supplier is very important.

There are many consequences for buying firms when suppliers are not satisfied. An unsatisfied supplier might produce qualitatively poor products and that will influence the quality of

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43 See Wong (2000), p. 427.
44 See Vos et al. (2016), p. 4620.
45 See Hüttinger et al. (2012), p. 1194.
46 See Steinle & Schiele (2008), p. 11.
47 See Schiele et al. (2012), p.1182.
48 See Kraljic (1983), p. 117.
49 See Christiansen and Maltz (2010), p. 182.

products of the buying firm[50]. This consequence will reduce not only the sales volume of the buying organization, but this also could lead to a reduction in profitability. An unsatisfied supplier will probably leave a buyer-seller relationship, since the stability is negatively damaged.

In conclusion, supplier satisfaction is a necessary condition for gaining and maintaining access to capable suppliers and their resources in this new competitive environment. This is important since the number of the suppliers is declining. Supplier satisfaction can lead to preferred to customer status, in this way firms are able to get access to resources before other firms. Finally, unsatisfied suppliers have a bad impact on the performance of the buying organizations.

2.3 Antecedents of Supplier Satisfaction are Growth Opportunity, Innovation Potential, Operative Excellence, Reliability, Support Involvement, Access to Contracts and Relational Behaviour

In order to measure whether the brand related factors have an impact on supplier satisfaction, it is necessary to operationalize supplier satisfaction. Supplier satisfaction can be measured in several ways, with several antecedents. In the history and the art of state of supplier satisfaction an overview was presented with several viewpoints towards supplier satisfaction. Most authors have different viewpoints towards supplier satisfaction, and she provided an overview with all possible drivers of supplier satisfaction[51]. There are four main drivers of supplier satisfaction: Technical Excellence (R&D), Supply Value (Purchasing), Mode of Interaction and Operational Excellence (Production).[52] These main drivers exist out of several factors, which were used in other studies. Since this study is a replicate study of the research of Vos et al. (2016), the antecedents of supplier satisfaction will be the same as his study[53]. There are several reasons why this study will build further on the research of Vos et al (2016). First of all, in the research of Vos et al. the antecedent growth opportunity is studied well, which is an important antecedent of this research. Furthermore, the research of Vos et al. (2016) is one of the most extended research for relational antecedents of supplier satisfaction.

[50] See Essig and Amann (2009), p. 104.
[51] See Hüttinger et al. (2014), p. 700.
[52] See Hüttinger et al. (2014), p. 718.
[53] See Vos et al. (2016), p. 4615.

The study of Vos et al. (2016) is a replicate study of the study of Hüttinger et al. (2014), where he added the antecedent *profitability* to her antecedents. In this study of Vos et al. (2016), procurement is divided into direct and indirect procurement. In this study, the antecedents brand image, brand awareness and brand equity will be added to the model of Vos et al. (2016). In this paragraph the existing antecedents of supplier satisfaction will be explained. These antecedents are: Growth Opportunity, Innovation Potential, Operative Excellence, Reliability, Support, Involvement, Access to Contacts, Relational Behavior and Profitability.

In a buyer-supplier relationship, both parties want to benefit from the relationship. The results are more enhanced in case the opportunities are infinite. Growth opportunity refers to 'the suppliers' ability to grow together with the buying firm and to generate new potential business opportunities through the relationship'[54]. According to Walter et al. (2001), 'large and prestigious customers can create value for suppliers because they have a valuable reference effect that enables suppliers to access new markets'[55].

Most of the companies believe that innovation is a priority to succeed. Innovation potential is 'understood as the supplier's opportunity to generate innovations in the exchange relationship due to the buying firm's innovative capabilities and its contribution in joint innovation processes'[56]. Therefore, buying firms needs to give suppliers the space to innovate in order to have satisfied suppliers.

Operative excellence should be pursued by buying organizations. The buying firms order processes or billing/delivery procedures have a direct impact on supplier satisfaction[57]. Operative excellence is 'the supplier's perception that the buying firm's operations are handled in a sorrow and efficient way, which facilitates the way of doing business for the supplier'[58]

The most important influencing factor which leads to supplier satisfaction according the discussants' experiences is reliability[59]. Reliability is defined as 'the supplier's perception that the buying firm acts in a consistent as well as reliable manner and fulfills its agreements'[60]. These agreements can be either written contracts or oral agreements.

54 See Walter et al. (2003), p. 721.
55 See Walter et al. (2001), p. 365.
56 See Schiele et al. (2011), p. 2.
57 See Essig and Amann's (2009), p. 103.
58 See Hüttinger et al. (2014), p.703.
59 See Hüttinger et al. (2014), p.704.
60 See Hald et al. (2009), p. 960.

Supplier want to be involved in several decision in a buyer-supplier relationship. A customer's supplier involvement construe 'the degree to which the supplier's staff participates directly in the customer's product development team and is entrusted with developing product ideas'[61].

According to Benton and Maloni's (2005) 'supplier satisfaction is mainly driven by relational behaviour'[62] Relational behavior refers to the buying firm's behavior towards the supplier with regards to the relational focus of exchange capturing multiple facets of the exchange behavior such as solidarity, mutuality, and flexibility[63]. Now that the existing antecedents of supplier satisfaction have been explained in last paragraphs, we will describe how supplier satisfaction can be influenced.

Supplier satisfaction can be influenced in several ways. The research of Hüttinger et al (2014) showed that reliability, involvement, growth opportunity, innovative potential, operative excellence and involvement can determine the supplier satisfaction. According to Schiele (2012), there are four drivers of supplier satisfaction. The first driver is Technical Excellence which refers to the research and development department. The second drive of supplier satisfaction is Supply Value which refers to purchasing. The third driver is Mode of Interaction and the last driver is Operational Excellence which refers to production. These drivers are also divided into subcategories in order to measure supplier satisfaction.

In conclusion, the four main drivers of supplier satisfaction are Technical Excellence (R&D), Supply Value (Purchasing), Mode of Interaction and Operational Excellence (Production). The most important factors that lead to supplier satisfaction are Growth Opportunity, Innovation Potential, Operative Excellence, Reliability, Support, Involvement and Relational Behaviour. The next chapter will shortly explain the factor growth opportunity, since this existing variable will be used and tested in this research.

61 See Handfield et al. (1999), p.72.
62 See Benton and Maloni's (2005). p. 3.
63 See Palmatier et al. (2007). p. 172.

2.4 Growth Opportunity: steady mutual growth, a strong brand, possible access to other customers and the role of the buying company as a global player are important factors

In the previous chapter the following antecedents of supplier satisfaction were explained: Growth Opportunity, Innovation Potential, Operative Excellence, Reliability, Support, Involvement, Access to Contacts, Relational Behavior and Profitability. For this research the antecedent Growth opportunity will be highlighted, since it is an important antecedent for this research. Because this study will also use this existing antecedent "Growth Opportunity" the concept will be elaborated on in order to make it understandable. According to Hatch and Schultz (2008), an organization's ability to manage growth is mostly determined by the compatibility of its branding practices. They found that 'the most successful corporate brands are universal and so paradoxically facilitate differences of interpretation that appeal to different groups'[64]. An example of an organization that has grown due to a strong corporate brand is McDonald's. The supplier will also profit when a buying organization grows, the buying organization will need more products and or services from the supplier. Since this research focuses on the brand related factors brand image, brand awareness and brand equity, we will examine what the impact is of the brand factor on the antecedent growth opportunity. In the following paragraphs, the role and importance of growth opportunities will be explained.

In 2012, Jawahar examined the mediating role of satisfaction with growth opportunities on the relationship between employee development opportunities. There he found out that development opportunities afforded by the company is positively related to satisfaction with growth opportunities[65].

Growth opportunity has been identified as a predicting factor for supplier satisfaction (Hüttinger et al., 2014). In this research, Hüttinger aimed at the growth opportunity of suppliers. Growth opportunity refers to 'the suppliers' ability to grow together with the buying firm and to generate new potential business opportunities through the relationship'[66].

In a buyer-supplier relationship, both parties want to benefit from the relationship. The results are more enhanced in case the opportunities are infinite. Therefore, how bigger the opportunities to grow for both parties are, how interested the parties should be.

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[64] See Hatch and Schultz (2008), p. 7.
[65] See Jawahar (2012), p. 2261.
[66] See Walter et al. (2003), p. 721.

According to Hüttinger (2014), growth opportunity 'plan an especially dominant role from the discussant's point of view'[67]. In general, they consider 'steady mutual growth, a strong brand, possible access to other customers and the role of the buying company as a global player to be important factors'[68]. According to Walter et al. (2001), impressive and large customers can generate value for suppliers, since these customers have a worthwhile reference effect that permits suppliers to access new markets.

There are several ways to measure growth opportunities. Huttinger (2014) decided to focus on the factors of Liu et al. (2009), namely that the relationship with the buyer can lead to a dominant market position, more growth rates and new market opportunities[69]. In the study of Hüttinger et al. (2014), growth opportunity has a positive effect on supplier behavior and therefore has a positive effect on preferred customer status[70]. In the study of Vos et al. (2016), growth opportunity has positive effect on supplier satisfaction[71]. In the following chapter, brand-related factors will be introduced and explained. Their relation on growth opportunity and supplier satisfaction will be tested in this research.

2.5 Existing research to brand-related factors: From an important concept in consumer behaviour to an important concept in organizational behaviour

In the next paragraphs an outline will be presented concerning a sequential review of the brand related factors research. Davis et al. (2008) distinguished between three brand-related factors, those are: brand image, brand awareness and brand equity. Davis et al. (2008) adopted the model of Keller (1993), where the brand-related factors are derived from. Keller's framework divides brand equity into brand image and brand awareness. The first factor which will be highlighted is brand image, followed by brand awareness and brand equity. After the existing research to the three different concepts, a deeper review of each antecedent and its relationship with supplier satisfaction will be analyzed and elaborated on. Old sources will be used, since these are still actual. These researchers focused on the impact of the brand related factors on consumers. These resources are still

67 See Hüttinger (2014), p. 79.
68 See Hüttinger (2014), p. 79.
69 See Liu et al. (2009), p. 300.
70 See Hüttinger et al. (2014), p. 708.
71 See Vos et al. (2016), p. 4618.

2.5.1 Existing research of brand image

Brand image became an important concept in consumer behaviour research since the beginning of 1950s. Since then, a lot of studies based on brand image are published and the proliferation of brand image research has been accompanied by some drawbacks. Over time and through overuse, or misuse, the meaning of 'brand image' has evaporated and has lost much of its richness and value[72]. That is the reasons why there are problems with the conceptualization of brand image. Over time researchers focused besides brand image also on brand awareness and brand equity. In this section, the history and state of the art in brand image research will be provided.

In 1955, Gardner and Levy began with the research of the concept brand image. They found that 'the long-term success of a brand depends on the marketer's abilities to select a brand meaning prior to market entry, operationalize the meaning in the form of an image, and maintain the image over time'[73]. They focused on the cognitive elements of brand image and found that the personality or character may be more important that for the overall status of the brand that many technical facts about the product.

In 1957, Newman (1957) found that the impressions of a brand determine how a prospective buyer feels about it and that it influences his selection[74]. According to Newman, brand image does not have one dimension, but it includes a social, economic, psychological and functional dimension. Brand image can be built through advertisements, styling and other aspects of the product.

In 1959, Levy (1959) found that the customers do not buy products because of the function of the product, but they buy it for what they mean. Levy came to the conclusion that ignoring the symbolism of consumer goods does not the affect the importance of the fact. Lastly, he found that a symbol is appropriate in the case it joins or meshes with or adds to the way a consumer thinks about himself.

In 1967, Grubb and Grathwohl (1967), researched what the relationship is between the psychological characteristics of a consumer and the purchase behavior of the consumer[75]. They made a model of consuming behavior, in order to find this relationship. First of all, the consumer

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[72] See Bullmore (1984), p. 235.
[73] See Gardner and Levy (1955), p. 35.
[74] See Newman (1957), p. 95.
[75] See Grubb and Grathwohl (1967), p. 22.

should have a self-concept of himself and this self-concept should have value to the consumer. Since this self-concept is of value to the consumer, the behavior of the consumer will be directed toward the progression and enhancement of the consumer's self-concept. The consumer's self-concept is formed through the interaction with his/her environment. These persons can be the consumer's parents, peers, teachers or other significant persons. Grubb and Grathwohl found that goods serve as social symbols and because of these goods are communication devices for the consumer. Finally, they found that 'the use of these good-symbols communicates meaning to the individual himself and to other, causing an impact on the intra-action and/or the interaction processes and therefore an effect on the individual's self-concept'. They came to the conclusion that the consuming behavior of an individual will be directed toward the furthering and enhancing of his self-concept through the consumption of goods as symbols'.

In 1973, Pohlman and Mudd (1973), examined the market image as a function of consumer group and product type[76]. They found that products have two kinds of value for the owner, one for its concrete functional utility and one for its utility as a prestige symbol. With functional value they mean the value which is conventionally meant by utility as a good. With symbolic value they mean 'the extent to which a purchase enhances the worth of the person in his/her eyes (self-esteem) and in the eyes of others (status).

In the same year, Levy and Glick (1973) found that consumers do not buy brands because of their physical attributes and functions, but consumers buy the brand because of the meanings connected with the brands.

In 1978, Gensch (1978) found that 'brand preference is a function of the perception space associated with the alternatives'[77]. He found that perception consists of two components, the brand image of the brand and the individual's ability to obtain measures of the brand attributes on factors the consumers find important. The image hint at expectations of the consumer. The interaction of the two components, vary across product types and across individuals.

In 1983, Swartz (1983) examined the message of a product. He concluded it is important to differentiate the message the product have as a marketing strategy. One year later, Reynolds and Gutman (1984), found that the most important thing about brand image is understanding connections between the heights that define 'the perceptual lens through which the consumer views the world and subsequently develops preferences for products'. They found that effective

[76] See Pohlman and Mudd (1973), p. 167.
[77] See Gensch (1978), p. 384.

connections can be established for products in the case they could gain a perspective on 'how the product relates to the personal value systems of consumers. This perspective can be achieved by viewing means-end chains as entities.

In 1985, Snyder and DeBono (1985) examined both the evaluative and behavioral reactions of high self-monitoring consumers and low self-monitoring consumers on the basis of two advertising strategies[78]. The first advertising strategy is based on the product's image, where the second advertisement strategy is based on the product's quality. They found that high self-monitoring reacted positively to the first advertisement strategy, which was based on the image of the product. These consumers wanted to try the high image products more and also wanted to pay more for these products. In contrast to the high self-monitoring consumers, the low self-monitoring consumers reacted positively to the second advertisement strategy, which was based on the quality of the products. These consumers also wanted to pay more for these products.

Later that year, Dichter(1985) found that the image does not ' describes individual traits or qualities, but the total impression an entity makes on the minds of others'[79]. Furthermore, he found that an image is 'not anchored in just objective data and details, but it is the configuration of the whole field of the object, the advertising, and, most important, the customer's disposition and the attitudinal screen through which he observes. He found that products can change the image of person, without changing the product.

In 1986, Park, Jaworksi and MacInnis (1986), presented the framework Brand Concept Management (BCM) for firms which could be used for selecting, implementing and controlling brand image over time[80]. They found that 'brand image is not simply a perceptual phenomenon affected by the firm's communication activities alone, but it is the understanding derive from the total set of brand related activities engaged in by the firm'. The brand's market performance is influenced by whether the brand concept is functional, symbolic or experiential.

In 1990, Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) presented an overview of a 28 prior studies about brand image. They came to the conclusion that brand image is 'at once a label that has become somewhat impoverished because of widespread use and a concept that has contributed richly to marketing practice'. According to them, brand image is both a concrete and abstract expression.

78 See Snyder and DeBono (1985), p. 586.
79 See Dichter (1985), p. 76.
80 See Park et al. (1986), p. 135.

Furthermore, the definition is generally an idiosyncratic and perceptual phenomenon. Also, the perception of reality is much more important than the reality itself.

In 2005, Nandan (2005), talked about the concepts brand identity and brand image from a communications perspective[81]. These two concepts are crucial for organizations in order to enhance brand loyalty. He found that brand identity is related to organizations since organizations are responsible for building a product with special features. In contrast to brand identity, brand image is related to consumer perceptions and contains a set of beliefs that consumers have about a brand.

In 2007, Cretu & Brodie (2007) found that research about brand image focused mostly on consumer goods markets and less on business markets. They examined the influences of brand image and company reputation on several factors in a business market. These factors are company reputation on customers' perceptions of product and service quality, customer value and customer loyalty. They concluded that 'brand's image has a more specific influence on the customers' perceptions of product and service quality while the company's reputation has a broader influence on perceptions of customer value and customer loyalty'.

In 2008, Davis et al. (2008) found that there was little known about branding in the context of business-to-business services. Davis et al. (2008) build a survey regarding brand awareness, brand image and brand equity for the logistics sector. They found out that 'customers were willing to pay more to do business with service providers with strong, positive brand images. This means that the brand image of companies has an impact on the company's business.

In conclusion, brand image has always been an important concept in consumers behavior. Since the early 50s, researchers started examining the cognitive elements of brand image. Later on, they found that brand image does not have one dimension, but it includes a social, economic, psychological and functional dimension. Keller (1993) found that brand image much broader than people thought till this moment[82]. According to him it exists out of four dimensions: types of brand associations, favorability of brand associations, strength of brand associations and uniqueness of brand associations. As time goes by, the feeling and idea of the brand became more important. After 2000, there was a shift from researching brand image in consumer goods markets to business markets. Finally, Davis found that the brand image of companies has an

[81] See Nandan (2005), p. 264.
[82] See Keller (1993), p. 7.

impact on the company's business. They stated that there is no difference in importance between brand image in business to consumer markets as in business to business markets.

2.5.2 Existing research of brand awareness

In the previous chapter, the existing research regarding brand image was shown. With regards to the concept brand, the most research was done on the factor brand image. Later on, researchers found that brand is much broader than only brand image. In the next paragraphs an outline will be presented concerning a sequential review of brand awareness research.

In 1990, Hoyer and Brown (1990) researched what the impact is of brand awareness on the choice of a common product and on a repeat-purchase product. They found that a known brand had a bigger chance of being chosen by consumers in comparison with an unknown brand[83].

In 1992, Percy and Rossiter (1992) build a model of brand awareness. They made a distinction between recognition brand awareness and recall brand awareness[84]. According to them, brand awareness is a crucial consideration. The concluded that consumers buy products based when they recognize the brand, even if they do not need it.

In 1993, Keller (1993) presented a conceptual model of brand equity from the perspective of the individual consumer. He found that brand awareness is a dimension of brand knowledge, Brand awareness can be divided in brand recall and brand recognition.

In 2000, Oh (2000) examined the effect of brand class, brand awareness and the price on customer value and behavioural intentions[85]. Oh, found out that brand awareness had a positive effect on the perceived quality. Also, brand awareness affected the price fairness significantly. According to Oh, 'building high brand awareness may mitigate consumer perceptions of price related feelings of sacrifice'[86].

In the same year, MacDonald and Sharp (2000) researched the effects of brand awareness on consumer decision making for a common product and a repeat purchase product[87]. Both came to the conclusion that brand awareness is an important choice tactic for consumers, even in the situation when consumers face a familiar repeat choice task.

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83 See Hoyer and Brown (1990), p. 143.
84 See Percy and Rossiter (1992), p. 264.
85 See Oh (2000), p. 136.
86 See Oh (2000), p. 153.
87 See MacDonald and Sharp (2000), p. 5.

In 2003, Kim et al. (2003), started researching the impact of brand awareness on market performance[88]. Their research focused on the hotel industry, where they high and low market performance hotels. They concluded that brand awareness has a positive impact on market performance, there were significant differences in brand awareness between high and low market performance hotels. Later in 2004 and 2005, Kim and Kim, researched the same as Kim et al. (2003), but the focus was on restaurants and hotel restaurants[89]. Here, they also found that brand awareness has a positive relationship to market performance

In 2010, Homburg et al. (2010) examined the effects of brand awareness in business markets[90]. They found that the importance of branding for increasing firm performance is firmly established for business to consumers markets. In this research they researched whether brand awareness is also important for increasing firm performance in business to business markets. According to them, brand awareness is strongly related to performance in business to business markets. The moderators product homogeneity, technical turbulence, buyer center heterogeneity and all time pressure in the buying process all significantly 'moderate the association between brand awareness and market performance'. This research is the first one where the sample is not restricted to only one industry.

In 2012, Esch et al. (2012) examined what the effects of brands are om the brain[91]. An important result of this study was that known brand have better information retrieval in the brain areas in comparison with unknown brands.

In 2014, Huang and Sarigöllü (2014) examined how brand awareness relates to market outcome, brand equity and the market mix[92]. They found that there was little research on brand awareness, especially when it comes to the relationship of brand awareness with brand market outcome. They researched what the impact is of advertising, distribution and price promotions on brand awareness. All these marketing mix elements have a positive impact on brand awareness.

In conclusion, there is not so much research done on the factor brand awareness is comparison with the factor brand image. Brand awareness is about recognizing and recalling the brand. Since 2003, Kim et al. (2003) started examining the impact of brand awareness on market

[88] See Kim et al. (2003), p. 335.
[89] See Kim and Kim (2004), p. 115.
[90] See Homburg et al. (2010), p. 202.
[91] See Esch et al. (2012), p. 75.
[92] See Huang and Sarigöllü (2014), p. 113.

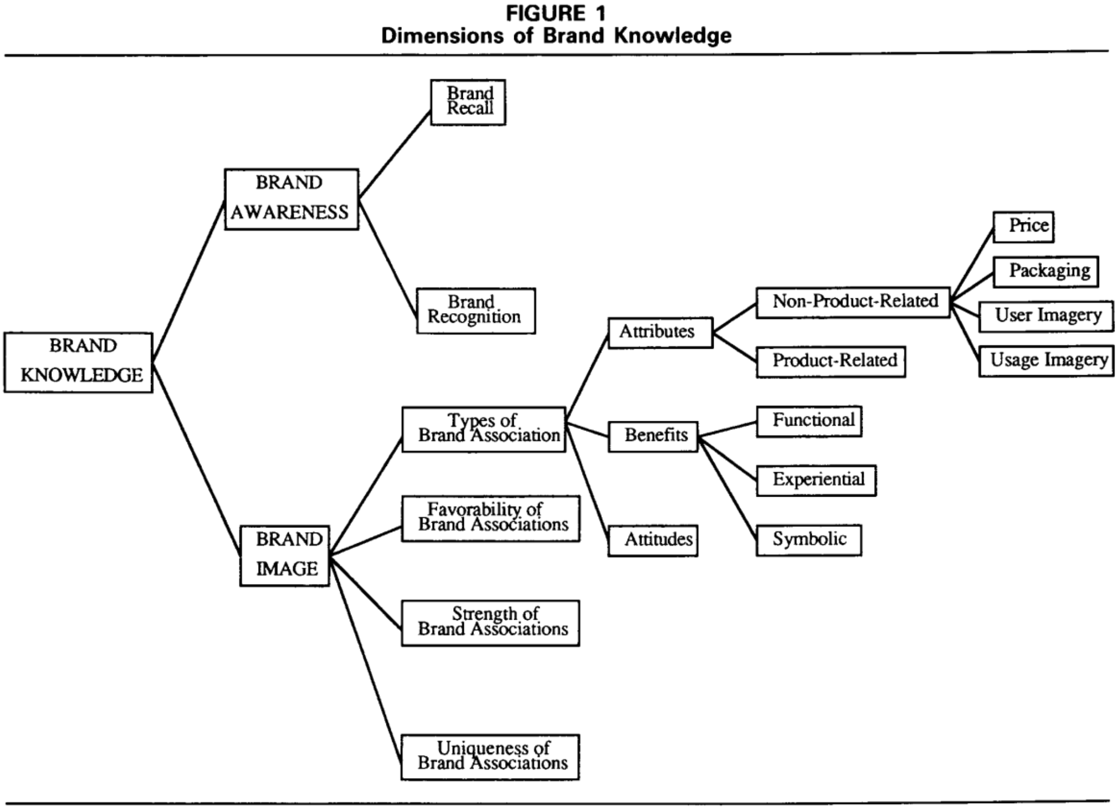
performance. Brand awareness in a business to consumer markets was a crucial factor and researchers started since 2003 (Kim et al.) examining the impact of brand awareness in business to business markets. They found that like in business to consumer markets, brand awareness is of huge importance in business to business markets.

2.5.3 Existing research of brand equity

In the previous chapter, the existing research regarding brand awareness was shown. In the next paragraphs an outline will be presented concerning a sequential review of brand equity research.

In 1993, Keller (1993) presented a conceptual model of brand equity from the perspective of the individual consumer. He found that brand image is a dimension of brand knowledge, like brand awareness is. Brand awareness can be divided in brand recall and brand recognition. The dimension brand image can be divided into 4 parts: types of brand associations, favorability of brand associations, strength of brand associations and uniqueness of brand associations. There are three parts of types of brand associations: attributes, benefits and attitudes. The type of brand association benefits can be divided into functional benefits, experimental benefits and symbolic benefits. The type of brand association attribute can be divided into non-product related attributes and product-related attributes. Non-product-related attributes can be separated into price, packaging, user imagery and usage imagery.

Figure 1 – Dimensions of Brand Knowledge (Keller, 1993)[93]



In 1993, Kirmani & Zeithaml (1993), examined the role of brand equity in building strong brands[94]. They differentiated brand equity and brand image in terms of perspective. Brand equity is 'a managerial concept'. There are five dimensions of brand equity: name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations besides perceived quality, customer base and other brand assets[95]. The study of Kirmani & Zeithaml focuses on the effect of perceived quality on brand image. Perceived quality is 'the consumer's judgement about a product' overall excellence or superiority'. According to their model, perceived quality can affect brand image both direct and indirect. It can affect brand image indirect through the constructs perceived value and brand attitude. Brand attitude is' a more complex structure than perceived quality'. Perceived value is 'the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product, based on perceptions of what is received and what is given'.

In 1996, Aaker (1996) researched why a brand is strong or weak. He questioned whether brand strength levels change over time and why[96]. Aaker developed a valid brand equity measurement

[93] See Keller (1993), p. 7.
[94] See Kirmani and Zeithaml (1993), p. 143.
[95] See Aaker (1996), p. 348.
[96] See Aaker (1996), p. 348.

system, consisting out of four criteria. The first criteria is that 'the measures should reflect the construct being measured, namely brand equity'. The second criteria is that the 'measures should reflect constructs that truly drive the market'. The third criteria is that the measures should be sensitive. The last criteria is that 'the measures should be applicable across brands, products categories and markets.

In 2003, Keller and Lehman (2003), wondered how brands create value[97]. Keller and Lehman classified brand equity into three subsets. The first subset of brand equity is customer mindset measures. Customer mindset measures indicates customer's general attitude towards a brand. This subset includes two important components: brand awareness and brand association. The second subset of brand equity is brand performance measures. The product market performance measures and assesses the brand market performance, which derives from the customer mindset measures. These customer mindset measures include several sales and premiums likes volume and dollar sales, but also price and volume premiums.

In 2004, Bendixen et al. (2004) examined the effects of brand equity in business to business markets[98]. They found that brands have been developed by consumer companies, but the brands in business to business markets are not developed as in business to consumer markets. There are several competitive advantages of organizations that have brands with a high equity. First of all, a price premium can be attained. Second, the demand will increase due to the increase of demand of the customers. Third, brands can be extended simply, also communications of good brands will be accepted more easily. Besides these competitive advantages, larger margins can be obtained, and organizations will be less vulnerable to competitive marketing actions. Bendixen et al. (2004) found out that brand equity exists in business to business markets, where buyers want to pay a price premium for their favorite brand. Besides this result, brand equity also ensures that buyer's recommend their preferred brand to other buyer's.

In conclusion, were researchers focused first on brand image, they started to do more research on other factors of brand like brand awareness and brand equity. It was important to know the impact of the brand related factors in business to business markets. Researchers found that brand equity is crucial in today's global economy for organizations in order to gain sustainable competitive advantages. Due to a high brand equity, the demand of an organization can

[97] See Keller and Lehman (2003), p. 26.
[98] See Bendixen et al. (2004), p. 371.

increase, larger margins can be obtained, communications of organizations will be accepted easily, and a price premium can be attained.

2.6 Brand Image: A constellation of pictures and ideas in people's minds that sum up their knowledge of the brand and their main attitudes

This chapter will explain what the concept brand image contains, what its importance is and what its influence can be on a buyer-supplier relationship. Brand image has been an important concept in consumer behavior research since the early 1950s[99]. Brand image is a very broad term, which can be defined in several ways. Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) found that the definitions of brand images can be grouped into broad categories, based on their principal emphasis. They assigned five categories, where the first category is based on blanket definitions. The second category is based on those which emphasize symbolism, where the third focuses on meanings and messages. The fourth category is based on personification and the last category focuses on cognitive or psychological dimensions.

The first category of definitions of brand image is based on blanket definitions, these definitions are based on the whole brand image concept. Newman (1957), defined brand image as 'A brand can be viewed as a composite image of everything people associate with it'[100]. Herzog (1963) defined brand image as 'a sum of total impressions the consumer receives from many sources'[101]. Dichter (1985) defined brand image as 'the concept of image can be applied to a product[102]. It describes not individual traits or qualities, but the total impression an entity makes on the minds of others'. The blanket definitions are most felicitous since the perception of reality is more important than the reality itself [103].

In the second category of definitions of brand image, the emphasis lays on symbolism. The definition of a symbol is 'a thing which stands for or expresses something else'[104]. There is no clear definition of the combination symbol and brand image, but these definitions are much broader and more public than the definitions in the other categories.

In the third category of definitions of brand image, the emphasis lays on meanings and messages. Levy and Glick (1973), defined brand image as 'an interpretation, a set of inferences

99 See Dobni and Zinkhan (1990), p. 110.
100 See Newman (1957), p. 95.
101 See Herzog (1963), p. 76.
102 See Dichter (1985), p. 76.
103 See Dobni and Zinkhan (1990), p. 112.
104 See Levy (1958), p. 1.

and reactions to a symbol because it not the object itself, but refers to it and for it'. Sommers (1963), defined it as 'the meaning that a product has perceived product symbolism'[105]. Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) defined brand image as 'the psychic or symbolic value of goods purchased in the marketplace'[106]. Reynolds and Gutman (1984), defined it as 'the set of meanings and associations that serve to differentiate a product of service from its competition'[107]. The most recent definition in this category comes from Durgee and Stuart (1987), they defined it as 'what the brand connotes or means symbolically in the eyes of consumers'[108]. Most of these definitions are based on what underlying meaning consumers ascribe to a product.

In the fourth category of definitions of brand image, the emphasis lays on personification. Bettinger, Dawson and Wales (1979) defined it as 'an 'adult' image and a 'child' image of the product'[109]. People started with personification of a brand and its image with human characteristics since 1970[110].

In the fifth category of definitions of brand image, the emphasis lays on cognitive or psychological elements, which is the largest category. Gardner and Levy (1955) defined brand image first as 'the sets of ideas, feelings and attitudes that consumers have about brands'[111]. Reynolds (1965) defined it as 'the mental construct developed by the consumer on the basis of a few selected impressions among the flood of total impressions'[112]. Bird, Channon and Ehrenberg (1970) defined it as 'an attitude about a given brand'[113]. Levy (1978) found that 'a brand image is a constellation of pictures and ideas in people's minds that sum up their knowledge of the brand and their main attitudes'. Friedmann and Lessig (1987), described brand image as 'the consumer' understanding and evaluation of the product'[114].

Levy's (1978) definition of brand image will be used for this research: 'a brand image is a constellation of pictures and ideas in people's minds that sum up their knowledge of the brand and their main attitudes'. The idea of organization that pops up the mind of the suppliers needs

[105] See Sommers (1963), p. 327.
[106] See Grubb and Grathwohl (1967), p. 22.
[107] See Reynolds and Gutman (1984), p. 1.
[108] See Durgee and Stuart (1987), p. 15.
[109] See Bettinger et al. (1979), p. 35.
[110] See Dobni and Zinkhan (1990), p. 114.
[111] See Gardner and Levy (1955), p. 36.
[112] See Reynolds (1965), p. 70.
[113] See Bird et al. (1970), p. 307.
[114] See Friedmann and Lessig (1987), p. 266.

to be positive in order achieve supplier satisfaction. This definition is the suitable for studies of inter-firm relationships since the brand image of an organization is everything for what the organizations stands, what the feeling is of the other organizations.

The paragraphs above introduced and explained the concept of brand image, now the importance of the concept will be stressed. On the basis of the paragraph about the history and state of art of brand image research, we can state that brand image research focused mostly on the consumer's view on brand image of products. The importance for a good brand image of products for the consumer will be explained. Furthermore, the importance for a good brand image of organizations based on the supplier's view will be discussed.

As said before, a lot of research has been done on the impact of brand image on customer satisfaction. Brand image has a significant impact on customer satisfaction especially across the E-banking, landline, mobile phone, bank and supermarket industries[115]. This was not only the case in these industries, but also in several more industries like the hospitality industry[116].

When it comes to the brand image of organization, it is important to know what businesses understand as the brand. According to Berry (2000), 'the company becomes the primary brand rather than the product itself[117]'.

First of all, a positive brand image can give an organization a competitive advantage. Since positive brand images are difficult to imitate and cost a lot of money to compete against, organizations can yield a forceful competitive advantage[118].

Second, Roth (1995) found that 'brand image management is a critical part of a company's marketing program'[119]. Communicating a distinct brand is important for the consumer in order to identify the needs satisfied by the brand[120]. By having a clear brand image as a company, a company can distinguish the brand from other competitors[121]. The theme that underlies most conceptualizations of brand image is that 'the perception of reality is more important than the

115 See Gronholdt et al. (2000), p. 512.
116 See Chitty et al. (2007), p. 563.
117 See Berry (2000), p. 128.
118 See Carpenter & Nakamoto (1989), p. 291.
119 See Roth (1995), p. 163.
120 See Park, Jaworski and MacInnis (1986), p. 135.
121 See Reynolds and Gutman (1984), p. 1.

reality itself'. This shows that brand image is crucial. Brand image is not only a critical part of a company's marketing program, but it also influences customer loyalty[122].

Batra and Miles (2004) stated that a 'purchasing agent for a company buying a mil- lion-dollar piece of equipment may be seeking satisfaction that this is a no-risk decision'[123]. Purchasing agents will buy the precious equipment at reliable companies, since they assume these companies as no-risk companies. This statement is supported by the research of Cretu and Brody (2007), where brand image has a positive impact on perceived quality[124]. In this research we saw that the perceived quality has a strong positive impact on customer value. Therefore we can conclude that brand image has a positive impact on customer value.

In a business to business service context, 'every interaction between a firm and its stakeholders becomes an input to brand image[125]. It is critical for business to business organizations in a service context articulate a desired value proposition and that every person in the organization understand the importance of constantly performing to the customer expectations. This is important since 'the service brand communicates a commitment to provide a certain kind of experience for customers'[126].

In conclusion, we can state that brand image plays a big role in customer satisfaction in several industries. In addition to this, a strong positive brand image influences customer loyalty and the perceived quality positively. Building a positive brand image is also crucial in a business to business context. A positive brand image can give an organization a powerful competitive advantage over their competitors[127]. It is also a critical part of a company's marketing program. Every person in an organization should constantly strive to provide a certain kind of experience for customers, since its impacts customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and the perceived quality positively[128].

[122] See Zins (2001), p. 273.
[123] See Batra and Homes (2004), p. 320.
[124] See Cretu and Brody (2007), p. 236.
[125] See Davis et al. (2008), p. 221.
[126] See Gombeski et al. (2002), p. 28.
[127] See Reynolds and Gutman (1984), p. 1.
[128] See Cretu and Brody (2007), p. 236.; See Zins (2001), p. 273.

2.7 Brand Awareness: an important factor for the organization's branding strategy for every business to business organization

The second brand related factor which will be discussed is brand awareness. First of all, the most important definitions of brand awareness will be highlighted. There are various definitions of brand awareness. Aaker (1996) stated that brand awareness is 'the customer ability to recognize and recall the brand under different conditions'.[129] Homburg et al. (2010) established a definition of brand awareness to a business to business context based on the definition of Keller. They defined brand awareness as 'the ability of the decision-makers in organizational buying centers to recognize or recall a brand'[130]. The definition of Homburg et al. (2010) will be used for this research, since this research focuses on the buyer-supplier relationship (B2B context).

MacDonald and Sharp (2000) examined the impact of brand awareness on decision making, but this research was only done at individual customer level. Homburg et al. (2010) investigated whether there is a link between brand awareness and market performance in various business to business industries. They found that brand awareness significantly drives market performance.

Figure 2 – Influence of Brand Awareness on Market Performance[131]

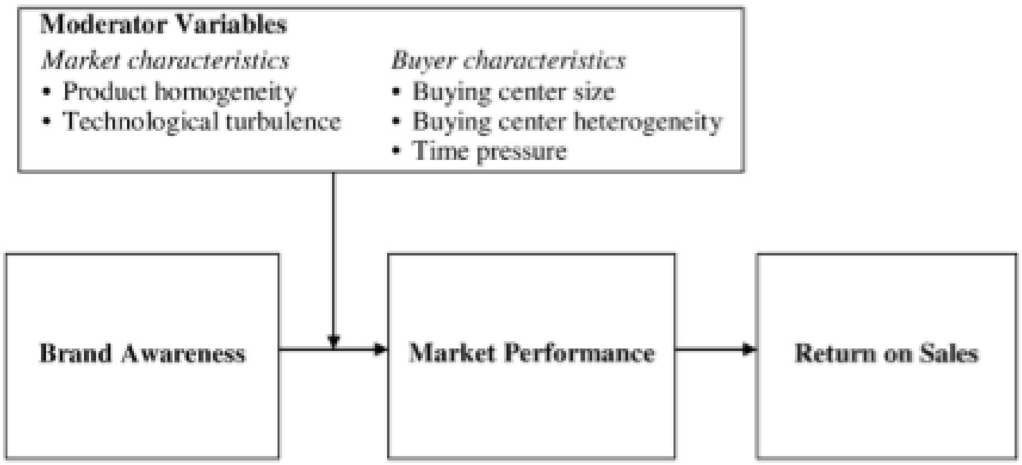


Fig. 1. Framework and constructs.

[129] See Aaker (1996), p. 348.
[130] See Homburg et al. (2010), p. 202.
[131] See Homburg et al. (2010), p. 202.

According to Keller (2008), two important factors of brand awareness are recognizing and recalling the brand. Creating brand awareness for almost every business to business organization is an important factor for the organization's branding strategy[132]. Davis et al. (2008) found that brand awareness exists out of several elements, where brand name the most fundamental element is of brand awareness. This is the case since a brand name provides symbolic meaning that aids customer recognition of the service provider and helps in predicting the service outcome.

Brand awareness is important for organizations for several reasons. First of all, the factor brand awareness precedes brand equity. There is a big chance that brand awareness exceptional role in driving brand equity in business to business markets[133]. As said before, brand awareness has a significantly positive impact on market performance. There are two important mechanisms why brand awareness drives market performance. First, the information costs for the buyer reduces since the buyer knows the brand. Second, the buyer-perceived risk is lower in comparison when the buyer buys a product/service at an organization that is unknown[134]. To support this statement, brand awareness acts as a strong sign of supplier commitment and product/service quality[135]. In case of markets with high levels of product homogeneity, brand awareness can play a decisive role in the buyers purchase decision[136].

In conclusion, brand awareness is the ability of the decision-makers in organizational buying centers to recognize or recall a brand. Creating brand awareness for almost every business to business organization is an important factor for the organization's branding strategy. Brand awareness is important for various reasons. Brand awareness drives market performance, since it lowers the buyer-perceived risks and the buyer information costs. Brand awareness can play an important role when the buyer has many options to choose out of.

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132 See Celi & Eagle (2008), p. 1.
133 See Davis et al (2008), p. 229.
134 See Erdem & Swait (2008), p. 183.
135 See Laroche et al. (1996), p. 116.
136 See Warlop et al. (2005), p. 30.

2.7 Brand Equity: the outcome of attributes of customer service and personnel

The last brand related factor which will be discussed is brand equity. There are several different definitions of brand equity, the most important will be stressed. A lot of research is done about customers-based brand equity. Customer –based brand equity is defined as 'the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand'[137]. This effect can be either negative of positive. Customer-based brand equity can happen when the customer knows the brand and holds positive brand associations in mind. For this research the brand equity of an organization is essential, which is known as corporate brand equity.

According to Davis et al. (2008), a critical difference between business to business markets and consumer markets is that 'brand equity accrues to firm brand rather than products brands'[138]. Brand equity can also be defined in 'terms of the incremental discounted future cash flows that would result from a product having its brand name in comparison with the proceeds that would accrue if the same product did not have that brand name'[139]. Also, Corporate brand equity is 'an outcome of attributes of customer service and personnel'[140]. The definition of Davis et al. (2008) will be used for this research, since this research focuses on the impact of the brand equity of the company on supplier satisfaction. With brand equity, the value is important in comparison with brand image and brand awareness. Will a high brand equity lead to additional cash flows, due to the satisfaction level of supplier?

According to Kirmani & Zeithaml (1993), brand equity is 'a managerial concept'. There are five dimensions of brand equity: name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations besides perceived quality, customer base and other brand assets[141]

Gordon et al. (1993) came to the conclusion that the development of brand equity exists out of five stages [142]. First of all, it starts with the birth of the brand. Second, brand awareness and associations need to be created. Third, the organization needs to develop the quality and value perceptions of the brand. Then brand loyalty should emerge and at last the brand extensions should be launched.

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137 See Keller (1993), p. 1.
138 See Davis et al. (2008), p. 220.
139 See Simon and Sullivan (1990), p. 3.
140 See van Riel et al. (2005), p. 845.
141 See Kirmani & Zeithaml (1993), p. 148.
142 See Gordon et al. (1993), p. 5.

There are several reasons why brand equity is important for organizations. The first reason derives from a financially based motivation. Organizations needs to estimate the value of brand for 'accounting purposes, or for merger, acquisition, or divestiture purposes'[143]. The second reason derives from a strategic-based motivation. Improving the brand equity of an organization can improve the marketing productivity of an organization. Organizations are looking to increase the efficiency of their marketing costs due to higher costs, more competition and less demand in several industries. Therefore, organizations need to understand the behavior of their customers well. In that way organizations are more capable to make important strategic decisions about several marketing actions. According to Keller (1993) an organizations most valuable asset for improving marketing programs probably is 'improving marketing productivity is the knowledge that has been created about the brand in consumers' minds from the firm's investment in previous marketing programs'[144]

Besides these financial and strategic based motivations, brand equity is important due to 'the intangible nature of service offerings and, consequently, the difficulty in differentiating a firm's service offering from competitors in the marketplace'[145]. Business to business brand equity 'provides a powerful source of competitive advantage in the form of increased brand loyalty and improved customer retention levels'[146].

In conclusion there are several definitions which can be used for defining brand equity. A lot of research is done on customer-based brand equity and less on corporate based brand equity. In business to business markets, brand equity accrues to firm brand rather than products brands. Brand equity is important for organization since needs to estimate the value of brand for several financial purposes. Second, brand equity is crucial since due to 'the intangible nature of service offerings and, consequently, the difficulty in differentiating a firm's service offering from competitors in the marketplace'

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143 See Keller (1993), p. 1.
144 See Keller (1993), p. 2.
145 See Davis et al. (2008), p. 220.
146 See Aaker (1996), p. 348.

3. Research model and hypotheses

Through an extensive literature analysis on supplier satisfaction, brand image, brand awareness, brand equity and growth opportunity, a research model with hypotheses is created. These hypotheses will be tested in order identify the impact of the brand related factors on supplier satisfaction.

This study focusses on the following relational aspects; (1) Brand Image, (2) Brand Awareness, (3) Brand Equity, (4) Growth Opportunity, (5) Supplier satisfaction. The antecedent Growth Opportunity is replicated from the study of Vos et al. (2016), which is replicated from the study of Hüttinger et al. (2014). Based on the study of Hüttinger et al. (2014), growth opportunity has a positive impact on supplier satisfaction. This antecedent will be tested again. As an addition on the research of Hüttinger et al. (2014), in this research the impact on of the brand related factors will be tested on the growth opportunity of the supplier. As explained before, the antecedent Growth opportunity will be highlighted, since it is an important antecedent for this research. According to Hatch and Schultz (2008), an organization's ability to manage growth is mostly determined by the compatibility of its branding practices. They found that 'the most successful corporate brands are universal and so paradoxically facilitate differences of interpretation that appeal to different groups'[147]. In addition to this relation, the impact of the brand related factors brand image, brand awareness and brand equity on supplier satisfaction will be tested.

3.1 Growth Opportunity as a predictor for supplier satisfaction

Growth opportunity has been identified as a predicting factor for supplier satisfaction (Hüttinger et al., 2014). Growth opportunity refers to 'the suppliers' ability to grow together with the buying firm and to generate new potential business opportunities through the relationship'[148]. Researchers considered possible access to other customers, steady mutual growth, the role of the buying company as a global player and a strong brand as important factors of growth opportunity. After thoroughly assessing the PLS-based analyses in the study of Huttinger et al (2014), growth opportunity emerged as a significant antecedent of supplier satisfaction. In the study of Vos et al. (2016), growth opportunity had also positive effect on supplier satisfaction. In those studies, suppliers found that due to the relationship with a buying firm, they were able

[147] See Hatch and Schultz (2008), p. 7.
[148] See Walter et al. (2003), p. 721.

to attract new customers, provide a dominant market position and exploiting new market opportunities. This study expect that these findings will be the same as in both studies. In combination with the positive factors of growth opportunity and the results of the study of Vos et al. (2016), we can assume that growth opportunity of the supplier leads to supplier satisfaction.

H1: There is a positive relation between growth opportunity and supplier satisfaction.

3.2 Brand image as a predictor for growth opportunity and supplier satisfaction

When it comes to the brand image of organization, it is important to know what businesses understand as the brand. According to Berry (2000), 'the company becomes the primary brand rather than the product itself[149]'. Brand image has a significant impact on customer satisfaction especially across the E-banking, landline, mobile phone, bank and supermarket industries[150]. This was not only the case in these industries, but also in several more industries like the hospitality industry[151]. Batra and Miles (2004) stated that a 'purchasing agent for a company buying a mil- lion-dollar piece of equipment may be seeking satisfaction that this is a no-risk decision'[152]. Purchasing agents will buy the precious equipment at reliable companies, since they assume these companies as no-risk companies. This statement is supported by the research of Cretu and Brody (2007), where brand image has a positive impact on perceived quality[153]. In conclusion, consumers experience buying at a company with a good brand image as a no-risk decision since they experience that the quality is higher.

A positive brand image can give an organization a competitive advantage. Since positive brand images are difficult to imitate and cost a lot of money to compete against, organizations can yield a forceful competitive advantage[154]. According to Hatch and Schultz (2008), an organization's ability to manage growth is mostly determined by the compatibility of its branding practices. They found that 'the most successful corporate brands are universal and so

149 See Berry (2000), p. 128.
150 See Gronholdt et al. (2000), p. 512.
151 See Chitty et al. (2007), p. 563.
152 See Batra and Homes (2004), p. 320.
153 See Cretu and Brody (2007), p. 236.
154 See Carpenter & Nakamoto (1989), p. 291.

paradoxically facilitate differences of interpretation that appeal to different groups'[155]. Suppliers will profit from growing organizations, since buying organizations need more of their products and or services. Suppliers may experience doing business with organizations with a good brand image as a no risk business, since they perceive that these organizations have more qualities. Taking in account one driver that leads to growth opportunities for the supplier, a strong brand, we can assume that a positive brand image has a positive impact on the growth opportunity of the supplier. Taking into account the mechanism of reverse marketing, where organizations need to compete for suppliers and that brand image has a significant impact on customer satisfaction across several industries, since buyers experience buying from organization with a good brand image as no-risk buy, since they perceive the quality is higher ,we can assume that brand image has a positive impact on supplier satisfaction.

With the theoretical background on brand image in mind and its relationship with growth opportunity and supplier satisfaction, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H2a: There is a positive relation between brand image and growth opportunity.

H2b: There is a positive relation between brand image and supplier satisfaction.

3.3 Brand awareness as a predictor for growth opportunity and supplier satisfaction

Creating brand awareness for almost every business to business organization is an important factor for the organization's branding strategy[156]. Homburg et al. (2010) established a definition of brand awareness to a business to business context and defined brand awareness as 'the ability of the decision-makers in organizational buying centers to recognize or recall a brand'[157]. They investigated whether there is a link between brand awareness and market performance in various business to business industries. They found that brand awareness significantly drives market performance. One of the mechanisms why brand awareness drives market performance, are the buyer information costs. The information costs are the resource requirements associated with collecting the information which is needed for a purchase decision. The information costs

155 See Hatch and Schultz (2008), p. 7.
156 See Celi & Eagle (2008), p. 1.
157 See Homburg et al. (2010), p. 202.

for the buyer reduces since the buyer knows the brand[158]. This is based on the theory of information economics, where markets are characterized by imperfect and asymmetrical information[159]. Customers are more uncertain about the quality of the product and therefore perceive that their decisions are riskier, since they do not know the brand.

According to Hatch and Schultz (2008), an organization's ability to manage growth is mostly determined by the compatibility of its branding practices. They found that 'the most successful corporate brands are universal and so paradoxically facilitate differences of interpretation that appeal to different groups'[160]. Suppliers will profit from growing organizations, since buying organizations will need more of their products and or services. Since a strong brand is named as one of the important factors that have impact on growth opportunity and that an organization's ability to manage growth is mostly determined by the compatibility of its branding practices, we can assume that brand awareness can have a positive impact on growth opportunity.

As said before, brand awareness in a business to business context is defined as 'the ability of the decision-makers in organizational buying centers to recognize or recall a brand'[161]. Homburg et al. (2010) investigated whether there is a link between brand awareness and market performance in various business to business industries. They found that brand awareness significantly drives market performance. Consumers will buy earlier at well-known brands in case of time pressure and the size of the buying center, since consumers know what they will get. Taking into account the mechanism of reverse marketing, where organizations need to compete for suppliers and that brand awareness has a significant impact on market performance, since buyers experience buying from organization with a good brand awareness as the most easiest way, we can assume that brand awareness has a positive impact on supplier satisfaction.

With the theoretical background on brand awareness in mind and its relationship with growth opportunity and supplier satisfaction, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H3a: There is a positive relation between brand awareness and growth opportunity.

H3b: There is a positive relation between brand awareness and supplier satisfaction.

158 See Erdem & Swait (2008), p. 183.
159 See Homburg et al. (2010), p. 202.
160 See Hatch and Schultz (2008), p. 7.
161 See Homburg et al. (2010), p. 202.

3.4 Brand Equity as a predictor for growth opportunity and supplier satisfaction

In order to compose the last brand-related hypotheses of this research, the research of Davis et al. (2008) is used. In this research, Davis et al. (2008) investigated whether brand awareness is positively related to brand equity in business to business services context. They found that brand awareness has a significant positive impact on brand equity. For this research, the following definition of brand equity will be used: 'the incremental discounted future cash flows that would result from a product having its brand name in comparison with the proceeds that would accrue if the same product did not have that brand name'[162]. In comparison with brand image and brand awareness, brand equity is about the value of the brand.

Business to business brand equity 'provides a powerful source of competitive advantage in the form of increased brand loyalty and improved customer retention levels'[163]. Also, according to Hatch and Schultz (2008), an organization's ability to manage growth is mostly determined by the compatibility of its branding practices. They found that 'the most successful corporate brands are universal and so paradoxically facilitate differences of interpretation that appeal to different groups'[164]. With these statements in mind, we can assume that organizations with a high brand equity can manage growth. This will lead to more demand from consumers, since the brand loyalty and customer retention levels improve. We can assume that more demand will also lead to growth opportunities for the supplier, since the buying firm needs more products and or services from the supplier. Also according to Hüttinger (2014), growth opportunity 'plan an especially dominant role from the discussant's point of view'[165]. They considered a strong brand as one of the important factors that have impact on growth opportunity. With those statements in mind, we can assume that having a high brand equity as an organization can have an impact on growth opportunity of the supplier firm.

As said before, business to business brand equity 'provides a powerful source of competitive advantage in the form of increased brand loyalty and improved customer retention levels'[166]. Taking into account the mechanism of reverse marketing, where organizations need to compete for suppliers and that brand equity provides a powerful source of competitive advantage in the form of increased brand loyalty and improved customer retention levels, we can assume that

[162] See Simon and Sullivan (1990), p. 3.
[163] See Aaker (1996), p. 102.
[164] See Hatch and Schultz (2008), p. 7.
[165] See Hüttinger (2014), p. 79.
[166] See Aaker (1996), p. 102.

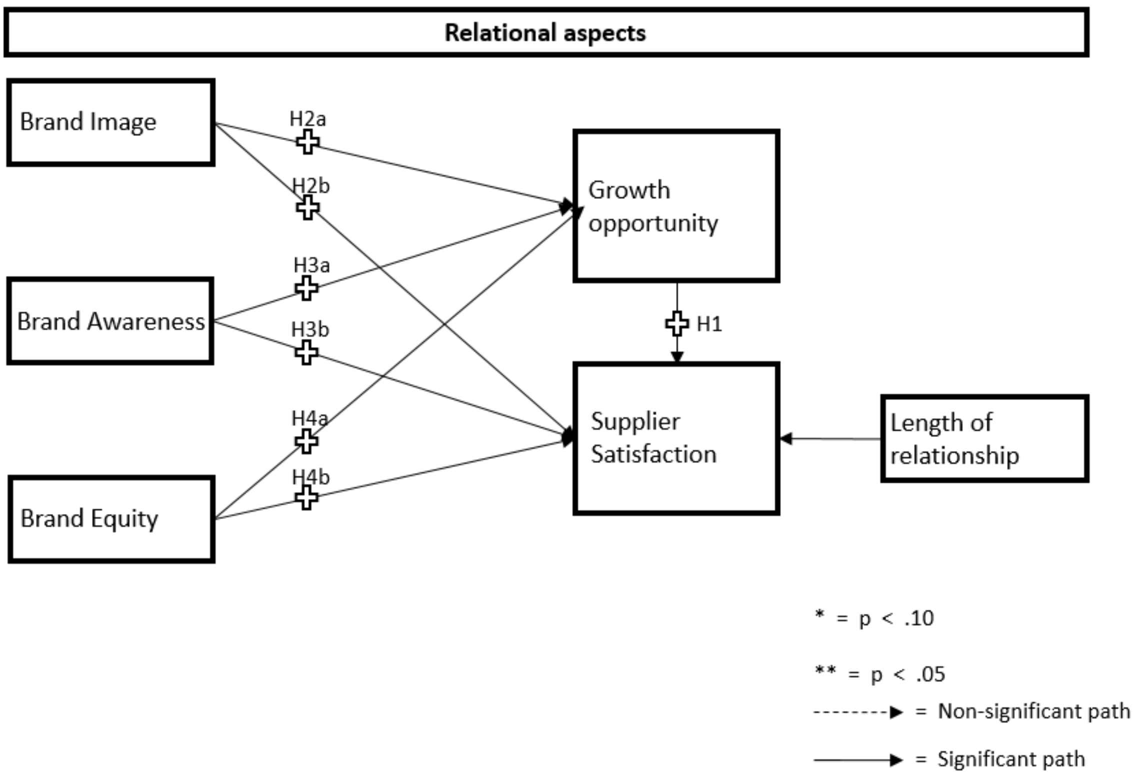
brand equity can provide powerful source of competitive advantage in the form of improved supplier retention levels and that brand equity have a positive impact on supplier satisfaction.

With the theoretical background on brand equity in mind and its relationship with growth opportunity and supplier satisfaction, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H4a: There is a positive relation between brand equity and growth opportunity.

H4b: There is a positive relation between brand equity and supplier satisfaction.

Figure 3 – Research Model



4. Methodology

4.1 Data collection via company X

In order to access the impact of brand image, brand equity and brand awareness on supplier satisfaction, an empirical quantitative study is designed. The research focuses on a market leader in motion control systems, company X. This company fits the context of this study very well. The automotive industry in the Netherlands is alive and kicking[167]. In almost every car of big brands like Volvo, BMW or Opel, there are products included of Dutch manufacturers in the automotive industry. The reason for this is that Dutch manufacturers are above average innovative, and they respond to the needs of their customers. We can assume that brands like BMW and Audi only want to do business with companies with an acceptable brand, but is this true? Company X operates in several industries in the Netherlands, France, Turkey, India, China, Brazil, Mexico and the USA. The research focuses on suppliers of company X all over the world. Company X supplies high-quality actuation systems in several industries like the Automotive, Medical and Truck industries. Company X is responsible for developing, assembling and marketing actuation systems for worldwide customers including original equipment manufacturers and Tier 1's in several end-markets. Company X is specialized in custom-made solutions for mile applications like drive systems and lifting truck cabins.

A survey is administered to 67 suppliers of company X worldwide, in order to measure the supplier satisfaction and the impact of the brand related factors brand image, brand awareness and brand equity on supplier satisfaction. Company X wanted to know how satisfied the direct procurement suppliers are and unfortunately, they had only 67 suppliers from who they directly purchase. For the research at least 100 suppliers need to fill in the survey in order to be reliable. The survey of Vos et al. is the basis of this study, in addition questions about the contingency factors brand image, brand awareness and brand equity will be added. The questions of brand related factors are derived from the study of Davis et al. (2008).

A survey is the best possible method for answering the research question since it helps with collecting information on a broad range of factors, both tangible and intangible factors. Using a survey is also the best method in order to collect a large amount of data in a relatively short period. Choosing for a survey, means that the researcher can easily contact the interviewee at

[167] https://www.vno-ncw.nl/forum/waarom-de-nederlandse-auto-industrie-nog-springlevend

every moment. A single e-mail reminder will double the number of responses[168] . The tables below present the characteristics of the sample and respondents.

Figure 4 – Types of Suppliers

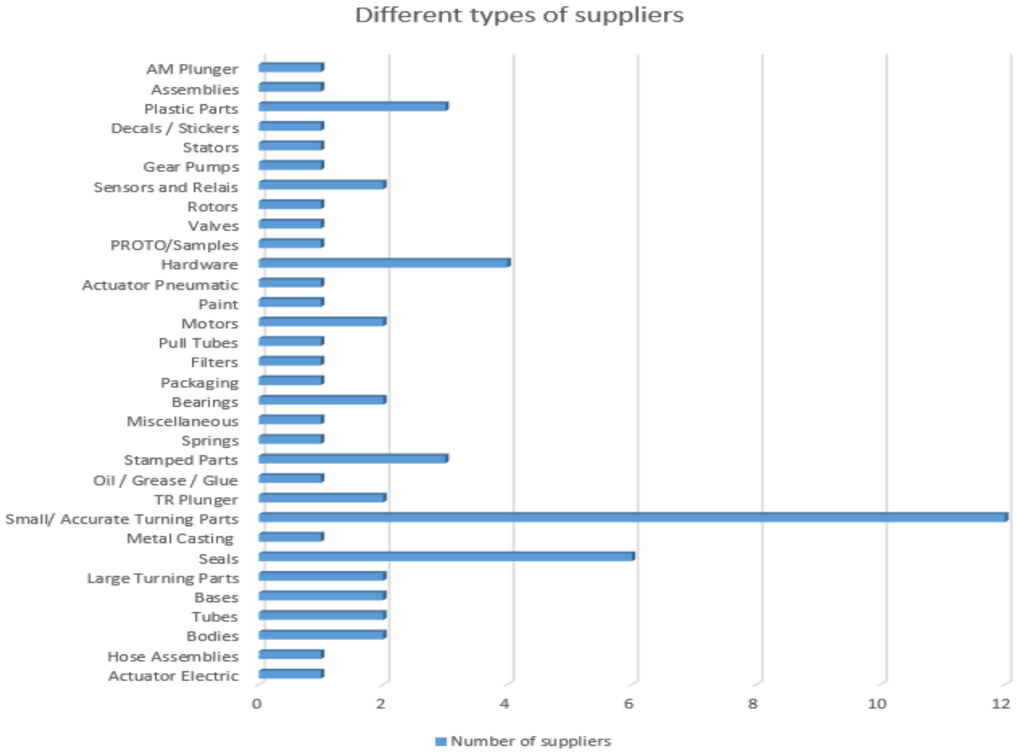


Table 1 – Sample and respondent characteristics

Characteristics of sample		Characteristics of respondents	
1. Length of buying relationship		**1. Tenure of respondent in company**	
< 1 years	0%	< 1 years	0%
1 -5 years	15%	1 - 5 years	13%
5 -10 years	15%	5 - 10 years	1%
10 - 20 years	11%	10 - 20 years	39%
> 20 years	59%	> 20 years	47%
2. Annual turnover with company X		**2. Tenure of respondent as sales representative**	
0 % – 25%	86%	< 1 years	0%
25% – 50%	10%	1 - 5 years	21%
50%– 75%	2%	5 - 10 years	13%
75%– 100%	2%	10 - 20 years	30%
		> 20 years	36%
3. Number of employees		**3. Length of respondent involvement in focal buyer-supplier relationship**	
< 100	66%	< 1 years	0%
100 – 1,000	20%	1 - 5 years	36%
1,000 – 10,000	13%	5 - 10 years	15%
10,000 – 50,000	0%	10 - 20 years	21%
> 50,000	1%	> 20 years	28%

168 See Crawford et al. (2001), p. 148.

The survey which is used, measures brand image, brand awareness and brand equity with help of a five-point Likert scale. The survey was built up in Qualtrics, which is the Leading Research & Experience Software. The survey started with a short introduction, followed with questions related to the core-aspects of supplier satisfaction. Then, the supplier had to answer questions related to the brand of company X, the growth opportunity and attractiveness of the customer. Finally, the supplier was asked to fill in some questions about the length of the relationship, type of organization they have and to which industry they belong to. All information which the suppliers gave, was completely anonymous. The first invitation to fill in the survey was sent in the middle of December 2018. After the Christmas holiday, at the beginning of January, the first reminder was sent to the suppliers. Unfortunately, the response rate was not so high as I expected. After the second reminder, 47 suppliers out of the 67 suppliers responded. The response rate was 70%, which is an acceptable rate.

In order to measure the dependent and independent variables, a multi-item scale is used. The research of Vos et al. is the basis of this study. This research was based on the research of Hüttinger (2014), who assessed supplier satisfaction and preferred customer status in a quantitative way. The contingency factors which are named earlier and the new factors that are related to the brand of the company are the independent variables. The dependent variable in the research is supplier satisfaction. The survey of Vos et al. is the basis of this study, in addition questions about the contingency factors brand image, brand awareness and brand equity will be added. The questions of brand related factors are derived from the study of Davis et al. (2008).

4.2 Choice of statistical analysis

For the analyses of the relationship between the brand related factors and supplier satisfaction, Partial Least Squares (PLS) will be used. PLS can be a powerful method of analysis because of the minimum demands on measurement scales, sample size and residual distributions[169]. A modeling-based statistical analysis will be used for this study, because this study focuses on prediction. Also PLS avoids two problems: inadmissible solutions and factor indeterminacy[170].

In order to test the data, SMARTPLS 3.0 and SPSS will be used in this research. The relationships between the variables become clear with the use of SMARTPLS 3.0. For the

[169] See Wold (1985), p. 581.
[170] See Fornell and Bookstein (1982) p. 441.

calculation of the descriptive statistics and the tests for data characteristics, IBM SPSS 22 (IBM-Corporation, 2013) will be used. For all analyses, this research will use a significance level of p<.10 is handled (two-tailed).

4.3 Quality assessment of data structure, measurement items and latent factors

First of all, a principal component analysis (PCA) will be used in order to access the data. Principal component analysis (PCA) is a multivariate technique that analyses a data table in which observations are described by several inter-correlated quantitative dependent variables[171.] The goal of this analysis is to extract the important information from the table, to represent it as a set of new orthogonal variables called principal components, and to display the pattern of similarity of the observations and of the variables as points in maps[172].

Second, it is important to conduct two tests in order to evaluate whether a factor analysis fits this research. The first test which is conducted, is the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test. This is a measure of the proportion of variance among variables that might be common variance. The lower the proportion, the more suited your data is to Factor Analysis[173] . The KMO value is a value between 0 and 1. KMO values between 0.8 and 1 indicates that the sampling is adequate. KMO values under 0.6 indicate that the sampling is not adequate.

The second test that is conducted, is the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The Bartlett's test is a chi-square statistic with (k-1) degrees of freedom, where k is the number of categories in the independent variable[174]. A factor analysis can be conducted in case that the value of the Bartlett's test is $p < .05$.

The table below shows that is it possible to conduct a factor analysis. The value of the KMO test is above the threshold of 0.6, which is 0.664. The value of the Bartlett's test of Sphericity is 0.000, which means that this is statistically significant ($p < .05$).

171 See Abdi and Williams (2010) p. 433.
172 See Abdi and Williams (2010) p. 433.
173 See Cerny and Kaiser (1977) p. 43.
174 See Garson (2012) p. 38.

Table 2 – Results of KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,664
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	478,624
	df	153
	Sig.	,000

The factor loadings should be assessed by using the Rotated Component Matrix. To assess the factor loadings the Varimax rotation option has been applied. In order to assess the loadings, the sample size is of big importance[175]. However, there exist many different rules of thumb for the sample size, Hogarty et al. (2005) also noted this and stated: "recommendations have not served researchers well[176]". In this research we have an effective sample size of 42, which is relatively low, because most research label sample sizes under 100 as poor (Williams et al. 2010). According to Hair et al., (1995) loadings need to be at least .50 to be practically significant. Due to the small sample size, a minimum loading of .60 is recommended (MacCallum, Widaman, Preacher & Hong 2001).

All four components are retained is this research. The table below shows us that most of the questions are loading to the components. The questions related to the variable supplier satisfaction are loading with component one. The questions related to the variable brand image are loading with component two. The questions related to the variable awareness are loading with component three. The questions related to the variable brand equity are loading with component four. It is important to have a big sample size in order give a good overview of the reality.

[175] See Williams et al. (2010), p. 4.
[176] See Hogarty et al. (2005), p. 203.

Table 3 – Results of rotated component matrix

Rotated Component Matrix[a]

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Brand awareness - Power-Packer is well-known in our industry.	,216	,045	,695	,131	,377
Brand awareness - Power-Packer is recognized by other members of our supply chain as a strong trade partner.	,192	,264	,684	,127	,340
Brand awareness - In comparison to other customers, this customers is a leading brand in the industry.	,144	,200	,870	,092	,014
Brand image - Power Packer can reliably predict how we will perform.	-,043	,222	,252	,077	,786
Brand image - In comparison to other customers, Power Packer is highly respected	,028	-,036	,356	,408	,585
Brand equity - We are willing to charge less in order to do business with Power Packer.	-,099	,188	,070	,777	,102
Brand equity - Power Packer's brand is different from other customers.	-,047	-,072	,028	,891	,242
Brand equity - Power Packer's name gives them an advantage over other customers.	-,169	,242	,514	,581	-,034
Brand equity - We benefit from working with Power Packer also in other relationships.	,098	,333	,361	,542	-,292
Satisfaction - Our firm is very satisfied with the overall relationship to Power-Packer.	,642	,193	-,062	,027	,625
Satisfaction - On the whole, our firm is completely happy with Power-Packer.	,748	,365	,037	,026	,319
Satisfaction - Generally, our firm is very pleased to have Power-Packer as our business partner.	,915	,146	,061	-,128	,114
Satisfaction - If we had to do it all over again, we would still choose to use Power-Packer.	,795	,216	,295	-,012	-,198
Satisfaction - Our firm does not regret the decision to do business with Power-Packer.	,892	,017	,148	-,079	-,085
Growth potential for your company: The relationship with Power-Packer... - ... provides us with a dominant market position in our sales area.	,040	,825	,155	,005	,281
Growth potential for your company: The relationship with Power-Packer... - ... is very important for us with respect to growth rates.	,180	,788	,051	-,007	,139
Growth potential for your company: The relationship with Power-Packer... - ... enables us to attract other customers.	,252	,747	,119	,190	-,083
Growth potential for your company: The relationship with Power-Packer... - ... enables us to exploit new market opportunities.	,150	,725	,248	,220	,009

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

Cronbach's Alpha is commonly employed index of test reliability[177]. Acceptable values of Cronbach's Alpha are ranging between 0.70 and 0.95[178]. The table below shows us that both the independent variables and the dependent variable supplier satisfaction have an alpha between the range of 0.70 and 0.95. Furthermore, the composite reliability, highest inner VIF and Average variance extracted have acceptable values too (see table below).

Table 4 – Quality criteria of constructs

Quality criteria	1	2	3	4	5	6
AVE	0.73	0.57	0.75	0.67	1.00	0.71
CR	0.89	0.84	0.86	0.89	1.00	0.92
Cronbach's Alpha	0.82	0.77	0.71	0.84	1.00	0.90
Highest VIF	1.781	1.400	1.679	1.581	1.240	1.781

Notes: AVE=Average Variance Extracted; CR= Composite Reliability; 1 = Brand Awareness; 2= Brand equity; 3=Brand Image; 4 = Growth Potential; 5=Length of Relationship; 6=Supplier Satisfaction

177 See Tavakol and Dennick (2011), p. 54.
178 See Bland and Altman (1997), p. 314.

5. Results

5.1 Results of the research model

Besides the impact of the brand related factors on supplier satisfaction, this research focused also on the impact of growth opportunity on supplier satisfaction. Based on the theory, we assume that there is a positive significant relationship of the growth opportunity of the supplier on supplier satisfaction. The findings regarding the variable growth opportunity of the supplier and supplier satisfaction show a strongly positive significant relationship **(**H1; t=.04, β=.40). Therefore, we can agree with the research which is done before by Vos et al. (2016).

The findings regarding the variables brand image of the organization and growth opportunity, shows a positive non-significant relationship (H2a; t=.61, β=-.08). Based on the information stated in the theoretical framework, a positive relationship was expected. Also, for the impact of brand image of the organization on supplier satisfaction, a positive relationship is expected. However, a positive non-significant relationship is shown by the models (H2b; t=.57, β=.11). On the basis of these results H2a and H2b are not supported. The findings regarding the variables brand awareness and growth opportunity, shows a positive significant relationship (H3a; t=.08, β=-.28). On the basis of the information stated in the theoretical framework, a positive relationship was expected. Also, for the impact of brand awareness of the organization on supplier satisfaction, a positive relationship is expected. Like the theory suggests, a positive significant relationship is shown by the models (H3b; t=.09, β=-.31). On the basis of these results H2a and H2b are supported. The results of the PLS-PM analyses reveal a positive significant relationship between the variables brand equity and growth opportunity (H4a; t=.06, β=.30). On the other hand, a negative significant relationship between brand equity and supplier satisfaction (H4b; t=.04, β=-.33). Therefore, H1a is supported like the theory suggests. H1b shows a significant relationship, nevertheless it is a negative relationship instead of a positive one.

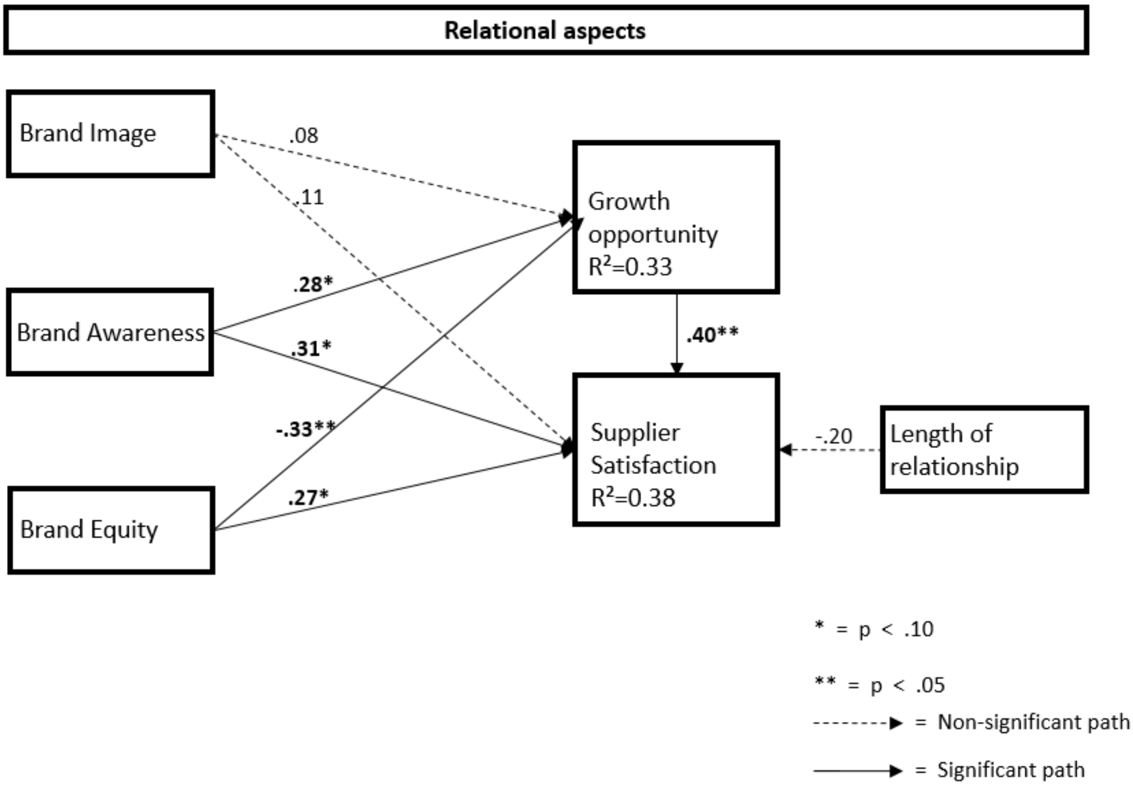
The last relationship which is examined in this research is the relationship between the length of buyer-supplier relationship and supplier satisfaction. The findings regarding the variables length of buyer-supplier relationship and supplier satisfaction show a strongly negative non-significant relationship (H5; t=.36, β=--.20).

Table 5 – Bootstrap and effect statistics of the model

Paths	β	SE	T	P
Brand Image -> Growth potential	.08	.16	.52	.61
Brand Image -> Supplier Satisfaction	.11	.20	.57	.57
Brand Awareness -> Growth Potential	.28	.16	1.77*	.08
Brand Awareness -> Supplier Satisfaction	.31	.18	1.75*	.08
Brand Equity -> Growth potential	.27	.15	1.87*	.06
Brand Equity -> Supplier Satisfaction	-.33	.16	2.10**	.04
Growth Potential-> Supplier Satisfaction	.40	.20	2.05**	.04
Length of Relationship -> Supplier Satisfaction	-.20	.21	.92	.36

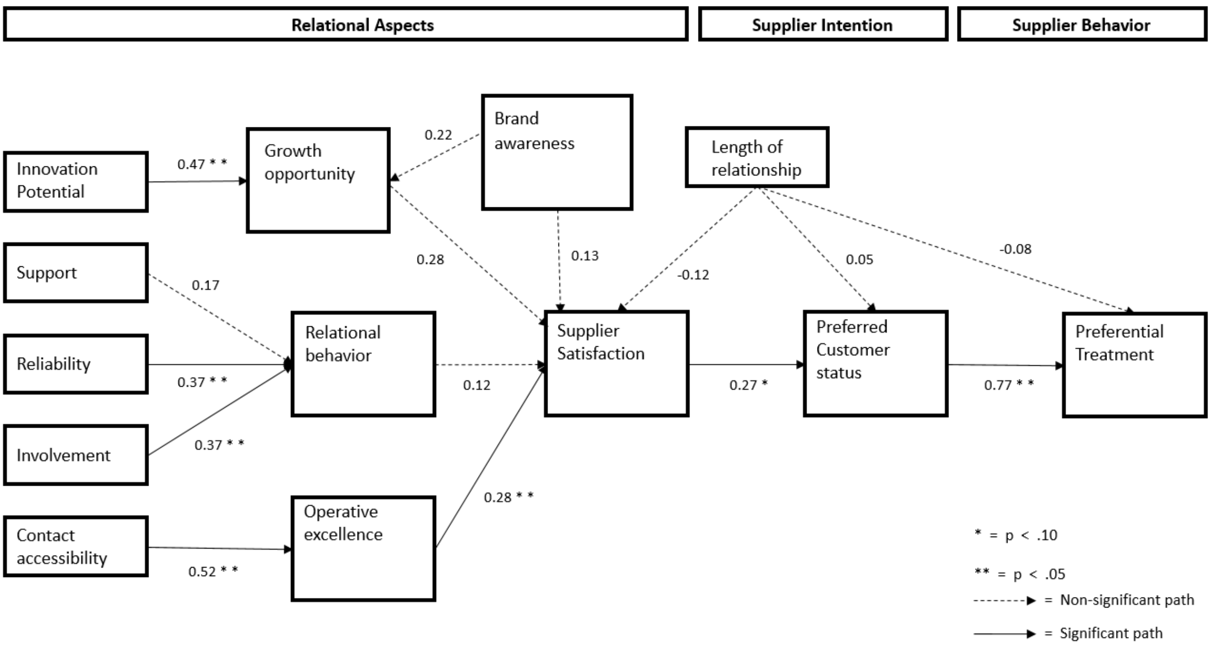
*Notes: β= standardized coefficient beta; SE= Standard error of β; T= T-statistic; P= P-value; *= p<.10 (two-sided); ** = p<.05 (two-sided);*

Figure 5 – Results of PLS-PM



5.2 Implementation of positive significant factors in the model of Vos et al. (2016)

In the previous chapter, we focused on the relationship of the brand related factors on growth opportunity and their relationship on supplier satisfaction. Based on the results, we concluded that brand awareness and brand equity have a significant impact on growth opportunity and supplier satisfaction. Brand awareness was the only brand related factor that had a positive significant impact on supplier satisfaction. In this paragraph, the brand related factor brand awareness, will be added to the model of supplier satisfaction of Vos et al. (2016).



Here, we can conclude that adding the variable brand awareness to the model of Vos et al. (2016), leads to different results. Unfortunately, there is no significant impact of the variable brand awareness on growth opportunity and on supplier satisfaction.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

Supplier satisfaction is a necessary condition for gaining and maintaining access to capable suppliers and their resources in this new competitive environment. Supplier satisfaction is measured several times in the past with the help of several contingency factors, but these studies focused for the most part on tangible assets and less on intangible assets such as brand image, brand awareness and brand equity. Besides this, currently 'reverse marketing' has become as important as the classical view of marketing. Reverse Marketing means that organizations need to compete for suppliers besides competing for customers. Based on the literature, we can also conclude there is a moderately strong positive relationship between brand image and customer commitment and between brand image and customer loyalty. Therefore, this researched examined whether the brand related factors brand equity, brand awareness and brand image could have an impact on the growth opportunity of the supplier and supplier satisfaction.

Through an extensive literature analysis on supplier satisfaction, growth opportunity, brand image, brand awareness, and brand equity a research model with hypotheses was created. The first hypothesis which was tested, is the relationship of growth opportunity on supplier satisfaction. As expected, there is a strongly positive relationship between these variables **(**H1; t=.04, β=.40). This hypothesis as already tested in the researches of Hüttinger et al. (2014) and Vos et al. (2016), which had the same result. Here we came to the conclusion that the buyer-supplier relationship is very important for the suppliers with respect to their growth rates. According to the asked questions, suppliers are also able to attract other customers and to exploit new market opportunities due the growth opportunities which the buying firms provide. In conclusion, due to the growth opportunities which the buying firm provides, a lot of suppliers are satisfied.

The first brand related hypotheses which were tested, are the hypotheses based on the brand image of the organization. The brand image of an organization is the idea of the organization that pops up the mind of the supplier. The findings regarding the variable brand image of the organization and growth opportunity show a positive non-significant relationship (H2a; t=.61, β=-.08). Unfortunately, this finding is unexpected. According to the theory, a strong brand is considered as one of the important factors that have impact on growth opportunity. As explained before, according to Hatch and Schultz (2008), an organization's ability to manage growth is mostly determined by the compatibility of its branding practices. Therefore, we can assume that an organization with a highly respected brand image is able to grow easier. When a buying firm is growing, there will be more opportunities to grow for the supplier. A possible explanation for this relationship is that the suppliers do not value the image of the organization in first instance, but only value what it yields in terms of direct value. Roth (1995) found that the perception of reality is more important than the reality itself. Nowadays, the only thing that matters for organization is realizing the key performance indicators. Brand image could affect these key performance indicators indirectly, therefore brand image will not satisfy supplying organizations directly.

The second hypotheses which is tested regarding the brand image of the organization, is the relationship of the brand image of the organization and supplier satisfaction. There is a positive non-significant relationship between brand image and supplier satisfaction (H2b; t=.57, β). Also here, we did not expect that there is no significant relationship between these two variables. Taking into account the mechanism of reverse marketing, where organizations need to compete for suppliers and that brand image has a significant impact on customer satisfaction across several industries, since buyers experience buying from organization with a good brand image as no-risk buy, since they perceive the quality is higher ,we can assume that brand image has a positive impact on supplier satisfaction. On the basis of the results, this is assumption is incorrect. A possible explanation for this is that suppliers do not value doing business with a buying organization as a risk. This can be the case since the suppliers deliver and do not have to buy. We can conclude that doing business with a highly respected firm does not lead to supplier satisfaction.

The results of the PLS-PM analyses (Table 5 and Figure 5) showed a positive significant relationship between the variables brand awareness and growth opportunity (H3a; t=.08, β=-.28). As said before, brand awareness in a business to business context is defined as 'the ability of the decision-makers in organizational buying centers to recognize or recall a brand'[179]. If consumers know that suppliers supply to organizations from who them recognize the brand of, it can lead that these consumers want to do business with this supplier. This can lead to more demand for the supplier and thus to growth opportunities for the supplier. In conclusion, when the buying firm is well-known in the industry where it operates and is recognized by other members of their supply chain as a strong trade partner, it will have a positive impact on the growth opportunities of the supplier. When the buying is recognized by the supplier as a leading

[179] See Homburg et al. (2010), p. 202.

brand in the industry, it will also have a positive impact on the growth opportunities of the supplier.

According to the results, these factors will also lead to supplier satisfaction, since there is a positive significant relationship between brand awareness and supplier satisfaction (H3b; t=.09, β=-.31). This result is as expected, since we assumed that brand awareness has a positive impact on supplier satisfaction. Taking into account the mechanism of reverse marketing, where organizations need to compete for suppliers and that brand awareness has a significant impact on market performance, since buyers experience buying from organization with a good brand awareness as the easiest way, we can assume that brand awareness has a positive impact on supplier satisfaction. Supplier will thus choose for organization from which they can recognize or recall their brand, since they will experience it as the simplest way to do business since they know the organization. Therefore, we can conclude that brand awareness is crucial for buying firms in order to have satisfied suppliers

The results of the PLS-PM analyses (Table 5 and Figure 5) showed a positive significant relationship between the variables brand equity and growth opportunity (H4a; t=.06, β=.27). Brand equity is explained as 'the incremental discounted future cash flows that would result from a product having its brand name in comparison with the proceeds that would accrue if the same product did not have that brand name'[162] According to the theory, a strong brand is considered as one of the important factors that have impact on growth opportunity. As explained before, according to Hatch and Schultz (2008), an organization's ability to manage growth is mostly determined by the compatibility of its branding practices. Therefore, we assumed that an organization with a high brand equity can lead to growth opportunities for the supplier. This assumption is correct, as we expected.

On the other hand, there was a negative significant relationship between brand equity and supplier satisfaction (H4b; t=.04, β=-.33). We expected a positive significant relationship, so this result is special. As said before, business to business brand equity 'provides a powerful source of competitive advantage in the form of increased brand loyalty and improved customer retention levels'[180]. Taking into account the mechanism of reverse marketing, where organizations need to compete for suppliers and that brand equity provides a powerful source of competitive advantage in the form of increased brand loyalty and improved customer retention levels, we assumed that brand equity can provide powerful source of competitive

[180] See Aaker (1996), p. 102.

advantage in the form of improved supplier retention levels and that brand equity have a positive impact on supplier satisfaction. This assumption is partly correct. A possible reason for this, is that suppliers have more expectations from suppliers with a high brand equity. Schiele et al. (2012) stated that 'supplier satisfaction is a condition that is achieved if the quality of outcomes from a buyer-supplier relationship meets or exceeds the supplier's expectations'[181]. Suppliers may perceive that companies with a high brand equity, deliver more quality in the buyer-supplier relationship, than companies with a low brand equity. When suppliers do not experience a qualitatively better relationship, it could impact the satisfaction of the suppliers negatively.

As said before, the goal of this research was to stimulate buying companies to build a strong brand in order to lead to supplier satisfaction. Almost every company in a business to consumer environment finds that developing and maintaining a strong brand is an essential factor for their marketing strategy. We found that brand image of an organization is about the idea that suppliers have about the organization. We found that brand awareness is about recalling and recognizing the brand of the organization. Last but not least, brand equity is about the incremental discounted future cash flows that would result from a product having its brand name in comparison with the proceeds that would accrue if the same product did not have that brand name. This research helped us to conclude that recognizing a brand by the supplier, has a positive impact on growth opportunity and therefore on supplier satisfaction. Having an acceptable brand image as a buying firm, does not have an impact on growth opportunity and therefore on supplier satisfaction. The brand equity of a buying organization has a positive impact on growth opportunities for the suppliers, but does not have a positive impact on supplier satisfaction. Having a long relationship with the supplier, does not mean that the supplier is satisfied. Here we can conclude that recognizing the brand of the organization is the most important for suppliers and that it will lead to supplier satisfaction. These unexpected findings are the result of some misplaced questions regarding the paper of Davis et al. (2008). The questions in the paper of Davis et al., do not measure the appropriate content of the brand related variables. Therefore, especially the answers relating to the questions of brand image and brand equity do not represent the right meaning of the variables brand image and brand equity. Based on the results of this research we can conclude that the only significant variable for supplier satisfaction is brand awareness. However, we saw that the implementation of this variable will

[181] Schiele et al. (2012), p. 1184.

negatively impact the overall outcome of the model. Therefore, we do not advice to implement this variable in the model of Vos et al. (2016).

6.1 Limitations: From sample size to face validity

In this paragraph, the limitations and implications of this research will be discussed. In addition to this, the opportunities for further research will be reviewed. Like in every study, this research has some limitations. The limitations should be taken into account when analyzing the results and findings. Therefore, we must be cautious in drawing conclusions. This research holds several implications for managers too. Due to these limitations of this research, there are some opportunities for further research in the future.

The biggest limitation of this research is the sample size of the suppliers (N=47). For these kinds of studies, we aim for at least a sample size of 100 suppliers. The small size can cause some problems for this research. The main problem of a small sample size is that we cannot be sure that the results of this research can serve as a parameter. The second limitation of this study is that this research is conducted in the automotive industry and not in other industries. Since this is the case, we cannot assume that the impact of brand image, brand awareness and brand equity on supplier satisfaction is the same in other industries. The third limitation of this research is the size of the company. This research focuses on a market leader in motion control systems, company X. This company has around 1100 employees, which is a respectable amount. With respect to company X, we cannot say that this company has the same size and brand awareness of companies like Shell (86.000 employees). Therefore, we cannot expect that this brand has a huge impact on the satisfaction of their suppliers. The fourth limitation is that the questions in the paper of Davis et al., do not measure the appropriate content of the brand related variables. Therefore, the answers relating to the questions of brand equity do not represent the right meaning of the variable brand equity. The final limitation of this study is that we experience face validity with questions. Examples are questions one and four of the brand equity questions. Here we can feel that these questions do not belong here, therefore we can use the wrong data.

6.2 Managerial Implications: The customer's actual experiences with the services is the most important factor in building a strong brand

This study holds several interesting implications for practitioners. First of all, this study focused on the importance of the brand related factors brand image, brand awareness and brand equity. The theory suggested that building a strong brand is crucial for organizations in a business to business context. On the basis of this research, we can conclude there is a positive significant relationship of brand awareness on supplier satisfaction. Brand awareness was defined as 'the ability of the decision-makers in organizational buying centers to recognize or recall a brand'. Since that brand awareness is an important concept for almost every business to business organization for the organization's branding strategy, managers of organizations should strive for achieving brand awareness of their organization by suppliers. According to Berry (2000), marketing and external communications help build the brand, but nothing is more powerful than the customer's actual experiences with the services. Therefore, organizations need to give everything what they have in order to please their suppliers.

6.3 Further Research: Focusing on other industries and stakeholders

The results and limitations of this study provide interesting directions for future research. This research tested the impact of brand related factors on supplier satisfaction in order to address the research question "What is the impact of brand related factors of buying firms on supplier satisfaction in the Netherlands?" First of all, it would be useful to test an expanded model of the brand related factors, since these factors consist of difference dimensions like the model of Keller (1993) suggested. Besides this opportunity, a larger sample size (at least N=100) should be used in order to detect more relations and to make a distinction between several industries. Using questions that explain the variable well, will make it easier for suppliers to understand and answer the questions in a good way. The questions of the paper of Davis et al. (2008) did not help to conduct the research properly. Finally, this study examined the impact of brand related factors of buying organizations on suppliers. However, there are other key stakeholders for business to business firms. This study can be conducted again, the impact of the brand related factors can then be examined on investors for example.

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8. Appendices

Questionnaire items

Brand Image (Davis et al., 2008)

1. BuyingFirmXY is known to take good care of their suppliers.*[182]
2. BuyingFirmXY can reliably predict how we will perform.
3. In comparison to other customers, BuyingFirmXY is known to consistently deliver very high quality products to its customers.*
4. In comparison to other customers, BuyingFirmXY is highly respected.
5. This customer brand has a rich history.*
6. With this customer, better people are working.*

Brand Awareness (Davis et al., 2008)

1. BuyingFirmXY is well-known in our industry.
2. BuyingFirmXY is recognized by other members of our supply chain as a strong trade partner.
3. In comparison to other customers, this customer is a leading brand in the industry.

Brand Equity (Davis et al., 2008)

1. We are willing to charge less in order to do business with BuyingFirmXY.
2. Their brand is different from other customers.
3. Their name gives them an advantage over other customers.
4. We benefit from working with them also in other relationships.

Growth Opportunity (Vos et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2009)

1. The relationship with BuyingFirmXY provides us with a dominant market position in our sales area.
2. The relationship with BuyingFirmXY is very important for us with respect to growth rates.
3. The relationship with BuyingFirmXY enables us to attract other customers.
4. The relationship with BuyingFirmXY enables us to exploit new market opportunities.

Length of relationship (Vos et al. 2016)

1. How long has your company been a supplier of BuyingFirmXY?

[182] *: Questions not used due to bad loadings

Supplier satisfaction (Vos et al., 2016)

1. Our firm is very satisfied with the overall relationship to BuyingFirmXY.
2. On the whole, our firm is completely happy with BuyingFirmXY.
3. Generally, our firm is very pleased to have BuyingFirmXY as our business partner.
4. If we had to do it all over again, we would still choose to use BuyingFirmXY.
5. Our firm does not regret the decision to do business with BuyingFirmXY.