

A Synthesis of Antecedents and Benefits Correlated to the Preferred Customer Status Based on Bachelor Theses of the University of Twente

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ABSTRACT,

The concept of the preferred customer status becomes increasingly important as the scarcity of suppliers within the market is rising. Therefore, this synthesis is focussed on 25 bachelor theses of the University of Twente that surround the topic of becoming a preferred customer and the related antecedents as well as benefits. The findings of the students' case studies are combined to draw a general conclusion on crucial antecedents of the preferred customer status with the focus on the attractiveness of the customers, the satisfaction of the suppliers and the preferred customer. Moreover, identified benefits of the case studies are included to show the valuable results of a preferred status with key suppliers and what preferential treatment can inhibit. Additionally, new drivers of the customer attractiveness, supplier satisfaction and preferred customer have been identified by the bachelor theses and enable future research avenues for the model of the preferred customer status. The new avenues include the awarding of suppliers for their performance, further implications on geographical proximity and the linguistic proximity as well as appropriate language support. Furthermore, the relevance of a good financial standing and one especially interesting finding on a level of tension in the buyer-supplier relationship are listed as new directions of future research.

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Keywords

Customer attractiveness, supplier satisfaction, preferred customer status, antecedents, benefits

ABBREVIATIONS

CA	=	Customer Attractiveness
NPD	=	New Product Development
PC	=	Preferred Customer
PCS	=	Preferred Customer Status
R&D	=	Research & Development
SET	=	Social Exchange Theory
SS	=	Supplier Satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

The context of the research is about how to become a preferred customer of a key supplier. Customers face an increased desire to achieve a unique position with their supplier and as a result differentiate from other competitors. Moreover, the competitiveness of buying firms for supplying firms is increasing due to a high need of suppliers in several markets, such as the railway, car and software industry as stated by Schiele et al. (2015, pp. 132-133).

A possible consequence of supplier scarcity for customers could be meeting shortages as well as becoming highly dependent on suppliers (Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 10). In order to counteract this, buyers should engage in becoming more attractive to suppliers to generate a preferred customer status. Furthermore, they should improve their relation with suppliers to experience the associated benefits of a preferred customership (Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1187). Being categorised as a preferred customer can increase the likelihood of inheriting a higher quality service from suppliers (Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 11). On this note, buyers are likely to get their demand fulfilled first, if they are considered to be a preferred customer (Williamson, 1991, p. 79).

Even though there has already been scientific literature and research conducted on this topic, there is still the need to assess real-life examples and may identify new needs or interests mentioned by different actors. Therefore, this paper includes case studies conducted by 25 bachelor students of the University of Twente. Moreover, the overall focus of the previous bachelor theses has been the identification of antecedents and benefits that are connected to the preferred customer status of a buying company. With regards to the practical evidence, the outcome from the conducted interviews by the bachelor students will be taken into account in order to proof the antecedents and benefits, which were encountered by several companies. As a result, the following *Research Questions* will be assessed:

RQ: What antecedents and benefits connected to the preferred customer status can be found in the case studies of the bachelor theses?

This synthesis includes the findings of the bachelor theses and combines them to draw a general solution on experienced antecedents and benefits, which are related to the model of the Preferred Customer Status (PCS). There is an introduction of the antecedents encountered in the case studies with a categorisation according to their origin in literature. Possibly new antecedent findings are elaborated on with the extension of finding a potential link to the existing literature. Key concepts of the PCS are the *Cycle of Preferred Customership* with an inclusion of the *Social Exchange Theory*.

Furthermore, an additional focus on the buyer status, reputation and segmentation process will be provided with a focus on their influence on the PCS as well as customer attractiveness and supplier satisfaction. These frameworks functioned as a special focal point in several bachelor theses. Real-life benefits will be combined and presented to assess the preferential treatment of the buying firms of the case studies. The key concept for benefits is the *Tie of Advantages*, which relates to the different preferential treatments a buying company can experience. Examples of benefits are provided to give information on how the differentiated handling could possibly look like for buying companies that focus on receiving a PCS. In the end hypotheses on new insights are stated for future research implications.

The relevance of this research paper is to provide further insights and ideas highlighted by various bachelor theses and can be seen

as an extension to these. By combining the findings of the research conducted by the 25 bachelor students, the literature on antecedents can further be supported as well as in some cases even expanded with new drivers for the PCS. The goal of the synthesis is to provide a construct with the important information about antecedents and benefits of the PCS and in addition, practical information on how to become a preferred customer.

2. MODEL OF THE PREFERRED CUSTOMER STATUS AND ITS INTERLINKED THEORIES

2.1 The Social Exchange Theory for the Relationship Development of the Buyer and Supplier

In order to explain how the relationship development of buyer and supplier is evolving, the *Social Exchange Theory (SET)* and *Interpersonal Attraction in Buyer-Supplier Relationship* can support the understanding of the psychological base for the relationship development (Ellegaard, 2012, p. 1220; Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180).

According to Schiele et al. (2012, p. 1180), the *Social Exchange Theory* can be viewed as a suitable theoretical framework in order to explain the different components and concepts of becoming a preferred customer. The SET describes the creation of “interdependent transactions” in order to develop valuable relations among the affected actors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 875). On the basis of Pulles et al. (2016, p. 131), relation benefits of the exchange between the actors are obtained resources, which is especially important in a market with high supplier scarcity.

The concept of *Interpersonal Attraction* can be considered to be important for buyer-supplier relationships, which have any “level of interpersonal interaction” (Ellegaard, 2012, p. 1220). Moreover, the attraction is based on being an affirmative attitude (Ellegaard, 2012, p. 1221; Huston & Levinger, 1978, p. 115). This perceived attraction can favourably result in interaction and cooperation between buyer and supplier (Ellegaard, 2012, p. 1221; Harris et al., 2003, p. 13).

2.2 The Cycle of Preferred Customership as Base Literature of the Preferred Customer Status

As stated by Schiele et al. (2012, p. 1179), there are different factors that explain and affect the relationship between suppliers and buyers. These are supplier satisfaction (SS), customer attractiveness (CA) and preferred customer (PC). On top of this, these building blocks are uttered to be crucial in order to assess a preferred customer status with a key supplier and need to be evaluated. Moreover, connected to the building blocks of CA, SS and PC are three essential factors.

The first one stated by Schiele et al. (2012, p. 1180) are the related “expectations” between the actors and furthermore relevant for the start of transactions between them. Following up, they defined the “comparison level”, which includes performance measures to determine the overall relationship with a focus on exchange and satisfaction (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180).

The last factor mentioned by Schiele et al. (2012, p. 1180) is the “comparison level of alternatives”, which deals with either the ongoing relation, if the performance was satisfying or the end of

relationship, if the performance was not considered to be satisfying with the additional presence of alternative solutions. The interrelation of the stated concepts is visualised in *Figure 1*.

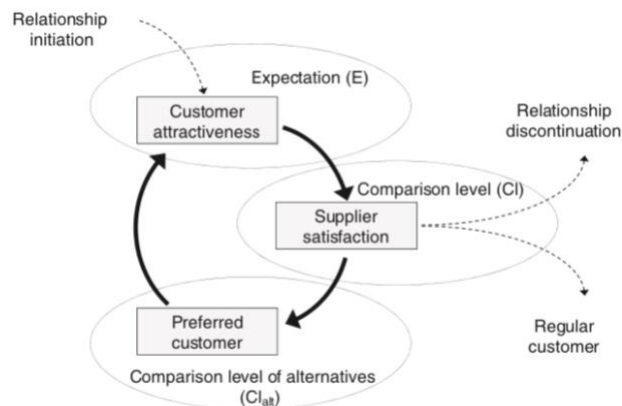


Figure 1. The Cycle of Preferred Customership with its Interconnected Dimensions of CA, SS and PC (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180).

2.2.1 Customer Attractiveness, Satisfaction of Suppliers and the Preferred Customer as Parts of the Cycle

When referring to Pulles et al. (2019, p. 2), the attractiveness of a customer towards suppliers consists out of two components. Firstly, the attraction towards additional and previously unknown suppliers to further strengthen and deepening the existing relationship. Part of the CA is the inclusion of the expectation factor, which is connected to the supplier's view on the customer and functions as an evaluation of the CA when first engaging in an exchange relation. According to Schiele et al. (2012, p. 1180), CA can be achieved by suppliers having an "positive expectation" for the partnership with a specific customer. Moreover, Schiele et al. (2012, p. 1180) state an additional heightened consciousness of the supplier towards a specific customer and the connected potential needs.

The satisfaction of suppliers inhibits the overall quality of the relation between the actors and the creation of value within this relation (Vos et al., 2016, p. 4613). In addition to this, Schiele et al. (2012, p. 1181) believe that the SS is controlled by the actual value of the achieved results that arise from the relation between buyer and supplier. This determines if the supplier's expectations towards the performance of the buyer are reached or even surpassed. These expectations tend to differ for each supplier and are established on their perception of value within the relationship (Pulles et al., 2016, p. 131; Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1181). Supplementary, the comparison level is important to consider for the SS since it can be seen as the evaluation base for the experienced satisfaction with the performance of the customer (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180).

A customer is most likely to be acknowledged as preferred if the previous stated building blocks (CA; SS) are fulfilled, which enables the customer to reach a differentiated position from competitors (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1181). Accompanied by this is the comparison level of alternatives. This level defines three possible scenarios in which the customer can receive the status of being preferred, a standard status or the supplier can decide to terminate the relation (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180).

3. METHODOLOGY

The inclusion of 25 bachelor theses enabled this research to find suitable information on the antecedents of the CA, SS and PC (see Appendix A). Case studies from various industries, for example retail, transport/ truck, mechanical engineering, telecommunication and construction, organic food, automobile, accounting, electrical engineering, bicycle, enclosure systems and climatisation technology, printing, trailer, food and beverage, pump, and oil, gas and power. A total of 165 interviews were conducted by the students to gather information about influential factors concerning the attractiveness of a customer, satisfaction of a supplier and the overall possibility to be recognised as a preferred customer. The findings enable this research to include data on the antecedents and benefits, which are related to being treated as a PC. Some of the bachelor theses focussed solely on the SS including the study of Bockstette (2017); Fischer (2017); Hegenberg (2017); Jazbek (2017); Lückner (2017); Skora (2017); Tucholka (2017).

The research model is based on the methodology approach of a qualitative synthesis to combine the information provided within the interviews of the previous bachelor theses about the PCS. Through collecting the findings and categorising them accordingly to the correlated literature, this research will ensure the creation of an overview of the PCS. Therefore, it was most suitable to use a form of synthesis methodology. When referencing Hannes and Lockwood (2012, p. 2), the utilisation of synthesising based on qualitative research papers can enable to invalidate or reconsider the present comprehension of the focus topic. Furthermore, the findings of the bachelor theses can allow to conclude on future research implications through presenting new antecedents in relation to the building blocks (CA, SS and PC).

According to Barnett-Page and Thomas (2009, p. 8), a synthesis can highlight two different aspects depending on varying approaches. One is focussed on the description and combination of the information into one while the other leans rather on going farther than the given outcomes to conclude with a "fresh interpretation of the phenomena under review" (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009, p. 8). Noblit and Hare (1988, p. 3) introduced the concept of *Lines-of-Argument*, which consists out of the *Clinical Inference* and *Grounded Theorizing* method, previously discussed by Geertz (1973) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009, p. 2).

When referring to Noblit and Hare (1988, p. 3), *Lines-of-Argument* includes the synthesis of the studies to form a general understanding and highlighting the examined connections and dissimilarities. In line with the previous stated information, the highlighting of similarities can help to further extend the theoretical framework by providing practical evidence. In order to be able to categorize the findings according to the literature, the model of Hüttinger et al. (2012, pp. 1199-1202) functioned as a guideline. It was further elongated with the later created model of Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718), since there have been differences in the theoretical base of the previous bachelor theses. Based on the outcomes of the interviews conducted by the students, the findings on antecedents and benefits were summarised to be able to further allocate them to the literature, which is used as a framework. Based on Hannes and Lockwood (2012, p. 5), a qualitative evidence synthesis does inhibit a list of outcomes from previous studies and moreover, assign them to a theory. Since there is no practical evidence provided in this research, antecedents have been matched to previous theoretical frameworks and mostly relied on the research of Hüttinger et al. (2012, pp. 1199-1202) and Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Customer Attractiveness as a Determinant of a Preferred Customer Status

The attractiveness of a customer is determined by the supplier and influential when considering the aspiration of building a business relationship with the buyer (Cordón et al., 2005, p. 7). According to Cordón et al. (2005, p. 5) two questions arise, which are concerned with increasing the buyer's attractiveness and what they can possibly assume from being attractive. An answer can be found in Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1199) and Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718). Here, they defined from the literature various drivers of the CA.

The first antecedent for being considered as an attractive customer is the perceived market growth opportunity, which can be offered to suppliers (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1199). This can have a focus on the possibility of assessing new customers and/or the image of the buying company (Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 718; Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, p. 131). Further additions are the size of the buying company, their market and growth share. Furthermore, these factors include the barrier to entry or exit the market and the possibility to access new customers or markets. This growth potential will be evaluated by the supplier and based on their liking the customer is either recognised as attractive or not (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1198).

The second antecedent concerning the CA mentioned by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1199) are risk factors. For this, it is important to assess the risk sharing, dependence, demand and stability and the supplier involvement (Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, p. 136). Thirdly, Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1199) highlight the importance of technological factors such as the customer's ability to cope with changes, depth of skills, commitment to innovation and early R&D involvement (Ellegaard & Ritter, 2006, p. 6; Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, p. 136). Furthermore, economic factors are stated by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1199) such as profit margins, prices and purchasing volumes (Moody, 1992, p. 52; Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, p. 131; Williamson, 1991, p. 80). In the end, this can lead to an increased financial attractiveness of the buying company (Baxter, 2012, p. 1255; Moody, 1992, p. 80; Williamson, 1991, p. 80). Lastly, social factors are used for the classification of the communication between buyer and supplier, their compatibility, information exchange and output factors such as trust, commitment and reliability (Ellegaard & Ritter, 2006, p. 6; Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, p. 135).

Further dimensions have been added to the CA based on the paper of Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718), namely contact accessibility and operative excellence. Contact accessibility in relation to CA consists out of factors such as close contact person and accessibility of contacts whereas operative excellence includes the planning reliability, reliable forecasting, simple internal processes and quick decision-making.

The overall findings on the CA can be found in *Table 2* (see Appendix B).

4.1.1 Findings on the antecedents of the CA from the case studies and their link to literature

First, Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1199) covered the relevance of *economic* factors. Factors included within this category deal with the overall economic performance of the buyer with a focus on the price/ volume and others costs relating to the business

(Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1197). Based on the literature of Ramsay and Wagner (2009, p. 130) and Hald et al. (2009, p. 966), the purchasing volume can increase the attractiveness by reaching a high level (Beering, 2014, p. 15; Driedger, 2015; Franck, 2016; Hanemann, 2014, p. 13; Hebestreit, 2015; Kokozinski, 2015; Kunde, 2018, p. 14; Laurenz, 2015; Mastebroek, 2016, p. 8; Schmidt, 2014, p. 10). Furthermore, Driedger (2015, p. 5) found the order quantity of the buying company to be influential when assessing the attractiveness of them. In line with the volume is the generated turnover by the supplier through the customer, which was referred to in Driedger (2015, p. 7) and Van der Vegt (2016, p. 13). Hald et al. (2009, p. 964) noticed the value of turnover for suppliers. Additionally, Van der Vegt (2016, p. 13) found the purchasing price to create either a positive or a negative effect on the CA, which is supported by Hald et al. (2009, p. 964).

Ramsay and Wagner (2009, p. 131 & 134) supposed the profit impact generated through the business relationship as an influential factor and possibly increasing the attention of the supplier towards the customer. In the case study of Kunde (2018, p. 14), a supplier determined the profitability as an important factor for the CA as well as high financial return described by a supplier in Broeze (2015, p. 7). Forecasting and the predictability of the production capacity utilization were mentioned to be influential factors for the CA (Broeze, 2015, p. 7; Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5). However, according to Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1201), forecasting finds its origin in the SS rather than the CA based on Maunu (2003, p. 76). It helps the supply chain to encounter less interruptions. Possible business opportunities realisable through working together with the buying company were specified to have an effect on the CA (Driedger, 2015, p. 8; Franck, 2016; Vural, 2015, p. 15). Nonetheless, Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1202) classified the potential of business opportunities to be an antecedent of the PCS.

Second, *market growth* factors are influential for the attractiveness and have been defined to create an effect on the CA. Likewise, the growth rate of the buying company, demand of the purchased good as well as growth within the industry sector was stated to have an influence on the attractiveness when referring to the suppliers of Beering (2014, p. 15), Driedger (2015, p. 7), Franck (2016, p. 7), Hanemann (2014, p. 13), Kokozinski (2015, p. 8), Kunde (2018, p. 14) and Vural (2015, p. 14). Suppliers in the study of Hebestreit (2015, p. 5) mentioned specifically the growth rate of the purchasing volume to increase the attractiveness status of their customers. Furthermore, Kunde (2018, p. 14), Franck (2016, p. 7), Schmidt (2014, p. 10), Van der Vegt (2016, p. 13) found another growth factor in the brand name of the buying company, which has been discussed as an influential factor for attractiveness in Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 702).

Access to possibly new buying companies and markets was established as an antecedent of the CA in Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1199), Hald et al. (2009, p. 964) and Ellegaard and Ritter (2007, p. 6) because of the chance to further enlarge their customer base and overall supply chain. Offering a potential access to new customers and/or markets seemed to be valued by suppliers and increased the overall attractiveness of the buying company (Beering, 2014, p. 15; Schmidt, 2014, p. 10).

Some suppliers addressed an increased level of the CA if the buyer has an influence in the market (Beering, 2014; Franck, 2016). In the study of Laurenz (2015, p. 10), the attractiveness was affected by the customer being "Europe's market leader", which suits the assumption of Fiocca (1982, p. 55) that customer market leadership have a strategic implication for the relationship between buyer and seller. When looking at the

characteristics of the buying company, the size of the business seems to shape the attractiveness experienced by the supplier defined by Fiocca (1982, p. 57). Several suppliers referred to the size as a driver for CA (Beering, 2014; Broeze, 2015; Laurenz, 2015; Mastebroek, 2016; Schmidt, 2014; Van der Vegt, 2016; Vural, 2015). Value creation can be seen as a focal point due to it including not only monetary term but also innovation aspects (Ellegaard & Ritter, 2007, p. 6). According to Vural (2015, p. 14) the relationship between the two businesses should be mutually able to create value.

Third, the next focus lies upon the *risk* factors perceived by the suppliers and mentioned to have an impact on the attractiveness of their buyers. Vural (2015, p. 14) found two suppliers mentioning the sharing of risk to have an impact on the buying company and its attractiveness, which is supported by the research of Christiansen and Maltz (2002, p. 191). Demand stability is concerned with a steady ordering of goods in order to enable the supplier to plan the production accordingly (Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, p. 131). A stable performance concerning the demand can be stated to increase the attractiveness in the cases of Beering (2014, p. 15), Hebestreit (2015, p. 5) and Vural (2015, p. 14). In cohesion with the demand stability is a stable environment in the market. Fiocca (1982, p. 57) discussed the attractiveness of the market as well as the buyer's stand. If suppliers view this as positive, they are most likely to perceive the relationship as good. stability referring to the overall market situation was mentioned as an influential factor by suppliers of the case studies of Beering (2014, p. 15), Schmidt (2014, p. 10) and Vural (2015, p. 14).

Ramsay and Wagner (2009, p. 131) highlighted the dependence within the business relationship and that it depends on the supplier whether or not they value a dependent customer. Moreover, Hebestreit (2015, p. 5) identified the dependency as an antecedent of CA. Suppliers included in the research of Schmidt (2014, p. 10) and Vural (2015, p. 14) stated to assess the attractiveness of their customers based on the standardisation of the produced products, which is stated to have the potential of focussing the product range on one supplier (Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, p. 181).

Fourth, the *technical* factors driving the CA will be highlighted and matched to their literature roots. Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718) included the early supplier involvement into the CA dimensions. This implies an impact on being attractive for supplier, if they are integrated early within processes. The early involvement in R&D of the supplier increased the attractiveness of the customer in the cases of Beering (2014, p. 15), Driedger (2015, p. 6), Hebestreit (2015, p. 5) and Vural (2015, p. 14). In cohesion is the joint development and joint improvement discussed within the interviews and identified as drivers of the CA by Franck (2016, p. 7) and Vural (2015, p. 14).

Working together in a cooperation was determined as an antecedent in the case of Franck (2016, p. 7) by stating a "trustful and long-term cooperation", Kokozinski (2015, p. 8) referring to it as "long-term cooperation" and lastly Driedger (2015, p. 6) including a "collaboration in planning of the production". Considering the work of Harris et al. (2003, p. 24), the parties need to see a potential benefit in order to engage in a cooperation. Moreover, the buying company could possibly increase their attractiveness by being able to cope with changes in case of new requirements or alterations (Fiocca, 1982, p. 57; Vural, 2015, p. 14).

In order to guarantee a successful business performance it is advisable for the two parties to exchange their information accordingly for planning matters (Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, p. 188). This refers to the importance of the information exchange

regarding the attractiveness of the customer. Based on the case studies of Beering (2014, p. 15), Driedger (2015, p. 8), Hanemann (2014, p. 13), Hebestreit (2015, p. 5), Schmidt (2014, p. 10) and Vural (2015, p. 15) the transfer of knowledge was found as a driver of CA, which aligns with the literature presented by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1199). Furthermore, the depth, complexity and types of technological skills were mentioned to increase the attractiveness (Beering, 2014, p. 15; Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5; Schmidt, 2014, p. 10; Vural, 2015, p. 14). This measurement of CA is supported by Fiocca (1982, p. 57).

Considering the innovativeness of customers, suppliers seem to find it attractive if the buyer shows commitment, is innovative and focussed on innovation development including a "high-technological and innovative" orientation of the customer (Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, p. 185; Franck, 2016, p. 7; Hanemann, 2014, p. 13; Kokozinski, 2015, p. 8). Hanemann (2014, p. 13) further stated the "acquiring customer's knowledge" and "competency development" which both connect to increasing the supplier's technologies by implementing the technical knowledge of the buyer (Hald et al., 2009, p. 963).

Fifth, Kunde (2018, p. 14) found the *operational excellence* within the interviews influencing the CA by supporting the goods and planning as well as the commercialisation and retailing. Additionally, Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 711) identified a positive relation between the operative excellence and CA. When further focusing on supplier support, Vural (2015, p. 14) informed about the significance of supplier trainings and field visits. This factor finds its foundation in Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1199) along with Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718) and underlying theory of Christiansen and Maltz (2002, p. 181), who highlighted the commitment towards training for the supplier. Payment period was defined as an antecedent for the CA by Driedger (2015, p. 5). Nonetheless, the literature provides a ground for the payment period within the SS antecedent grouping due to being relatable to payment habits of a customer (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1201).

Sixth, the *social* factors are described in the following paragraph, since they were further uttered to be influential concerning the attractiveness level of the buying company (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1198). As defined by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1199), trust, commitment, adaption, long-term interactions/ loyalty and reliability do all belong to the output factors of the relationship between supplier and buyer and are uttered to have a direct impact on the CA.

Within the relationship of supplier and buyer, trust inhibits a crucial role. Trust is influenced by actions of the buyer or supplier, and further based on not only one party but both (Fiocca, 1982, p. 62; Hald et al., 2009, p. 964). This factor was backed up by multiple supplier of case studies (Broeze, 2015; Mastebroek, 2016, p. 8; Schmidt, 2014; Van der Vegt, 2016; Vural, 2015).

Based on Cook and Emerson (1978, p. 734), the commitment between two parties is needed for a stable transfer and creating a personal connection. Commitment was expressed by supplier from several case studies (Broeze, 2015, p. 7; Hanemann, 2014; Schmidt, 2014, p. 10; Van der Vegt, 2016; Vural, 2015) as well as adaption described by two suppliers in the study of Schmidt (2014, p. 10). Not only is adaption connected to the purchased goods but also to business operations and could improve the attractiveness of the buyer (Hald et al., 2009, p. 967).

This can be extended by long-term interactions and/ or loyalty (Beering, 2014; Hanemann, 2014; Schmidt, 2014; Vural, 2015), having a "long-term relationship" (Driedger, 2015, p. 8) and a "stable relationship" (Broeze, 2015, p. 7). A "long history" shared by the buyer and supplier was specified to increase the CA in the study of Broeze (2015, p. 7). The importance of long-

term interactions depends on the preference of the supplier. According to Ramsay and Wagner (2009, p. 131), the businesses that trade with technical goods informed on suppliers valuing a long-term relation and/ or contact with their buyers. When referring to Hald et al. (2009, p. 965), being responsible and reliable can improve the reliance of the customer. Reliability was uttered as a highly influential factor mentioned in several case studies, since it can either increase or decrease the attractiveness of the customer (Beering, 2014; Driedger, 2015; Kunde, 2018; Vural, 2015). The compatibility consists out of sharing the same goals and aims within the business relationship (Harris et al., 2003, p. 29). Generally speaking, the fit of the strategy between the buying company and their suppliers can be stated as influential for CA and the overall future of the business relationship between the two parties (Kokozinski, 2015; Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 13).

Another factor highlighted by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1199) are the tight personal relations experienced by supplier and buyer. These are positively related to the attention of the supplier towards the buyer (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1203). Beering (2014, p. 15), Broeze (2015, p. 6), Franck (2016, p. 7), Hebestreit (2015, p. 5), Mastebroek (2016, p. 8) and Van der Vegt (2016, p. 13) informed within their research on the importance of tight personal relations for the attractiveness of the buying company. In the study of Kokozinski (2015, p. 8) „good personal contacts“ have been described by suppliers to have an impact on the CA.

The behaviour of a customer forms expectations on the supplier side, which are connected to trust and value (Hald et al., 2009, p. 962). Due to this, the behaviour and especially relational behaviour can create an attractive base for the customer and further identified in the case studies of Kunde (2018, p. 14) and Mastebroek (2016, p. 8), where behaviour relates to the ease of handling the customer and the experienced reciprocity.

Seventh, the *accessibility of contact* within the buying firm specified in Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 703) was found to be influential in the case of Kunde (2018, p. 14) while Beering (2014, p. 15) and Hebestreit (2015, p. 5) related it to possibilities for extensive face-to-face contact defined by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1199). These face-to-face meetings are discussed to further build trust and through this improve the attractiveness of the customer perceived by the supplier (Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, p. 180).

Communication is an important variable for a successful collaboration between two businesses in order to exchange information, objectives and feedback and, should be conducted by all parties involved (Hald et al., 2009, p. 967). Overall, the communication between the two parties can be stated to increase the attractiveness if it matches the expectations and preferences of the supplier by being for example “functioning and open” (Beering, 2014, p. 15; Kokozinski, 2015, p. 8) or generally speaking perceived as “good” (Driedger, 2015, p. 6).

Table 3. The Antecedents of the Customer Attractiveness

Categorisation	Sub-factors
<i>Economic</i>	Purchasing price
	Purchasing volume
	Turnover
	Profitability
	Forecasting
	Capacity utilisation
	Business opportunities

<i>Market growth factors</i>	Size
	Growth rate
	Industry growth
	Influence on market
	Access to new customers/ markets
	Value creation
	Brand name
<i>Risk factors</i>	Risk sharing
	Demand stability
	Market stability
	Dependence
	Standardisation of product
<i>Technical factors</i>	Early R&D involvement and joint improvement
	Cooperation
	Customer’s ability to cope with changes
	Information exchange
	Technological skills
	Commitment to innovation
	Competency development
<i>Operational excellence</i>	Payment period
<i>Social factors</i>	Behaviour
	Tight personal relations
	Output factors
	(trust, commitment, adaption, long-term interactions/ loyalty, reliability)
<i>Contact accessibility</i>	Communication

4.1.2 CA antecedent findings of case studies stated without a literature base

Based on the findings of the case studies, supplier mentioned additional influential factors for the CA. Starting off with being involved and engaged in networks, which was added and seen as important when determining the CA (Mastebroek, 2016, p. 8). A further factor was related to the overall knowledge of the market development (Kunde, 2018, p. 14).

A relatively outstanding factor was given by two suppliers that stated the “legal form as family-controlled foundation” to be influencing the attractiveness of the buying company (Beering, 2014, p. 15). Another exceptional remark for the attractiveness of a customer was in relation to “diversification purposes” to broaden the existing customer base to eventually grow as a business (Franck, 2016, p. 7).

Hebestreit (2015, p. 5) discovered the importance of the geographical proximity of the buying company for the CA, which cannot be backed up by previous literature. Suppliers seem to find it attractive if the customer is rather fast accessible in relation to deliveries, interaction and operational excellence (Beering, 2014, p. 5; Kunde, 2018, p. 10).

Moreover, Hebestreit (2015, p. 5) found the business field to have an influence on the attractiveness of a customer. This was further supported by suppliers relating the CA to the buyer being in the oil industry (Hanemann, 2014, p. 13). Suppliers in the case study of Voortman (2016, p. 6 & 7) associated attractiveness of a customer with the kind of business. Not to mention the operational excellence such as strategic pricing, which was referred to in the cases of Driedger (2015, p. 8) and Vural (2015, p. 15). In the study of Van der Vegt (2016, p. 13), the procurement policy caused a decrease of attractiveness due to “purchasing at sharp prices”.

Mastebroek (2016, p. 8) pointed out suppliers, who find it attractive if the customer stays within the agreed-on time period of payment. An additional inclusion of a new program for an increased payment speed was introduced by a supplier in the case study of Schmidt (2014, p. 10). This particular program is called “supplier cost finance”. Furthermore, the overall knowledge of the product could be regarded as a new antecedent (Kunde, 2018).

When referring to Driedger (2015, p. 6), a “long product life cycle” is further contributing to the attractiveness of a customer as well as the kind of product, which was purchased (Kokozinski, 2015, p. 8). Vural (2015, p. 15) stated a connection between CA and a reduction of production mistakes. When referring to the innovation potential, an increased CA is noticed for innovativeness concerning the “frequency of new developments and innovations” and willingness for cooperation in order to develop new products (Kokozinski, 2015, p. 8; Vural, 2015, p. 15).

A potentially new relational factor is the provision of feedback to the supplier in order to improve their performance (Driedger, 2015, p. 14). Next to the previous, the awarding of suppliers seemed to be valued by several suppliers from case studies and could have a potential to increase the attractiveness related to the buying company (Driedger, 2015, p. 8; Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5; Vural, 2015, p. 15). As stated by Van der Vegt (2016, p. 13), honesty of the buying company can be seen as a relational factor regarding the business relation and affecting the CA.

Moreover, the importance of a buyer not only within an industry, but also generally as a customer can be noted as an influential factor stated by Van der Vegt (2016, p. 13). Beering (2014, p. 15) even revealed the possibility of the buying company to function as a “reference customer” for the supplier. According to Beering (2014, p. 15), one supplier additionally mentioned the stand of the buying company in the media, which makes the company attractive, which could have a potential connection to the brand image of a buyer. Beering (2014, p. 15) incorporated the financial situation of the buying company, which was mentioned as the customer needing to have a good financial position to increase the likelihood of being recognised as attractive. Additionally, Broeze (2015, p. 8) introduced a new finding for the PCS based on one supplier, who recognised the buying company of the case study as their only preferred customer which again was stated to raise the attractiveness of the buyer.

Table 4. The New Antecedents of the Customer Attractiveness

Categorisation	Sub-factors
<i>Growth opportunities</i>	Market development knowledge
	Field of business/ industry
	Networking
	Legal form of business
	Diversification

<i>Innovation potential</i>	Geographical proximity
	Frequency of new developments and innovations
	Willingness for cooperation
<i>Operational excellence</i>	Purchasing strategy
	Strategic pricing
	Payment period
	Procurement policy
	Supplier cost finance
	Product knowledge
	Kind of product
<i>Relational factors</i>	Reduction of production mistakes
	Product life cycle
	Feedback for supplier
	Supplier award
	Honesty
<i>Company image</i>	Media standing
	Reference customer
	Importance of customer
	Financial standing
	Only PC

4.2 Supplier Satisfaction as a Determinant of the Preferred Customer Status

In order to guarantee the satisfaction of the supplier, customers need to meet their expectations (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1181). In cohesion to CA, Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1201) and Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718) created a framework for drivers of the SS based on the existing literature about the topic.

Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1201) stated four influential factor groups. The first factor deals with the technical excellence, which includes the early supplier involvement, technical competence, joint relationship effort, response to supplier requests and suggestions for improvement (Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 105 & 111; Nyaga et al., 2010, p. 109). As a second antecedent the supply value is presented by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1201), which withholds components such as profitability, adherence to agreements, cooperation and recommendations (Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 109; Wong, 2000, p. 429).

The third antecedent is mode of interaction with the focus on the communication, structure, reaction and information. Communication is based on the experienced availability of direct contact of the buying company by the supplier (Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 109). The research of Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718) included contact accessibility to the SS with contact person for all matters, cross-functional coordination and long-term commitment.

Examples for reaction are trust, constructive controversy, conflict management and reaction speed (Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 109; Nyaga et al., 2010, p. 104). The information aspect includes the level, quality, accuracy and timeliness of information exchange (Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 109; Nyaga et al., 2010, p. 105). The last important antecedent of SS mentioned by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1201) is the operational excellence. Forecasting/ planning, order process, billing/ delivery, payment habits, support and business competence are part of this last antecedent in order to guarantee the satisfaction of supplier

(Caniels et al., 2018, p. 349; Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 109; Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 718).

The findings on drivers for the SS from the bachelor theses can be found in *Table 2* (see Appendix B).

4.2.1 Findings on the antecedents of the SS discovered in the case studies and their connection to the literature

First, concerning the *supply value* factors for the satisfaction of supplier introduced by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1201), the most and foremost influences addressed has been the profitability experienced through the buying company with an addition of the “amount of business” the supplier received due to the buyer found in the research of Tucholka (2017, p. 14) (Bockstette, 2017, p. 5; Brüning, 2017, p. 12; Fischer, 2017, p. 15; Fitschen, 2018, p. 9; Franck, 2016, p. 7; Hegenberg, 2017, p. 5 & 6; Jazbek, 2017, p. 7; Kunde, 2018, p. 14; Lückner, 2017, p. 11; Mastebroek, 2016, p. 9).

The importance of profitability is not unusual, since it is elementary for well-functioning businesses (Maunu, 2003, p. 76). Not only does the profitability impact the satisfaction but also the purchasing volumes and them having a relatively high amount, which again is satisfying the supplier (Beering, 2014, p. 15; Bockstette, 2017, p. 7; Brüning, 2017, p. 13; Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5; Kokozinski, 2015, p. 9; Schmidt, 2014, p. 10; Tucholka, 2017, p. 14). Hegenberg (2017, p. 6) noticed suppliers would reach a higher level of satisfaction if the buyer would increase the purchasing volume. Both of these factors are related to the overall continuity and stability of a company and therefore part of satisfying a supplier (Maunu, 2003, p. 92).

In regards to the bargaining position of the supplier during negotiations, the case studies of Schmidt (2014, p. 10) and Vural (2015, p. 16) highlighted to maintain a fair negotiation between supplier and buyer. Essig and Amann (2009, p. 109) included the bargaining position as an influential factor into their research model to assess the significance. The position for bargaining was further supported by Fitschen (2018, p. 14) with emphasis on the quality level and reasonable price and Tucholka (2017, p. 14) with the focus on methods for a fair negotiation. One supplier included in the case study of Driedger (2015, p. 6) was negatively affected by experiencing a high amount of pressure concerning the price point. Overall, fairness within the business relationship was seen as an influential factor for SS (Franck, 2016, p. 7; Hegenberg, 2017, p. 6). Essig and Amann (2009, p. 104) explained the SS as “[...] a supplier’s feeling of fairness [...]”, which additionally highlights the gravity of fairness within the business relationship.

Adhering to the made agreements not only in price negotiation but also contractual agreements was named in multiple interviews and considered as a way to satisfy suppliers (Driedger, 2015; Fitschen, 2018; Laurenz, 2015; Mastebroek, 2016; Vural, 2015). Maunu (2003, p. 76 & 95) referred to agreements between two business entities as “key issues” and they should satisfy the assumptions of both. Cooperative relationships have been revealed to be an antecedent of the SS based on the research findings of Benton and Maloni (2005, p. 9).

Moreover, this was supported by the findings for SS by multiple case studies (Beering, 2014, p. 15; Brüning, 2017, p. 12; Franck, 2016, p. 7; Hanemann, 2014, p. 8; Skora, 2017, p. 12; Tucholka, 2017, p. 14; Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 14; Vural, 2015, p. 16). Driedger (2015, p. 7) informed about a supplier referring to the cooperation and how it enables them to minimise the amount of arising issues. Maunu (2003, p. 72) defined a stable and continuing relationship as precious. Based on the findings of the interviews, the time horizons between the two parties seems to

have an influence on the SS. A long and healthy business relationship with the customer seems to be valued by many suppliers (Beering, 2014, p. 15; Bockstette, 2017, p. 5; Brüning, 2017, p. 12; Fitschen, 2018, p. 14; Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5; Tucholka, 2017, p. 10; Vural, 2015, p. 16). A long-term relationship was stated in Hanemann (2014, p. 14) to set up a “transparency and honesty” between the businesses and according to Tucholka (2017, p. 14) suppliers valued “honesty about the scope of the project”. According to Ghijsen et al. (2010, p. 18), providing recommendations can be viewed as favourable in order to accomplish the desired outcome and not focus on insignificant factors. Vural (2015, p. 16) reported on a supplier mentioning the importance of recommendations when it comes to innovative and technical implications.

Second, the opportunities and potential to increase the *growth* of the supplier was included in several studies, which leaves the impression of being valued by the supplier and contributing to the satisfaction (Bockstette, 2017, p. 5; Brüning, 2017, p. 12; Fischer, 2017, p. 15; Franck, 2016, p. 7; Jazbek, 2017, p. 7; Kunde, 2018, p. 14; Tucholka, 2017, p. 10). This is in line with the literature of Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 708), which stated the influence of growth opportunity on the SS. Hegenberg (2017, p. 6) informed about the importance of the growth opportunity due to suppliers being satisfied through becoming the “sole supplier” of their customers.

Third, *mode of interaction* was stated as influential not only in literature but also within the case studies. The aspect of experiencing relational behaviour within the business relationship of supplier and buyer was part of the statements made in Brüning (2017, p. 13), Fischer (2017, p. 15 & 16), Jazbek (2017, p. 7), Kunde (2018, p. 14 & 15), Lückner (2017, p. 11) and Skora (2017, p. 12). Wong (2000, p. 429) uttered an increased satisfaction if suppliers experience a “relational approach” conducted by the buyer. Another factor mentioned was the communication stream between the two parties.

Considering the high amount of suppliers, who highlighted the significance of a good, respectful, open and ongoing communication, it can more than definitely increase the SS (Beering, 2014, p. 16; Driedger, 2015, p. 7; Fitschen, 2018, p. 14; Franck, 2016, p. 7; Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5; Hegenberg, 2017, p. 6; Kokozinski, 2015, p. 9; Skora, 2017, p. 12; Tucholka, 2017, p. 10; Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 13; Vural, 2015, p. 16).

When referring to Maunu (2003, p. 115), a “clear” communication was assessed as a crucial part of the business relationship as well as the continuous exchange of information, which can increase the business performance (Ghijsen et al., 2010, p. 18). The exchange of information between supplier and customer can be seen as crucial for some supplier and highly influential when evaluating their satisfaction with the buyer (Beering, 2014, p. 15; Bockstette, 2017, p. 7; Franck, 2016, p. 7; Hanemann, 2014, p. 14; Kokozinski, 2015, p. 9; Skora, 2017, p. 12; Tucholka, 2017, p. 10; Vural, 2015, p. 16).

Reaction of the customer defined by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1201) was generally included in Brüning (2017, p. 13) whereas trust received additional focus in Beering (2014, p. 16), Bockstette (2017, p. 5), Driedger (2015, p. 7), Jazbek (2017, p. 7), Kokozinski (2015, p. 9), Schmidt (2014, p. 10), Van der Vegt (2016, p. 13) and Vural (2015, p. 16). Based on the findings of Benton and Maloni (2005, p. 9), trust was found to be of significance for SS. In cohesion with trust is the openness within the relationship as explained by Maunu (2003, p. 76) and further referred to in the case studies of Skora (2017, p. 12), Van der Vegt (2016, p. 14) and Vural (2015, p. 16). Lastly, the politeness from the buyer side was discussed to be influential in multiple

case studies, which again relates to the reaction (Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 109; Hanemann, 2014, p. 14; Vural, 2015, p. 16).

Feedback can be used as a tool to inform the supplier on their performance, especially when comparing them to other suppliers as well as including information about quality and shipments (Maunu, 2003, p. 97). Receiving feedback provided by the customer was valued by suppliers (Beering, 2014, p. 16; Driedger, 2015, p. 8; Hegenberg, 2017, p. 6; Tucholka, 2017, p. 10) in conjunction with constructive controversy (Hanemann, 2014, p. 14; Schmidt, 2014, p. 10; Vural, 2015, p. 15). An active and functioning conflict management was included in the interviews of Beering (2014, p. 15) and Franck (2016, p. 7) and found a significant outcome in the research of Benton and Maloni (2005, p. 11) on SS.

Fourth, as claimed by Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 708), the *reliability* of the buying company was found to have an impact on the overall SS. Suppliers included in the case studies of Brüning (2017, p. 12), Fischer (2017, pp. 14-16), Fitschen (2018, p. 14), Kunde (2018, p. 14), Lückner (2017, p. 11), Skora (2017, p. 12) and Van der Vegt (2016, p. 13) talked about and confirmed the influence of reliability on the satisfaction level. Bockstette (2017, p. 5) further elaborated on the importance of being able to rely on the customer due to developing “distrust” if reliability is missing.

Fifth, the *contact accessibility* is further elaborated in the following paragraph. Being able to contact the buying firm in a direct, regular and frequent manner was found to persuade the satisfaction of the supplier (Beering, 2014, p. 15; Bockstette, 2017, p. 7; Fischer, 2017, p. 15 & 16; Kunde, 2018, p. 14 & 15; Tucholka, 2017, p. 14; Vural, 2015, p. 16). Hanemann (2014, p. 14) informed about a supplier who related the contact accessibility to the size of the customer and reported on an “inertia” of the buying company because of the substantial business size. This stands in contrast to the research conducted by Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 708), in which they found no significance between contact accessibility and the satisfaction of the supplier.

Sixth, when looking at the *technical excellence*, the early involvement of the supplier into processes is viewed as a key driver for SS (Beering, 2014, p. 15; Bockstette, 2017, p. 5; Franck, 2016, p. 7; Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5; Tucholka, 2017, p. 14; Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 13; Vural, 2015, p. 15). Maunu (2003, p. 76) categorised the early involvement as crucial in order to increase the quality of the goods, “manufacturability” and expense improvements. The technical competence of the buyer received attention from suppliers from the research of Beering (2014, p. 16) and Hanemann (2014, p. 14) focussed on the “technological understanding” and the innovativeness of the buyer. Essig and Amann (2009, p. 105) further backed up these findings by stating the competence to have an influence on the SS.

Working together on the business relationship and putting effort into it from both sides increased the SS in several case studies (Bockstette, 2017; Broeze, 2015; Franck, 2016; Vural, 2015). Furthermore, it is stated to offer a possible alignment of business procedures (Nyaga et al., 2010, p. 104). In addition, being responsive to the supplier and their suggestions for improvement was detected as a driver for SS in Beering (2014, p. 15) and Hebestreit (2015, p. 5).

Seventh, the *operational excellence* of customers can help to increase the performance of the supplier (Fischer, 2017, p. 14 & 16; Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5; Kunde, 2018, p. 14 & 15; Lückner, 2017, p. 11; Mastebroek, 2016, p. 9). Nonetheless, Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 708) evaluated the operative excellence of buying companies and failed to find a significance considering the

impact on the satisfaction of suppliers. Forecasting and the planning of production are necessary steps to ensure a reliable supply and were discussed within the case studies to have an impact on the satisfaction level of the supplier (Beering, 2014, p. 15; Brüning, 2017, p. 12; Franck, 2016, p. 7; Tucholka, 2017, p. 14; Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 13).

Moreover, it can be used as an evaluation base for the supplier to compare the accuracy among their customers (Maunu, 2003, p. 92). In line with this, an appropriate time scheduling can additionally persuade the satisfaction (Brüning, 2017, p. 13; Vural, 2015, p. 16). In the research of Essig and Amann (2009, p. 107), the order process was detected to have an effect on the SS. This was supported by the study of Vural (2015, p. 16). A stable ordering process should be guaranteed according to Hanemann (2014, p. 14).

Maunu (2003, p. 112) declared the ordering in a timely manner as valuable for suppliers and can possibly create dissatisfaction when orders are made too late. In connection to order process is the payment habit. Customer need to keep in mind the importance of payment habits when it comes to an increased satisfaction of the supplier (Beering, 2014, p. 16; Brüning, 2017, p. 12; Fitschen, 2018, p. 14; Hanemann, 2014, p. 14; Kokozinski, 2015, p. 9; Schmidt, 2014, p. 10; Tucholka, 2017, p. 14; Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 13; Vural, 2015, p. 16).

Furthermore, Essig and Amann (2009, p. 111) found an influence of delivery process for satisfying the supplier, which was assessed in the study of Beering (2014, p. 15). Generally, the competence of the buying company has the potential to increase the performance of the supplier as well as their satisfaction with the customer (Essig & Amann, 2009; Tucholka, 2017, p. 105; Van der Vegt, 2016).

Eighth, the overall provided *support* for the supplier was included within the studies of Bockstette (2017, p. 5), Fischer (2017, p. 14 & 16) and Kunde (2018, p. 14 & 15). Tucholka (2017, p. 14) added the specific focus on supplier training to “improve business processes and quality”. Supplementary, “special services/support” from the buyer side were stated in the case study derived by Franck (2016, p. 7). According to Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718), the development of supplier can be categorised to the support of suppliers, which was defined as an influential factor for SS in Van der Vegt (2016, p. 13). However, Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 708) were not supporting this outcome due to a non-significant outcome on the importance of support on the SS.

Table 5. The Antecedents of the Supplier Satisfaction

Categorisation	Sub-factors
<i>Supply value</i>	Profitability
	Purchasing volumes
	Bargaining position
	Adherence to agreements
	Cooperative relationships
	Long-term time horizons
	Recommendations
<i>Growth opportunities</i>	
<i>Mode of interaction</i>	Relational behaviour
	Communication
	Information exchange
	Reaction

	(trust, openness, politeness, feedback, constructive controversy, conflict management)
<i>Reliability</i>	
<i>Contact accessibility</i>	
<i>Technical excellence</i>	Early supplier involvement Technical competence Joint relationship effort Response to supplier requests and suggestions for improvement
<i>Operational excellence</i>	Forecasting/ planning Order process Payment habit Delivery Business competence
<i>Support</i>	Supplier training

4.2.2 Potential new antecedents of SS without literature base found in the case studies

Based on the outcomes of the case studies, suppliers mentioned additional factors, that should be assessed by customer in order to ensure the satisfaction of their suppliers. A potential new antecedent of the SS could be sympathy and the pleasantness to work with the buyer, which was mentioned to have an impact on the satisfaction of the supplier (Mastebroek, 2016, p. 9; Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 13). Further related factors can be found in the thesis of Skora (2017, p. 12) with remarks on the initial impression and dialogue of and with the buying company and further focus on a lasting commitment of the buyer.

Therefore, being considered as ambitious was resulting in SS for this specific case. Another relational factor is the possibility to generate positive achievements in order to satisfy the supplier (Franck, 2016, p. 7). A sharing of respect for each other can be seen as influential for the relationship and satisfaction of the supplier (Driedger, 2015, p. 7; Franck, 2016, p. 7). An extraordinary statement was found in the study of Driedger (2015, p. 5), in which a supplier addressed the need for a “certain level of tension” in order to assure the most excellent performance. Similar to CA, supplier awards were mentioned to have an impact on the satisfaction experienced by the supplier (Franck, 2016, p. 7). Van der Vegt (2016, p. 13) informed about a supplier being satisfied if the buying company is adding additional value to the business since “when a company does not add value to you, you will be less satisfied with him”.

Operational implications communicated within the bachelor theses are integrating an electronic data interchange. This was missing in the case study conducted by Beering (2014, p. 5) and caused dissatisfaction for one supplier. When looking at the product side, being able to identify with the goods of the buyer was found to increase the satisfaction level of suppliers (Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5). The study of Brüning (2017, p. 12) included a supplier valuing the inclusion of “wishes” uttered by the supplier.

Information about an influence of the proximity on the SS was stated to have an impact. First of the geographical proximity for which supplier generally prefer to be rather close to their

customer (Fischer, 2017, p. 14; Franck, 2016, p. 7; Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5). In addition to this, Franck (2016, p. 7) informed about the importance of a linguistic proximity, which was highlighted in an interview of one supplier.

Concerning the company image, the stability of the financial performance of the buying company was addressed and stated to be influential for the satisfaction of the supplier in the case of Fitschen (2018, p. 9). Tucholka (2017, p. 8) identified another factor based on the contact availability from the buyer-side which is focussed on a stable and constant purchasing personnel instead of an every-changing staff.

Table 6. The New Antecedents of the Supplier Satisfaction

Categorisation	Sub-factors
<i>Relational factors</i>	Sympathy Added value Pleasantness Initial impression and dialogue Ambitiousness Certain level of tension Mutual respect Lasting commitment Positive achievements Supplier award
<i>Operational excellence</i>	Identification with products EDI Stable purchasing personnel Integrating wishes of supplier Geographical proximity Linguistic proximity
<i>Company image</i>	Financial standing
<i>Customer contact</i>	Stable purchasing personnel

4.3 Preferred Customer and its Influential Factors

Once the supplier is satisfied, the customer is likely to further achieve a PCS (Vos, 2017, p. 4). In line with the previous antecedent groups of the PCS, Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1202) and Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718) included driver for the PC. Antecedents of the PC defined by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1202) are divided into economic value, relational quality, instruments of interaction and strategic compatibility.

The economic value consists out of a high purchase volumes, profitability, business opportunities and costs referring to the customer service, which include for example the delivery cost (Moody, 1992, pp. 54-55; Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 11). Furthermore, relational quality includes factors such as trust, commitment, respect, fairness and strong bonds (Blonska, 2010, p. 103; Moody, 1992, p. 53). The fourth group is defined by instruments of interaction, which consist out of for example early supplier involvement, communication and feedback, involvement in product design and crisis management (Moody, 1992, p. 53).

Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1202) described the last group as strategic compatibility with variables such as strategic fit, shared

future, geographical proximity and cluster membership (Blonska, 2010; Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 103). Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718) further provided insight on the growth opportunity and its influence on the PCS with focus on mutual growth, brand image, access to other customers and the status of a global player. In addition to this, reliability was defined, which consists out of credibility in agreements and fairness in negotiations. Similar to the previous two building blocks is the inclusion of contact accessibility and the closeness to the contact person (Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 718). Lastly, the support in form of supplier training was mentioned as an influential factor of the PCS (Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 718).

The overall findings on the PC can be found in *Table 2* (see Appendix B).

4.3.1 Findings on the antecedents of the PC from the case studies and their relation to the literature

First, *economic value* for the preferred status of a customer include first and foremost the high purchasing volume. As discussed in Steinle and Schiele (2008, p. 11), the purchasing volume ordered by the buying firm does have an impact on a PCS. This antecedent was mentioned several times in the case studies of Beering (2014, p. 16), Franck (2016, p. 7), Hanemann (2014, p. 14), Hebestreit (2015, p. 5), Kokozinski (2015, p. 9), Phan (2019, p. 8), Schmidt (2014, p. 10), Van der Vegt (2016, p. 15) and Vural (2015, p. 16). Driedger (2015, p. 6) informed about an automatic PCS after the customer derived a certain volume. The overall profitability generated through the buying company was stated to have a significance for the PCS is profitability (Phan, 2019, p. 8; Seppenwoolde, 2018, p. 8; Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 15).

Profitability was considered as one of the crucial factors that determine the relationship between supplier and buyer in the research of Moody (1992, p. 53). Business opportunities were stated to play a role when considering customers as preferred (Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 699). Based on the case studies of Beering (2014, p. 16), Driedger (2015, p. 8), Franck (2016, p. 7), Schmidt (2014, p. 10), Van der Vegt (2016, p. 15) and Vural (2015, p. 16), the opportunities perceived by the suppliers had an influence on the PC.

Basing the purchasing price on the principle of the total cost of ownership was additionally seen as preferential considering the buying behaviour of the customer (Beering, 2014, p. 16; Moody, 1992, p. 53). One factor was included that are based on a different categorisation than the one according to Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1202). This factor was the bargaining position reported by Schmidt (2014, p. 10) and based on the literature an antecedent of SS.

Second, Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 708) defined an importance of *growth opportunity* in relation to the PCS. Here, the access to other customers influenced in the case study of Phan (2019, p. 8) the suppliers and further functioned as an evaluation ground for becoming a PC, whereas Hanemann (2014, p. 14) identified the access to new markets as an antecedent for the PCS. Furthermore, in the interviews of Franck (2016, p. 7), one supplier defined a higher chance of receiving a PCS if the buying company is a global player. The overall growth potential of buying companies was considered as a driver for supplier included in Kokozinski (2015, p. 9) and Phan (2019, p. 8). Characteristics of the buying company in form of a brand image and financial standing mentioned by Phan (2019, p. 8), Driedger (2015, p. 8) and Franck (2016, p. 7), and stated to have a potential to increase the likelihood of being perceived as a PC, which is supported by

Baxter (2012, p. 1255) and Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 708). When comparing customers on their financial attractiveness or brand image, suppliers are likely to choose customers that match their expectations for both categories.

Third, *strategic factors* play an important role as antecedents of the PCS. The overall strategic fit between the buying company and their suppliers was stated as an evaluation base for the PCS in the case studies of Beering (2014, p. 16), Hanemann (2014, p. 14), Kokozinski (2015, p. 9), Phan (2019, p. 9), Van der Vegt (2016, p. 15) and Vural (2015, p. 17) with a focus on sharing the same goals. Another part of this category is the geographical proximity, which deals with the closeness of the factories of buyers to the ones of suppliers and in turn receiving a heightened chance of receiving a PCS (Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 5). It can enable a faster and more smooth delivery in emergency cases and was found to have an impact on being viewed as a PC (Beering, 2014, p. 16; Franck, 2016, p. 7; Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5; Phan, 2019, p. 9; Vural, 2015, p. 17). In Vural (2015, p. 15) the ability of the buying company to “operate in at least three countries” was categorised as favourable by one supplier. This aligns with Driedger (2015, p. 7), since one supplier identified their international supply for the buying company as preferential. Being able to envision a shared future for the business relationship supported the position of a PC and possible cooperation with suppliers (Blonska, 2010, p. 30; Hanemann, 2014, p. 14; Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5; Phan, 2019, p. 9; Vural, 2015, p. 17).

Fourth, *instruments of interaction* of the PCS include the early supplier involvement as well as the involvement in product design. Beering (2014, p. 16) and Phan (2019, p. 9) classified the early involvement as influential. Furthermore, the involvement in the design of the product was discussed as an antecedent in Beering (2014, p. 16), Hebestreit (2015, p. 5) and Vural (2015, p. 17). The early involvement of suppliers and the involvement in the product development is favourable to receive additional input from the supplier (Moody, 1992, p. 54). Additionally, Beering (2014, p. 16) and Phan (2019, p. 9) found an influence of the development of suppliers that was referred to as a driver by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1202) due to having a significant part in the establishment of “relational capital” within the business relation (Blonska, 2010, p. 37).

In order to be able to ensure a successful involvement and information exchange, the parties need to communicate (Moody, 1992, p. 54). Communication and feedback were evaluated as influential by multiple suppliers (Beering, 2014, p. 16; Driedger, 2015, p. 8; Franck, 2016, p. 7; Hanemann, 2014, p. 14; Kokozinski, 2015, p. 9; Phan, 2019, p. 9; Vural, 2015, p. 17). When conducted successfully, the predictability of decision processes should be increased and effective for becoming a PC (Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5). The length of the relationship was included as having an impact on the PCS by the studies of Driedger (2015, p. 8), Franck (2016, p. 7), Kokozinski (2015, p. 9) and Van der Vegt (2016, p. 14). Blonska (2010, p. 25) related the long-term relationship to the increased likelihood of receiving “access to specific privileges”. Excellent customers are uttered to engage in an action-oriented crisis management to ensure a high quality performance of their supplier (Moody, 1992, p. 53).

Beering (2014, p. 16), Phan (2019, p. 9) and Vural (2015, p. 17) highlighted the importance of a successful crisis management mentioned by suppliers. Quality initiatives influenced the preferred status with suppliers in the cases of Beering (2014, p. 16), Hebestreit (2015, p. 5), Van der Vegt (2016, p. 15) and Vural (2015, p. 17) due to specific quality requirements expected from the buyer (Moody, 1992, p. 53).

Fifth, the case studies included *relational quality*, which is defined to have an impact on the PCS. Especially factors relating to the behaviour of the buying company are included within this section. First off, the loyalty the supplier receives from the buyer can be viewed as a driver for PCS (Beering, 2014, p. 16; Driedger, 2015, p. 8; Phan, 2019, p. 9; Schmidt, 2014, p. 10; Seppenwoolde, 2018, p. 9; Vural, 2015, p. 16). Loyalty can be earned by the customer throughout the relationship and moreover increase the impact on the supplier (Williamson, 1991, p. 80). In line with this is the established trust between supplier and the buying company, which, similar to loyalty, needs to be acquired through a relational behaviour (Moody, 1992, p. 55). Multiple case studies informed about the influence of trust on the relationship between buyer and seller (Beering, 2014, p. 16; Driedger, 2015, p. 8; Franck, 2016, p. 7; Hanemann, 2014, p. 14; Kokozinski, 2015, p. 9; Phan, 2019, p. 9; Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 15; Vural, 2015, p. 16).

As previously stated, a respectful behaviour experienced by the supplier can increase the chance of becoming a PC (Driedger, 2015, p. 8; Moody, 1992, p. 55; Schmidt, 2014, p. 11; Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 15; Vural, 2015, p. 17) as well as conceiving the relationship and business as fair (Hebestreit, 2015, p. 5; Moody, 1992, p. 55; Schmidt, 2014, p. 10; Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 15; Vural, 2015, p. 17). As defined by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1202), strong bonds were found and identified as a driver for receiving a preferred status. This was further supported by the studies of Beering (2014, p. 16), Hanemann (2014, p. 14), Hebestreit (2015, p. 5), Phan (2019, p. 9), Schmidt (2014, p. 11), Van der Vegt (2016, p. 14) and Vural (2015, p. 17). Furthermore, the commitment to the relationship between supplier and buyer was expressed to determine the quality of the business relationship (Blonska, 2010, p. 32). Therefore, Beering (2014, p. 16) and Phan (2019, p. 9) informed about the potential influence of commitment on the PCS.

Sixth, the *accessibility of contact* within the buying company and the level of intensity was referred to in the interviews of Driedger (2015, p. 8), Phan (2019, p. 9) and Seppenwoolde (2018, p. 9). This is especially crucial for a sufficient information exchange between the parties, which was added as an antecedent in (Franck, 2016, p. 7), Kokozinski (2015, p. 9) and Schmidt (2014, p. 10). However, Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 708) concluded within the research on a little to non-existent influence of contact accessibility on the PCS.

Seventh, according to Franck (2016, p. 7), *support* for the supplier from the side of the buying company was appreciated in one of the case studies, which counteracts to the literature based on Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 708). Within the research, a non-significant outcome for the influence of buyer's support for suppliers on the PCS.

Eighth, the *reliability* of buyers was found to be influential for the PCS by Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 708). In line with this, supplier of the case studies of Driedger (2015, p. 8), Franck (2016, p. 7) and Phan (2019, p. 8 & 9) highlighted the importance of reliability within the relationship and the effect it has on the PCS.

Table 7. The Antecedents of the Preferred Customer

Categorisation	Sub-factors
<i>Economic value</i>	Purchasing volume
	Profitability
	Business opportunities
	Total cost as a basis

<i>Growth opportunities</i>	for purchasing price
	Growth potential
	Global player
	Brand image
	Access to new customers/ markets
<i>Strategic factors</i>	Financial standing of customer
	Strategic fit
	Geographical proximity
<i>Instruments of interaction</i>	Shared future
	Early supplier involvement
	Involvement in product design
	Supplier development
	Information exchange
	Communication and feedback
	Long-term relationship
	Action-oriented crisis management
	Quality initiatives
	Loyalty
<i>Relational quality</i>	Trust
	Respect
	Strong bonds
	Commitment
<i>Contact accessibility</i>	
<i>Support</i>	
<i>Reliability</i>	

4.3.2 Possibly new findings for PC antecedents without a literature base

Uniform to the previous sections of the CA (3.1.2), the PCS was found to have additional operational factors not mentioned in literature. Strategic pricing was mentioned to heighten the likelihood of receiving a PCS (Driedger, 2015, p. 8; Vural, 2015, p. 15). A further part of operational excellence is the overall knowledge and experience about/ in the business field (Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 14). Additionally, supplier were found to have "high customer requirements" when it comes to awarding buyers with a PCS (Beering, 2014, p. 16). A case study specific factor was addressed in Beering (2014, p. 16), where a supplier identified the need for a "similar length of technology life cycle" due to operating with electronic components. Seppenwoolde (2018, p. 9) stated the payment to be important for a PC since they are more likely to receive an increased speed of service, if the buyer is paying relatively fast in the first place.

In the case study of Franck (2016, p. 7), the innovativeness of the customer was essential for the PCS. In regards to cooperation, it was mentioned that buying companies should show an increased interest in working together with the supplier (Hanemann, 2014, p. 14).

A driver relating to the growth opportunities is the “business and sales potential” offered by a buying firm that one supplier viewed as crucial when considering a customer for a PCS (Franck, 2016, p. 7; Hanemann, 2014, p. 14).

Furthermore, the bachelor theses included potential new relational factors influencing the PC. The sympathy between the contact persons and the obtainment of the PCS defined as “a people’s job” (Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 14). Likewise, supplier described that in order to avert disputes the values need to be complied to (Schmidt, 2014, p. 10). In line with the previous is the possibility of receiving “added value” from the customer valuable for suppliers and could potentially increase the chances of a PCS (Seppenwoolde, 2018, p. 9). The focus on “good appointments” was revealed to have an impact on a preferred status in Van der Vegt (2016, p. 14). Moreover, invitations to occasions were found to be highly valued by suppliers as discussed in Kunde (2018, p. 15). The awarding of supplier was named by one supplier in Franck (2016, p. 7) to be meaningful when wanting to receive a preferential status.

The findings of Phan (2019, p. 9) highlight the effect of culture and language on the PCS. Generally, the research concluded with potentially new drivers which were stated as “language support”, “cultural differences”, “know the language / culture” and “language difficulty”.

Additional influential factors for PC referred highly to the image of the buying company. In relation to this is the relevance of the buying company to the supplier as well as the brand awareness, which were also uttered to find no literature base (Franck, 2016, p. 7; Van der Vegt, 2016, p. 14). Additionally, all suppliers included in the case study of Franck (2016, p. 7) relied on a high market presence of the buyer.

Table 8. The New Antecedents of the Preferred Customer

Categorisation	Sub-factors
<i>Operational excellence</i>	Knowledge and experience about/ in business field
	Length of technology life cycle
	Customer requirements
	Good appointments
	Linguistic proximity
	Payment habit
<i>Innovation potential</i>	Strategic pricing
	Innovativeness of customer
<i>Growth opportunities</i>	Interest in cooperation
	Business and sales potential
<i>Relational factors</i>	Added value
	Value compliance
	Supplier award
	Sympathy
<i>Support</i>	Language support
<i>Company image</i>	Brand awareness
	Market presence
	Relevance of customer

4.4 Findings with Further Focus on Additional Concepts including Buyer Status, Reputation, and the Segmentation Processes

Additional focus points within several bachelor theses were the status and reputation of the customer as well as the segmentation approach conducted by the customer and/ or supplier. These points were stated to have a potential influence on the relationship of the business partners.

When addressing the status of a buyer, it relates heavily to the perceived importance of them. According to the literature of Sauder et al. (2012, p. 274) and Swaminathan et al. (2002, p. 14), the status of a buying company is connected to the positioning and their importance within the market or industry. If a customer has a relatively high status, they tend to be recognised more often which can be favourable since companies are more likely to do business with buying firms they know of (Sauder et al., 2012, p. 272). In turn, when building a business relation with a high status customer, suppliers can increase their own status through receiving additional attraction of other possible customers (Swaminathan et al., 2002, p. 14 & 15).

Franck (2016, p. 7) informed about an increase of the CA and resulting from this additionally influences the PCS positively due to suppliers finding it “interesting for joint innovations”. Supported is this by Tucholka (2017, p. 10) with findings on a positive influence of the buyer status on SS stated by two suppliers, while one defined it as “helpful” for the positioning in the market, which relates to the CA rather than the SS. Furthermore, Hegenberg (2017, p. 6) found the high buyer status as valuable for the suppliers. However, in the case study of Lückner (2017, p. 8) the status of the buying company had no significant effect on the SS.

Bockstette (2017, p. 7) concluded on the buyer status as having an impact on the perceived attractiveness of the customer by the supplier but not the satisfaction. Through improvements of the relationship quality, it was stated to have an indirect effect on the SS. Supplier included in the research of Mastebroek (2016, p. 10) were not influenced by a high customer status due to the fact that they allegedly do not provide a preferential treatment based on the status. Based on the statements made in the work of Van der Vegt (2016, p. 9), there are mixed opinions related to the buyer status. Two suppliers regard factors such as appearance, history and popularity of the buying company as important, whereas one supplier does not align with these and state them as not having an impact on receiving a preferential treatment.

Reputation enables suppliers to receive a preview of the overall value and output of the buying company (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 30). As stated by Fombrun (1996, p. 72), a buyer’s reputation finds its origin within the history of the company and prospective outlooks. The reputation of a buying company can be influenced by other drivers such as the market position, reliability, high quality products, a focus on innovation and perceived growth opportunities (Franck, 2016, p. 7).

When referring to Ramsay and Wagner (2009, p. 131), the buyer reputation could have an influence on the relationship and the attractiveness related to the customer (Schmidt, 2014, p. 10). Additionally, Maunu (2003, pp. 112 & 130-131) found the reputation to be part of the satisfaction of suppliers within the research on the concept and measurement of the SS. According to Mastebroek (2016, p. 10), the reputation was found to be influential for the attractiveness related to the customer but is not considered to be an evaluation base for the relationship with a customer. In cohesion to this are the findings of Broeze (2015, p. 7), which support an effect of reputation on the CA.

In contrast, suppliers in Van der Vegt (2016, p. 9) informed about an influence of the reputation on the chances of receiving a PCS. Fitschen (2018, p. 14) was able to detect the importance of the reputation in regard to the satisfaction of one supplier. Moreover, Driedger (2015, p. 8), Franck (2016, p. 7) and Vural (2015, p. 10) discussed the impact of the buyer reputation on the CA as well as the PCS. Generally speaking, the reputation of the customer was identified as a driver for the CA, SS and PCS, and therefore covers all categorisations. The reputation as a related driver can mostly be covered by literature.

Concerning the segmentation of the suppliers, buying companies can make use out of the portfolio approach by Kraljic (1983, p. 110). The Kraljic matrix was one of the earliest approaches to segment suppliers based on the importance of their products (Gelderman & MacDonald, 2008, p. 78; Gelderman & Van Weele, 2003, p. 207; Hesping & Schiele, 2016, p. 101). Buying firms can engage in supplier segmentation or the other way around in order to form a supply strategy with the focus on strategic importance and complexity of the supply market (Kraljic, 1983, p. 110). Furthermore, the purchased items of the customer can be classified according to their procurement focus (Kraljic, 1983, p. 112). Referring to Kraljic (1983, p. 112), a component with a high profit impact combined with a high supply risk can be categorised as strategic.

When focussing on the strategy for strategic components, companies are advised to engage in analysis of the market and the connected risks. Furthermore, it is favourable to conduct digital simulations to create an improved planning process (Kraljic, 1983, p. 112). Similar to the previous stated strategic are bottleneck components with the slight difference within the profit impact since this is classified as low in comparison (Kraljic, 1983, p. 112). When working with bottleneck components within the product portfolio, companies can focus on a specialized market analysis and resolution constructs (Kraljic, 1983, p. 112). Next to this, Kraljic (1983, p. 112) stated leverage components to have a high profit impact with a low supply risk.

This implies a strategy including on the one hand supplier analysis in order to find their strengths and weaknesses and on the other hand analysing the component's value and price forecasts (Kraljic, 1983, p. 112). Lastly, noncritical components can be stated to have a low profit impact with a low supply risk. In this case, the components do not need heavily difficult analysis. Stock optimizations and analysis on the market can be considered to be conducted when planning a strategy for noncritical components (Kraljic, 1983, p. 112).

The segmentation of customers could have a potential connection to the PCS due to the specific categorisation of customers. Based on the findings of Bockstette (2017, p. 7), the strategic positioning of suppliers and customer segmentation both resonate with the satisfaction of suppliers and were defined as potential antecedents of the relational behaviour. The buying company in the case of Fitschen (2018, p. 5) utilised a "supplier lifecycle management system" to categorise their supplier into five segments. These are "drop suppliers" that do not satisfy the buyer; "directed parts suppliers" which are obligated to use based on prescriptions; "base suppliers" who are focussed on standard products and can be switched from in a simple manner and lastly, "preferred supplier" that focus on bundling their sales and purchasing volume.

Hegenberg (2017, p. 4) reported on the segmentation approach according to Winkelmann (2005, p. 309), which inhibits the "own supplier quota at suppliers" and the "customer sales volume quota". Nonetheless, Hegenberg (2017, p. 6 & 7) was not successful in providing evidence for a possible influence of the

customer segmentation on the SS because all suppliers were satisfied despite being categorised within different sections. However, Lückner (2017, p. 8) stated the segmentation process according to the Kraljic matrix having a direct and the customer portfolio analysis conducted having an indirect impact on SS.

Tucholka (2017, p. 3) informed about the ABC approach, which categorises the customers according to their revenue or contribution (Bruhn et al., 2008, p. 1295). The research was able to find a positive correlation between segmentation and the SS, due to all suppliers supplying the customer with strategic goods. Based on the categorisation of the customer within the various frameworks, one can assess the satisfaction of the supplier (Kolarovszki et al., 2016, p. 123).

Based on the findings, it can be said that the theoretical aspects of buyer status, reputation and segmentation have the potential of influencing the relationship between buyer and supplier.

As stated before, the status can be heavily influential for the perceived importance of the customer by the supplier and through this determine the chances of receiving a PCS. In line with this should the reputation of the buyer be evaluated on due to not only a negatively affected the CA and PCS but also causing a dissatisfied supplier in case of a customer with an unfavourable reputation. The segmentation process can be conducted from both sides of the relationship. Customers can categorise their suppliers to further engage in and ensure the SS as well as suppliers segmenting their customers accordingly and further provide a PCS based on their segmentation choice.

4.5 The Model of Preferred Customer Status with the Additional Influential Factors in Relation to CA, SS and PC.

Based on all previous discussed antecedents of the building blocks, a general picture of the Preferred Customer Model has been visualised below in *Figure 2*. The influential realm of the CA, SS and PC include the not only the already existing antecedents from literature but also the potential new factors discussed in the bachelor theses as well as the influence of the status and reputation of the buyer on all three buildings blocks. The segmentation process was found to have an impact on the CA and SS and therefore in the dimension between the two.

Since further research is needed to prove the impact of the additional factors mentioned by suppliers of the bachelor theses, they are not fully integrated in the dimensions of the building blocks. The CA inhibits the influential factors defined by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1199) and Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718) namely market growth, economic, risk, technical and social factors as well as operative excellence and contact accessibility. Further extended by the reputation and status of a customer and the segmentation process. New factors (4.1.2) were included as potentially influential for the CA.

Going on, the SS also mostly consists out of antecedents mentioned by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1201) and Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718). These are growth opportunities, supply value, technical and operative excellence along with relational antecedents such as contact accessibility, mode of interaction, reliability and the support the supplier receives from the customer. Similar to the previous, new possible antecedents (4.2.2) have been introduced to the building block and further added to the model. Also the PC covers the drivers indicated by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1201) and Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718), which are economic value, strategic compatibility of the relationship and growth opportunity. Furthermore, it focusses on the important instruments of interaction, relational quality,

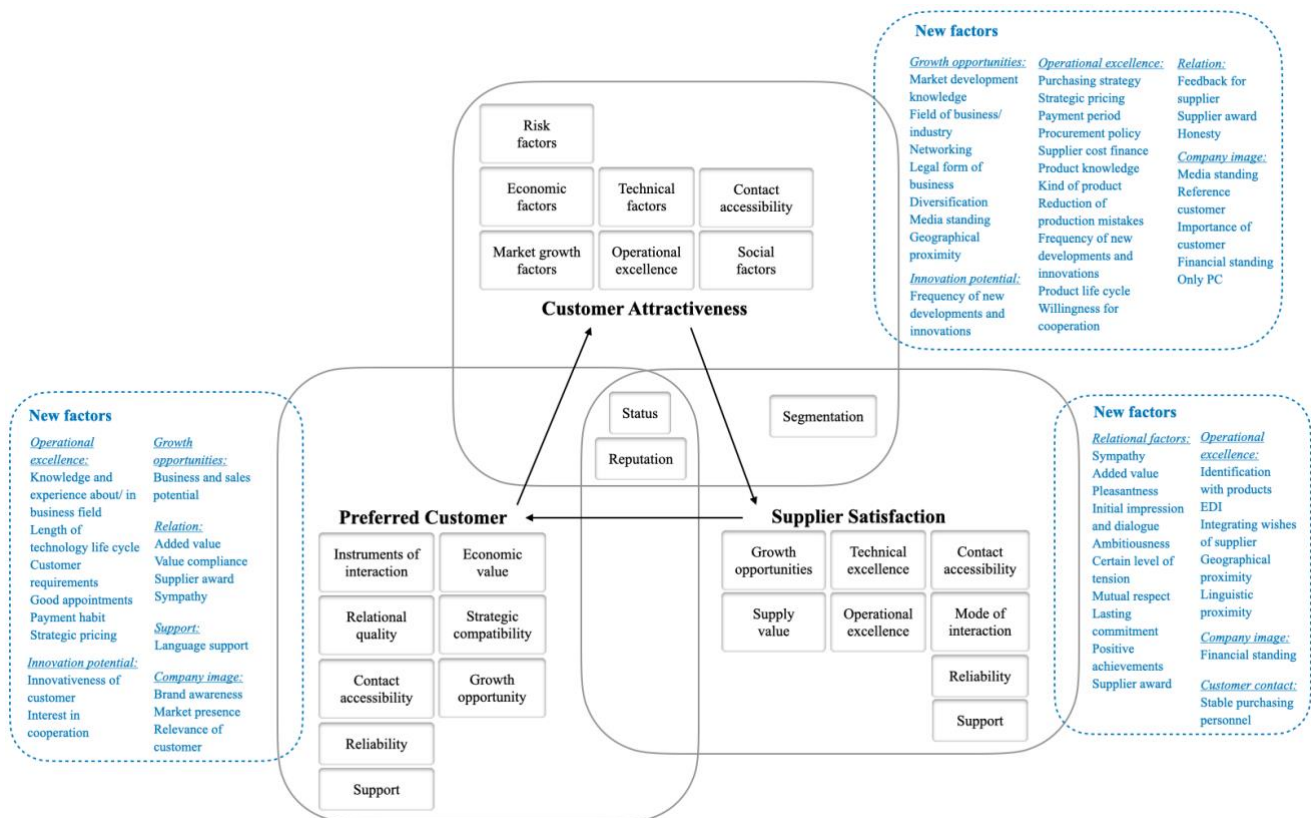


Figure 2. The Preferred Customer Status Model with Additional Influential Factors Found in the Bachelor Theses.

contact accessibility, reliability and support. In cohesion with the previous building blocks does PC incorporate new factors (4.3.2) mentioned within the bachelor theses. The newly found antecedents of the CA (4.1.2), SS (4.2.2) and PC (4.3.2) were categorised into different groupings that are likely to match their possible origin. Still, research on these factors is missing and therefore, their influence on the CA, SS and PC is unknown due to a lack of practical evidence. Statements were made by suppliers within the case studies of the bachelor students that stand out more than others and could function as variables for future research.

Future research on the PCS could include the focus on the supplier award, geographical proximity, linguistic proximity with language support, financial standing of the customer and tension level experienced in the relationship. These will further be referred to and elaborated on in the *Discussion*.

4.1 The Preferential Treatment of Preferred Customers in Form of Benefits

4.1.1 Established literature for assessing encountered benefits

When being considered as a PC due to a high attractiveness and satisfaction of the supplier, buying companies are most likely to receive a better treatment than ordinary customers (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1179). Moreover, Schiele (2020, p. 126) created the tie of advantages, which includes four levels for the classification of the customer (see Figure 3). This concept explains different levels on which customers can find themselves being classified to by their suppliers. Customers on level -1 are likely to pay a higher price for standard products/ services.

One level up, customers receive the regular product/ service and also pay the original price for it. On level 1, suppliers are

engaging in preferential treatment for a supplementary expense for the customers. Lastly, on the highest level reachable (level 2), customers encounter a preferred situation by the products/ services supplied to them without having to pay an additional fee to the suppliers.

A preferential treatment from the supplier towards preferred customer can include benefits in terms of economic, innovative, operational and social form. Economic and financial benefits can contain price reductions and / or efficiency matter, which embodies in reduced time frames in product design (Blenkhorn & Banting, 1991, p. 963; Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, p. 188; Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1187; Ulaga & Eggert, 2006, p. 686).

Following this are benefits connected to innovation and can be explained by authorising the buyer access to technology or the co-development of new products/ services (Ellis et al., 2012, p. 1260; Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1187; Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 11). For the operational benefits Nollet et al. (2012, p. 1187) and Williamson (1991, p. 79) referred to them as being first-served when it comes to supply shortages and even the re-locating of warehouses to be near the facilities of the preferred customer.

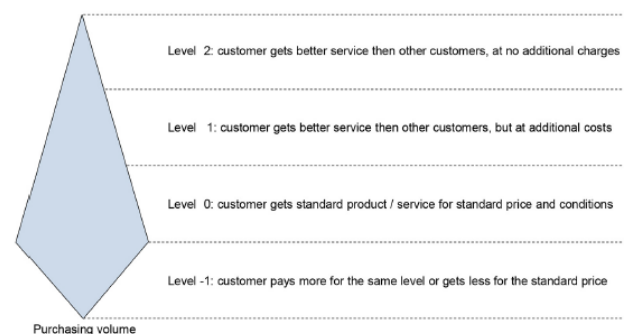


Figure 3. The Tie of Advantages for Assessing the Level of Customer Benefits (Schiele, 2020, p. 126).

Lastly, benefits in form of social interaction are based on a possible collaboration between supplier and customer. This includes a team of experts from the supplier side to support the customer (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1178). Moreover, the achievements of seemingly impossible objectives defined by Blenkhorn and Banting (1991, p. 188) related to factors such as “quality, quantity, price, delivery, and service”.

4.2 Findings on Possible Benefits for Being Perceived as a Preferred Customer

As mentioned before, PC are likely to experience a preferential treatment. Examples from the case studies can be found in this section with a focus on being economic and financial, technical and innovative, operational and social and interactional benefits. A list with all benefits encountered by the participating buying companies can be found in *Table 9* (see Appendix C). The benefits are based on the supplier view to engage in the information gathering with focus on assessing what is actually perceived to be a benefit of being a PC. In the case of Voortman (2016, p. 6), two of the three supplier stated that they will never recognise the buying company as a PC due to operating in the electrical installation market even though the customer does receive discounts, benevolent pricing and delivery priority from two of three suppliers in the case study.

4.2.1 *Economic and financial benefits identified in case studies*

The case studies show a high significance for benevolent pricing. In the interviews of Beering (2014, p. 14), the customer stated “good prices” from three suppliers, which was categorized as benevolent pricing. Schmidt (2014, p. 9) informed about a benevolent pricing from all of the supplier participants as well as Vural (2015, p. 19). This benefit was additionally mentioned in the works of Hebestreit (2015, p. 4) with being described as “better pricing”, Kokozinski (2015, p. 9) with “pricing behaviour” of the suppliers and Kunde (2018, p. 15), where it was mentioned that the customer obtains “exceptional prices” when setting second orders. “Lower prices” were named by two suppliers in the case study of Van der Vegt (2016, p. 12) and one supplier of Voortman (2016, p. 7). Furthermore, Broeze (2015, p. 8 & 9) indicated financial benefits through acquiring “sharp prices” and “better terms of payment” while one supplier is also referencing the long-term relationship with the buying company and includes this factors within their pricing. Another example for benevolent pricing is displayed by Fischer (2017, p. 18), which counteracts the importance of high purchase volumes through still receiving a reduction of the price. In Vural (2015, p. 19), a supplier stated a “payment term extension”, which is only granted to PC.

4.2.2 *Technical and innovative benefits identified in case studies*

The first example for a benefit with technical and innovative origin is focussed on the access to technology and/ or best personnel from the supplier. The definition of this vary with the statement of the interview participants and were stated “access to new innovation” (Franck, 2016, p. 8), “access to key technological know-how” (Franck, 2016, p. 8), “access to new products and technologies” (Hanemann, 2014, p. 12), “access to innovation before competitors” (Laurenz, 2015, p. 9) and “increased technology access” with “access to best employees” (Vural, 2015, p. 18 & 19). This benefit was further stated in the bachelor thesis of Broeze (2015, p. 8) and Van der Vegt (2016,

p. 12). Another benefit within this segment is the quality of delivered products from the supplier to the customer (Schmidt, 2014, p. 10; Vural, 2015, p. 18). Beering (2014, p. 14) referred to it as “quality initiatives for products bought by the customer” and initiations of “quality improvements for the products required by the customer” whereas Fischer (2017, p. 17 & 18) defined factors such as “improved engineering/ planning effort by supplier”, “replacement of lacking products” and “guarantee of excellent and complete order so the customer notices no problem of the supplier”. In the study of Hanemann (2014, p. 12), a supplier stated that they are obliged to buy parts from suppliers and manufacturer to be able to guarantee a qualitative product. An additional unusual benefit statement was made by a supplier in the thesis of Tucholka (2017, p. 6) referring to “Company X office”, where they set up an office with the integration of various organisation division for the solution generation concerning technical and quality issues. In line with the quality of a product is the benefit of product customisation. Beering (2014, p. 6) informed about a “customer-specific label with its internal item code”, which is declared to be of high difficulty. Overall was the customisation farther mentioned in Brüning (2017, p. 12), Driedger (2015, p. 7), Franck (2016, p. 8), Hanemann (2014, p. 12), Van der Vegt (2016, p. 12) and Vural (2015, p. 19 & 20). Based on Franck (2016, p. 8) does the buyer receive support from the supplier in order to develop collaboratively on products. An extraordinary found was made by Kokozinski (2015, p. 9). One supplier mentioned the additional hire of employees for the product development in order to be able to support their customer.

4.2.3 *Operational benefits identified in case studies*

Concerning the operational benefits, the case studies of Driedger (2015, p. 7), Voortman (2016, p. 7) and Vural (2015, pp. 18-20) inhibit the benefit of being “first served” or otherwise called prioritised delivery. In compliance with this is the timely delivery of missing components a benefits identified in Beering (2014, p. 14), Vural (2015, p. 19) and Mastebroek (2016, p. 7), here the supplier sends out employees “if even a single piece of fruit is missing”. In addition to the previous benefit, the possibility of keeping safety stocks for crucial products is highly important when it comes to the continuity of supply based on the opinions of two supplier and one buyer according to Hanemann (2014, p. 12). It is a benefit in the cases of Beering (2014, p. 14), Hanemann (2014, p. 12) and Kokozinski (2015, p. 9). Considering the cases of Brüning (2017, p. 12) and Van der Vegt (2016, p. 12), they both informed on a different and privileged treatment for bottlenecks, which have a relatively low profit factor but high scarcity within the supply market (Kraljic, 1983, p. 111). An extraordinary example was derived from the thesis of Beering (2014, p. 9) by one supplier mentioning the access to the SAP system of the buying company to autonomously plan their production and the delivery of the goods, which is also suitable for the utilised Kanban system. None of the research informed about the benefit of preferential resource allocation in particular.

4.2.4 *Social and interactional benefits identified in case studies*

As stated before, the quality of relationship between the supplier and buyer can possibly be received as highly important. Therefore, buyers are likely to experience a more intense support of their supplier if they are a PC. Support through the effort of suppliers was indicated in Beering (2014, p. 14), Brüning (2017,

p. 12), Hebestreit (2015, p. 6) and Van der Vegt (2016, p. 12). Exceptional cases on kinds of support received from suppliers are delivered by Fischer (2017, pp. 17-19), Kokozinski (2015, p. 9) and Kunde (2018, p. 15). First, Fischer (2017, pp. 17-19) talked about support in a way of additional work on work-free days or vacation, therefore an all-around-the-clock service accessibility. Second, Kokozinski (2015, p. 9) informed about supplier support when they are facing complaints of customers. Lastly, Kunde (2018, p. 15) reported on exchange of personal contact with the CEO of the supplier company in case of emergencies during company holidays. In line with the support benefit is the availability and responsiveness of the supplying company (Beering, 2014, p. 14; Hanemann, 2014, p. 12; Kokozinski, 2015, p. 9; Schmidt, 2014, p. 9). Furthermore, Beering (2014, p. 14) mentioned routinely sessions with the top management of the supplier. The achievement of seemingly impossible objectives was also frequently stated as a benefits in the bachelor theses of Beering (2014, p. 15) with two of three suppliers, Schmidt (2014, p. 10) and Vural (2015, p. 18), where all of the suppliers refer to it as a benefit the customer receives from them.

4.2.5 *Examples of benefits categorised according to their exclusiveness and if the preferential service is received for free*

Findings on possible benefits vary among the bachelor theses. Most of them do not differentiate between exclusive benefits and/or if the buyer needs to pay for these benefits. The studies of Beering (2014, p. 14 & 15), Broeze (2015, p. 8 & 9), Fischer (2017, pp. 17-19), Kokozinski (2015, p. 9), Schmidt (2014, p. 9 & 10) and Vural (2015, pp. 18-20) categorised their findings on benefits accordingly. When using Beering (2014, p. 14), one can see that not every classification is based on one benefit level. An example for this is the “be ready to deliver missing component within a reasonable time” benefit, which is found in exclusive and free with the focus on a personal priority delivery, while another can be found in the exclusive and paid section with delivery on the same day if there are missing components. Fischer (2017, p. 17 & 18) included support on four different categorisations, which are free and selected, free and everyone, paid and selected, and paid and everyone. For the first, increasing speed was used as support, whereas the second includes an agility concerning additional working hours and emergency situations. When it comes to paid and selected, a reduced paperwork for the buying company was stated as support and lastly, working on vacation and business-free days, which is accessible for every customer but needs to be compensated with money. The categorisation of Kokozinski (2015, p. 9) included only two factors, which are free and exclusive, and paid and exclusive. This implies the possibility that customers, who do not experience a PCS may not be able to obtain any preferential treatment, even if they are agree on paying for it. Similar to the previous mentioned thesis is Vural (2015, p. 19 & 20) focussed on the exclusivity of the benefits with the addition of whether this is paid for or not.

5. DISCUSSION WITH FUTURE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Overall, the results for each antecedent group indicate a high importance for quality of the relationship and the handling of it. Furthermore, the economic performance of the customer seems to play a crucial role when assessing a preferred status. Therefore, the perceived growth opportunities and relational aspects could potentially be argued to be the key antecedents of

all three building blocks. Within the bachelor theses, suppliers mentioned additional influential factors without a direct link to the existing literature. These additional factors may vary within the different industries and not applicable for others. Another plausible reason for differences in the preferences of the suppliers. What is valued by one supplier does not necessarily mean that others value the same. Based on these new insights, five research avenues have been made to highlight interesting findings of the bachelor theses and create a base for future research implications.

Most of the avenues include research implications for more than one building block due to one affecting the other. The first research avenue is going to focus on the effect of providing awards as a customer to valuable suppliers. This avenue is concerned with all dimensions of the PCS model. Furthermore, the geographical proximity was discussed as being important to consider for the CA and SS. Previously the physical distance between supplier and buyer was categorised as an influence for PC.

Therefore, future research could focus on the geographical proximity in relation to the CA and SS. The third research avenue deals with the linguistic proximity of the business relation and has been mentioned as influential for the SS and PC. Going on, the financial standing and performance of the customer was referred to as influencing the CA and SS, which could further be researched on in the future. Lastly, a specific level of tension between the business partner was stated to improve the performance and ultimately the SS, which could be researched due to it may only be appropriate for specific suppliers.

Research avenue 1:

The impact of supplier awards on the CA, SS and PC.

By awarding the supplier for a good performance, the buyer can increase their relational behaviour and a positive mind-set perceived by the supplier. Supplier awards are handed out to suppliers if their performance matched or exceeded the expectations of the customer, which could be related to a preferred supplier. All building blocks have been stated to include a potential influence of the supplier awards.

Franck (2016, p. 7) highlighted the importance of the awarding of supplier as a plausible antecedent of not only SS but also PC. In cohesion to the previous, Driedger (2015, p. 8), Hebestreit (2015, p. 5) and Vural (2015, p. 15) assessed the heightened attractiveness of the buyer in connection to awarding the supplier. A possible link to the previous literature could be found in the relational behaviour of the customer towards the supplier. The recognition of a good and stable performance by the supplier and ultimately rewarding them for their work could potentially influence or deepen the relationship between the two parties. Within the research, Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 708) identified a significance for the connection between relational behaviour and CA as well as SS.

Research avenue 2:

The geographical proximity and its influence on the CA and SS.

Originally, Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1202) categorised the geographical proximity as an antecedent of the PC but this does not rule out having an effect on the satisfaction level of a supplier and the attractiveness connected to the customer. Being close to the customer/supplier has the potential to increase the contact accessibility due to being able to driver to the facilities in a short timeframe as well as improve the relationship through the

creation of clusters (Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 5). According to the findings of the bachelor theses the geographical proximity has an impact on the whole cycle of preferred customership. Extending the influence of geographical proximity further to the concepts of the CA and SS could be a research implication to see whether or not it can be classified as a driver for the building blocks.

Concerning the CA, Beering (2014, p. 5), Hebestreit (2015, p. 5) and Kunde (2018, p. 10) concluded through their interviews on a focus of geographical proximity and its either positive or negative relation to the attractiveness of the buyer. Moreover, the satisfaction could as well be influenced by the geographical proximity as experienced by the suppliers in the case studies of Fischer (2017, p. 14), Franck (2016, p. 7) and Hebestreit (2015, p. 5).

Research avenue 3:

The linguistic proximity between buyer and supplier and its connection to the SS and the experienced language support for PC.

Similar to the geographical proximity is the linguistic proximity with the focus on language difficulties especially within international business relationship. Misunderstandings can be costly when they relate to product specifications, production processes, R&D and so on. They can end up causing not only additional costs but also cause dissatisfaction and unattractiveness towards the other party. The studies of Bockstette (2017, p. 7) and Fitschen (2018, p. 5) both had an additional focus on cultural aspects. Bockstette (2017, p. 5) informed about it in relation to the size of the supplier as well as the kind by being a family owned business.

According to Fitschen (2018, p. 5) corporate culture is shaped by “long-term activities” conducted and acknowledged. Based on this, the linguistic proximity can find a potential link to the corporate culture. Cultural aspects such as language can increase the satisfaction of the supplier as well as the chances of receiving a PCS. This factor is especially important when doing business with international suppliers. Therefore, findings of the case studies related the effect of linguistic proximity to the satisfaction level of the supplier and the possibility of receiving a PCS. An example of this is the case study of Phan (2019, p. 9) that involved the importance of support for language difficulties and further dealt with the influence of cultural aspects on the relationship between buyer and supplier.

Research avenue 4:

The financial standing of the customer as a potential new driver for the CA and SS.

The thesis of Beering (2014, p. 15) included the factor of a good financial situation of the customer and its potential connection to the attractiveness of the buyer. Similar to this, Fitschen (2018, p. 9) identified a further influence of financial standing on the SS. According to Fiocca (1982, p. 57) the attractiveness of a buyer can be increased by financial factors based on the margins and/or economies of scale.

The importance of a stable financial situation was further found to have an impact on the SS. This could find a connection to the overall generated profit by the supplier. If the buyer does not ensure a stable financial performance, the profitability of the supplier would be affected as well as a negative performance in regard to the payment habit of the customer.

Research avenue 5:

The level of tension between supplier and buyer and its impact on their relationship.

One of the most remarkable findings of this synthesis is that a heightened tension is increasing the performance of the relationship and simultaneously the SS (Driedger, 2015, p. 5). The specific supplier mentioning this tension within the business relation explained this driver by creating a comparison to a married couple. One is not likely to find a couple without having fights now and then. This finding was rather unusual since tension is generally envisioned as a relatively negative factor. Still, suppliers can have different expectations for such a business relationship and perceive value differently. Nonetheless, during the research, it stayed to be one of the most outstanding and unique factors gathered from the case studies.

6. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS OF THE SYNTHESIS

Within the synthesis of 25 bachelor theses, most of the antecedents could further be found in the already existing literature. This mostly supports the theoretical framework of Hüttinger et al. (2012, pp. 1199-1202) and Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 718) and various underlining theories included in these. However, there have been factors mentioned that do not find a direct link within the literature. As suggested by several students, it would be interesting to further research on unique findings within their research.

In line with this, economic factors in regard to the performance of the customer were mentioned and could find a potential origin within the overall profitability generated through conducting business with them. This in turn was stated to have an influence on the CA and SS which could be part of future research. Findings on the importance of the buyer status and reputation, and segmentation process leave room for research on why it is seen as influential and could be extended with further mediating variables.

Overall, additional factors connected to the behaviour of the customer have been identified as influential in several case studies. In line with this is the experienced honesty from the buyer as well as providing feedback to the supplier could be an addition to the social factors defined by Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1199). Sympathy, pleasantness and respect can be classified as part of the relational behaviour connected to the customer due to “[...] the focus of exchange capturing multiple facets of the exchange behaviour [...]” (Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 703).

Due to the fact that each individual paper stated the non-generalisation of their findings because of a small sample size, it is rather difficult to draw a conclusion. In cohesion, the industries included within the bachelor theses are diverse and not comparable. Therefore, it cannot function as a representative outcome for each industry included due to a lack of similar distribution characteristics as well as the sample size being too small for a generalisation (Babbie, 2016, p. 133). Furthermore, there is a chance of an occurrence of an interpretation bias in relation to ambiguity.

Due to confidentiality reasons, the full interviews are missing to a large extent, which could have enabled this synthesis to have an in-depth look at the findings from the previous research. Regarding future research on the topic of PCS, researchers could focus on drawing general solutions for specific industries or markets to build a representative case. This would be a rather quantitative research approach. All of the findings of the bachelor theses were generated through interviews with the

suppliers and the buying companies, which can be classified as qualitative research on the topic. Another possible data generation could be quantitative research on the topic of PCS to be able to deliver generalisable outcomes for industries, countries, etc. When conducting quantitative research, the data generation makes usage out of statistical analysis and summarises data by numbering them (Babbie, 2016, p. 414). However, this could be viewed as a disadvantage, since there can be a “potential loss in richness of meaning” (Babbie, 2016, p. 24).

All in all, this research enabled a further look at the underlying drivers and antecedents of the PCS. Even though this topic already received attention of various researcher, it is still possible to further extent the research objectives by for example the research avenues highlighted in this research.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Table 1. List of Bachelor Theses.				
Name	Year	Bachelor thesis title	Industry	Interviews
Phan, N.	2019	What did buying firms do to outperform other competitors and become the preferred customers of suppliers? - An empirical study from 41 interviews with purchasers and salespersons from various countries.	Manufacturing facility; Home economics; Automotive technology; Electrical engineering; Energy; Packing material; Organic Chemical; Logistics; Machine device; Food, beverage, tobacco; Information; Interim class	41
Fitschen, H.	2018	The influence of corporate culture on the preferred customer status: A multiple case study with one buying company and three of its suppliers.	-	4 Buyer (1) Supplier (3)
Kunde, F.	2018	Antecedents and benefits of preferred customer relations and the influence of corporate culture: A case study at company X and three of its key suppliers	Food retail	4 Buyer (1) Supplier (3)
Seppenwoolde, M.J.R.	2018	Best combination, sequence or relative importance of variables in order to improve the level of business performance and the use of preferred customer status: A case study among Dutch-located firms in the transportation/truck sector.	Transport/truck	5
Bockstette, A.	2017	Antecedents and benefits of supplier satisfaction in a buyer-supplier relationship: A case study at company X and three of its key suppliers.	Mechanical engineering	4 Buyer (1) Supplier (3)
Brüning, M.	2017	Benefits, antecedents, buyer status and customer segmentation in relation to supplier satisfaction: A multiple case study at company X and three of its (key) suppliers.	Telecommunication and construction	6 Buyer (3) Supplier (3)
Fischer, M.	2017	Antecedents and benefits of supplier satisfaction and the influence of segmentation and status on buyer-supplier relationships: A multi-perspective case study of company X and four of its suppliers.	Chemical	5 Buyer (1) Supplier (4)
Hegenberg, J.	2017	A case study: Assessing the antecedents and benefits of supplier satisfaction.	-	4 Buyer (1) Supplier (3)
Jazbeck, F.T.	2017	The influence of negotiation behavior on supplier satisfaction: A case study.	-	5
Lücker, D.	2017	Drivers and benefits of supplier satisfaction in a buyer-supplier relationship: A multiple case	Organic food	5 Buyer (2) Supplier (3)

		study at company X and three of its suppliers.		
Skora, C.	2017	Satisfaction of key supplier: Analyzing and evaluating factors of supplier satisfaction in a case study with company X.	Retail	4 Buyer (1) Supplier (3)
Tucholka, M.S.	2017	Satisfying the supplier - Antecedents of supplier satisfaction and the influence of segmentation and status: A multiple case study in cooperation with one buying company and three of its key suppliers.	Automobile	6 Buyer (3) Supplier (3)
Franck, K.	2016	Antecedents and benefits of the preferred customer status in a buyer-supplier relationship: A multiple case study at company X and three of its key suppliers.	-	6 Buyer (3) Supplier (3)
Mastebroek, V.	2016	Antecedents and benefits of preferred customer status with suppliers: A case study at a Dutch accounting firm.	Accounting	6 Buyer (2) Supplier (4)
Van der Vegt, D.	2016	Benefits, antecedents, buyer reputation, buyer status and strategic fit in relation to the preferred customer status: A multiple case study at company X and three of its key suppliers.	-	4 Buyer (1) Supplier (3)
Voortman, D.	2016	Preferred customer status with key suppliers: A case study at Paauwe Installaties	Electrical installation	4 Buyer (1) Supplier (3)
Broeze, H.	2015	Antecedents, benefits and history development of the preferred customer status in a buyer-supplier relationship: A multiple case study at Accell Nederland BV and three of her suppliers.	Bicycle	4 Buyer (1) Supplier (3)
Driedger, T.	2015	Antecedents and benefits of the preferred customer status - A case study with the world's biggest producer of enclosure systems.	Enclosure systems and climatisation technology	8 Buyer (4) Supplier (4)
Hebestreit, O.	2015	Antecedents and benefits of a preferred customer status in a buyer-supplier relationship: A case study at company X and four of its key suppliers.	-	7 Buyer (3) Supplier (4)
Kokozinski, S.	2015	Antecedents and benefits of the preferred customer status in a buyer-supplier relationship: A multiple case study at Gebr. Becker GmbH.	Printing	6 Buyer (3) Supplier (3)
Laurenz, J.	2015	Antecedents and benefits of the preferred customer status: A case study at Europe's leading trailer manufacturer.	Trailer	-
Vural, M.	2015	Antecedents and benefits of the preferred customer status in a buyer-supplier relationship: A multiple case study at X and four of its key suppliers.	Food and beverage	6 Buyer (2) Supplier (4)

Beering, J.	2014	Antecedents and benefits of a preferred customer status in a buyer-supplier relationship: A case study at WILO SE and four of its key suppliers.	Pump	8 Buyer (4) Supplier (4)
Hanemann, E.	2014	Antecedents and benefits of a preferred customer status in a buyer-supplier relationship: A dyadic case study at a company from the oil and gas industry and three of its suppliers.	Oil and gas	5 Buyer (2) Supplier (3)
Schmidt, F.	2014	Antecedents and benefits of the preferred customer status in a buyer-supplier relationship: A case study at Atlas Copco and three of its key suppliers.	Oil, gas and power	8 Buyer (3) Supplier (5)

Appendix B

Table 2. Antecedents Found in the Case Studies			
Author	CA	SS	PC
Beering (2014)	Early R&D involvement Growth rate Communication Price/ volume Reliability Demand stability; market stability Size Long-term interactions/ loyalty Influence on the market Depth of skills Access to new customers/ markets Possibilities for face-to-face contact Information exchange Tight personal relations	Conflict management Early supplier involvement Level of information exchange Cooperative relationships Substantial volumes Required effort needed for delivery Response to suggestions for improvement Forecasting/ planning Long-term time horizons Availability of direct contact in the buying firm Feedback Communication Payment habits Technical competence Trust	Early supplier involvement; involvement in product design Supplier development/ Quality initiatives/ Response to cost reduction ideas Business opportunities Quality initiatives High purchase volume Action-oriented crisis management Loyalty/ strong bonds Geographical proximity Loyalty Communication and feedback Focus on partnership Strategic fit Strong bonds Total cost as basis for purchasing price Trust
Hanemann (2014)	Acquiring customer's knowledge Competency development Size Commitment Information exchange Growth Price & volume	Constructive controversy Payment habits Politeness Cooperative relationships Technical competence Information exchange Availability Transparency	Purchasing volumes Strategic fit Strong relationship Goodwill and trust Access to new markets Shared future Communication and feedback

	Innovation development Long-term interactions Reputation	Demand stability	
Schmidt (2014)	Price/ volume Information exchange Standardisation of products Depth of skills/ types of technological skills Trust/ loyalty Size Long-term interactions Commitment and adaption Access to new customers/markets Market stability	Payment habits Openness and trust Constructive controversy Substantial volumes Bargaining position	Business opportunities Purchasing volumes Fairness Information exchange Loyalty Bargaining position Strong bonds Respect
Broeze (2015)	Knowing the company Reputation Trust Financial return Business Long history Forecast Size Personal relations Commitment	Joint effort Information sharing Expectations	-
Driedger (2015)	Long-term relationship Payment period Order quantity Purchasing volume Turnover Information sharing Collaboration in planning of production R&D involvement Communication Long-term perspective of business Long product life cycle Reliability Steady growth rate Supplier award	Expectations Communication (both sides) Supplier know-how for implementation Adherence to agreements High pressure regarding price (Dissatisfaction) Mutual trust Mutual respect Feedback Work together to decrease the amount of occurring problems	Long-term interaction/ relationship Loyalty Trust/ Mutual trust Satisfaction with performance Profit impact Order quantity Behaviour of buying company Mutual respect Top management relations (future business outlook; urgent topics) Business opportunities Good reputation High purchasing volume (automatically PC after reaching a specific volume) Worldwide set as supplier Reliability Dependability Constant feedback
Hebestreit (2015)	Purchasing volume Predictable utilization of the production capacity	Response to supplier suggestions for improvements	Purchasing volume Strong bonds

	Demand stability Dependency Tight personal relations Exchange of information Possibility for extensive face-to-face contact Complexity and type of technological skills Early R&D involvement Growth rate of purchasing volume Supplier award	Involvement in an early design stage Long-term horizons Substantial purchasing volume Good communication Responsiveness Operational excellence	Fairness Involvement in the product design Quality initiatives Predictable decision processes Geographical proximity Shared future
Kokozinski (2015)	Purchasing volume Strategic fit New market access Innovativeness Long-term cooperation Growth potential	Purchasing volume Payment habit Trust/ open communication/ information exchange	Purchasing volume Strategic fit Long term relationship Growth potential Trust/ open communication/ information exchange
Laurenz (2015)	Size Turnover/ Purchasing volume Europe's market leader	Monetary terms	-
Vural (2015)	Size Growth rate Market stability Access to new customers and/or markets Risk sharing Standardization of product Demand stability Customer's ability to cope with changes Commitment to innovation Supplier trainings and field visits Supplier award Early R&D involvement and joint improvement Types and depth of technological skills Value creation Information exchange Output factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trust - Commitment - Loyalty - Reliability - Long-term interactions 	Early supplier involvement Reaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Constructive controversy - Openness - Politeness - Trust Communication Joint relationship effort Bargaining position Adherence to agreements Cooperative relationships Recommendations Structure Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality and time Forecasting/ planning Long-term horizons Order process Time scheduling Payment habits	Purchase volumes Business opportunities Trust Loyalty Respect Fairness Strong bonds Involvement in product design Quality initiatives Communication and feedback Action-oriented crisis management Strategic fit Shared future Geographical proximity
Franck (2016)	Potential business opportunities Tight personal relationships	Early supplier involvement Joint efforts Growth opportunities	Buyer status Reputation Strategic fit

	Enter new markets Trustful and long-term cooperation Influence on the market Growth rate Purchasing volume Commitment to innovation Joint developments	Cooperative and trustful relationship Open communication Effective conflict management Profitability Interpersonal relationship Mutual respect and fair treatment Information exchange Reliable forecasting and planning abilities Supplier award	Purchasing volumes Potential business opportunities Long-term relationships Trust Communication Relational reliability Geographical proximity
Mastebroek (2016)	Output factors Margins Tight personal relations Behaviour Price/ Volume/ Compatibility	Adherence to agreements Operational excellence Profitability	-
Van der Vegt (2016)	Commitment Loyalty Honesty Price Company size Compatibility Tight personal relations Margins Reputation	Communication Payment habits Forecasting/ planning Supplier development Reliability Business competence Trust Supplier involvement Business competence Openness Cooperative relationship	Strong bonds Long-term contracts Profitability Fairness Business opportunities Purchase volumes Strategic fit Quality initiatives Respect Trust
Voortman (2016)	Reliability Purchasing volume Every customer is attractive Preference for companies with large financial gain Relationship fit Meeting requirements Open and trustworthy	Forecasting Feedback Reasonable price negotiations	-
Bockstette (2017)	-	Long-term and long-lasting relationship Profitability Commitment Support Reliability (on-time payment; meeting commitments) Involvement Trust Earlier supplier involvement Corporate culture Size of supplier	-

		<p>Origin of business</p> <p>Growth potential for future with a high level of innovativeness of product or processes</p> <p>Contact accessibility</p> <p>High level of communication/ frequent information sharing</p> <p>Confirmation of their good work</p> <p>Purchase volume</p>	
Brüning (2017)	-	<p>Profitability</p> <p>Payment habits</p> <p>Forecasting/ planning</p> <p>Reliability</p> <p>Supplier involvement</p> <p>Cooperative relationships</p> <p>Long-term contracts</p> <p>Growth opportunity</p> <p>Relational behaviour</p> <p>Reaction</p> <p>Time scheduling</p> <p>Substantial volumes</p>	-
Fischer (2017)	-	<p>Operative excellence</p> <p>Reliability</p> <p>Locational factors</p> <p>Operative excellence</p> <p>Support</p> <p>Profitability</p> <p>Reciprocity</p> <p>Contact accessibility</p> <p>Relational behaviour</p> <p>Growth opportunity</p> <p>Joint history</p> <p>Support</p>	-
Hegenberg (2017)	-	<p>Increasing purchasing volume</p> <p>Sole supplier</p> <p>Fair treatment</p> <p>Mutual respect</p> <p>Constructive feedback</p> <p>Profitability</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Transparency</p>	-
Jazbek (2017)	-	<p>Growth potential</p> <p>Trustability of customer</p> <p>Relational behaviour of customer</p> <p>Profitability</p>	-

Lücker (2017)	-	Relational behaviour Profitability Operative excellence Reliability	-
Skora (2017)	-	Communication/ Mode of interaction/ Information sharing Openness Reliability Cooperativity Relational behaviour	-
Tucholka (2017)	-	Consistent purchasing staff Willingness to pay early Good communication with clear rules and statements and open discussions Feedback on both sides Sharing of business expectations Communication Sharing of strategic plans and ideas for cooperation Honesty Early supplier involvement Forecast and production planning Cooperation and partnership Regular contact Information sharing Sharing of strategic approaches Open partnership Appreciation of products Fair negotiation Trainings to improve business processes and quality Turnover Efficient administration of paperwork Alignment of quality standard to EU standards Optimization of purchasing software use Amount of business the company can get Potential growth Sales volume	-
Fitschen (2018)	-	Collaboration Communication Long-term relationship Payment habit	-

		Turnover Appreciation of work Participation at events Reputation Financial standing Reliability Innovativeness Compliance to agreements Buyer status	
Kunde (2018)	Relational behaviour - Reciprocity Contact accessibility Growth opportunity - Brand name - Volume - New potential business opportunities - Growth Reliability Operative excellence	Operative excellence Relational behaviour Contact accessibility Reliability Profitability Support of suppliers Growth opportunity	-
Seppenwoolde (2018)	-	-	Preferred customer matrix (Profitability/ Aftermarket Loyalty) Turnover Intensive contact Size Payment period Business for whole year
Phan (2019)	-	-	Growth opportunity - Mutual growth - Access to other customers - Brand image - Profitability - Purchasing volume - Financial attractiveness Reliability - Credibility in agreements - Fairness in negotiations - Buying firm acts as expected through consistent manner and agreement fulfilment/ relational reliability Operative excellence - Communication and feedback Relational behaviour - Mutual trust

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commitment to partnership - Strong bonds - Loyalty <p>Innovation potential</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investment in product design <p>Support of supplier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Crisis management - Supplier development <p>Supplier involvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early supplier involvement <p>Contact accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personnel available for information exchange process to develop structural bonds <p>Strategy compatibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mutual goals - Geographical proximity and cluster membership <p>Shared future</p>
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APPENDIX C

Table 9. Benefits Identified in the Case Studies		
Author		Benefits
Beering (2014, p. 14 & 15)		
Supplier A	Exclusive and free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be ready to deliver missing components within reasonable time • Benevolent pricing/ One of the lowest prices • Delivering consistent quality • Disclosing internal cost data • Process improvements • Reducing acquisition costs • Delivery despite unfinished administrative processes
	Exclusive and paid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be ready to deliver missing components within reasonable time • Delivery flexibility • Less working capital needed
	Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement of seemingly impossible objectives • Adjust to changes in delivery schedules • Physical presence
Supplier B	Exclusive and free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate information on timely basis • Developing customer competencies • Disclosing internal cost data • Initiate quality improvements for the products required by the customer • More technological input from supplier • Physical presence • Sharing information about markets • Suggest innovations for the products required by the customer • Facilitation of direct support from the producer • Proactive escalation management

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forward-looking pricing model • Paying for accounts payable financing • Regular meetings with top management
	Exclusive and paid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customise products to customer specifications • Taking over parts of the customer's activities
	Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement of seemingly impossible objectives
Supplier C	Exclusive and free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be available and responsive (speed of response) • Benevolent pricing/ one of the lowest prices • Keep safety stocks • More technological input from supplier • Quality initiatives for products bought by customer • Sharing information about markets • Undertaking non-core activities • Invoicing copper separately in another currency • Key account status despite low purchasing volume
	Exclusive and paid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing acquisition costs
	Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing information about products and markets
Supplier D	Exclusive and free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benevolent pricing/ one of the lowest prices • Keep safety stocks • More technological input from supplier • Reducing acquisition costs
	Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievements of seemingly impossible objectives
Hanemann (2014, p. 12 & 13)		
Supplier A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping safety stock • Be available and responsive • Delivery flexibility • Enhanced communication • Involvement into NPD process • Logistics improvements • Logistics improvements • Customised products according to customers specifications • Access to new products and technologies • Special treatment of deliveries
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High efforts in meeting first confirmed delivery date • Consulting and development services from supplier
Supplier B		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be available and responsive • Process improvements • Lower administration costs • Enhanced communication • Outsourcing of activities • Taking over transportation costs • Shorter lead times • Logistics improvements • Customised products according to customers specifications • Reduced inventory
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prescribed suppliers and manufacturers to guarantee quality
Supplier C		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping safety stock • Delivery flexibility • Outsourcing of activities • Customised products according to customers specifications • Exclusive commitment to innovations

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price stability • Premium packaging for remarkable look
Schmidt (2014, p. 9 & 10)		
Supplier A	Free and exclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benevolent pricing • Be available and responsive • Disclosing internal cost data • Prioritized delivery during constraints • Standardization initiatives • “Achievement of seemingly impossible objectives”
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer programs for difficult machines, prices and delivery times • Own, separate construction department • Own production planner
	Paid and exclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent supplier product quality • More technological input from supplier
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering products made to order
Supplier B	Free and exclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disclosing internal cost data • Benevolent pricing • Be available and responsive • Prioritized delivery during constraints • “Achievement of seemingly impossible objectives”
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral orders in emergency cases • Status reports for better buyer production planning
	Paid and exclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent supplier product quality • More technological input from supplier
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering products made to order
Supplier C	Free and exclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benevolent pricing • Be available and responsive • Prioritized delivery during constraints • “Achievement of seemingly impossible objectives”
Broeze (2015, p. 8 & 9)		
Supplier A	Free and selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal relations • Supplier innovativeness • Access to technology • Quality
	Paid and everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial benefits
	Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bonus by specific amount of turnover
Supplier B	Free and selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to technology • Predictability • Increased service • Financial benefits • Quality
	Paid and selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New product development
Supplier C	Free and selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best offer • Reduced lead times • Quality
Driedger (2015, pp. 5-7)		
Supplier A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment of extra staff for key-account management of buyer • Decrease of process times (focus on just-in-time delivery) • Demand flexibility • Open book relationship for improvements
Supplier B		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment of extra staff • Decreased response time

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forecast changes • Just-in-time delivery • Extraordinary requirements
Supplier C		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customised products • First served • Increased service
Hebestreit (2015, p. 4)		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better pricing • Shorter delivery times • Innovation Support
Kokozinski (2015, p. 9)		
Supplier A	Free and exclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pricing behaviour • Exclusive agreements • Assigning best personal • Safety stock
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiring new staff for product development support • Organization of customer events
	Paid and exclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support on customer complaints
Supplier B	Free and exclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pricing behaviour • Lowest cost • Exclusive agreements • Shorter delivery
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reservation of production capacity
Supplier C	Free and exclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pricing behaviour • Shorter delivery • Shorter lead times • Be available and responsible
	Paid and exclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support on customer complaints • Supplier efforts to optimize production
Laurenz (2015, p. 9)		
Selected and paid		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to innovation before competitors
Selected and free		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferential resource allocation
Other		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplier outperform lead times → Often rather occasionally and mostly because of purchasing volume
Vural (2015, pp. 18-20)		
Supplier A	Exclusive and free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of consistent supplier product quality • Achievement of seemingly impossible objectives • Suggestion of quality improvements and innovations for the products required by the customer • Increased supplier innovativeness • Increased technological input from suppliers • Increased technology access • Being offered innovations first • Timely provision of information and availability • Adaption of supplier capacities to the customer's requests • Access to best employees • Prioritised delivery during limitations • Timely delivery of missing components • Benevolent pricing/ One of lowest market prices • Receptivity to further price negotiations with the customer • Disclosure of internal cost data • Cost reduction initiatives
	Not in literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering additional services (additional service offer to help buying company with scheduling of orders)

	Exclusive and paid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product customisation according to customer's specifications
Supplier B	Exclusive and free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivery of consistent supplier product quality Achievement of seemingly impossible objectives Standardisation initiatives Suggestion of quality improvements and innovations for the products required by the customer Increased supplier innovativeness Increased technological input from suppliers Increased technology access Being offered innovations first Timely provision of information and availability Adaption of supplier capacities to the customer's requests Access to best employees Prioritised delivery during limitations Timely delivery of missing components Benevolent pricing/ One of lowest market prices Receptivity to further price negotiations with the customer Disclosure of internal cost data Cost reduction initiatives
	Not in literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusive cross-site development team 5 Definition of a specific price level
	Exclusive and paid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product customisation according to customer's specifications
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offering additional services
Supplier C	Exclusive and free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivery of consistent supplier product quality Achievement of seemingly impossible objectives Standardisation initiatives Suggestion of quality improvements and innovations for the products required by the customer Increased supplier innovativeness Increased technological input from suppliers Prioritised delivery during limitations Benevolent pricing/ One of the lowest market prices Receptivity to further price negotiations with the customer Disclosure of internal data Cost reduction initiatives
	Exclusive and paid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product customisation according to customer's specifications Achievement of seemingly impossible objectives - Adaption of supplier capacities to the customer's requests
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Payment terms extensions
Supplier D	Exclusive and free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement of seemingly impossible objectives Timely provision of information and availability Adaption of supplier capacities to the customer's requests Access to best employees Benevolent pricing/ One of the lowest market prices Receptivity to further price negotiations with the customer Disclosure of internal cost data Cost reduction initiatives
	Not in literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Payment term extension
	Exclusive and paid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offering additional services
	Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offering additional services
Franck (2016, p. 8)		
Supplier A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to new innovations Supplier support during collaborative product developments Product customisations (according to buying company's wishes) Higher flexibility towards buying company

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick problem-solving • Receive more information than other customers • Access to key technological know-how • Supplier innovativeness • Unique cost reduction opportunities • Increased transparency • Exclusive investments for buying company • Special attention when facing problems • Increased responsiveness compared to other customers
Supplier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to new innovations • Supplier support during collaborative product developments • Product customisations (according to buying company's wishes) • Higher flexibility towards buying company • Quick problem-solving • Preferred resource allocation during shortages • Best personnel for new product development • Logistics benefits • Special attention when facing problems • Increased responsiveness compared to other customers • EDI connection specifically adapted to buying company's system • Weekly delivery monitoring as well as shipping orders • Data processing adapted to buying company's standard • Direct pick up from supplier's production plant (organized by supplier and electronically communicated towards logistics provider of buying company)
Supplier C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to new innovations • Supplier support during collaborative product developments • Product customisations (according to buying company's wishes) • Higher flexibility towards buying company • Quick problem-solving • Preferred resource allocation during shortages • Receive more information than other customers • Access to key technological know-how • Supplier innovativeness • Best personnel for new product development • Logistics benefits • Unique cost reduction opportunities • Increased transparency • Exclusive investments for buying company • Special attention when facing problems • Increased responsiveness compared to other customers
Mastebroek (2016, pp. 7-8)	
Supplier A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sending employee in case of missing product (service)
Supplier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional accountability insurance (not exclusively, paid) • Partner up for better customer service
Van der Vegt (2016, p. 12)	
Supplier A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privileged treatment when bottlenecks occur (Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 11) • Short delivery times/ reduction of lead times • Shared development projects/ joint development • Customise products according to the customer's wishes
Supplier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privileged treatment when bottlenecks occur • Short delivery times/ reduction of lead times • Lower prices • Access to new proprietary technologies
Supplier C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privileged treatment when bottlenecks occur • Lower prices • Shared development projects/ joint development • Access to new proprietary technologies • Customise products according to the customer's wishes • Support (be available and responsive)

Voortman (2016, p. 7)		
Supplier A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discount on repetitive purchased items • End year bonus
Supplier C		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (End year bonus possible) • Lower prices • First served
Brüning (2017, p. 12)		
Supplier A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privileged treatment in case of bottlenecks
Supplier B		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customisation of products • Changes in delivery schedules • Privileged treatment in case of bottlenecks
Supplier C		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in delivery schedules • Information exchange • Exclusivity agreements • Customisation of products • Support • Privileged treatment in case of bottlenecks
Fischer (2017, pp. 17-19)		
Supplier A	Free and selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Risk management • Quality • Joint development with other suppliers • Service availability • Preferential resource allocation
	Free and everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk management • Support
	Paid and select	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support
	Paid and everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support
Supplier B	Free and selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price • Support • Preferential resource allocation
	Paid and selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production/ logistics
Supplier C	Free and selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality • Price/ Cost • Price reduction • Logistics • Support • Preferential resource allocation
	Paid and selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support
	Paid and everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logistics
Supplier D	Free and selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logistics • Support • Price/ Cost • Joint development projects • Delivery reliability • Preferential resource allocation
Hegenberg (2017, p. 6)		
Selected customers and free		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-development with technological exclusivity • Better accessibility and service • Shorter lead times

Skora (2017, p. 12)		
Supplier A & Supplier C		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More flexibility • Premium service • Faster delivery times
Tucholka (2017, pp. 6-8)		
Supplier A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplier shares know-how • “Company X office”; inclusion of several departments for technical and quality issues (service) • Proximity of plants
Supplier B		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Investigation reports for returns”; documentations; certifications (services) • Sharing of IP
Supplier C		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R&D utilized with supplier resources (for free) • Warranty agreement of 66 months • Service guarantee (after-service for 15 year, if product is no longer produced)
Fitschen (2018, p. 10)		
Supplier A	Paid benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfilment of requests
Supplier B	Free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price information (when best to buy products/ services) • Supplier tries to meet urgent requirements • Offers consulting services • Notifications about new models and solutions • Event invitations
Supplier C	Free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project discussions • New innovative solutions • Event invitations
Kunde (2018, p. 15)		
Supplier A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Delivery reliability • Costs • Price
Supplier B		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support • Delivery reliability
Supplier C		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs • Price • Support • Invitations for events
Seppenwoolde (2018, p. 6 & 7)		
Supplier A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher amount of visits/ Intensity of contact • Contact with directors • Discounts
Supplier B		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher amount of visits/ Intensity of contact • Extra service
Supplier C		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher amount of visits/ Intensity of contact
Supplier D		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact with directors • Discounts • Served faster
Supplier E		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Served faster

Blue writing refers to findings without a literature base.