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The Effect of Reputation on the Four Stages of Buyer-Supplier Relationships and the Extent to which Buyers and Suppliers Preserve their Reputation in B2B Relationships in the Food Industry

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to find out to what extent reputation affects the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and the preservation of reputation. To investigate this, semi-structured interviews with buyers and suppliers in the food industry were conducted. The data from these interviews were inductively coded and analysed through directed content analysis. Findings show that, for preserving reputation, the derived aspects from the literature are overlapping, credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment. Additionally, communication, quality, and employee training are also important. Besides, findings show only the derived aspects from the literature, credibility, honesty, and commitment to reputation in buyer-supplier relationships overlap. Other important aspects are trust, price, experience, and communication. Moreover, findings show buyers' reputation is equally important, and suppliers' reputation is the most important in the first stage. With these findings, it is suggested that buyers and suppliers look at the aspects of reputation to create a better reputation and stronger buyer-supplier relationships. However, limitations are that the food industry is a complicated industry, only strategic buyer-supplier relationships are considered, and it has not been tested whether and to what extent the aspects affect the two subjects of this research.

Management summary

This thesis investigates the effect of reputation on the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and the extent to which buyers and suppliers preserve their reputation in business-to-business relationships. Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to build on existing literature by investigating to what extent reputation affects the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and to what extent buyers and suppliers preserve their reputation. Consequently, buyers and suppliers in the food industry could benefit from this knowledge to attract and retain customers and suppliers by using their reputation. Therefore, the following research questions are formulated: “To what extent does reputation affect the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships?” and “To what extent do buyers and suppliers preserve their reputation?”. To answer these questions, literature providing different expected influencing aspects is assessed. These aspects were tested using qualitative research, namely semi-structured interviews with buyers and suppliers in the food industry in the Netherlands, to find the influencing aspects of reputation in buyer-supplier relationships and preserve a reputation. The data from these interviews were inductively coded and analysed through directed content analysis.

Findings show that, for preserving reputation, the derived aspects from the literature are overlapping, credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment. Additionally, buyers’ and suppliers’ other important aspects are communication, quality, and employee training. Besides, findings show only the derived aspects from the literature, credibility, honesty, and commitment of reputation in buyer-supplier relationships overlap. Other important aspects for buyers and suppliers in the buyer-supplier relationship stages are trust, price, experience, and communication. Moreover, findings show buyers’ reputation is equally important in every stage of the buyer-supplier relationship. The reputation of suppliers is the most important in the first stage. After this stage, reputation will change into an experience. With these findings, it is suggested that buyers and suppliers look at the aspects of reputation to create a stronger buyer-supplier relationship in the different stages and look at their top-five ranking aspects to preserve their reputation. Finally, buyers and suppliers need to keep in mind the importance of word-of-mouth advertising and solving problems immediately to build and preserve their reputation. However, the limitations are that the food industry is a complicated industry and that only strategic buyer-supplier relationships are considered. Besides, it has not been tested whether and to what extent the aspects affect this research’s two subjects.

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1. The relationships between buyers and suppliers in the food industry are employed as a tool to gain a competitive advantage, for which reputation is essential

Nowadays, buyers and suppliers in the food industry face dynamic and unpredictable environments. That is because of globalisation through technology, communication, and the entry of emerging companies.¹ In general, the growing competition ensures that B2B businesses review their supply chains critically and operate more efficiently.² For these reasons, the quality of buyer-supplier relationships provides significant opportunities for buyers and suppliers.³ Consequently, to remain and progress in dynamic and unpredictable environments, successful buyer-supplier relationships can assist ensure a buyer and supplier achieve a competitive advantage together.⁴

Accordingly, Helper and Sako (1995) define buyer-supplier relationships as business dealings between B2B companies regarding the acquisition and distribution of products or services.⁵ The concept of the buyer-supplier relationship has the perspective that both the buyer and supplier want to exploit the relationship to achieve a competitive advantage. To exploit a successful relationship, attractiveness to the relationship needs to be developed by both buyer and supplier to persuade the other partner to engage in the relationship.⁶ According to Kalafatis (2002), the development and maintenance of buyer-supplier relationships are becoming increasingly important in current practice and research.⁷ That is because buyers and suppliers need to be considered as a partnership.⁸ Besides, according to Wilson (1995), reputation is an essential dimension of buyer-supplier relationships. Reputation is essential in the stage of partner selection.⁹ Suppliers are satisfied with the cooperation with buyers of proven history.¹⁰ Because history seems to influence buyer-supplier relationships, reputation is an essential construct that captures this factor as reputation is potentially a source of competitive advantage and consequently leading to less uncertainty in buyer-supplier relationships and higher financial

¹ (Tajeddini, Martin, & Ali, 2020, p. 2)

² (Kannan & Tan, 2006, p. 756)

³ (Pulles, Schiele, Veldman, & Hüttinger, 2016, p. 129)

⁴ (Zaheer, McEvily, & Perrone, 1998, p. 20)

⁵ (Helper & Sako, 1995, p. 78)

⁶ (Tanskanen & Aminoff, 2015, p. 128)

⁷ (Kalafatis, 2002, p. 225)

⁸ (Peck, Christopher, Clark, & Payne, 2013, p. 171)

⁹ (D. T. Wilson, 1995, p. 15)

¹⁰ (Meena, Sarmah, & Sinha, 2012, p. 65)

achievement.¹¹ However, Suh and Houston (2010) have found reputation as an under-researched topic.¹² Pires and Trez (2018) agree on that and state that corporate reputation is not a settled topic in academic literature.¹³

Although, existing research showed reputation is an essential factor in business-to-business buyer-supplier decisions.¹⁴ In this thesis, the definition of reputation will be drawn from those of Bennett and Gabriel (2001), Gray and Balmer (1998), Rajendran, Kamarulzaman, Nawi, and Mohamed (2012), and Wagner, Coley, and Lindemann (2011). So, reputation can be defined as an immaterial property and expresses a vision of a company's honesty, fairness, and commitment that can be subjectively assessed by an external person.¹⁵ For B2B buyers and suppliers, it is an urgent task to preserve their reputation as a reliable partner, so the other partner is confident not to capitalise on the weakness of this buyer or supplier.¹⁶ As a result, preserving a good reputation is essential for B2B buyers and suppliers, and preserving a good reputation leads to a long-term buyer-supplier relationship.¹⁷ As a result, limited studies have already linked the concepts of buyer-supplier relationships and reputation.¹⁸ However, these studies have not looked into the extent to which reputation affects the different stages of buyer-supplier relationships. As a result, evaluating the buyer-supplier relationship is about the performance of the two parties together, namely, the relationship from the dyadic perspective.

Furthermore, buyer-supplier relationships consist of different stages. Accordingly, in this research, the four corresponding stages of the buyer-supplier relationship development models of Ford (1993) and Ford, Gadde, Håkansson, and Snehota (2003) will be employed, which are the pre-relationship stage, early (explanatory) stage, development stage, and final (stable) stage.¹⁹ These four stages are employed because according to Ngouapegne and Chinomona (2018), trust and commitment are essential buyer-supplier relationship measures within the food industry.²⁰ However, those researchers have paid limited attention to the effect of reputation on the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and preserving buyers' and

¹¹ (Leppelt, Foerstl, & Hartmann, 2013, p. 130)

¹² (Suh & Houston, 2010, p. 744)

¹³ (Pires & Trez, 2018, p. 58)

¹⁴ (Suh & Houston, 2010, p. 744)

¹⁵ (Bennett & Gabriel, 2001, p. 424; Gray & Balmer, 1998, p. 697; Rajendran, Kamarulzaman, Nawi, & Mohamed, 2012, p. 49; Wagner, Coley, & Lindemann, 2011, p. 29)

¹⁶ (Sabel, 1993, p. 1133)

¹⁷ (Meena et al., 2012, p. 71)

¹⁸ (Doney & Cannon, 1997, p. 35; Ganesan, 1994, p. 1; Wagner et al., 2011, p. 29)

¹⁹ (Ford, 1993, p. 345; Ford, Gadde, Håkansson, & Snehota, 2003, p. 230)

²⁰ (Ngouapegne & Chinomona, 2018, p. 1)

suppliers' reputation in the food industry, which creates a gap in the literature. For those reasons, this thesis aims to build on the existing research by investigating the extent to which reputation affects the different stages of buyer-supplier relationships and the extent to which buyers and suppliers preserve their reputation in the food industry. Therefore, the following research questions are formulated:

RQ1: To what extent does reputation affect the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships?

RQ2: To what extent do buyers and suppliers preserve their reputation?

Accordingly, Suh and Houston (2010) and Wagner et al. (2011) investigated the relationship between buyer-supplier relationships and reputation.²¹ However, this is limited because the studies are not focused on the stages of buyer-supplier relationships. To expand research about buyer-supplier relationships and reputation, the effect of reputation on the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships will be investigated.²² Besides, to expand the research of Sabel (1993) about preserving reputation, the extent to which buyers and suppliers preserve their reputation is investigated.²³ As a result, in this research, there exist four contributions. Firstly, a theoretical contribution is that more information will be created about to what extent reputation affects the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships. Secondly, another theoretical contribution is that more information will be created about the extent to which buyers and suppliers preserve their reputation. Thirdly, one practical contribution is that managers gain a deeper understanding of the concepts of buyer-supplier relationships, the different stages of buyer-supplier relationships, reputation, and how to preserve a reputation. Finally, another practical contribution is that buyers and suppliers can discover the effect of reputation on the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and find out to what extent preserving their reputation is essential.²⁴

To provide an answer to the two research questions, this thesis consists of four parts. First, previous research is presented in Section 2 with relevant concepts on reputation and buyer-supplier relationships. Second, the research methodology is described in Section 3. That section will explain the research methods and data collection. Third, findings will be discussed in Section 4. In Section 5, there will be a discussion, and finally, a conclusion will be drawn.

²¹ (Suh & Houston, 2010, p. 749; Wagner et al., 2011, p. 48)

²² (Ford, 1993, p. 345; Ford, Gadde, Håkansson, & Snehota, 2003, p. 230)

²³ (Ford, 1993, p. 345; Ford et al., 2003, p. 230; Sabel, 1993, p. 1133; Suh & Houston, 2010, p. 749; Wagner et al., 2011, p. 48)

²⁴ (Suh & Houston, 2010, p. 749; Wagner et al., 2011, p. 48)

2. Previous research

2.1 Companies in the food industry

Many complicated problems confront companies in the food industry.²⁵ For example, greater complexity due to consumer protection, safety, sustainability, etcetera. Companies in the food industry need to remain competitive in this growing complexity and rapidly developing knowledge and advances in technology.²⁶ Additionally, the food industry is facing technical and economic transformations. Namely, in society, food production and processing, which in return have affected the whole food distribution process, including the supply of food to the final consumer, and obliged businesses to focus on foods that satisfy consumer requirements for health-conscious living.²⁷ Finally, the food industry operates in a dynamic environment since customers change their expectations, expect high food safety levels, and have an increasing request for sustainably manufactured products.²⁸ The demands of the buyers in the food industry are affected by growing competition in the food industry. Especially, the competitive conditions indicate that greater attention needs to be paid to scale benefits, prices, timeframes, and continuous innovation throughout the supply chain.²⁹

The food industry is generally categorised as a sector with weak research activity, representing one of the smallest R&D-sales figures of all industrial branches. Furthermore, the speed of technology-driven transformation in this industry, as expressed in terms of patented discoveries, seems to be less dynamic than in other sectors of production.³⁰ However, suppliers in the retail sector favour a link with buyers in the food industry for different reasons. First, it is more convenient to monitor the supply chain because of the asymmetry of control. Second, it enables greater flexibility in offering ranges and improved definition of the retail concept of buyers by integrating standard ranges with a combination of unique products, including organic, ethnic, and ethical foods. That results in a higher market ranking.³¹ In addition, buyers in the retail sector ensure suppliers in the food industry with more freedom in their product range. At the same time, the European buyers in the retail sector take various actions to give companies

²⁵ (Saguy & Sirotinskaya, 2014, p. 136)

²⁶ (Saguy & Sirotinskaya, 2014, p. 146)

²⁷ (Bigliardi & Galati, 2013, p. 118)

²⁸ (Beske, Land, & Seuring, 2014, p. 131)

²⁹ (Pepe, Musso, & Risso, 2010, p. 24)

³⁰ (Christensen, Rama, & Von Tunzelmann, 1996, p. 1; Martinez & Briz, 2000, p. 155)

³¹ (Pepe et al., 2010, p. 22)

greater flexibility in their product range.³² Despite what buyers explain, a long-term focus within the supply chain in strategic buyer-supplier relationships is not always available to all food industry suppliers. In many instances, suppliers are required to ensure structures, means, and methods of communication to maintain advanced relationships. As a result, personal and direct contact, including transparency, is essential for buyers and suppliers in the food industry.³³ Simultaneously, safety and quality are of the biggest concern in the food industry. So, managing the entire supply chain, ensuring quality, and improving traceability and tracing methods are particular concerns for companies in the food industry.³⁴ In conclusion, strategic buyer-supplier relationships are essential for, in particular, buyers and suppliers in the food industry because they are dealing with food products that must meet specific safety and quality requirements. For this reason, this thesis will focus on strategic buyer-supplier relationships.³⁵

In the next section, different definitions of buyer-supplier relationships are considered. Buyer-supplier relationships are business dealings between B2B companies regarding the acquisition and distribution of products and services. However, buyer-supplier relationships can be divided into successful and unsuccessful buyer-supplier relationships, defined by different aspects.

2.2 Buyer-supplier relationships

2.2.1 Buyer-supplier relationships; business dealings between B2B companies regarding the acquisition and distribution of products or services

To better understand successful buyer-supplier relationships, the concept has to be investigated in depth. The relationships between buyers and suppliers have gained a high amount of interest in different business research institutes, using a great variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to investigate relation-specific issues.³⁶ Maloni and Benton (2000) discussed that buyer-supplier relationships have a significant positive effect on performance.³⁷ However, the word buyer-supplier relationship is seen as a wide term. Accordingly, Helper and Sako (1995) define buyer-supplier relationships as business dealings between B2B companies regarding the

³² (Pepe et al., 2010, p. 22)

³³ (Pepe et al., 2010, p. 23)

³⁴ (Manning, Baines, & Chadd, 2005, p. 225, 2006, p. 91; X. Wang, Li, & O'Brien, 2009, p. 2865)

³⁵ (Manning et al., 2005, p. 225, 2006, p. 91; Saguy & Sirotinskaya, 2014, p. 146; X. Wang et al., 2009, p. 2865)

³⁶ (Autry & Golicic, 2010, p. 88)

³⁷ (Maloni & Benton, 2000, p. 49)

acquisition and distribution of products or services. As a result, in this research, this definition will be employed for defining buyer-supplier relationships.³⁸

Besides, there also exist successful buyer-supplier relationships. Lambert and Schwieterman (2012) identify the value of successful buyer-supplier relationships based on cost, as well as providing product and service information.³⁹ According to Waithaka and Waiganjo (2015), a successful buyer-supplier relationship is a long-term win-win partnership. Namely, having a relationship with a supplier who is approached with kindness, sincerity, and equity will provide a high-quality product for the right price, excellent service, and responding to urgent cases and specific demands.⁴⁰ As a result, in this thesis, the definition of successful buyer-supplier relationships will be drawn from those of Lambert and Swieterman (2012) and Waithaka and Waiganjo (2015). So, successful buyer-supplier relationships are long-term win-win business partnerships between B2B companies based on cost and providing product and service information.⁴¹ Moreover, Biehl, Cook, and Johnston (2006) state that successful buyer-supplier relationships assist both trading partners to control uncertainty and improve supply chain efficiency. Mutual collaboration between all partners in the supply chain is required, which is crucial for improving supply chain performance.⁴² That corresponds to Maloni and Benton (2000), who concluded successful buyer-supplier relationships lead to better performance of the entire supply chain. They also stated successful buyer-supplier relationships have a significant positive impact on manufacturer performance and supplier performance.⁴³ As a result, successful buyer-supplier relationships have a significant positive effect on manufacturer performance, supplier performance, and the performance of the entire supply chain.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, a successful buyer-supplier relationship can lead to different benefits. These benefits include continuous cost reductions, quality enhancements, greater operational flexibility, and big competitive strategies.⁴⁵ Moreover, another study, such as the one of Kannan and Tan (2006), showed the buyer benefits from successful buyer-supplier relationships regarding financial and lead time achievements. Furthermore, such relationships can increase response speed and customer loyalty, as well as innovation and quality.⁴⁶ From a supplier's

³⁸ (Helper & Sako, 1995, p. 78)

³⁹ (Lambert & Schwieterman, 2012, p. 338)

⁴⁰ (Waithaka & Waiganjo, 2015, p. 137)

⁴¹ (Lambert & Schwieterman, 2012, p. 338; Waithaka & Waiganjo, 2015, p. 137)

⁴² (Biehl, Cook, & Johnston, 2006, p. 15)

⁴³ (Maloni & Benton, 2000, p. 49)

⁴⁴ (Biehl et al., 2006, p. 15; Maloni & Benton, 2000, p. 49)

⁴⁵ (Peck et al., 2013, p. 171)

⁴⁶ (Kannan & Tan, 2006, p. 760)

perspective, buyer-supplier relationships can lead to a reduction in inventory costs and lead time, as well as improvements in product/process design, quality, financial performance, and the relationship's prospects. Finally, effective buyer-supplier relationships also prove to lead to an increase in supply chain performance.⁴⁷

Moreover, there exist unsuccessful buyer-supplier relationships. According to Das, Narasimhan, and Talluri (2006), an unsuccessful buyer-supplier relationship exists when both parties have seriously and continuously worked towards reaching a relationship, their collaboration would not lead to mutual advantages and greater achievements but would decrease and turn out to be less synergistic and would lead to a situation of decreasing revenues.⁴⁸ As a result, in this research, this definition of Das et al. (2006) of unsuccessful buyer-supplier relationships is employed. Besides, Wullenweber, Jahner, and Krcmar (2008) state unsuccessful buyer-supplier relationships exist when there is a lack of trust, commitment, and communication between the buyer and the supplier.⁴⁹ Moreover, buyer-supplier relationships defined by non-symmetric interdependencies are considered unsuccessful since the independent party perceives a great power and possibly tries to exploit that power.⁵⁰ Accordingly, McDonald (1999) argues that power inequalities in a buyer-supplier relationship may result in unsuccessful relationships. Ultimately, the position of the weaker party will be undermined excessively, and the relationship could collapse.⁵¹ As a result, unsuccessful buyer-supplier relationships can exist because of different aspects, which must be considered. Finally, in Table 1, the definitions of buyer-supplier relationships, successful buyer-supplier relationships, and unsuccessful buyer-supplier relationships are provided.

⁴⁷ (Kannan & Tan, 2006, p. 760)

⁴⁸ (Das, Narasimhan, & Talluri, 2006, p. 15)

⁴⁹ (Wullenweber, Jahner, & Krcmar, 2008, p. 438)

⁵⁰ (Anderson & Weitz, 1989, p. 312)

⁵¹ (F. McDonald, 1999, p. 52)

Table 1. Definitions of buyer-supplier relationships

| Term | Definition | References |
|--|---|---|
| Buyer-supplier relationships | Business dealings between B2B companies regarding the acquisition and distribution of products or services | (Helper & Sako, 1995, p. 78) |
| Successful buyer-supplier relationships | Long-term win-win business partnerships between B2B companies based on cost and providing product and service information | (Lambert & Swieterman, 2012, p. 338; Waithaka & Waiganjo, 2015, p. 137) |
| Unsuccessful buyer-supplier relationships | A relationship that exists when both parties have worked seriously and continuously towards reaching a relationship, their collaboration would not lead to mutual advantages and greater achievements but would decrease and turn out to be less synergistic and would lead to a situation of decreasing revenues | (Das et al., 2006, p. 15) |

In the next section, different dimensions of buyer-supplier relationships will be examined. Various researchers agree with each other. However, other researchers believe other buyer-supplier relationship dimensions are essential. The corresponding dimensions of buyer-supplier relationships are communication, cooperation, power-dependence, commitment, trust, and adaption.

2.2.2 Buyer-supplier relationships consist of different dimensions; the corresponding dimensions are communication, cooperation, power-dependence, commitment, trust, and adaption

Firstly, Hsiao, Purchase, and Rahman (2002) provide four essential dimensions of buyer-supplier relationships, communication, interpersonal relationship, cooperation, and power-dependence.⁵² Secondly, Fynes and Voss (2002) claim communication, cooperation, commitment, trust, adaption, and power-dependence are essential dimensions of buyer-supplier relationships. Nevertheless, they also state satisfaction should not be overlooked.⁵³ Besides, Ambrose, Marshall, and Lynch (2010) state buyers and suppliers have different perceptions of the relationship dimensions. As a result, the different perceptions of buyers and suppliers must be taken into consideration with the identification of the relationship dimensions.⁵⁴ However,

⁵² (Hsiao, Purchase, & Rahman, 2002, p. 4)

⁵³ (Fynes & Voss, 2002, p. 592)

⁵⁴ (Ambrose, Marshall, & Lynch, 2010, p. 14)

according to Wilson (1995), buyer-supplier relationships consist of a corresponding set of dimensions, commitment, trust, adaption, reputation, and relationship history.⁵⁵ The first dimension of buyer-supplier relationships is commitment. Commitment is the most frequently occurring dependent variable employed in research into the relationship between buyers and suppliers.⁵⁶ Besides, commitment implicates the relationship's significance with the parties and the willingness to maintain and continue the relationship.⁵⁷ Moreover, commitment is essential in the stage of creating relationship value.⁵⁸ Finally, Fynes and Voss (2002) agree on this, and state commitment ultimately will lead to a better buyer-supplier relationship.⁵⁹

The second dimension of buyer-supplier relationships is trust. Trust is a core element of relationship models and is embedded in the majority of relationship models. Trust is based on the conviction that one party will behave under the other party's interests.⁶⁰ Besides, trust is essential in the stages of partner selection and defining the purpose of the relationship.⁶¹ Hsiao et al. (2002) agree on this and state trust in a buyer-supplier relationship is a critical element in building a comprehensive corporate network and ensuring a company's success.⁶² Besides, Ganesan (1994) claims that trust in a buyer-supplier relationship leads to fewer transaction costs and the risk of opportunistic behaviour. Moreover, trust in a buyer-supplier relationship provides more willingness to make investments.⁶³ Fynes and Voss (2002) agree on this and claim that trust, in the end, will result in a stronger buyer-supplier relationship.⁶⁴ Besides, the third dimension of buyer-supplier relationships is adaption. During the beginning stages of the relationship, the adaption dimension will provide a tool to establish trust. In the maturity stage, adaption will extend and reinforce the buyer-supplier relationship.⁶⁵ For that reason, adaption is essential in the stages of setting relationship boundaries and creating relationship value.⁶⁶ Finally, Fynes and Voss (2002) also state that adaption is an important dimension of buyer-supplier relationships.⁶⁷ Moreover, the fourth dimension of buyer-supplier relationships is

⁵⁵ (D. T. Wilson, 1995, p. 1)

⁵⁶ (D. T. Wilson, 1995, p. 6)

⁵⁷ (D. T. Wilson, 1995, p. 7)

⁵⁸ (D. T. Wilson, 1995, p. 15)

⁵⁹ (Fynes & Voss, 2002, p. 605)

⁶⁰ (D. T. Wilson, 1995, p. 8)

⁶¹ (D. T. Wilson, 1995, p. 15)

⁶² (Hsiao et al., 2002, p. 5)

⁶³ (Ganesan, 1994, p. 1)

⁶⁴ (Fynes & Voss, 2002, p. 605)

⁶⁵ (D. T. Wilson, 1995, p. 12)

⁶⁶ (D. T. Wilson, 1995, p. 15)

⁶⁷ (Fynes & Voss, 2002, p. 605)

reputation. Reputation for performance is the criterion if a partner is a new partner with no previous business.⁶⁸ Reputation is essential in the stage of partner selection. The fifth and final dimension of buyer-supplier relationships is relationship history.⁶⁹ As a result, the corresponding dimensions of buyer-supplier relationships are communication, cooperation, power-dependence, commitment, trust, and adaption, shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Dimensions of buyer-supplier relationships

| Dimensions of buyer-supplier relationships | References |
|---|---|
| Communication | (Fynes & Voss, 2002, p. 592) (Hsiao et al., 2002, p. 4) |
| Interpersonal relationship | (Hsiao et al., 2002, p. 4) |
| Cooperation | (Fynes & Voss, 2002, p. 592) (Hsiao et al., 2002, p. 4) |
| Power-dependence | (Fynes & Voss, 2002, p. 592) (Hsiao et al., 2002, p. 4) |
| Satisfaction | (Fynes & Voss, 2002, p. 592) |
| Commitment | (Fynes & Voss, 2002, p. 592) (Wilson, 1995, p. 1) |
| Trust | (Fynes & Voss, 2002, p. 592) (Ganesan, 1994, p. 1) (Hsiao et al., 2002, p. 4) (Wilson, 1995, p. 1) |
| Adaption | (Fynes & Voss, 2002, p. 592) (Wilson, 1995, p. 1) |
| Reputation | (Wilson, 1995, p. 1) |
| Relationship history | (Wilson, 1995, p. 1) |

In the next section, the four corresponding stages of a buyer-supplier relationship employed in this research will be discussed. That will show some insights into the variables that are important in evaluating the buyer-supplier relationship in the food industry. The first stage is the pre-relationship stage, the second stage is the early stage, the third stage is the development stage, and the last stage is the final stage. The variables experience, uncertainty, distance, commitment, adaptations, and trust develop through these stages. However, commitment and trust are the main aspects of buyer-supplier relationships in the food industry.

⁶⁸ (D. T. Wilson, 1995, p. 16)

⁶⁹ (D. T. Wilson, 1995, p. 15)

2.2.3 Buyer-supplier relationships in the food industry proceed throughout various corresponding stages; the pre-relationship stage, early stage, development stage, and final stage

Buyer-supplier relationships consist of different stages. As a result, not all transactions between industrial buying and selling companies occur within tight relationships.⁷⁰ The two companies' product and process technologies are essential determinants of the type of buyer-supplier relationship.⁷¹ Equally relevant are the current market patterns for buyers and suppliers, and thus, the accessibility of replacement buyers and suppliers.⁷² B2B companies will establish strong relationships instead of exploiting the market because B2B companies are focusing on long-term relationships, benefiting in terms of cost reduction or higher revenues. These advantages are obtained by aligning resources to interact with a particular buyer or supplier.⁷³ However, relationships may not develop or deteriorate due to the actions of one party or the actions of competing buyers or suppliers.⁷⁴ Accordingly, buyer-supplier relationships consist of different stages. Firstly, Ford (1993) states buyer-supplier relationships include five stages, the pre-relationship stage, early stage, development stage, long-term stage, and final stage.⁷⁵ Secondly, Ford et al. (2003) claim buyer-supplier relationships involve four stages, the pre-relationship stage, exploratory stage, developing stage, and stable stage.⁷⁶

Firstly, according to Ford (1993), the five stages of the evolution of the buyer-supplier relationship are the pre-relationship stage, early stage, development stage, long-term stage, and the final stage.⁷⁷ In these stages, six variables are essential to evaluate the buyer-supplier relationship. These variables are experience, uncertainty, distance, commitment, adaptations, and trust. The first stage is the pre-relationship stage. At this stage, the buyer or supplier assesses a potential new supplier or buyer, which may be the outcome of a specific period in an existing relationship.⁷⁸ Further grounds that may give rise to an evaluation of new potential suppliers are a regular supplier analysis that assesses the performance and potential of existing suppliers. But also, the commitment of a non-delivery company to doing business, and any variation in

⁷⁰ (Kim, Park, Ryoo, & Park, 2010, p. 865)

⁷¹ (Ford, 1993, p. 340)

⁷² (Kim et al., 2010, p. 865; Y. Wang, Wang, Jiang, Yang, & Cui, 2016, p. 5589)

⁷³ (Ford, 1993, p. 340)

⁷⁴ (Ford, 1993, p. 341)

⁷⁵ (Ford, 1993, p. 341)

⁷⁶ (Ford et al., 2003, p. 230)

⁷⁷ (Ford, 1993, p. 341)

⁷⁸ (Ford, 1993, p. 341; White, 2000, p. 10)

the demands or market circumstances faced by the buyer.⁷⁹ However, the assessment of potential suppliers can also reflect a general policy. Previous and existing relationships indicate the benchmarks against which the potential performance of a prospective business partner is assessed.⁸⁰ The buyer is confronted with uncertainty regarding the possible costs and advantages that probably will be involved in handling a new supplier.⁸¹ There will have been no occasion to narrow the distance among the parties at this first stage in their dealings.⁸²

The second stage is the early stage. That is the stage where prospective suppliers approach buyers to negotiate or create a detailed description of a buy of capital goods.⁸³ At this stage, it may also concern the supply of samples for commonly procured parts or suppliers. During this early stage of the relationship, both buyer and supplier probably have limited mutual experience. The perception of what the other party wants from them, or even of what the buyer and supplier hope to gain from the relationship itself, will only be distorted. The investment in human resources will be undertaken in an uncertain time when the prospective return on the relationship will be hard to predict. Besides, the structure of future costs is uncertain.⁸⁴ The opportunity to narrow the distance between the parties at this early stage in their actions is limited. Each party will be conscious of the associated risks and find limited or no evidence to assess their partner's commitment to the relationship. It is expected that the current level of commitment from both sides will be weak.⁸⁵

The third stage is the development stage. The development stage of a relationship arises as supplies of continually procured products grow.⁸⁶ It is possible that staged supplies take place or that the supplier has begun processing the product.⁸⁷ Buyers and suppliers will both be involved in matters relating to the incorporation of the bought product or service into the buyer's activities or training before delivery. The development stage is characterised by a growing experience among the B2B companies in the functioning of their organisations. Moreover, the buyers and suppliers concerned will have obtained a certain knowledge of their respective

⁷⁹ (Ford, 1993, p. 341)

⁸⁰ (Ford, 1993, p. 341)

⁸¹ (Ford, 1993, p. 341; Mohanty & Gahan, 2012, p. 320)

⁸² (Ford, 1993, p. 343; Mohanty & Gahan, 2012, p. 320)

⁸³ (Ford, 1993, p. 343; White, 2000, p. 10)

⁸⁴ (Ford, 1993, p. 343)

⁸⁵ (Ford, 1993, p. 344; Mohanty & Gahan, 2012, p. 320)

⁸⁶ (Ford, 1993, p. 345)

⁸⁷ (Ford, 1993, p. 345; White, 2000, p. 10)

norms and values.⁸⁸ The experience will have decreased the level of uncertainty that applies to both parties in the relationship. At this stage, the distance between the two parties is narrowed.⁸⁹ A large part of the assessment of a supplier's or buyer's business during the development of their relationship will be determined by the extent to which the buyer and supplier are engaged in developing the relationship.⁹⁰

The fourth stage is the long-term stage. It is impossible to establish a schedule for the process through which a relationship achieves the long-term stage.⁹¹ This stage is defined by the mutual interest of the B2B companies for each other. This stage is achieved following large-scale deliveries of continually procured products or multiple purchases of essential single unit products.⁹² The extensive experience of the parties in interacting with each other results in the determination of standardised working practices, trust, and standards of behaviour.⁹³ The uncertainty regarding the process of handling a certain partner is kept to a minimal level in the long-term stage. Moreover, in this stage, the distance is reduced.⁹⁴ Due to the long-term stage, the involvement of both the supplier and the buyer in the relationship will have been evidenced through the comprehensive procedural and informal adjustments that have taken place.⁹⁵

The last stage is the final stage. This stage is achieved in steady markets over a sustained period.⁹⁶ It is characterised by an expansion of the institutionalisation process towards a level at which business operations are governed by the sector's codes of conduct. Although these considerations may not relate to commercial concerns, the considerations are more consistent with a proper way of conducting business, namely “the avoidance of price-cutting and restrictions on changes in the respective roles of buyer and seller”.⁹⁷ On many occasions, efforts to escape from institutionalised trading structures will, in the final stage, be countered by sanctions imposed by fellow buyers or suppliers of the company's trading partners.⁹⁸

⁸⁸ (Ford, 1993, p. 345)

⁸⁹ (Ford, 1993, p. 345; Mohanty & Gahan, 2012, p. 320)

⁹⁰ (Ford, 1993, p. 346; Mohanty & Gahan, 2012, p. 320)

⁹¹ (Ford, 1993, p. 347)

⁹² (Ford, 1993, p. 347; White, 2000, p. 10)

⁹³ (Ford, 1993, p. 347)

⁹⁴ (Ford, 1993, p. 347; Mohanty & Gahan, 2012, p. 320)

⁹⁵ (Ford, 1993, p. 348)

⁹⁶ (Ford, 1993, p. 349; White, 2000, p. 10)

⁹⁷ (Ford, 1993, p. 349)

⁹⁸ (Ford, 1993, p. 349)

Secondly, according to Ford et al. (2003), the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships are the pre-relationship stage, exploratory stage, developing stage, and stable stage.⁹⁹ Firstly, the pre-relationship stage is about the aspects that make a supplier or buyer looking for a new buyer or supplier. That can be the result of a comprehensive assessment of an existing partner or an overview of an existing database of suppliers or customers. In this case, buyers and suppliers can change their requirements and are, therefore, looking for a new buyer or supplier. Buyers and suppliers ask themselves what partners will receive from this relationship, what each partner wants to receive, how much each party has to invest to create a relationship, how much each party has to adapt, how much knowledge is needed to deal with the relationship, and how to create trust.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, in the exploratory stage, the customer and the supplier are engaged in negotiations about a possible purchase. As a result, this stage is about the investment of time for learning and distance reduction. Besides, in this stage, there are no routines and commitment created, and the parties have no or little experience of working together. Finally, a lack of trust exists in the commitment of the other party. Thirdly, in the development stage, the relationship is evaluating because of increasing volume or transforming character, for example, signing contracts for a great large purchase.¹⁰¹ As a result, the relationship grows, and the uncertainty decreases. In this stage, the parties have more knowledge about the values and needs of the other party. Consequently, commitment and trust increase when parties reach their promises, and intensive mutual learning and investment, and informal adaption exist. Finally, in the stable stage, the buyer and the supplier have achieved a degree of stability in mutual learning, as well as in their investments and involvement in the relationship. That can happen after the provision of an offer has turned into routine, or after multiple purchases of equity products. It is not possible to establish a timescale on achieving this stage since certain relationships will perhaps never reach the stage, and other relationships will rapidly stabilise quite well if only a bit of learning and investment is necessary.¹⁰² As a result, standard operating procedures, norms of conduct, and trust can be created. Consequently, the uncertainty of both parties decreases, and institutionalisation exists. However, because the stage is about routines, the costs and the commitment are lower, which results in less commitment from both parties and fewer mutual requirements.¹⁰³ Accordingly, the stages are shown in Table 3.

⁹⁹ (Ford et al., 2003, p. 230)

¹⁰⁰ (Ford et al., 2003, p. 230)

¹⁰¹ (Ford et al., 2003, p. 230)

¹⁰² (Ford et al., 2003, p. 230)

¹⁰³ (Ford et al., 2003, p. 230)

Table 3. Stages of the buyer-supplier relationship

| | Ford (1993, p. 341) | Ford et al. (2003, p. 341) |
|----------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Stage 1 | Pre-relationship stage | Pre-relationship stage |
| Stage 2 | Early stage | Exploratory stage |
| Stage 3 | Development stage | Developing stage |
| Stage 4 | Long-term stage | Stable stage |
| Stage 5 | Final stage | |

Overall, the two different buyer-supplier relationship development models of Ford (1993) and Ford et al. (2003) correspond clearly to each other in one aspect. Accordingly, it is possible to move between the different stages. It is possible that stages are crossed or that a buyer-supplier relationship returns to a previous stage because one or more aspects of the stage are no longer reached. Besides, most established relationships will probably have experienced several stages. Moreover, not all buyer-supplier relationships reach the last stage of all models.¹⁰⁴

In this research, the corresponding stages of the models of development of buyer-supplier relationships of Ford (1993) and Ford et al. (2003) will be employed.¹⁰⁵ According to Ngouapegne and Chinomona (2018), trust and commitment are essential buyer-supplier relationship measures within the food industry.¹⁰⁶ Besides, trust is a major issue for buyers and suppliers in the food industry since relationships established on mutual trust usually lead to successful outcomes, and without trust, they will collapse.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, commitment makes it possible for buyers and suppliers in the food industry to take an extra step, to invest more effort in the establishment of the company and the relationship with the suppliers, and to create emotions of pride and trust in the relationship.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, the corresponding stages of the buyer-supplier relationship models of Ford (1993) and Ford et al. (2003) are employed because, in these models, trust and commitment are essential aspects, and this also applies to the food industry. The first stage is the pre-relationship stage, in which the buyer or supplier assesses a potential new supplier or buyer, which may be the outcome of a specific period in an existing relationship.¹⁰⁹ The second stage is the early (explanatory) stage, where prospective suppliers

¹⁰⁴ (Ford, 1993, p. 349; Ford et al., 2003, p. 230)

¹⁰⁵ (Ford, 1993, p. 349; Ford et al., 2003, p. 230)

¹⁰⁶ (Ngouapegne & Chinomona, 2018, p. 1)

¹⁰⁷ (Makhitha, 2017, p. 417)

¹⁰⁸ (Jacobs, 2008, p. 49)

¹⁰⁹ (Ford, 1993, p. 341; Ford et al., 2003, p. 230; White, 2000, p. 10)

approach buyers to negotiate or create a detailed description of a buy of capital goods.¹¹⁰ The third stage is the development stage, in which a relationship arises as supplies of continually procured products grow.¹¹¹ The last stage is the final (stable) stage, achieved in steady markets over a sustained period. It is characterised by an expansion of the institutionalisation process towards a level at which business operations are governed by the sector's codes of conduct.¹¹² As a result, the stages, content, aspects, and references employed in this research are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The stages of a buyer-supplier relationship in this research

| The stages of buyer-supplier relationships in this research | Content | Aspects | References |
|---|--|---|---|
| Pre-relationship stage | The buyer or supplier assesses a potential new supplier or buyer, which may be the outcome of a specific period in an existing relationship | Experience Uncertainty Distance Commitment | (Ford, 1993, p. 341; Ford et al., 2003, p. 230) |
| Early (exploratory) stage | Prospective suppliers approach buyers to negotiate or create a detailed description of a buy of capital goods | Adaptions Trust | (Ford, 1993, p. 341; Ford et al., 2003, p. 230) |
| Development stage | A relationship arises as supplies of continually procured products grow | | (Ford, 1993, p. 341; Ford et al., 2003, p. 230) |
| Final (stable) stage | Characterised by an expansion of the institutionalisation process towards a level at which business operations are governed by the sector's codes of conduct | | (Ford, 1993, p. 341; Ford et al., 2003, p. 230) |

In the next section, the antecedents of buyer-supplier relationships will be discussed. That will show some insights into the essential aspects that may lead to a buyer-supplier relationship. First, the effectiveness of a relationship is discussed since relationships must be mutually beneficial for both supplier and buyer. Second, different antecedents drive a buyer-relationship to be effective, seen from the buyer and supplier view. From the buyers' view, the antecedents of buyer-supplier relationships are trust, credibility, alignment, uncertainty, and satisfaction.

¹¹⁰ (Ford, 1993, p. 343; Ford et al., 2003, p. 230; White, 2000, p. 10)

¹¹¹ (Ford, 1993, p. 345; Ford et al., 2003, p. 230)

¹¹² (Ford, 1993, p. 349; Ford et al., 2003, p. 230; White, 2000, p. 10)

Besides, from the suppliers' view, the antecedents of buyer-supplier relationships are engagement, communication, and uncertainty. As a result, there exist variations in the motives for the success of buyer-supplier relationships from the buyer and supplier view.

2.2.4 Supplier satisfaction is one essential antecedent of buyer-supplier relationships; a satisfied buyer is committed to maintaining the relationship with the supplier

To understand buyer-supplier relationships, the antecedents of buyer-supplier relationships have to be investigated. Several researchers have discussed buyer-supplier relationships provide different significant antecedents from the buyer view, but also the supplier view. Ravald and Grönroos (1996) indicate the effectiveness of a relationship, being a mutually beneficial relationship for both supplier and buyer, relies on the capacity to consistently deliver episodes and relationship value. Episode value is enhanced by improving the advantages and/or decreasing the sacrifice for the buyer. That will increase the satisfaction of the buyer and encourages repurchase or continuity.¹¹³ When the relationship progresses, the buyer becomes secure with the supplier, and trust is created. Trust based on safety, credibility, and security decreases the sacrifices for the buyer and is supposed to be worthwhile in its own right.¹¹⁴

Different researchers, such as Ambrose et al. (2010), Anderson and Weitz (1992), and Morris and Carter (2005), state there are different essential antecedents of buyer-supplier relationships.¹¹⁵ Ambrose et al. (2010) show a varying dynamic of relationship performance for buyers and suppliers. Accordingly, there are notable variations in the motives for the success of a buyer-supplier relationship.¹¹⁶ Buyers focus on the antecedents credibility, trust, and alignment, whereas suppliers focus on the antecedents engagement and communication to ensure a successful buyer-supplier relationship.¹¹⁷ The communication from the buyer is an essential antecedent for suppliers to create a successful buyer-supplier relationship, which corresponds to the outcome of the research of Anderson and Weitz (1992). They stated communication from the buyer is essential for the supplier.¹¹⁸ However, the importance of engagement to the supplier from the buyer is another antecedent of buyer-supplier

¹¹³ (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996, p. 19)

¹¹⁴ (Selnes, 1998, p. 305)

¹¹⁵ (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11; Anderson & Weitz, 1992, p. 18; Morris & Carter, 2005, p. 32)

¹¹⁶ (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11)

¹¹⁷ (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11)

¹¹⁸ (Anderson & Weitz, 1992, p. 18)

relationships.¹¹⁹ As a result, buyers and suppliers in a single supply chain relationship represent significantly different perceptions of important antecedents of buyer-supplier relationships.¹²⁰ Besides, Morris and Carter (2005) show uncertainty in a buyer-supplier relationship is negatively correlated to relationship performance for buyers.¹²¹ Ambrose et al. (2010) build on this and state for both groups, buyers and suppliers, there is a negative correlation between uncertainty and performance in a buyer-supplier relationship.¹²² Moreover, the greatest antecedent for the performance in a buyer-supplier relationship for buyers is trust from the supplier. In addition, buyers expect their suppliers to adapt their products, services, processes, and procedures and invest relationally on behalf of the buying company, which results in the antecedent alignment.¹²³

Nevertheless, according to Selnes (1998), also other antecedents ensure that the buyer-supplier relationship is positive or negative, which is seen from the buyer's view. First, the greater the satisfaction with the supplier, the more committed the buyer is to maintain the relationship with the supplier.¹²⁴ Second, the greater the buyer's trust in the supplier, the stronger the motivation to increase the size of the relationship.¹²⁵ For example, every effort by a supplier to increase the scope of a relationship with a dissatisfied buyer seems destined to fail. Consequently, trust is an essential antecedent of motivation to expand the scope of the relationship. Moreover, trust is not required when dealing with the continuity of the relationship. Besides, relationship continuity does not always require a close relationship but may well be carried on at arm's length.¹²⁶ Third, the greater the satisfaction with the supplier, the better the buyer will trust the supplier.¹²⁷ As a result, satisfaction is a strong antecedent of trust.¹²⁸ Finally, enhancement drives continuity.¹²⁹ As a result, satisfaction has an indirect effect on the buyer-supplier relationship, through trust, on improvement. However, there is also a direct impact of satisfaction on the buyer-supplier relationship. Satisfied buyers are highly motivated to continue the relationship with the supplier and increase the scope of the relationship.¹³⁰

¹¹⁹ (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11)

¹²⁰ (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11)

¹²¹ (Morris & Carter, 2005, p. 32)

¹²² (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11)

¹²³ (Palmatier, Dant, & Grewal, 2007, p. 172)

¹²⁴ (Selnes, 1998, p. 307)

¹²⁵ (Selnes, 1998, p. 309)

¹²⁶ (Selnes, 1998, p. 317)

¹²⁷ (Selnes, 1998, p. 310)

¹²⁸ (Selnes, 1998, p. 317)

¹²⁹ (Selnes, 1998, p. 315)

¹³⁰ (Selnes, 1998, p. 316)

Consequently, from the buyers' viewpoint, the antecedents of buyer-supplier relationships are trust, credibility, alignment, uncertainty, and satisfaction. Besides, from the suppliers' viewpoint, the antecedents of buyer-supplier relationships are engagement, communication, and uncertainty. These antecedents can be found in Table 5. As a result, there exist variations in the motives for the success of buyer-supplier relationships for the buyer and supplier view.¹³¹

Table 5. Antecedents of buyer-supplier relationships: buyers' and suppliers' view

| Antecedents of buyer-supplier relationships | |
|--|--|
| The viewpoint of buyers | References |
| Trust | (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11) (Palmatier et al., 2007, 172) (Selnes, 1998, p. 316) |
| Credibility | (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11) |
| Alignment | (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11) (Palmatier et al., 2007, 172) |
| Uncertainty | (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11) (Morris & Carter, 2005, p. 32) |
| Satisfaction | (Selnes, 1998, p. 316) (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996, p. 19) |
| The viewpoint of suppliers | References |
| Engagement | (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11) |
| Communication | (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11) (Anderson & Weitz, 1992, p. 18) |
| Uncertainty | (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11) |

In the next section, different definitions of reputation are considered. Reputation is an immaterial property and expresses a vision of a company's honesty, fairness, and commitment that can be subjectively assessed by an external person. However, reputation distinguishes itself from image, prestige, and status. Image is an individual's perception of the actions, activities, and accomplishments of an organisation. Besides, prestige is the property of having status, which indicates the positive characteristics of an individual, group, or organisation. Finally, status is a socially constructed, intersubjectively agreed-upon, and accepted ordering or ranking of individuals, groups, organisations, or activities in a social system.

¹³¹ (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 11; Anderson & Weitz, 1992, p. 18; Morris & Carter, 2005, p. 32; Palmatier et al., 2007, p. 172; Selnes, 1998, p. 316)

2.3 Reputation

2.3.1 Reputation is an immaterial property and expresses a vision of a company's honesty, fairness, and commitment; it distinguishes itself from image, prestige, and status

According to Veh, Göbel, and Vogel (2019), reputation research occupies a leading place in managerial studies. Although, the growing volume of literature means it is becoming difficult to maintain this increasing literature volume.¹³² Moreover, the concept of corporate reputation constitutes a comparatively new and complementary perspective that allows the top management to assess the problems their company is experiencing.¹³³ Reputation may be a driver of competitive advantage, which leads to less uncertainty in the buyer-supplier relationship and better financial performance.¹³⁴ For this reason, it is essential to look into the meaning and effects of reputation.

The definition of reputation varies widely among different researchers. To begin with, Gray and Balmer (1998) define a company's reputation as a judgement of worth on the characteristics of companies, which develops through time, reflecting continuous performance.¹³⁵ According to Bennett and Gabriel (2001), reputation is a term associated with the image and includes the subjective assessment of an external person about the qualities of an institution concerning its historical performance.¹³⁶ Besides, Wagner et al. (2011) define reputation as an immaterial property, which is the perception of the purchaser regard to honesty, fairness, and anxiety concerning the purchasing company.¹³⁷ Finally, Rajendran et al. (2012) state reputation is an immaterial good. Besides, reputation expresses a vision of a company's honesty, fairness, and commitment. Reputation also included the view of the past performance, experience, and capabilities of a company.¹³⁸ Consequently, in this thesis, the definition of reputation will be drawn from those of Bennett and Gabriel (2001), Gray and Balmer (1998), Rajendran et al. (2012), and Wagner et al. (2011). So, reputation can be defined as an immaterial property and

¹³² (Veh, Göbel, & Vogel, 2019, p. 315)

¹³³ (Gray & Balmer, 1998, p. 695)

¹³⁴ (Leppelt et al., 2013, p. 130)

¹³⁵ (Gray & Balmer, 1998, p. 697)

¹³⁶ (Bennett & Gabriel, 2001, p. 424)

¹³⁷ (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 29)

¹³⁸ (Rajendran et al., 2012, p. 49)

expresses a vision of a company's honesty, fairness, and commitment that can be subjectively assessed by an external person.¹³⁹

Reputation is different from image, prestige, and status. Firstly, Gray and Balmer (1998) state a company's reputation is the outcome of consistency in performance, enhanced by successful communication, and therefore, takes time to evolve. Conversely, the company's image might be formed more rapidly through advertising and public relations campaigns.¹⁴⁰ Accordingly, image is defined by Riordan, Gatewood, and Bill (1997) as "an individual's perceptions about the actions, activities, and accomplishments of an organization".¹⁴¹ As a result, a company's reputation may last longer than its image.¹⁴² Secondly, D'Aveni (1990) defines prestige as the "property of having status".¹⁴³ However, there is exists confusion about the difference between the terms reputation and prestige. As a result, reputation is a neutral term, while prestige is identified with positive associations. Hence, prestige indicates the positive characteristics of an individual, group, or organisation, whereas reputation can be either positive, negative, or neutral.¹⁴⁴ Finally, according to Washington and Zajac (2005), status refers to a "socially constructed, intersubjectively agreed-upon, and accepted ordering or ranking of individuals, groups, organizations, or activities in a social system".¹⁴⁵ Besides, they state status catches variations in social standing that create prerogatives or discrimination, which are no performance-related rewards, while reputation reflects variations in the perceived or actual quality of earnings that create deserved, performance-related rewards.¹⁴⁶ As a result, reputation is based on performance-related rewards, and status is based on non-performance-based rewards.¹⁴⁷ Accordingly, the terms and definitions can be found in Table 6.

¹³⁹ (Bennett & Gabriel, 2001, p. 424; Gray & Balmer, 1998, p. 697; Rajendran et al., 2012, p. 49; Wagner et al., 2011, p. 29)

¹⁴⁰ (Gray & Balmer, 1998, p. 697)

¹⁴¹ (Riordan, Gatewood, & Bill, 1997, p. 401)

¹⁴² (Markwick & Fill, 1997, p. 398)

¹⁴³ (D'Aveni, 1990, p. 121)

¹⁴⁴ (Certo, 2003, p. 435)

¹⁴⁵ (Washington & Zajac, 2005, p. 283)

¹⁴⁶ (Washington & Zajac, 2005, p. 283)

¹⁴⁷ (Washington & Zajac, 2005, p. 283)

Table 6. Distinguishing the terms reputation, image, prestige, and status

| Term | Definition | References |
|------------|---|---|
| Reputation | An immaterial property that expresses a vision of a company's honesty, fairness, and commitment that can be subjectively assessed by an external person | (Bennett & Gabriel, 2001, p. 424; Gray & Balmer, 1998, p. 697; Rajendran et al., 2012, p. 49; Wagner et al., 2011, p. 29) |
| Image | An individual's perceptions about the actions, activities, and accomplishments of an organisation | (Riordan et al., 1997, p. 401) |
| Prestige | The property of having status which indicates the positive characteristics of an individual, group, or organisation | (Certo, 2003, p. 435; D'Aveni, 1990, p. 121) |
| Status | A socially constructed, intersubjectively agreed-upon, and accepted ordering or ranking of individuals, groups, organisations, or activities in a social system | (Washington & Zajac, 2005, p. 283) |

In the next section, the elements of a good and bad reputation and the essential perceived aspects of displaying a good and bad reputation will be discussed. Employees assist in the achievement of creating a good reputation, but also companies have to reach three crucial elements, which are gaining credibility, maintaining transparency, and gaining legitimacy. However, not reaching these three elements may lead to having a bad reputation for B2B companies. Accordingly, the negative in the reputation is defined as the valence associated with the reputation concept, meaning the reputation is disadvantageous. Besides, research shows honesty, fairness, and commitment are essential to display reputation. As a result, perceived acceptable behaviour by buyers and suppliers, namely honesty, fairness, and commitment, displays a good reputation, and perceived unacceptable behaviour, namely dishonesty, unfairness, and no commitment, displays a bad reputation.

2.3.2 Reaching and displaying a good reputation is not an easy task; credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment are essential

Different parties can assist buyers and suppliers in B2B companies to obtain a good reputation, but also various elements are essential in achieving a good reputation. Employees participate in the creation of a good company reputation by engaging in interactions among other

stakeholders.¹⁴⁸ Likewise, Olmedo-Cifuentes, Martínez-León, and Davies (2014) state having more skilled employees enhances the company's dealings with other stakeholders, once again increasing the company's reputation and possibly generating an upward spiral of reputation improvement in which employees are the key players.¹⁴⁹ However, according to Huang-Horowitz (2015), companies can succeed in creating a good reputation by reaching three crucial aspects. These are gaining credibility, maintaining transparency, and gaining legitimacy. Companies can acquire credibility by remaining transparent regarding their strengths and weaknesses and their advances. Companies can also obtain legitimacy by entering into strategic alliances with greater, better-positioned companies and building value for their clients, investors, and partners.¹⁵⁰

First, credibility is essential for building a good reputation. Building a credible reputation for a company is crucial to keeping promises, achieving goals, and fulfilling expectations. Although companies must assume risks and pursue ambitious goals, they must also be capable of achieving those goals. The fact that companies fail to meet their promises and targets has resulted in a lack of credibility with potential investors, customers, and partners.¹⁵¹ Second, transparency is essential for building a good reputation, which is strongly linked to credibility. Companies can create transparency by ensuring they are transparent about what they do and do not do, as well as what they can accomplish and not able to accomplish. That is why clear communication with an external audience is crucial.¹⁵² Third, companies face the problem of legitimacy to build a good reputation. As a result, companies not only need to tackle the difficulties of legitimacy for their enterprises, but they also need to conquer the issues of legitimacy for the area in which they are active. Enterprises can create and gain legitimacy through strategic alliances and value creation. Adequate partnerships can empower and give companies legitimacy and credibility, together with providing access to supply channels and other assets.¹⁵³ As a result, employees assist in the achievement of creating a good reputation, but also companies have to reach three crucial elements, which are gaining credibility, maintaining transparency, and gaining legitimacy. Consequently, employees can help the company to achieve these elements.¹⁵⁴ Finally, a good reputation is defined by Riquelme,

¹⁴⁸ (Helm, 2011, p. 657)

¹⁴⁹ (Olmedo-Cifuentes, Martínez-León, & Davies, 2014, p. 106)

¹⁵⁰ (Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 349)

¹⁵¹ (Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 349)

¹⁵² (Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 350)

¹⁵³ (Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 350)

¹⁵⁴ (Helm, 2011, p. 657; Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 349; Olmedo-Cifuentes et al., 2014, p. 106)

Román, Cuestas, and Iacobucci (2019) as the value of a good business and is gained across time by a supplier's excellence in providing high-quality products and services to its buyers and serving them honestly, through direct consumer perception or word-of-mouth communication from other parties.¹⁵⁵ In contrast, not reaching these three crucial elements, which are gaining credibility, maintaining transparency, and gaining legitimacy, may lead to having a bad reputation for B2B companies.¹⁵⁶ When a company or an organisational operation is judged negatively, the company is described as a company that suffers from a bad reputation.¹⁵⁷ According to Rhee and Valdez (2009), the negative in the reputation is defined as the valence associated with the reputation concept, meaning the reputation is disadvantageous.¹⁵⁸ As a result, a good reputation changes much faster from good to bad than from bad to good since stakeholders evaluate new signs with the assumption that doubtful companies will continue to perform doubtfully.¹⁵⁹ As a result, the essential elements of achieving a reputation can be found in Table 7.

Table 7. Essential elements of achieving a reputation

| Essential elements of achieving a reputation | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Good reputation | References | Bad reputation | References |
| Gaining credibility | (Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 349) | No credibility | (Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 349) |
| Maintaining transparency | (Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 349) | No transparency | (Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 349) |
| Gaining legitimacy | (Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 349) | No legitimacy | (Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 349) |

Moreover, the buyer's and supplier's perception of the reputation of the suppliers and buyers at the beginning of a cooperation project is considered essential, as these perceptions concern the continuity requirements of the relationship and the prospective cooperation interests in the relationship between buyer and supplier.¹⁶⁰ Whereas reputation is an imperceptible characteristic, it takes on a visible shape using positive or negative perceptible factors that can affect perceptions of the company's abilities and objectives, for example, the way the company deals with relationship partners.¹⁶¹ As a result, suppliers' reputation is an indicator that can positively or negatively impact the perception of a buyer about the buyer-supplier

¹⁵⁵ (Riquelme, Román, Cuestas, & Iacobucci, 2019, p. 39)

¹⁵⁶ (Helm, 2011, p. 657; Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 349; Olmedo-Cifuentes et al., 2014, p. 106)

¹⁵⁷ (Mishina & Devers, 2012, p. 202)

¹⁵⁸ (Rhee & Valdez, 2009, p. 146)

¹⁵⁹ (Fombrun, 1996, p. 299; Nichols & Fournier, 1999, p. 1)

¹⁶⁰ (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 42)

¹⁶¹ (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 31)

relationship.¹⁶² Research by Wagner et al. (2011) shows honesty, fairness, and commitment are essential to display reputation.¹⁶³ First, buyers' reputation at the start of the project is a positive signal for the perception of fairness. Second, reputation has a significant positive relationship with the honesty of the outcome, and the honesty of the outcome has a significant effect on the expectations of the continuity of the relationship. While the buyer's perception of the supplier's reputation at the beginning of the project continues to have a significant direct effect. Third, fairness also has a significant effect on the willingness to cooperate in future projects and the commitment to the relationship.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, Kumar, Scheer, and Steenkamp (1995) argue perceptions of unfairness endanger the future of relationships.¹⁶⁵ So, buyers and suppliers who feel trust in a project experience are more willing to take an interest in the future of the relationship.¹⁶⁶ As a result, perceived acceptable behaviour by buyers and suppliers, namely honesty, fairness, and commitment, displays a good reputation, and perceived unacceptable behaviour, namely dishonesty, unfairness, and no commitment, displays a bad reputation.¹⁶⁷ Accordingly, the essential perceived aspects of displaying a reputation are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Essential perceived aspects of displaying a reputation

| Essential perceived aspects of displaying a reputation | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Good reputation | References | Bad reputation | References |
| Honesty | (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 39) | Dishonesty | (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 39) |
| Fairness | (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 39) | Unfairness | (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 39) |
| Commitment | (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 39) | No commitment | (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 39) |

In the next section, the benefits and disadvantages of reputation will be examined. The benefits of reputation are, for example, reducing uncertainty, reducing risk awareness, increasing trust, strengthening the overall position of a company, reducing risks, and assuring the manufacturing of quality products and services. The disadvantages of reputation are, for example, being considered as an untrustworthy party, higher costs, unequal access to information, decreased loyalty, decreased trust, negative word-of-mouth, and decreased satisfaction.

¹⁶² (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 32)

¹⁶³ (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 39)

¹⁶⁴ (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 39)

¹⁶⁵ (Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 1995, p. 54)

¹⁶⁶ (Morgan & Hunt, 1994)

¹⁶⁷ (Kumar et al., 1995, p. 54; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Wagner et al., 2011, p. 39)

2.3.3 Reputation may lead to reduced uncertainty and other benefits, but also higher risks and other disadvantages

The reputation of a company will lead to different benefits. Firstly, a high reputation will reduce uncertainty and risk awareness inside the relationship. Consequently, that leads to building trust.¹⁶⁸ Secondly, Williamson (1996) suggests reputable companies are desirable trading partners, as their reputation can replace costly governance structures.¹⁶⁹ Thirdly, the reputation of a supplier for high-value products and services contributes to creating trustworthy and affirmative statements about the supplier and to strengthening the overall position of the buying company regarding the supplying company.¹⁷⁰ Fourthly, the reputation of a company is essential to reduce the buyer's risks and to motivate buyers to buy a product.¹⁷¹ Fifthly, reputation is a tool for ensuring the manufacturing of quality products and services and to provide content on these products and services.¹⁷² Sixthly, according to Wuyts (2007), a good reputation is useful if the supplier company needs to differentiate itself from close rivals, as in the case of multiple sourcing. Multiple sourcing offers the buyer an opt-out opportunity and the possibility to expand or diminish the share of any individual supplier in time. Therefore, multiple sourcing strategies enhance the control of the buyer over every supplier and inter-supplier competition.¹⁷³ Seventhly, Fombrun and Shanley (1990) state that a good corporate reputation has a positive impact on financial performance.¹⁷⁴ Finally, Ali, Lynch, Melewar, and Jin (2015) agree on this and state, besides (future) financial performance, a good reputation will lead to better customer loyalty, customer trust, and customer commitment.¹⁷⁵

The reputation of a company also provides different disadvantages. For example, when a supplier deals opportunistically, the buyer is not expected to make any more transactions in the future. In addition, the buyer may inform other companies concerning the supplier being an untrustworthy party. Conversely, costs may be incurred in creating and retaining a reputation as a fair and reliable person. Thus, the selection of the supplier relies on a rating of the costs and advantages of remaining a credible party.¹⁷⁶ Besides, according to reputation, not all parties

¹⁶⁸ (Rajendran et al., 2012, p. 49)

¹⁶⁹ (Williamson, 1996, p. 196)

¹⁷⁰ (Bonner & Calantone, 2005, p. 57)

¹⁷¹ (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990, p. 233)

¹⁷² (Ippolito, 1990, p. 56)

¹⁷³ (Wuyts, 2007, p. 308)

¹⁷⁴ (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990, p. 233)

¹⁷⁵ (Ali, Lynch, Melewar, & Jin, 2015, p. 1110)

¹⁷⁶ (Pedersen & Andersen, 2006, p. 237)

have access to information simultaneously, while the asymmetry of information is the norm.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, when a company has a bad reputation, that may lead to decreased loyalty, decreased trust, negative word-of-mouth, and decreased satisfaction.¹⁷⁸ Accordingly, reputation may travel from person to person through word-of-mouth. Finally, Sohn and Lariscy (2015) have noticed that a good reputation will be a setback in the hard times of a company since great expectations of a company will change into a feeling of treachery.¹⁷⁹ Consequently, the consequences of reputation including benefits and disadvantages can be found in Table 9.

Table 9. Consequences of reputation; benefits and disadvantages

| Consequences of reputation | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Benefits | References | Disadvantages | References |
| Reducing uncertainty | (Rajendran et al., 2012, p. 49) | Considered as an untrustworthy party | (Pedersen & Andersen, 2006, p. 237) |
| Reducing risk awareness | (Rajendran et al., 2012, p. 49) | Decreasing transactions | (Pedersen & Andersen, 2006, p. 237) |
| Increasing trust | (Bonner & Calantone, 2005, p. 57; Rajendran et al., 2012, p. 49; Williamson, 1996, p. 196) | Decreasing trust | (Walsh & Wiedmann, 2004, p. 309) |
| Strengthening the positioning of the company | (Bonner & Calantone, 2005, p. 57) | Increasing costs | (Pedersen & Andersen, 2006, p. 237) |
| Reducing risks | (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990, p. 233) | Unequal access to information | (Spence, 1973, p. 355) |
| Assuring the manufacturing of quality products and services | (Ippolito, 1990, p. 56) | Decreased loyalty | (Walsh & Wiedmann, 2004, p. 309) |
| Increasing financial performance | (Ali et al., 2015, p. 1110; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990, p. 233) | Negative word-of-mouth | (Walsh & Wiedmann, 2004, p. 309) |
| Increasing customer loyalty | (Ali et al., 2015, p. 1110) | Decreased satisfaction | (Walsh & Wiedmann, 2004, p. 309) |

¹⁷⁷ (Spence, 1973, p. 355)

¹⁷⁸ (Walsh & Wiedmann, 2004, p. 309)

¹⁷⁹ (Sohn & Lariscy, 2015, p. 238)

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Increasing customer trust | (Ali et al., 2015, p. 1110) | Increasing expectations | (Sohn & Lariscy, 2015, p. 2) |
| Increasing customer commitment | (Ali et al., 2015, p. 1110) | | |

In the next section, reputation as an important aspect of evaluating buyers and suppliers will be discussed. That will show why companies having a positive reputation have an advantage over companies that lack a positive reputation. Both buyers and suppliers want to enhance the attractiveness of their company by deliberately building a reputation. Therefore, reputation is considered just as essential as standard supplier selection criteria. Besides, for B2B companies, it is an urgent task to preserve its reputation as a reliable partner, so the other partner is confident not to capitalise on the weakness of this buyer or supplier. However, buyers staying with suppliers because they fear a negative reputation can negatively influence the buyer. Besides, there are several strategies companies employ to improve their damaged reputation. The strategies of reputation repair target several stakeholder groups that vary according to the characteristics of the company. Examples of activities are investor-related activities, customer-focused activities, and employee-related activities.

2.3.4 Reputation is an essential aspect in evaluating buyers and suppliers; companies undertake activities to preserve their reputation

Buyers' and suppliers' reputation is essential in the process of evaluating buyers and suppliers. According to Sarkar and Mohapatra (2006), the reputation of suppliers is an important characteristic of suppliers. That is why buyers consider the reputation of the supplier when evaluating a particular supplier. Accordingly, B2B companies assess the reputation of companies based on their market position.¹⁸⁰ Eriksson (2008) agrees and states suppliers' reputation is an important aspect for a buyer in the evaluation of a supplier.¹⁸¹ However, the evaluation of the company's reputation takes multiple years to complete.¹⁸² Moreover, a harmed reputation can negatively influence the financial performance of companies.¹⁸³ Besides, if there is a positive reputation, it makes the buyer-supplier relationship seem more transparent and trustworthy. The opposite is the case if there is a negative reputation. Particularly, supplier

¹⁸⁰ (Sarkar & Mohapatra, 2006, p. 635)

¹⁸¹ (Eriksson, 2008, p. 435)

¹⁸² (Balmer, 2001, p. 248)

¹⁸³ (Gatzert, 2015, p. 485)

research is the most common method of evaluating the buyers' reputation. Which, in the end, leads to the evaluation of the buyer itself.¹⁸⁴

The suggestion is that the reputation can enhance a buyer's positive perceptions of a supplier, resulting in more attention given to the supplier during the evaluation process.¹⁸⁵ Moreover, the findings of the research of Grunig and Hung-Baesecke (2015) demonstrate remembering positive and negative behaviours, also known as reputation, impacts the evaluation of buyer-supplier relationships most strongly. Companies need to increase their reputation to become more attractive for suppliers in the evaluation process.¹⁸⁶ Accordingly, the reputation of companies improves along with the number of buyers they can acquire.¹⁸⁷ As a result, for suppliers, not all customers are identical. The reputation of the buyer they supply is essential. Suppliers look at the buyers' reputation when they evaluate buyers. In this way, buyers may wish to improve their reputation to become more attractive to suppliers.¹⁸⁸ Besides, assessing the reputation of buyers or suppliers for the evaluation of buyer-supplier relationships can be applied for companies that have a reputation-based relationship but also for companies that have an experiential relationship.¹⁸⁹ However, the study of Manello and Calabrese (2019) suggests, in general, both buyers and suppliers want to enhance the attractiveness of their company by deliberately building a reputation. Therefore, reputation is considered as essential as standard supplier's selection criteria, such as price and quality.¹⁹⁰

For B2B companies, it is an urgent task to preserve its reputation as a reliable partner, so the other partner is confident not to capitalise on the weakness of this buyer or supplier. Although there is a chance of doing so. For that, it is useful to think about the shared interests and standards of both parties, also called reciprocity standards. As a result, the buyer-supplier relationship changes from egocentric partners to a strategic relationship.¹⁹¹ However, buyers may stay with their suppliers because they fear a negative reputation will be created as a reliable partner for other suppliers in the future. That can have negative consequences for the buyer because a supplier can gain advantages at the buyers' expense. For example, a supplier may

¹⁸⁴ (Smeltzer, 1997, p. 43)

¹⁸⁵ (Bonner & Calantone, 2005, p. 57)

¹⁸⁶ (Grunig & Hung-Baesecke, 2015, p. 1)

¹⁸⁷ (Manello & Calabrese, 2019, p. 72)

¹⁸⁸ (Manello & Calabrese, 2019, p. 76)

¹⁸⁹ (Grunig & Hung-Baesecke, 2015, p. 1)

¹⁹⁰ (Manello & Calabrese, 2019, p. 76)

¹⁹¹ (Sabel, 1993, p. 1133)

impede the performance of the buyer.¹⁹² Besides, there are also moments when buyers or suppliers prevent opportunistic actions to preserve their reputation and breakdown of a long-term buyer-supplier relationship. For example, when they disagree with the price or quality of the products.¹⁹³ Consequently, preserving a positive reputation is so essential for companies that they do not even mention important points they disagree with because they are afraid of losing their positive reputation.¹⁹⁴

Also, some buyers and suppliers suffered a damaged reputation. A company that has suffered a damaged reputation struggles to acquire new customers and retain current customers.¹⁹⁵ As a result, a company's reputation recovery depends on how third parties react to the harmful reputation situation and on the decisions that the company takes, together with the corporate and historical background.¹⁹⁶ Firstly, a company's reputation recovery depends on how third parties react to the harmful reputation situation and on the decisions that the company takes, together with the corporate and historical background.¹⁹⁷ Secondly, the difficulty of repairing the reputation of a company depends on the external visibility of its mistakes. As a result, these two aspects impact the complexity of recovering the reputation of a company.¹⁹⁸ Consequently, when something happens that harms a company's reputation, a major stakeholder may respond adversely by reducing the quality of their engagement, confronting management, requiring improved contractual terms, and/or disconnecting from the company.¹⁹⁹

There exist several strategies companies employ to improve their damaged reputation. The strategies of reputation repair target several stakeholder groups that vary according to the characteristics of the company. These groups include: companies that sell sustainable products focus on customers, companies with structured or highly qualified staff target employees, and companies that work across multiple sites perform major community-focused activities.²⁰⁰ Examples of investor-related activities involve enhancing governance, dismissal of senior managers, upgrading incentive or intercompany monitoring systems, restructuring the company, and buying back shares. Besides, customer-focused actions include significant

¹⁹² (Villena, Revilla, & Choi, 2011, p. 565)

¹⁹³ (Carey & Lawson, 2011, p. 155)

¹⁹⁴ (Carey & Lawson, 2011, p. 155; Villena et al., 2011, p. 565)

¹⁹⁵ (T. E. Wilson & Grimlund, 1990, p. 43)

¹⁹⁶ (Rhee & Valdez, 2009, p. 151)

¹⁹⁷ (Rhee & Valdez, 2009, p. 151)

¹⁹⁸ (Rhee & Valdez, 2009, p. 162)

¹⁹⁹ (Rhee & Valdez, 2009, p. 146)

²⁰⁰ (Chakravarthy, DeHaan, & Rajgopal, 2014, p. 1331)

advertising launches, branding, and third-party endorsement of product performance through prizes or certification. Finally, employee-related activities include providing ethical training or coaching to assist in avoiding employee turnaround and strengthening the company's integrity engagement, but also enhancing employee engagement plans and encouraging investment in obtaining best-player prizes.²⁰¹ Consequently, the strategies to improve a damaged reputation can be found in Table 10.

Table 10. Strategies to improve a damaged reputation

| Strategies to improve a damaged reputation | References |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Examples of investor-related activities | |
| Enhancing governance | (Chakravarthy et al., 2014, p. 1338) |
| Dismissal of senior managers | |
| Upgrading incentive or intercompany monitoring systems | |
| Restructuring the company | |
| Buying back shares | |
| Examples of customer-focused actions | |
| Significant advertising launching | (Chakravarthy et al., 2014, p. 1338) |
| Branding | |
| Third-party endorsement of product performance through prizes or certification | |
| Examples of employee-related activities | |
| Providing ethical training or coaching to assist in avoiding employee turnaround and strengthening the company's integrity engagement | (Chakravarthy et al., 2014, p. 1338) |
| Enhancing employee engagement plans and encouraging investment in obtaining best-player prizes | |

In the next section, a synopsis is created from the established literature. A distinction is drawn in the expected influence of the elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation on the four stages of buyer-suppliers relationships. Besides, the expected influence of the elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation on the preservation of a reputation is also described. After analysing the outcomes of the literature, a theoretical framework is created, with the expected influencing elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation on the four buyer-supplier relationship stages and the preservation of their reputation. As a result, the variable reputation and its elements and aspects are included in the theoretical framework. That also applies to the variable buyer-supplier relationship and its dimensions and stages.

²⁰¹ (Chakravarthy et al., 2014, p. 1338)

2.4 Synthesis and theoretical framework

This thesis is focused on the effect of reputation on the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and the preservation of reputation by buyers and suppliers. The research of Huang-Horowitz (2015) shows the essential elements of achieving a reputation are credibility, transparency, and legitimacy.²⁰² Moreover, Wagner et al. (2011) show the essential aspects of displaying a reputation are honesty, fairness, and commitment.²⁰³ As a result, to investigate whether these elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation are influencing the four different stages of buyer-supplier relationships and the preservation of a reputation, qualitative research will be conducted. Therefore, the following propositions are formulated into five categories, and a theoretical framework is created.

2.4.1 Propositions about stages in buyer-supplier relationships

The first stage is the pre-relationship stage. At this stage, the buyer or supplier assesses a potential new supplier or buyer, which may be the outcome of a specific period in an existing relationship.²⁰⁴ Further grounds that may give rise to an evaluation of new potential suppliers are a regular supplier analysis that assesses the performance and potential of existing suppliers.²⁰⁵ Previous and existing relationships indicate the benchmarks against which the potential performance of a prospective business partner is assessed.²⁰⁶ According to Wilson (1995), reputation is essential in the stage of partner selection.²⁰⁷ Accordingly, suppliers are satisfied with the cooperation with buyers of proven history.²⁰⁸ Because history seems to influence buyer-supplier relationships, reputation is an essential construct that captures this factor as a reputation is potentially leading to less uncertainty in buyer-supplier relationships.²⁰⁹ Since the pre-relationship stage is about assessing a potential buyer or supplier, it is expected that the elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation, which are credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment, mostly influence the pre-

²⁰² (Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 349)

²⁰³ (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 39)

²⁰⁴ (Ford, 1993, p. 341; White, 2000, p. 10)

²⁰⁵ (Ford, 1993, p. 341)

²⁰⁶ (Ford, 1993, p. 341)

²⁰⁷ (D. T. Wilson, 1995, p. 15)

²⁰⁸ (Meena et al., 2012, p. 65)

²⁰⁹ (Leppelt et al., 2013, p. 130)

relationship stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships. For this reason, the following proposition has been formed:

Proposition 1: *The expected elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation, credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment are mostly influencing the pre-relationship stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships.*

The second stage is the early stage. That is the stage where prospective suppliers approach buyers to negotiate or create a detailed description of a buy of capital goods.²¹⁰ During this early stage of the relationship, both buyer and supplier probably have limited mutual experience.²¹¹ It is expected that the current level of commitment from both sides will be weak.²¹² However, Wagner et al. (2011) claim reputation is associated with the level of trust and commitment.²¹³ The buyer's and supplier's reputation will increase the confidence of both parties in the relationship, enhance the willingness to extend the relationship, and also increase the level of commitment in the relationship.²¹⁴ Because buyers' and suppliers' commitment is weak in the early stage, buyers' and suppliers' reputation is expected to affect the early stage less than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships. Both parties need to get to know each other, whereby expected that the elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation, which are credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment, less influence the early stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships. For this reason, the following proposition has been formed:

Proposition 2: *The expected elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation, credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment are less influencing the early stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships.*

The third stage is the development stage. The development stage of a relationship arises as supplies of continually procured products grow.²¹⁵ It is possible that staged supplies take place or that the supplier has begun processing the product.²¹⁶ The development stage is characterised

²¹⁰ (Ford, 1993, p. 343; White, 2000, p. 10)

²¹¹ (Ford, 1993, p. 343)

²¹² (Ford, 1993, p. 344; Mohanty & Gahan, 2012, p. 320)

²¹³ (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 29)

²¹⁴ (Doney & Cannon, 1997, p. 35; Ganesan, 1994, p. 1; Wagner et al., 2011, p. 29)

²¹⁵ (Ford, 1993, p. 345)

²¹⁶ (Ford, 1993, p. 345; White, 2000, p. 10)

by a growing experience among the B2B companies in the functioning of their organisations. Moreover, the buyers and suppliers concerned will have obtained a certain knowledge of their respective norms and values.²¹⁷ The experience will have decreased the level of uncertainty that applies to both parties in the relationship. At this stage, the distance between the two parties is narrowed.²¹⁸ Because the development stage is about experiencing the relationship between the buyer and supplier, buyers and suppliers rely more on their own experiences than on reputation. As a result, the experience begins to feed the reputation. Hence, it is expected that the elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation, which are credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment, less influence the development stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships. For this reason, the following proposition has been formed:

Proposition 3: *The expected elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation, credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment are less influencing the development stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships.*

The last stage is the final stage. This stage is achieved in steady markets over a sustained period.²¹⁹ It is characterised by an expansion of the institutionalisation process towards a level at which business operations are governed by the sector's codes of conduct.²²⁰ Accordingly, reputation is a particularly significant guarantee when the supplier can profit from cooperation with the buyer in the future and when the buyer can damage the supplier by reporting failures to other essential parties, for example, in business networks.²²¹ In the same way, Meena et al. (2012) state a good reputation of the buying party contributes to the satisfaction of its suppliers, and more suppliers will attempt to sustain a long-term relationship with the buying party, assuming the corporate reputation is well established in the industry.²²² Because the final stage is about communicating a good reputation of the buyer and supplier to the external environment to create long-term relationships with other parties in the future, the elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation, which are credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment, are expected to mostly influence the final stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships. For this reason, the following proposition has been formed:

²¹⁷ (Ford, 1993, p. 345)

²¹⁸ (Ford, 1993, p. 345; Mohanty & Gahan, 2012, p. 320)

²¹⁹ (Ford, 1993, p. 349; White, 2000, p. 10)

²²⁰ (Ford, 1993, p. 349)

²²¹ (Pedersen & Andersen, 2006, p. 237)

²²² (Meena et al., 2012, p. 71)

Proposition 4: *The expected elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation, credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment are mostly influencing the final stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships.*

2.4.2 The proposition about preserving a reputation in buyer-supplier relationships

The findings of the research of Grunig and Hung-Baesecke (2015) demonstrate companies need to increase their reputation to become more attractive for suppliers in the evaluation process.²²³ As a result, buyers may wish to improve their reputation to become more attractive to suppliers.²²⁴ However, the study of Manello and Calabrese (2019) suggests, in general, both buyers and suppliers want to enhance the attractiveness of their company by deliberately building a reputation.²²⁵ As a result, for B2B companies, it is an urgent task to preserve their reputation as a reliable partner, so the other partner is confident not to capitalise on the weakness of this buyer or supplier.²²⁶ Consequently, because buyers and suppliers do everything to preserve their positive reputation, the elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation, which are credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment, are expected to mostly influence the burden of a positive reputation of buyers and suppliers in B2B companies. For this reason, the following proposition has been formed:

Proposition 5: *The expected elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation, credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment are mostly influencing the burden of a positive buyer and supplier reputation.*

2.4.3 The theoretical framework

This thesis aims to investigate the extent to which reputation affects the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and the preservation of a reputation. As seen in Figure 1, reputation consists of three expected elements of achieving reputation, credibility, transparency, and legitimacy, and three expected aspects of displaying a reputation, honesty, fairness, and commitment. Besides, buyer-supplier relationships consist of six expected dimensions,

²²³ (Grunig & Hung-Baesecke, 2015, p. 1)

²²⁴ (Manello & Calabrese, 2019, p. 76)

²²⁵ (Manello & Calabrese, 2019, p. 76)

²²⁶ (Sabel, 1993, p. 1133)

communication, cooperation, power-dependence, commitment, trust, and adaption. Finally, buyer-supplier relationships consist of four stages, the pre-relationship stage, early stage, development stage, and final stage. Firstly, it is expected that the elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation are mostly influencing the pre-relationship stage, which is Proposition 1, and the final stage, which is Proposition 4, than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships. Secondly, it is expected that the elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation are less influencing the early stage, which is Proposition 2, and the development stage, which is Proposition 3, than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships. Finally, it is expected that the elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation are mostly influencing the burden of a positive buyer and supplier reputation, which is Proposition 5. As a result, the propositions and expected influencing elements and aspects are combined into a theoretical framework in Figure 1.

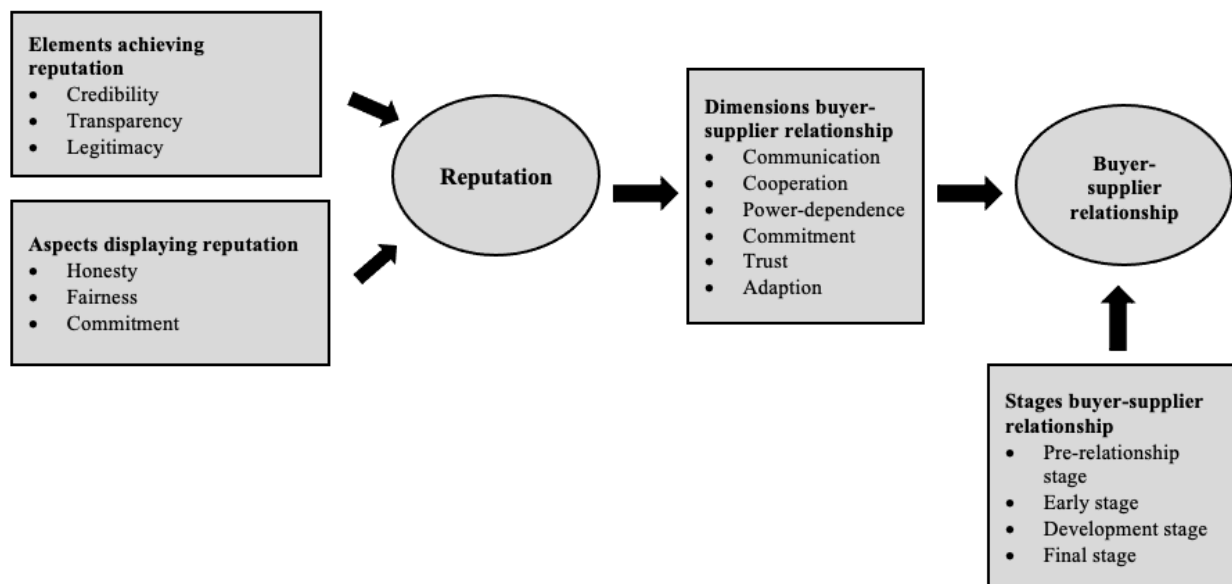


Figure 1. The theoretical framework of this research

3. Methodology

To answer research question 1: “To what extent does reputation affect the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships?” and research question 2: “To what extent do buyers and suppliers preserve their reputation?”, qualitative research is employed. In this research, it is important to describe complicated settings and interactions, also referred to as complex mechanisms. Namely, in this case, interactions between different food industry companies.²²⁷ As a result, this research identifies possible causes and effects, which may be hidden or interactive.²²⁸ For that reason, qualitative methods are employed as these possible hidden/interactive effects are hard to uncover with quantitative research. As a result, this research is conducted qualitatively since in-depth knowledge is gained by obtaining the underlying motivations, perceptions, and explanations of the participant sample, which hold significant relevance to this research, and is not possible with quantitative research.²²⁹ Consequently, gathering qualitative data is essential to make statements.²³⁰ Different techniques are offered within qualitative research, such as observations, interviews, and focus groups.²³¹ A qualitative research method is employed to answer the two research questions, namely, interviews.

Accordingly, qualitative semi-structured interviews are employed to investigate the effect of reputation on the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and the extent to which buyers and suppliers preserve their reputation. Throughout the semi-structured interviews, leading open questions are utilised to allow the participants to refine and provide a broader explanation to the questions.²³² The semi-structured interviews are maintained as a data collection tool. First of all, they are well designed to investigate the respondents' perceptions of complex issues and allow more in-depth information to be gathered. Secondly, because of the diversity of the selected sample and personal questions, a standard interview schedule is not suitable.²³³ For these reasons, semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this research.

²²⁷ (Sofaer, 1999, p. 1105)

²²⁸ (Johnson, 1997, p. 282)

²²⁹ (Jones, 1995, p. 2)

²³⁰ (Doney & Cannon, 1997, p. 35; Ganesan, 1994, p. 1; Leppelt et al., 2013, p. 130; Meena et al., 2012, p. 71; Morsy, 2017, p. 42; Suh & Houston, 2010, p. 744; Wagner et al., 2011, p. 29; D. T. Wilson, 1995, p. 15)

²³¹ (Rosenthal, 2016, p. 510)

²³² (Longhurst, 2003, p. 103)

²³³ (Barriball & While, 1994, p. 330)

3.1 Validity, reliability, and objectivity of the research

To execute semi-structured interviews, the validity, reliability, and objectivity of the research are essential to consider. According to Andrade (2018), the research validity involves the measurement of what is required to be measured.²³⁴ To achieve the research validity, the formulated questions or themes for the interview questions are based on the findings of previous research. To decrease the bias, the questions are presented in the same order and way. Even though the questions are predetermined, there is a margin of flexibility.²³⁵ Besides, to preserve the research reliability, attention is also paid to the number of participants and the extent to which the measures provide the same response.²³⁶ However, the researcher's objectivity also forms an element of the reliability of the research. To guarantee this objectivity, there are no leading questions raised, and the view of the researcher is omitted.²³⁷

3.2 Optimal situation to perform qualitative research into the food industry in the Netherlands

To conduct the semi-structured interviews, companies in the food industry in the Netherlands had the optimal situation to analyse the effect of reputation on the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and preserving a reputation. That is because strategic buyer-supplier relationships are essential for, in particular, buyers and suppliers in the food industry. After all, they deal with food products that must meet specific safety and quality.²³⁸ According to qualitative research, buyers and suppliers in the food industry are asked to be included in the interviews when performing semi-structured interviews.

The buyers consisted of four owners and one owner who is also the executive manager. Besides, the suppliers included two account managers, one sales manager, one commercial manager, and one branch manager. As a result, credibility is created. These buyers and suppliers are asked to clarify how essential reputation is in the four different stages of buyer-supplier relationships and how they are preserving their reputations. Consequently, the sample consisted of ten B2B

²³⁴ (Andrade, 2018, p. 498)

²³⁵ (Schmidt, 2004, p. 255)

²³⁶ (N. McDonald, Schoenebeck, & Forte, 2019, p. 4)

²³⁷ (Rose & Johnson, 2020, p. 4)

²³⁸ (Manning et al., 2005, p. 225, 2006, p. 91; Saguy & Sirotinskaya, 2014, p. 146; X. Wang et al., 2009, p. 2865)

Dutch companies in the food industry, namely, five buying companies and five of their selling companies, to gain information about their existing buyer-supplier relationships and reputation. For that reason, it is possible to look at the perspective of buying companies, but also at the perspective of selling companies in the food industry. As a result, a dyadic perspective is created. Besides, by comparing various companies in the same industry, it is possible to make statements about this particular industry, namely, the food industry.

A total of ten interviews is conducted so that the sample is large enough to make statements about the results and maintain the research representativeness, which is part of the reliability of interviews. Consequently, the sample size is sufficiently large and diverse to clarify the objectives of the study.²³⁹ The interviews are performed online due to COVID-19 measures and are conducted over two weeks, between the 7th and 15th of December 2020. Moreover, the interviews took between 33 minutes and 1 hour and 5 minutes to get extensive and detailed information about buyer-supplier relationships and reputation. As a result, the semi-structured questions for the buyers and suppliers are provided in the interview guide in Appendix A.

3.3 Analysing the data of the interviews

To analyse the data of the interviews, qualitative content analysis is employed. Different qualitative content analysis methods exist, conventional content analysis, directed content analysis, and summative content analysis.²⁴⁰ The three methods are applied to derive interpretations from word content data and thus follow the naturalistic framework. However, the main distinctions between the methods are encoding techniques, the source of the encoding, and the reliability implications. Firstly, for conventional content analysis, the encoding classifications are obtained based on the content directly from the text data. Secondly, in a directed approach, the evaluation begins with theory or significant findings of research to provide guidelines for the first set of codes. Finally, summative content analysis entails counting and matching, generally of terms or content, as well as an understanding of the subordinate context.²⁴¹

²³⁹ (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016, p. 1753)

²⁴⁰ (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281)

²⁴¹ (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281)

As a result, in this research, the conventional content analysis and the summative content analysis are not appropriate because these methods do not deal with existing theory. This research concerns established theory and literature, but this information remains insufficient and is expected to receive value from future research, for which the directed content analysis method is the most appropriate.²⁴² Accordingly, Suh and Houston (2010) and Wagner et al. (2011) already investigated the relationship between buyer-supplier relationships and reputation, but this is limited because the researchers are not focused on the stages of buyer-supplier relationships.²⁴³ Therefore, directed content analysis is employed to expand the research about buyer-supplier relationships and reputation by investigating the effect of a reputation on the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and preserving a reputation. Finally, the existing literature is also employed to establish questions and topics for the interviews.²⁴⁴ The asked main questions are divided into three topics, which are questions about preserving a reputation, the buyer-supplier relationship and the influence of reputation on this relationship, and a few finishing questions. The related main questions are shown in Table 11.

Table 11. The main questions asked in the interviews

| |
|---|
| The main questions asked in the interviews |
| Preserving a reputation |
| What type or types of reputation do you experience? |
| What type or types of reputation do you prefer? |
| Is reputation important to you? |
| Does reputation affect your decision-making process? |
| What level of reputation does the company experience? |
| Do you do something to preserve the reputation of the company? |
| Which aspects are important to preserve the reputation of the company? |
| The stages of the buyer-supplier relationship and the influence of reputation |
| <u>Questions per stage:</u> |
| Do you think the relationship between you and your buyer/supplier reached this stage? |
| In your opinion, do you think that reputation is an influential factor in this stage? |
| What are the important aspects of reputation in this stage? |
| Finishing questions |
| When you think back over all stages the relationship between you and your buyer/supplier reached, how do you think the reputation of the company evolved over these stages? |
| Has this affected the relationship with your buyer/supplier? |

²⁴² (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281)

²⁴³ (Suh & Houston, 2010, p. 749; Wagner et al., 2011, p. 48)

²⁴⁴ (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281)

| |
|---|
| Do you think the reputation of the company is more and/or less important in one (or more) specific stage(s) than in other stages? |
| When you think back over all stages the relationship between you and your buyer/supplier reached, how do you think the reputation of your buyer/supplier evolved over the reached stages? |
| Has this affected the relationship with your buyer/supplier? |
| Do you think the reputation of your buyer/supplier is more and/or less important in one (or more) specific stage(s) than in other stages? |

After conducting the interviews, the data is analysed. When performed, the data is coded. Nevertheless, with the directed content analysis, the coding framework is created before conducting the interviews. But it is possible to add or change codes after transcribing the interviews.²⁴⁵ In this research, the development of data-driven codes is executed, also named inductive coding, which means codes emerge from raw data.²⁴⁶ Inductive analysis is employed to identify patterns in data. The coding framework is predefined by employing previous research on buyer-supplier relationships and reputation.²⁴⁷ Accordingly, three coding methods exist, which are all executed, namely, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The first step is to determine how to reduce raw information into smaller units, such as categories or themes.²⁴⁸ For that reason, firstly, open coding is executed. Khandkar (2009) defines open coding as “labeling concepts, defining and developing categories based on their properties and dimensions”.²⁴⁹ Creating categories can be executed before performing the interviews by using the theory. Secondly, after open coding, axial coding is executed. Axial coding is the appreciation of concepts in terms of their dynamic interrelationships. The aim is to recreate breached data during open coding.²⁵⁰ After axial coding, selective coding is executed. Selective coding is the process whereby categories are associated with the key category that, eventually, forms the base of the founded theory.²⁵¹ The coding scheme is shown in Appendix D. In conclusion, by utilising transcribing and coding methods, findings are analysed, and a conclusion is drawn.

²⁴⁵ (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1286)

²⁴⁶ (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 85)

²⁴⁷ (Akrouit & Diallo, 2017, p. 168; Carter, 2000, p. 30; Suh & Houston, 2010, p. 749; Vanpoucke, Vereecke, & Boyer, 2014, p. 201; Wagner et al., 2011, p. 48)

²⁴⁸ (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011, p. 136)

²⁴⁹ (Khandkar, 2009, p. 1)

²⁵⁰ (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 1)

²⁵¹ (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 1)

4. Findings

The findings of the qualitative research are displayed in this chapter. The research structure is divided into three topics, namely, preserving a reputation, the stages of the buyer-supplier relationship and the influence of reputation, and the finishing questions. Therefore, the findings are presented in these three groups. The aspects of preserving a reputation are credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, commitment, communication, quality, and training. Besides, a reputation's aspects are credibility, honesty, commitment, trust, price, experience, and communication. However, the importance of buyers' and suppliers' reputation is different. Firstly, buyers' reputation is equally important in every stage of the relationship. Secondly, suppliers' reputation is the most important in the first stage.

4.1 Quality and word-of-mouth advertising provide important reasons for experiencing a good reputation among buyers, but word-of-mouth advertising is also a reason why buyers and suppliers prefer a good reputation

Firstly, the buyers and suppliers were asked what kind of reputation they experience. In general, most buyers and suppliers stated they experience a good reputation. However, the reasons why they experience a good reputation are divided. Supplier 1 states they experience a good reputation because "We provide a high and good service and we actually get more questions from people who do want to become customers of us". But another supplier states good contact with customers leads to confidence in them as a supplier (Supplier 2). Moreover, a supplier also claims they have a good reputation because they know people talk positively about their company (Supplier 4). In contrast, different buyers state they have a good reputation because people say they sell good quality food and drinks in a nice informal atmosphere with good staff (Buyer 1; Buyer 4). Additionally, another buyer states they have a good reputation since people appreciate them and like the things they add for the customers (Buyer 2). Besides, a buyer claims they have a good reputation because they are honest and have a good price-quality ratio (Buyer 3). Finally, Buyer 5 states "We have a good reputation. We are well known in the place where the company is located and its surroundings, namely, as a company where you can eat well for a reasonable price with good service".

Secondly, the buyers and suppliers were asked what kind of reputation they prefer. It is notable that all buyers and suppliers that experience a good reputation, have a preference for a good

reputation. Moreover, most buyers and suppliers mention it is important that people talk positively about you and that you are positively known to people. As a result, word-of-mouth advertising is important for a good reputation. Besides, when a company has a good reputation, it is easier to gain and retain customers. To conclude, most buyers and suppliers state they experience a good reputation, but also prefer a good reputation. But for suppliers, the reasons why they experience a good reputation differ a lot, namely, from service to communication and word-of-mouth advertising. However, for buyers, most reasons include the aspect quality and/or word-of-mouth advertising. Accordingly, the reasons why buyers and suppliers experience and prefer a good reputation can be found in Table 12.

Table 12. Reasons why buyers and suppliers experience and prefer a good reputation

| Supplier | Reasons why suppliers experience a good reputation |
|---|---|
| S1 | High and good service; people want to become customers |
| S2 | Good contact with customers; confidence in the supplier |
| S4 | Suppliers know people talk positively about them; word-of-mouth advertising |
| Buyer | Reasons why buyers experience a good reputation |
| B1; B4 | People say buyers sell good quality; word-of-mouth advertising |
| B2 | People appreciate buyers |
| B3 | Buyers are honest and have a good price-quality ratio |
| B5 | Buyer is well known where the company is located |
| Reasons why buyers and suppliers prefer a good reputation | |
| People need to talk and think positively about you; word-of-mouth advertising | |
| Easier to gain and retain customers | |

4.2 Buyers and suppliers agree on certain aspects of preserving a reputation, but they both have other opinions as well; seventeen important aspects of preserving a reputation are identified

The buyers and suppliers were asked about which aspects are important to preserve their reputation. As a result, the buyers and suppliers mentioned 23 different aspects. However, some aspects were only mentioned one time. For this reason, these aspects are left out, which are sustainable entrepreneurship, assertiveness, trust, continuity, problem-solving, and experience. As a result, 17 important aspects of preserving a reputation are mentioned by buyers and suppliers, shown in Table 13. However, the number of times aspects are mentioned by buyers and suppliers differ. For that reason, the top five frequently mentioned aspects of preserving a

reputation from buyers and suppliers separately are also included in Table 13. As a result, the suppliers' top five ranking consists of the aspects of commitment, credibility, transparency, communication, and honesty. Besides, the buyers' top-five ranking consists of the aspects of commitment, transparency, honesty, quality, and training. Accordingly, the aspects mentioned by both buyers and suppliers are commitment, transparency, and honesty. Consequently, all six aspects of the existing literature are overlapping the findings of the interviews, which are credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment. Accordingly, Proposition 5, which is "The expected elements and aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation, credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment are mostly influencing the burden of a positive buyer and supplier reputation" is overlapping the interviews.

Table 13. Important aspects of preserving a reputation and top-five ranking of buyers and suppliers

| Important aspects of preserving a reputation | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Aspects according to the literature | Aspects according to the interviews | Number of times mentioned by suppliers | Number of times mentioned by buyers | Total number of times mentioned |
| Commitment | 1. Commitment | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| Transparency | 2. Transparency | 4 | 5 | 9 |
| Credibility | 3. Credibility | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| Honesty | 4. Honesty | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| | 5. Communication | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Legitimacy | 6. Legitimacy | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| | 7. Distinctiveness | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| | 8. Quality | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| | 9. Stakeholders | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 10. Specialisation | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | 11. Training | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| | 12. Product range | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| | 13. Service | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| | 14. Customer satisfaction | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Fairness | 15. Fairness | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| | 16. Kindness | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| | 17. Price-quality ratio | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Top five ranking suppliers (1 = most frequently mentioned, 5 = less frequently mentioned) | | | Aspects | |

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| 1. | Commitment |
| 2. | Credibility |
| 3. | Transparency |
| 4. | Communication |
| 5. | Honesty |
| Top five ranking buyers (1 = most frequently mentioned, 5 = less frequently mentioned) | Aspects |
| 1. | Commitment |
| 2. | Transparency |
| 3. | Honesty |
| 4. | Quality |
| 5. | Training |

4.2.1 The suppliers' top-five ranking for preserving a reputation consists of the aspects of commitment, credibility, transparency, communication, and honesty

The suppliers' top-five ranking consists of the aspects of commitment, credibility, transparency, communication, and honesty, shown in Table 13. For a supplier, commitment in a relationship is important. For this, it is important to visit a customer when necessary. However, Supplier 1 mentioned that "But one person asks you to come by once a month, and the other does not expect you to come if there is no problem, or just wants you to come by once if there is something new to report". For a supplier, a customer is not a number because you have a relationship with the customer. For this, it is important that you show every day that you are committed to the relationship with the customer (Supplier 2). Supplier 3 states that "We also have a share scheme, so that commitment is created among the people and customers, which they receive annually. In this way, we want to obtain the commitment". By staying in touch with the customer, a supplier can create commitment (Supplier 4). The relationship suppliers have with their customers is not just a relationship. Supplier 5 states customers need "Someone they can spar with and someone who thinks along with them". As a result, a buyer-supplier relationship is more a partnership rather than ordering from the supplier and the supplier delivering the products (Supplier 5).

Besides, for a supplier, credibility is important. For this, it is important to keep the appointments you make (Supplier 1). Supplier 2 mentioned that "The agreements we make with our customers, we fulfil. Otherwise, we do not make these agreements". Besides, Supplier 4 states

that “It is important to keep the agreements we make with our customers. Credibility is important for this. You always want people to keep their agreements, no matter which agreement”. Customers need to be able to rely on the customer. For example, if the customer wants products at the agreed time and price, the supplier needs to be there at the time and not change prices (Supplier 5). Moreover, for a supplier, transparency is important. Supplier 1 states that “All is discussed with the customer in a transparent way. So, it is not the case that they only see the packing slip when the product is not delivered. The customer is called in advance, and then the customer is also consulted in order to keep it in stock, for example”. Suppliers need to make clear agreements about what is possible and what is not possible (Supplier 2). Another supplier states you are transparent if you have no complicated systems and no hidden backdoor, but also customers need to know what they can get (Supplier 3). To create transparency, it is important to discuss actions concretely with the customer and be transparent towards your customer. A supplier needs to sit down with a customer once in a while to discuss prices (Supplier 4).

In addition, for a supplier, communication is important. For this, communicating a lot with the customer is important, and the contacts you have with your customers must be good (Supplier 1; Supplier 2). Besides, when a supplier makes a mistake, such as giving the wrong price, the supplier calls that customer (Supplier 3). Another supplier states it is important to make sure the buyer and the supplier stay in touch (Supplier 4). Finally, for a supplier, honesty is important (Supplier 1). When a supplier makes a mistake, such as giving the wrong price, the supplier calls that customer and admits that this person is wrong and looks for a solution together with this customer (Supplier 3). Accordingly, Supplier 4 mentioned that “Honesty is also important. I think we are very loyal when it comes to prices and we will not just change prices without the customer's knowledge”. In conclusion, the aspects of commitment, credibility, transparency, communication, and honesty are important for a supplier to preserve their reputation.

4.2.2 The buyers’ top-five ranking for preserving a reputation consists of the aspects of commitment, transparency, honesty, quality, and providing training to employees

The buyers’ top-five ranking consists of the aspects of commitment, transparency, honesty, quality, and training, shown in Table 13. For a buyer, commitment is important. Buyer 1 states commitment is important “Because people need to have a good feeling when they enter our company and most certainly when they leave. Also, it is important to commit themselves and

come back later”. It is important people feel welcome through a chat with the guest, for example, by saying “good evening” and “see you next time” (Buyer 2). In this way, people want to come back to the buyer. Buyers can create commitment between themselves and the guests by always getting closer to the guests, being involved with the guests, and paying extra attention to the guests (Buyer 3). Buyer 4 mentioned that “With regular guests, we always make sure we have a chat, and sometimes they get a drink from us. They must experience the atmosphere and the experience of the company. And the staff is involved with the guests”. But also, Buyer 5 claims that “The cooks in the kitchen also need to know how to prepare products to the wishes of the guests. The cooks also always walk up to the front to ask how the food is and have a chat with the guests”.

Besides, for a buyer, transparency is important. For this, being transparent to guests is important. Buyer 1 states that “If you are a hospitality company with an open kitchen, then you also show a certain degree of transparency to your guests”. Also, a buyer can be transparent to guests by indicating the prices of the products they sell. For example, Buyer 2 mentioned that “We have very large signs at the shot bar with information about what each shot costs. We never have a problem with that because we are very transparent about it”. For example, if the prices become higher than agreed, you are not transparent to your customers (Buyer 3). So, buyers need to be transparent to their guests in terms of prices (Buyer 4). However, not always buyers can be transparent about their prices. For example, when they get the menu card from the brewery (Buyer 5).

Moreover, for a buyer, honesty towards guests is important. Buyer 3 states that “If something cannot be done for the customers, then you have to be honest with your customers as well. If a mistake is made, it has to be solved for the customer”. Besides, buyers have to be honest about the prices of the dishes and drinks they sell to guests, for example, on the menu card (Buyer 5). In addition, for a buyer, quality is important. Buyer 1 mentions that “If the quality of the service we offer is high and good, then, of course, the reputation goes up automatically”. Another buyer, Buyer 4, states that “It is important that the food quality is good. Our meat supplier comes by every day to deliver products so that the products are fresh. We also buy the most expensive steak, for example. The important thing is that the quality is excellent, but then you have a slightly smaller piece of meat, but of better quality”.

Finally, for a buyer, it is important to provide training for the employees (Buyer 1). When buyers do not provide training to their employees, they may not know what they do. Buyer 5 mentioned that “I always put a lot of time into training the staff, so they know what to do and do not walk around like a headless chicken”. As a result, the company’s employees know what they have to do and how to satisfy the customer (Buyer 5). That is important because one buyer stated they keep a close eye on the staff. For example, if the food is not prepared as it should, the customers will be dissatisfied (Buyer 4). Besides, Buyer 4 states that “The staff is actually the pillar of the company, but also the staff in the kitchen. If people do not do their best or are very lax, that reputation goes down as well”. In conclusion, the aspects of commitment, transparency, honesty, quality, and training are important for a buyer to preserve their reputation. Finally, in Appendix E, more findings on preserving a reputation can be found.

4.3 The important aspects of the four different stages of buyer-supplier relationships differ; there exist eighteen different aspects of reputation

The buyers and suppliers were asked about which aspects are important in the four different stages of a buyer-supplier relationship. As a result, the buyers and suppliers mentioned 21 different aspects. However, some aspects were only mentioned one time per stage. For this reason, these aspects are left out, which are product range, honesty, connection, confidence, customer goodwill, and belong in the first stage. But service, connection, quality, customer goodwill, belong, transparency, and delivery in the second stage. Besides, confidence, transparency, service, quality, delivery, and distinctiveness in the third stage. Finally, honesty, quality, product range, and convenience in the last stage. Consequently, eighteen different important aspects of reputation are mentioned by buyers and suppliers in total in the four different stages shown in Table 14, in order of most to least frequently mentioned in every stage. As a result, three out of six aspects of the existing literature are overlapping the findings of the interviews, which are credibility, commitment, and honesty.

Table 14. Reputation aspects per buyer-supplier relationship stage

| Aspects according to the literature | Aspects according to the interviews | Number of times mentioned by suppliers | Number of times mentioned by buyers | Total number of times mentioned |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Stage 1: Pre-relationship stage | | | | |
| Credibility | 1. Credibility | 2 | 2 | 4 |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|---|
| | 2. Delivery | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 3. Quality | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | 4. Trust | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| | 5. Service | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| | 6. Price | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Commitment | 7. Commitment | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Stage 2: Early stage | | | | |
| | 1. Price | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| | 2. Trust | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| | 3. Experience | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Credibility | 4. Credibility | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Honesty | 5. Honesty | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | 6. Confidence | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Commitment | 7. Commitment | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | 8. Communication | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Stage 3: Development stage | | | | |
| | 1. Experience | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| Commitment | 2. Commitment | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| | 3. Price | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| | 4. Trust | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| | 5. Communication | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | 6. Product range | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Credibility | 7. Credibility | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| | 8. Loyalty | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | 9. Convenience | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | 10. Customer satisfaction | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| | 11. Customer goodwill | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Stage 4: Last stage | | | | |
| | 1. Experience | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Commitment | 2. Commitment | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Credibility | 3. Credibility | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| | 4. Trust | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | 5. Distinctiveness | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | 6. Communication | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | 7. Customer goodwill | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | 8. Price | 1 | 1 | 2 |

4.3.1 The first stage exists of seven important aspects of reputation; credibility, delivery, quality, trust, service, price, and commitment

In the first stage, which is named the pre-relationship stage, buyers and suppliers mentioned seven different aspects of reputation, which are credibility, delivery, quality, trust, service, price, and commitment. Firstly, credibility is important because you need to deliver what you promise. If you promise someone you will bring a certain number of products for a certain price and you do not, customers will not cooperate with you (Supplier 3). Besides, a buyer who starts a new business wants to offer the guests what is promised. Then you do not want a supplier whom you cannot rely on (Supplier 5). Secondly, the delivery is important. So, there needs to be a subsequent delivery, and those products are delivered right away when possible. Suppliers have to make sure when the buyer needs something, they deliver it as soon as possible. As a result, the company can make sales again. If the company has to wait a day before something is delivered, it will not work (Supplier 1). Thirdly, quality is important. As Supplier 5 mentioned, “Someone who starts a business, they do not want any bullshit. They want to deliver quality”. Fourthly, trust is important. The supplier needs to have trust in the entrepreneur, namely, being willing to take a step. For example, suppliers who deliver products to the buyer, and buyers can pay later (Buyer 1). Fifthly, service is important. For example, one buyer chooses a particular supplier because they are offering to deliver on Saturdays. For that reason, this buyer chose this supplier (Buyer 4). Sixthly, price is important. Supplier 3 states that “Especially in the beginning it should cost as little as possible, so people look for the supplier who can deliver the cheapest products they need”. Finally, commitment is important. Both parties need to be committed to the relationship. In this way, it is possible to create a win-win situation in the relationship (Buyer 3).

4.3.2 The second stage exists of eight important aspects of reputation; price, trust, experience, credibility, honesty, confidence, commitment, and communication

In the second stage, which is named the early stage, buyers and suppliers mentioned eight different aspects of reputation, price, trust, experience, credibility, honesty, confidence, commitment, and communication. Firstly, price is important. As a supplier, you have to make sure the prices you mention to your buyers are right (Supplier 1). For buyers, the price they pay to suppliers, ultimately determines what we earn at the end of the year (Buyer 1). Secondly, trust is important. Trust has to be created in the relationship because trust does not yet exist in

the beginning. As buyer and supplier, also have to get to know each other, and what is important for one party and what is not (Supplier 3). Thirdly, the experience is important. Experiencing becomes more important in the second stage of the buyer-supplier relationship. Supplier 5 states “People can then confirm or disprove that they find us expensive, for instance, by means of that quotation which has been made”. As a result, you have to experience the relationship yourself. Besides, Buyer 3 mentioned that “In the beginning, reputation is important to get new people, but after that, you build up a relationship and can experience for yourself what the relationship is like and how it develops”. Fourthly, credibility is important. Suppliers need to continue to do their best for their customers every day (Supplier 2). Fifthly, honesty is important. For example, Supplier 5 states that “In the quotation, we are always very honest about our prices, but also about the fact that prices can change”. Buyers also want suppliers to be honest because buyers have to assume that they receive market conform prices, and they do not find out half a year later a colleague is offered much better prices (Buyer 1). Sixthly, confidence is important. A supplier has to make sure the buyer has confidence in the company (Supplier 1). Seventhly, commitment is important. Finally, communication is important because, in this stage, the contact person of the supplier is seen as a point of contact, since the buyer speaks to this person every time (Supplier 4).

4.3.3 The third stage exists of eleven important aspects of reputation; experience, commitment, price, trust, communication, product range, credibility, loyalty, convenience, customer satisfaction, and customer goodwill

In the third stage, which is named the development stage, buyers and suppliers mentioned eleven different aspects of reputation, which are experience, commitment, price, trust, communication, product range, credibility, loyalty, convenience, customer satisfaction, and customer goodwill. Firstly, the experience is important. Buyers can experience they are satisfied with the supplier. When this is not the case, the person does not want to expand the quantity that the person bought from us (Supplier 3). Accordingly, Supplier 4 states that “The relationship changes a bit in stage 3 because you get to know each other better, and you experience that the reputation is good”. Secondly, commitment is important. Supplier 3 states that “In this stage, you go more to that cooperation in the relationship, instead of the price relationship that was there before”. In this stage, you want to answer all questions and solve all problems for the client (Supplier 4). Thirdly, price is important. Consequently, the price agreements buyers and suppliers make with each other are becoming increasingly transparent

(Supplier 1). Fourthly, trust is important. In this stage, there is more trust in the relationship. For that reason, buyers choose to buy more products from the supplier (Supplier 3). Fifthly, communication is important. Supplier 1 states that “We remain in constant dialogue with each other about negotiations, other prices, and conditions”. Also, another supplier claims that this person is in contact with the employees in the kitchen (Supplier 3). Sixthly, the product range is important. Suppliers are always making sure the assortment they have at their buyer, is expanded further and further. The suppliers will keep informing them about adding products to their product range (Supplier 5). Seventhly, credibility is important because suppliers need to keep their agreements (Supplier 4). Eighthly, loyalty is important. Supplier 1 states “Buyers do not go looking for a new product from another supplier, but that the buyer comes to us again and again”. Ninthly, convenience is important. Buyers buy from suppliers for the sake of convenience, because the person bought from the supplier anyway, the person could still buy those products from the supplier (Supplier 3). Tenthly, customer satisfaction is important. Suppliers have to do their best to make sure the buyer is satisfied (Supplier 1). Finally, customer goodwill is an important aspect in the third stage of the buyer-supplier relationship.

4.3.4 The fourth stage exists of eight important aspects of reputation; experience, commitment, credibility, trust, distinctiveness, communication, customer goodwill, and price

In the fourth stage, which is named the last stage, buyers and suppliers mentioned eight different aspects of reputation, experience, commitment, credibility, trust, distinctiveness, communication, customer goodwill, and price. Firstly, the experience is important. In this stage, it is complete that the buyer knows who the supplier is, what they do, and what they think is important, and what they like. So, the reputation has changed into self-experience, no more hearing from other people (Supplier 4). That is equal to another buyer, who states that in this stage, you experience the reputation is good every day (Buyer 3). If buyers and suppliers do not experience that the relationship is good, they probably wanted to stop the relationship (Buyer 5). Secondly, commitment is important. In this stage, commitment has improved. You start talking to each other on a different level. As a supplier, you need to think along with the customer (Supplier 3). That means at some point, you will have more contact with a particular supplier than with another supplier because they will never visit you, which makes the commitment in this stage more important (Buyer 3). Thirdly, credibility is important. Suppliers must keep their agreements, just as in every stage (Supplier 2). Fourthly, this also counts for

trust, which remains important in this stage. Fifthly, distinctiveness is important. As a supplier, you have to see what your distinguishing capacity is. That also ensures the client stays with you and does not switch suppliers (Supplier 3). Sixthly, communication is important. In this stage, you will have more contact with your supplier, which reduces ordering from the other supplier (Buyer 3). Seventhly, customer goodwill remains important in this stage, and finally, this also counts for price.

4.3.5 Different aspects are found in three or more stages, which are credibility, trust, price, commitment, experience, and communication; but the importance of these aspects is different for buyers and suppliers

The paragraphs above show different aspects return in several stages. For that reason, these aspects are examined and whether these aspects are mentioned less or more frequently than in other stages by buyers and suppliers. To do this, only the aspects mentioned in three or more stages are examined to keep the overview. The aspects mentioned in three or more stages are credibility, trust, price, commitment, experience, and communication. The top-four ranking frequently mentioned aspects of buyers' and suppliers' reputation per stage are included in Table 15. As a result, two out of six aspects of the existing literature are overlapping the findings of the interviews, which are credibility and commitment.

Table 15. The top four ranking frequently mentioned aspects of reputation per stage by buyers and suppliers

| Credibility | | | |
|-----------------------|---------|--------------------------|---------|
| Ranking buyers | | Ranking suppliers | |
| 1. | Stage 1 | 1. | Stage 4 |
| 2. | Stage 2 | 2. | Stage 1 |
| | | 3. | Stage 2 |
| | | 4. | Stage 3 |
| Trust | | | |
| Ranking buyers | | Ranking suppliers | |
| 1. | Stage 1 | 1. | Stage 2 |
| 2. | Stage 2 | 2. | Stage 3 |
| 3. | Stage 3 | 3. | Stage 4 |
| 4. | Stage 4 | | |
| Price | | | |
| Ranking buyers | | Ranking suppliers | |
| 1. | Stage 2 | 1. | Stage 2 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|---------|--------------------------|---------|
| 2. | Stage 3 | 2. | Stage 3 |
| 3. | Stage 1 | 3. | Stage 1 |
| 4. | Stage 4 | 4. | Stage 4 |
| Commitment | | | |
| Ranking buyers | | Ranking suppliers | |
| 1. | Stage 3 | 1. | Stage 3 |
| 2. | Stage 4 | 2. | Stage 4 |
| 3. | Stage 1 | 3. | Stage 1 |
| 4. | Stage 2 | 4. | Stage 2 |
| Experience | | | |
| Ranking buyers | | Ranking suppliers | |
| 1. | Stage 3 | 1. | Stage 3 |
| 2. | Stage 4 | 2. | Stage 4 |
| 3. | Stage 2 | 3. | Stage 2 |
| Communication | | | |
| Ranking buyers | | Ranking suppliers | |
| 1. | Stage 3 | 1. | Stage 2 |
| 2. | Stage 4 | 2. | Stage 3 |
| | | 3. | Stage 4 |

Firstly, credibility is an important aspect is in stage 1, but also in stage 2, stage 3, and stage 4. However, in stage 1, it is the most frequently mentioned aspect, which is not the case in stage 2, stage 3, and stage 4. In the first stage, it was mentioned four times, two times by suppliers and two times by buyers. In the second stage, it was mentioned three times, two times by suppliers and one time by buyers, making it number four in the ranking. In the third stage, it was mentioned two times by suppliers, making it number seven in the ranking. Finally, in the last stage, it was mentioned three times by suppliers, making it number three in the ranking. As a result, for buyers, credibility is the most important in stage 1 but remains important in stage 2. Besides, for suppliers, credibility is the most important in stage 4 but is also important in the other stages.

Secondly, trust is an important aspect in stage 1, but also in the other stages. However, trust is never the most frequently mentioned aspect. In the first stage, it was mentioned three times by buyers, making it number four in the ranking. In the second stage, it was mentioned five times, two times by suppliers and three times by buyers, making it number two in the ranking. In the third stage, it was mentioned four times, two times by suppliers and two times by buyers,

making it number four in the ranking. Finally, in the last stage, it was mentioned three times, two times by suppliers and one time by buyers, making it number four in the ranking. As a result, for buyers, trust is the most important in stage 1 and stage 2 but remains an important aspect in the other stages. Besides, for suppliers, trust is equally important in stage 2, stage 3, and stage 4. Only, for suppliers, trust is not important in stage 1.

Thirdly, price is an important aspect in stage 1, but also in the other stages. However, in stage 2, price is the most frequently mentioned aspect. In the first stage, it was mentioned two times, one time by suppliers and one time by buyers, making it number six in the ranking. In the second stage, it was mentioned eight times, four times by suppliers and four times by buyers, making it number one in the ranking. In the third stage, it was mentioned four times, two times by suppliers and two times by buyers, making it number three in the ranking. Finally, in the last stage, it was mentioned two times, one time by suppliers and one time by buyers, making it number eight in the ranking. As a result, for buyers and suppliers, price is the most important in stage 2 but is also an important aspect in the other stages.

Fourthly, commitment is an important aspect in stage 1, but also in the other stages. However, commitment is never the most frequently mentioned aspect. In the first stage, it was mentioned two times, one time by suppliers and one time by buyers, making it number seven in the ranking. In the second stage, it was mentioned two times, one time by suppliers and one time by buyers, making it number seven in the ranking. In the third stage, it was mentioned five times, two times by suppliers and three times by buyers, making it number two in the ranking. Finally, in the last stage, it was mentioned four times, two times by suppliers and two times by buyers, making it number two in the ranking. As a result, for buyers, commitment is the most important in stage 3 but is also an important aspect in the other stages. Besides, for suppliers, commitment is equally important in stage 3 and stage 4 but is also important in stage 1 and stage 2.

Fifthly, the experience is an important aspect in stage 2, but also in stage 3 and stage 4. Besides, the experience is two times the most frequently mentioned aspect, namely, in stage 3 and stage 4. In the second stage, it was mentioned four times, three times by suppliers and one time by buyers, making it number three in the ranking. In the third stage, it was mentioned seven times, three times by suppliers and four times by buyers, making it number one in the ranking. Finally, in the last stage, it was mentioned six times, three times by suppliers and three times by buyers, making it number one in the ranking. As a result, for buyers, the experience is the most

important in the third stage but is also an important aspect in stage 2 and stage 4. Besides, for suppliers, the experience is equally important in stage 2, stage 3, and stage 4.

Sixthly, communication is an important aspect in stage 2, but also in stage 3 and stage 4. However, communication is never the most frequently mentioned aspect. In the second stage, it was mentioned two times by suppliers, making it number eight in the ranking. In the third stage, it was mentioned three times, one time by suppliers and two times by buyers, making it number one in the ranking. Finally, in the last stage, it was mentioned two times, one time by suppliers and one time by buyers, making it number six in the ranking. As a result, for buyers, communication is the most important in stage 3 but is also an important aspect in stage 4. Besides, for suppliers, commitment is the most important in the second stage, but it is also an important aspect in stage 3 and stage 4.

In conclusion, in every stage of the buyer-supplier relationships, different aspects are important. Accordingly, the buyers and suppliers mentioned eighteen different important aspects in total. Besides, six different aspects are mentioned in three or more stages, which are credibility, trust, price, commitment, experience, and communication. However, for buyers and suppliers, the importance of these aspects per stage is different. For buyers, credibility is only important in stage 1 and stage 2, and for suppliers, it is important in every stage. Moreover, for buyers, trust is important in every stage, and for suppliers, it is only important in stage 2, stage 3, and stage 4. In contrast, for buyers and suppliers, price, commitment, and experience are equally important. Finally, for buyers, communication is only important in stage 3 and stage 4, and for suppliers, it is important in stage 2, stage 3, and stage 4.

4.4 Most buyers and suppliers believe suppliers' reputation is the most important in the first stage of the buyer-supplier relationship

The buyers and suppliers were asked if suppliers' reputation is more or less important in one or more stages than in other stages. One supplier believed its reputation is in every stage equally important. However, most buyers and suppliers state the suppliers' reputation is the most important in the first stage. Besides, only one supplier states it is the most important in the first two stages, and one buyer states the suppliers' reputation is not important. Different suppliers state their reputation is the most important in the first stage because you cannot do business with each other if the suppliers' reputation is not good, you have to make the first impression

in the first stage. By having a reputation, you get customers, but you have to prove you are worthy of this reputation, and you do that by allowing customers to experience it. That is how you preserve your reputation (Supplier 2; Supplier 3; Supplier 5). Besides, Supplier 4, who stated their reputation is the most important in the first two stages, mentioned that “Our reputation in the first two stages is the most important because then you get in touch with the new client and if that reputation is good then they also want to enter into a relationship with us”. Finally, Supplier 1, who stated their reputation is in every stage equally important, finds this because “In order to be able to continue on good terms with a customer, not to make mistakes, good service, good assortment, and a good price-quality ratio. That must all be good and fit together”. In addition, different buyers state suppliers’ reputation is the most important in the first stage because a buyer selects its supplier based on suppliers’ reputation, which is mostly based on word-of-mouth advertising. After this stage, it is less important because reputation slowly changes into an experience. You experience yourself that the relationship is good because you have contact with them (Buyer 3; Buyer 4; Buyer 5). Finally, the buyer stating supplier reputation is not important, stated this because they are a café that only looks at the prices of suppliers (Buyer 2). As a result, the reasons why suppliers’ reputation is the most important in stage 1 are shown in Table 16.

Table 16. Reasons why suppliers’ reputation is most important in stage 1

| Supplier | Reasons why suppliers think their reputation is most important in stage 1 |
|-----------------|--|
| S2; S3; S5 | Cannot do business with no good reputation |
| S2; S3; S5 | You have to make the first impression in the first stage |
| S2; S3; S5 | By having a reputation, you get customers |
| S2; S3; S5 | You have to prove you are worthy of the reputation; experience |
| Buyer | Reasons why buyers think suppliers’ reputation is most important in stage 1 |
| B3; B4; B5 | Supplier selection based on reputation; mostly based on word-of-mouth advertising |
| B3; B4; B5 | After this stage, reputation slowly changes into an experience |

Consequently, the propositions of this research change. Firstly, for suppliers, Proposition 1 changes into “The expected elements and aspects of suppliers’ reputation, credibility, honesty, and commitment are mostly influencing the pre-relationship stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships”. Secondly, for suppliers, Proposition 2 changes into “The expected elements and aspects of suppliers’ reputation, credibility, honesty, and commitment are less influencing the early stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships”. Thirdly, for suppliers, Proposition 3 changes into “The expected elements and aspects of suppliers’

reputation, credibility, honesty, and commitment are less influencing the development stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships”. Finally, for suppliers, Proposition 4 changes into “The expected elements and aspects of suppliers’ reputation, credibility, honesty, and commitment are less influencing the final stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships”. Accordingly, these propositions only count for suppliers’ reputation. In Paragraph 4.5, the buyers’ reputation will be discussed. In conclusion, most buyers and suppliers state suppliers’ reputation is the most important in the first stage. The reasons vary, but both buyers and suppliers mentioned reputation changes into an experience because you can experience the buyer-supplier relationship.

4.5 All buyers and suppliers believe buyers’ reputation is equally important in every stage of the buyer-supplier relationship

The buyers and suppliers were asked if buyers’ reputation is more or less important in one or more stages than in other stages. All buyers and suppliers believed buyers’ reputation is equally important in every stage of the buyer-supplier relationship. However, buyers and suppliers provide different reasons for this. Suppliers state buyers’ reputation is equally important in every stage because new customers are attracted, and other customers continue to visit the company. In this way, you run a successful business because the customers are satisfied. Because the buyer continues to develop, the supplier can also deliver more to the buyer, which is a logical trade consequence and makes it more interesting for both parties (Supplier 1; Supplier 2; Supplier 4; Supplier 5). Another supplier mentioned buyers’ reputation is equally important in every stage because you have to look at the first impression. However, many customers come there for the first time, making it the first impression every time. For that reason, buyers’ reputation must remain good in all stages (Supplier 3). Besides, buyers state their reputation is equally important in every stage because if your reputation is not good, you do not attract customers, and the customers do not keep coming to you. As a result, when you have a good reputation, the supplier also can see it is busy at our company (Buyer 2; Buyer 4; Buyer 5). Accordingly, the reasons why buyers’ reputation is equally important in every stage are shown in Table 17.

Table 17. Reasons why the buyers' reputation is equally important in every stage

| Supplier | Reasons why suppliers think buyers' reputation is equally important |
|----------------|---|
| S1; S2; S4; S5 | Potential customers are attracted, and existing customers want to remain customer; successful business with satisfied customers |
| S1; S2; S4; S5 | The buyer continues to develop; the supplier can deliver more |
| S3 | First impression every time for new customers; reputation must remain good |
| Buyer | Reasons why buyers think their reputation is equally important |
| B2; B4; B5 | No attraction and remaining of customers with no good reputation |
| B2; B4; B5 | When having a good reputation; the supplier can see it is busy |

Consequently, the propositions of this research change. Firstly, for buyers, Proposition 1 changes into “The expected elements and aspects of buyers’ reputation, credibility, honesty, and commitment are mostly influencing the pre-relationship stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships”. Secondly, for buyers, Proposition 2 changes into “The expected elements and aspects of buyers’ reputation, credibility, honesty, and commitment are mostly influencing the early stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships”. Thirdly, for buyers, Proposition 3 changes into “The expected elements and aspects of buyers’ reputation, credibility, honesty, and commitment are mostly influencing the development stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships”. Finally, for buyers, Proposition 4 changes into “The expected elements and aspects of buyers’ reputation, credibility, honesty, and commitment are mostly influencing the final stage than other stages of buyer-supplier relationships”. Accordingly, these propositions only count for buyers’ reputation. In conclusion, all buyers and suppliers believed buyers’ reputation is equally important in every stage of the buyer-supplier relationship. This is because the buyer continues to develop, the supplier can also deliver more to the buyer, and because if your reputation is not good, you do not attract customers and the customers do not keep coming to you. Finally, in Appendix F, more findings on the effect of reputation on the four stages of a buyer-supplier relationship can be found.

4.6 The obtained aspects influence the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and the preservation of a reputation, but the experience is also important; a new theoretical framework and research model are created

The aspects of preserving a reputation that have arisen from literature and field research, credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, commitment, communication, quality, and training, have a substantial effect on preserving a reputation. From those aspects, the

overlapping aspects of the literature mentioned in the interviews are credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment. Besides, the aspects of a reputation that have arisen from the literature and field research, credibility, honesty, commitment, trust, price, experience, and communication have a substantial effect on the four buyer-supplier relationship stages. From those aspects, the overlapping aspects of the literature mentioned in the interviews are credibility, honesty, and commitment. However, the importance of reputation for buyers and suppliers is different. Firstly, buyers' reputation is equally important in every stage of the relationship. Secondly, the suppliers' reputation is the most important in the first stage, the pre-relationship stage. In the end, a new theoretical framework for the food industry is created with the aspects for a reputation in the four buyer-supplier relationship stages and preserving a reputation, including the overlapping aspects included in the literature, presented in Figure 2. Besides, the most important findings are shown in Table 18.

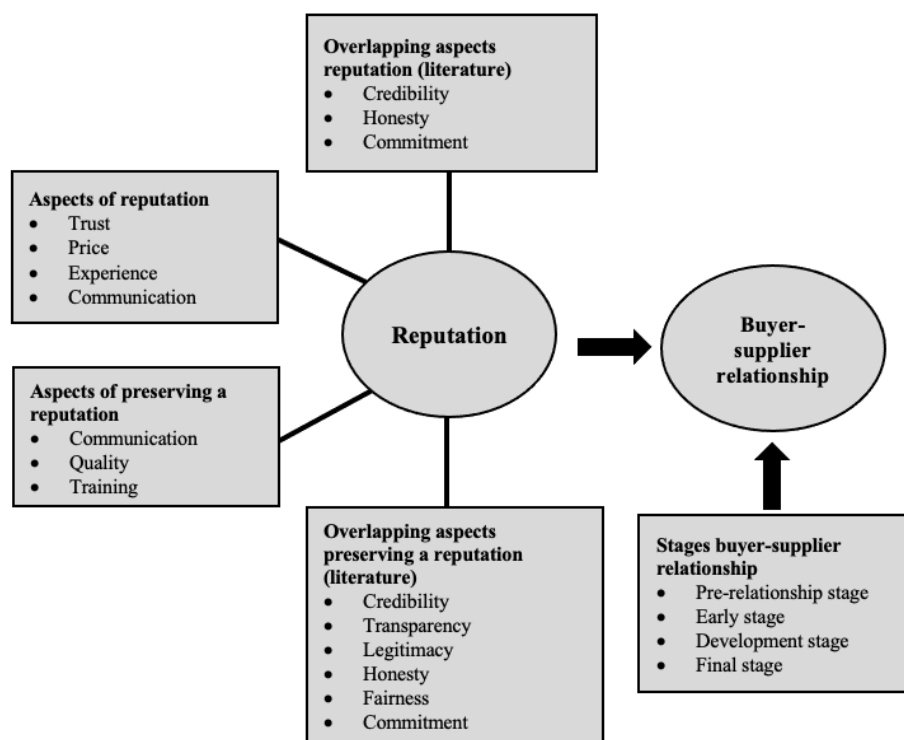


Figure 2. The new theoretical framework of the food industry

Table 18. Main findings of this research

| Aspects of (preserving a) reputation | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aspects of reputation stages buyer-supplier relationship (literature) | Aspects of reputation stages buyer-supplier relationship (interviews) | Aspects of preserving a reputation (literature) | Aspects of preserving a reputation (interviews) |
| Credibility | Credibility | Credibility | Credibility |
| Transparency | | Transparency | Transparency |
| Legitimacy | | Legitimacy | Legitimacy |
| Honesty | Honesty | Honesty | Honesty |
| Fairness | | Fairness | Fairness |
| Commitment | Commitment | Commitment | Commitment |
| | Trust | | Communication |
| | Price | | Quality |
| | Experience | | Training |
| | Communication | | |
| Importance reputation | | | |
| Buyer-supplier relationship stages | | Buyers' reputation | Suppliers' reputation |
| Stage 1: Pre-relationship stage | | Equally important | Mostly important |
| Stage 2: Early stage | | Equally important | Less important |
| Stage 3: Development stage | | Equally important | Less important |
| Stage 4: Final stage | | Equally important | Less important |

In the end, a research model is created with the influence of reputation and experience on the four stages of a buyer-supplier relationship, which can be found in Figure 3. As time and the stages pass, there exists more experience. That is because buyers and suppliers are experiencing the relationship and what it is about. As a result, the relationship changes because, first, reputation influences the experience. But after that, experience influences the reputation since people are going to talk about their experiences with this specific buyer or supplier to other parties. Consequently, reputation is the most important in the first stage, and after that stage, the influence of a reputation on the other three stages becomes less and less. That influence is inverted for experience since experience is almost not important in the first stage. After that stage, the influence of experience on the other three stages becomes more and more.

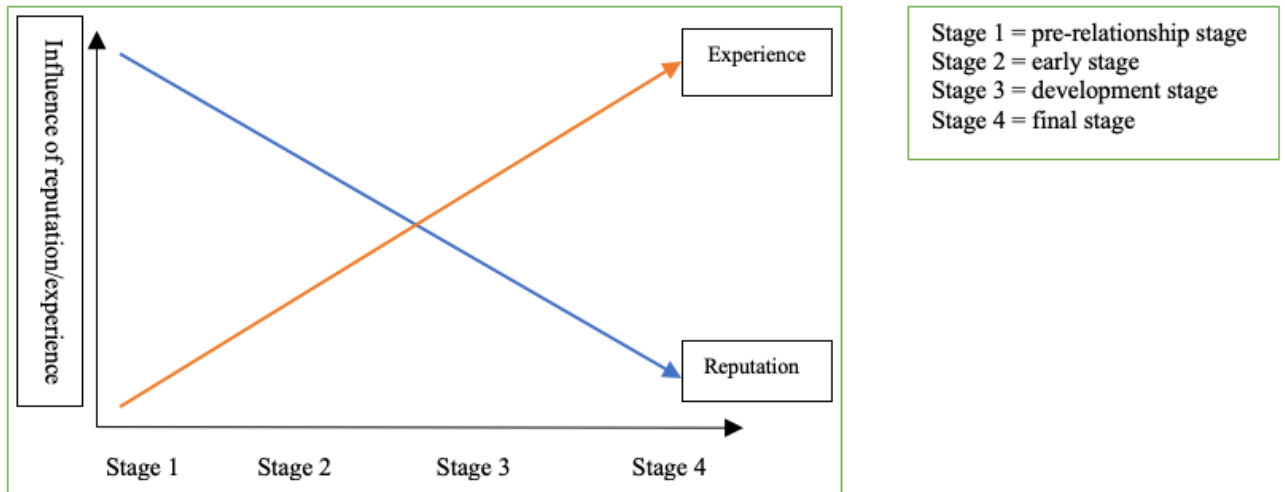


Figure 3. The research model of this research

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter, the findings are discussed and linked to the previous research, and hence, the theoretical contributions are presented. Next, a conclusion is given, and the research questions are answered. In addition, the limitations of the research and chances for future research are appointed. Finally, the practical contributions are illustrated with activities for companies.

5.1 Preservation of a reputation

5.1.1 The fact that a reputation is built by word-of-mouth advertising, mentioned in the literature, is corresponding; but word-of-mouth advertising can also work against you

Riquelme et al. (2019) state reputation is the value of a good business and is gained over time through word-of-mouth communication from other parties.²⁵² The findings of the interviews indicate all buyers and suppliers experience a good reputation, but also prefer a good reputation. After analysing the findings, it can be concluded that word-of-mouth advertising is important for buyers and suppliers in the food industry to experience and prefer a good reputation, which corresponds to the definition of Riquelme et al. (2019).²⁵³ However, a reputation can also work against you as a company. For example, when people do not want to work with you as a company because of the information they get from other parties. That is corresponding to the literature of Walsh and Wiedmann (2004), who state having a bad reputation may lead to negative word-of-mouth advertising.²⁵⁴

5.1.2 The aspects of reputation described in the literature are important aspects for preserving a reputation in the food industry; however, communication, quality, and training are also important aspects

Research shows the essential elements of achieving a reputation are credibility, transparency, and legitimacy.²⁵⁵ Moreover, research also shows the essential aspects of displaying a

²⁵² (Riquelme et al., 2019, p. 39)

²⁵³ (Riquelme et al., 2019, p. 39)

²⁵⁴ (Walsh & Wiedmann, 2004, p. 309)

²⁵⁵ (Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 349)

reputation are honesty, fairness, and commitment.²⁵⁶ For a supplier, the aspects of commitment, credibility, transparency, and honesty are important aspects of preserving a reputation, which is corresponding to literature. Besides, communication is also an important aspect of preserving a reputation for suppliers, in addition to the literature. Consequently, in the suppliers' top-five ranking, four out of six mentioned aspects of literature are mentioned. Besides, the buyers' top-five ranking consists of the aspects of commitment, transparency, honesty, quality, and training. For a buyer, the aspects of commitment, transparency, and honesty are important aspects of preserving a reputation, which is corresponding to literature. Moreover, quality and training are important aspects of preserving a reputation for buyers, in addition to the literature. Consequently, in the buyers' top-five ranking, three out of the six mentioned aspects of the literature are mentioned.

5.2 The effect of a reputation on the four stages of a buyer-supplier relationship

5.2.1 The influence of buyers' and suppliers' reputation on the buyer-supplier relationship is different; buyers' reputation is equally important in every stage, and suppliers' reputation is the most important in the first stage

The interviews show the influence of buyers' and suppliers' reputation on the buyer-supplier relationship differs. Most buyers and suppliers state suppliers' reputation is the most important in the first stage. In contrast, all buyers and suppliers believed buyers' reputation is equally important in every buyer-supplier relationship stage. In conclusion, buyers' reputation is equally important in every stage because, in this way, buyers retain and attract customers, and customers have a first impression every time. Besides, suppliers' reputation is the most important in stage 1, the pre-relationship stage. Because after stage 1, reputation changes into an experience. In this way, buyers can experience the relationship with the supplier instead of receiving information about the supplier from other parties.

5.2.2 Only credibility, honesty, and commitment of existing research are important aspects of reputation in the food industry; but trust, price, experience, and communication are also important aspects

²⁵⁶ (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 39)

Research shows the essential elements of achieving a reputation are credibility, transparency, and legitimacy.²⁵⁷ Moreover, research shows that the essential aspects of displaying a reputation are honesty, fairness, and commitment.²⁵⁸ However, according to the findings of the interviews, eighteen different important aspects of a reputation are mentioned. In stage 1, the pre-relationship stage, credibility, delivery, quality, trust, service, price, and commitment are important aspects of a reputation. In stage 2, the early stage, price, trust, experience, credibility, honesty, confidence, commitment, and communication are important aspects of a reputation. In stage 3, the development stage, experience, commitment, price, trust, communication, product range, credibility, loyalty, convenience, customer satisfaction, and customer goodwill are important. Finally, in stage 4, the last stage, experience, commitment, credibility, trust, distinctiveness, communication, customer goodwill, and price are important.

In conclusion, the mentioned aspects of existing research, credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment are not all important aspects for reputation in the food industry. Only credibility, honesty, and commitment are mentioned in the interviews by buyers and suppliers in one or more stages. As a result, three out of six aspects of existing research are mentioned in the interviews. However, other important aspects mentioned by buyers and suppliers in three or more stages are trust, price, experience, and communication. According to this, it is notable that experience becomes important starting at stage 2 because reputation changes into an experience. Finally, in Appendix E and Appendix F, more conclusions and discussions on preserving a reputation and the effect of reputation on the four stages of a buyer-supplier relationship can be found.

5.3 To conclude; the obtained aspects have a substantial influence on the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and the preservation of a reputation

This research has investigated the aspects of reputation that influence the four stages of the buyer-supplier relationship and preserving reputation by buyers and suppliers. The research attempts to cover a gap in the shortage of research studies on the two topics. Buyer-supplier relationships and reputation have already been investigated. But the specific aspects which affect the preservation of a reputation and the four stages of the buyer-supplier relationship

²⁵⁷ (Huang-Horowitz, 2015, p. 349)

²⁵⁸ (Wagner et al., 2011, p. 39)

were not investigated. After conducting the interviews, the expected influencing aspects of existing literature were indeed proven to be appropriate as influencing aspects of preserving a reputation, which are credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment. Besides, other important aspects for preserving a reputation in the food industry are communication, quality, and training. However, not all expected influencing aspects of existing literature were proven to be appropriate as influencing aspects of a reputation in the four different stages of a buyer-supplier relationship. The aspects proven to be appropriate are credibility, honesty, and commitment. Besides, other important aspects for a reputation in the food industry in the four different stages are trust, price, experience, and communication.

When investigating the findings of the interviews, some findings are noticeable. Firstly, word-of-mouth advertising is frequently mentioned by buyers and suppliers as being important. Secondly, buyers and suppliers think different aspects are important for a reputation and preserving a reputation. For example, suppliers believe communication is an important aspect and buyers think quality and training are important aspects of preserving a reputation. Finally, buyers and suppliers mention the aspect of experience many times, in the aspects of reputation, but also in the aspects of preserving a reputation. Most buyers and suppliers mentioned that reputation changes into an experience. For that, a reputation becomes less important because buyers and suppliers can experience the relationship themselves.

To conclude, this research has led to two answers. Namely, one to research question 1 “To what extent does reputation affect the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships?” and one to research question 2 “To what extent do buyers and suppliers preserve their reputation?”. The extent of the influencing aspects is well defined. The aspects of preserving a reputation from the literature and field research, credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, commitment, communication, quality, and training, have a substantial effect on preserving a reputation. Besides, the aspects of a reputation from the literature and field research, credibility, honesty, commitment, trust, price, experience, and communication, have a substantial effect on the four stages of a buyer-supplier relationship. However, the importance of buyers’ and suppliers’ reputation is different. Firstly, buyers’ reputation is equally important in every stage of the relationship. Secondly, suppliers’ reputation is the most important in the first stage of the relationship, the pre-relationship stage. As a result, for preserving a reputation in the food industry, all literature aspects are important. But for a reputation, only three literature aspects,

credibility, honesty, and commitment are important. But in addition to these aspects, many different aspects are also found to be important by buyers and suppliers in the food industry.

5.4 Limitations and future research

This research presents certain limitations that provide possibilities for future research. This research examined the aspects that influence preserving a reputation and the four stages of the buyer-supplier relationship. Nevertheless, the presently available literature regarding these terms is limited. As a result, the subsequent proposals can be considered to enhance these terms. Firstly, a limitation is the food industry is a complicated industry. In the food industry, safety and quality are of the greatest concern since buyers and suppliers are dealing with food products that must meet specific safety and quality requirements. For that reason, quality can be more important in the food industry than in another industry. Secondly, another limitation of the research is the perspective of the research operations in strategic supplier-relationships among buyers and suppliers in the food industry. The research particularly dealt with strategic buyer-supplier relationships. Accordingly, other buyer-supplier relationships were not covered, while it is not always possible for a food industry supplier to start a strategic buyer-supplier relationship. Finally, the research identified different aspects of reputation that influence buyers and suppliers that preserve their reputation and the influence of reputation on the four stages of the buyer-supplier relationship. However, it has not been tested whether and to what extent these different aspects affect these two subjects.

Concluding, while the terms reputation and buyer-supplier relationships received an expansion, we might draw new insights from future research. To work through the limitations, firstly, it would be appropriate to conduct similar qualitative research involving buyers and suppliers of companies in other industries and the food industry, to broaden the scope of the two terms and finish the research. Hence, it is possible to determine if the findings are comparable or otherwise. Secondly, because other buyer-supplier relationships were not covered, to successfully finish the research in the categorisation area, similar research can be carried out involving other buyer-supplier relationships, which are different from strategic buyer-supplier relationships. Thirdly, it would also be beneficial to test the research findings. That is because it has not been tested whether and to what extent these different aspects affect these two subjects. Consequently, for future research, quantitative research through testing could help

investigate which characteristics influence and which aspects have more or less influence than other aspects.

5.5 Practical contributions

The research provides theoretical contributions, as well as practical contributions. After analysing the findings of the interviews, a suppliers' top-five ranking and a buyers' top-five ranking of aspects of preserving a reputation were created. Since these aspects are the most important, looking at how to apply them to preserve their reputation is the most appropriate initial action. The suppliers' top-five ranking consists of the aspects of commitment, credibility, transparency, communication, and honesty. Firstly, suppliers need to visit a buyer when necessary and need to see the buyer-supplier relationship more like a partnership, instead of ordering from the supplier and the supplier delivering the product. Secondly, suppliers need to keep the appointments they make because buyers need to be able to rely on the supplier. Thirdly, suppliers need to be transparent to buyers about what is possible and what is not, and to discuss prices with a buyer once in a while. Fourthly, the communication between the supplier and buyer must be good, to ensure the buyer and supplier stay in touch. Finally, suppliers must be honest to buyers, also when making mistakes and giving the wrong price. As a result, since these aspects are the most important for suppliers to preserve their reputation, they need to keep these aspects in mind when they want to attract and retain buyers. Otherwise, there is a possibility that buyers will choose another supplier because this supplier does possess these aspects. That also counts for the buyers, who need to keep in mind their top-five ranking to attract and retain guests. The buyers' top-five ranking consists of the aspects of commitment, transparency, honesty, quality, and training. Firstly, buyers need to be committed to guests because, in this way, people want to come back. Secondly, buyers need to be transparent to guests in terms of prices. Thirdly, buyers need to be honest to guests when activities cannot be performed, or mistakes are made. Fourthly, buyers need to deliver good quality products to the guests. Finally, providing training to employees will help to satisfy the customer.

Besides, after analysing the findings of the interviews, buyers and suppliers identified seven important aspects of a reputation in the buyer-supplier relationship, which are credibility, honesty, commitment, trust, price, experience, and communication. Since these aspects are the most important aspects of a reputation in buyer-supplier relationships, looking at how to apply

them is also the most appropriate initial action. Firstly, credibility is important because you need to deliver what you promise, and suppliers need to continue to do their best for their customers every day. Secondly, trust is important for buyers because the supplier needs to have trust in the entrepreneur, namely, being willing to take a step with a new entrepreneur. Trust has to be created in the relationship because trust does not yet exist in the beginning but gets more when you get to know each other. Thirdly, price is important because, first, products should cost as little as possible, and after this, the mentioned prices must be right, and the price agreements must be transparent. Fourthly, commitment is important because you need to be committed to the relationship, which gets more during the relationship. Fifthly, the experience is important because, after the first stage of the buyer-supplier relationship, you can experience the relationship yourself, which leads to reputation changing into an experience. Sixthly, communication is important because you need to remain in constant dialogue about negotiations, prices, and conditions. Finally, honesty is important because suppliers need to be honest about prices, but also the fact that prices can change.

In the end, another logical step would be for buyers and suppliers to keep in mind word-of-mouth advertising means everything when attracting customers or finding suppliers. When a company does not have a good reputation, and other parties talk about this reputation to potential customers or suppliers, there is a possibility the guest will not come to a buyer, a buyer will not choose for a particular supplier, or a supplier will not choose for a particular buyer. As a result, when buyers or suppliers receive complaints, they have to solve them immediately and make sure the buyer or guest knows it is solved. Consequently, having a good reputation will help to gain customers or suppliers because people talk a good reputation through to others. However, once you have attracted a buyer or supplier, it is important to retain this buyer or supplier by living up to the reputation, which means ensuring the customer or supplier experiences the reputation is good. In this way, reputation changes into experience, and experience begins to feed reputation, for which reputation is the most important in the first stage of the buyer-supplier relationship. In contrast, buyers' reputation is important in every stage of the buyer-supplier relationship because buyers need to attract new guests every day. In this way, buyers will obtain more guests, which leads to buyers can sell more to guests, for which suppliers can deliver more to the buyer. In the end, this will have a positive influence on the buyer-supplier relationship and will make the relationship stronger.

6. References

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7. Appendices

Appendix A. Interview guide of the semi-structured interviews

Questions for the buyer

Questions about preserving a reputation

1. When you think about reputation, what does it mean to you?
 - Could you explain this?
2. What type(s) of reputation do you experience?
 - Why?
 - What type(s) of reputation do you prefer?
 - Why?
3. Is reputation important to you?
 - If yes, why?
 - If no, why not?
4. Does reputation affect your decision-making process?
 - If yes, in what way?
 - If no, why not?
5. What does reputation mean in your line of work?
 - Do you use reputation in your work?
 - If yes, how?
 - If no, why not?
6. What level of reputation does the company experience? Please rate it from one to five, where one is very weak, two is weak, three is medium, four is good, and five is a high level of reputation.
 - Why is this?
7. Do you do something to preserve the reputation of the company?
 - If yes, then what?
 - If no, why not?
8. Which aspects are important to preserve the reputation of the company?
 - Why?

If they mention the aspects named credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment, let them elaborate on this:

- Why is credibility important in preserving the reputation of the company?
- Why is transparency important in preserving the reputation of the company?
- Why is legitimacy important in preserving the reputation of the company?
- Why is honesty important in preserving the reputation of the company?
- Why is fairness important in preserving the reputation of the company?
- Why is commitment important in preserving the reputation of the company?

Questions about the stages of the buyer-supplier relationship and the influence of reputation

9. From your point of view, what is a buyer-supplier relationship?
 - What do you think is a successful buyer-supplier relationship?
 - What do you think is an unsuccessful buyer-supplier relationship?
10. Do you experience different stages in the relationship with your supplier, in which stages are defined as different moments in your relationship from before you knew your supplier until now?
 - Could you describe these stages?
 - On what basis do you distinguish these stages?

According to my research, the relationship between buyers and suppliers consists of four different stages. The first stage is the pre-relationship stage. At this stage, the buyer or supplier evaluates a potential new supplier or buyer, which may be the outcome of a specific period in an existing relationship.

11. Do you think the relationship between you and your supplier reached this stage?
 - If yes, could you explain this?
 - If no, why not?
12. In your opinion, do you think that reputation is an influential factor in this stage?
 - If yes, what are the important aspects of reputation in this stage?
 - Why?
 - If no, why not?

The second stage is the early stage. That is the stage where prospective suppliers approach buyers to negotiate or create a detailed description of a buy of (capital) goods.

13. Do you think the relationship between you and your supplier reached this stage?

- If yes, could you explain this?
- If no, why not?

14. In your opinion, do you think that reputation is an influential factor in this stage?

- If yes, what are the important aspects of reputation in this stage?
- Why?
- If no, why not?

The third stage is the development stage. The development stage of a relationship arises as supplies of continually procured products grow. It is possible that staged supplies take place or that the supplier has begun processing the product.

15. Do you think the relationship between you and your supplier reached this stage?

- If yes, could you explain this?
- If no, why not?

16. In your opinion, do you think that reputation is an influential factor in this stage?

- If yes, what are the important aspects of reputation in this stage?
- Why?
- If no, why not?

The fourth stage is the final stage. This stage is achieved in steady markets over a sustained period. It is characterised by an expansion of the institutionalisation process towards a level at which business operations are governed by the sector's codes of conduct.

17. Do you think the relationship between you and your supplier reached this stage?

- If yes, could you explain this?
- If no, why not?

18. In your opinion, do you think that reputation is an influential factor in this stage?

If yes, what are the important aspects of reputation in this stage?

- Why?
- If no, why not?

Finishing questions

19. When you think back over all stages the relationship between you and your supplier reached, how do you think the reputation of the company evolved over these stages?
 - Has this affected the relationship with your supplier?
 - If yes, how?
 - If no, why not?
20. Do you think the reputation of the company is more and/or less important in one (or more) specific stage(s) than in other stages?
 - If yes, for which stage or stages do you think the reputation of the company is more and/or less important?
 - Why?
 - If no, why not?
21. When you think back over all stages the relationship between you and your supplier reached, how do you think the reputation of your supplier evolved over the reached stages?
 - Has this affected the relationship with your supplier?
 - If yes, how?
 - If no, why not?
22. Do you think the reputation of your supplier is more and/or less important in one (or more) specific stage(s) than in other stages?
 - If yes, for which stage or stages do you think the reputation of your supplier is more and/or less important?
 - Why?
 - If no, why not?

Questions for the supplier

Questions about preserving a reputation

1. When you think about reputation, what does it mean to you?
 - Could you explain this?
2. What type(s) of reputation do you experience?
 - Why?
 - What type(s) of reputation do you prefer?
 - Why?
3. Is reputation important to you?
 - If yes, why?
 - If no, why not?
4. Does reputation affect your decision-making process?
 - If yes, in what way?
 - If no, why not?
5. What does reputation mean in your line of work?
 - Do you use reputation in your work?
 - If yes, how?
 - If no, why not?
6. What level of reputation does the company experience? Please rate it from one to five, where one is very weak, two is weak, three is medium, four is good, and five is a high level of reputation.
 - Why is this?
7. Do you do something to preserve the reputation of the company?
 - If yes, then what?
 - If no, why not?
8. Which aspects are important to preserve the reputation of the company?
 - Why?

If they mention the aspects named credibility, transparency, legitimacy, honesty, fairness, and commitment, let them elaborate on this:

- Why is credibility important in preserving the reputation of the company?
- Why is transparency important in preserving the reputation of the company?
- Why is legitimacy important in preserving the reputation of the company?

- Why is honesty important in preserving the reputation of the company?
- Why is fairness important in preserving the reputation of the company?
- Why is commitment important in preserving the reputation of the company?

Questions about the stages of the buyer-supplier relationship and the influence of reputation

9. From your point of view, what is a buyer-supplier relationship?
 - What do you think is a successful buyer-supplier relationship?
 - What do you think is an unsuccessful buyer-supplier relationship?
10. Do you experience different stages in the relationship with your buyer, in which stages are defined as different moments in your relationship from before you knew your buyer until now?
 - Could you describe these stages?
 - On what basis do you distinguish these stages?

According to my research, the relationship between buyers and suppliers consists of four different stages. The first stage is the pre-relationship stage. At this stage, the buyer or supplier evaluates a potential new supplier or buyer, which may be the outcome of a specific period in an existing relationship.

11. Do you think the relationship between you and your buyer reached this stage?
 - If yes, could you explain this?
 - If no, why not?
12. In your opinion, do you think that reputation is an influential factor in this stage?
 - If yes, what are the important aspects of reputation in this stage?
 - Why?
 - If no, why not?

The second stage is the early stage. That is the stage where prospective suppliers approach buyers to negotiate or create a detailed description of a buy of (capital) goods.

13. Do you think the relationship between you and your buyer reached this stage?
 - If yes, could you explain this?
 - If no, why not?
14. In your opinion, do you think that reputation is an influential factor in this stage?
 - If yes, what are the important aspects of reputation in this stage?

- Why?
- If no, why not?

The third stage is the development stage. The development stage of a relationship arises as supplies of continually procured products grow. It is possible that staged supplies take place or that the supplier has begun processing the product.

15. Do you think the relationship between you and your buyer reached this stage?

- If yes, could you explain this?
- If no, why not?

16. In your opinion, do you think that reputation is an influential factor in this stage?

- If yes, what are the important aspects of reputation in this stage?
- Why?
- If no, why not?

The fourth stage is the final stage. This stage is achieved in steady markets over a sustained period. It is characterised by an expansion of the institutionalisation process towards a level at which business operations are governed by the sector's codes of conduct.

17. Do you think the relationship between you and your buyer reached this stage?

- If yes, could you explain this?
- If no, why not?

18. In your opinion, do you think that reputation is an influential factor in this stage?

If yes, what are the important aspects of reputation in this stage?

- Why?
- If no, why not?

Finishing questions

19. When you think back over all stages the relationship between you and your buyer reached, how do you think the reputation of the company evolved over these stages?

- Has this affected the relationship with your buyer?
- If yes, how?
- If no, why not?

20. Do you think the reputation of the company is more and/or less important in one (or more) specific stage(s) than in other stages?

- If yes, for which stage or stages do you think the reputation of the company is more and/or less important?
- Why?
- If no, why not?

21. When you think back over all stages the relationship between you and your supplier reached, how do you think the reputation of your buyer evolved over the reached stages?

- Has this affected the relationship with your buyer?
- If yes, how?
- If no, why not?

22. Do you think the reputation of your buyer is more and/or less important in one (or more) specific stage(s) than in other stages?

- If yes, for which stage or stages do you think the reputation of your buyer is more and/or less important?
- Why?
- If no, why not?

Appendix B. Overview of terms and definitions for the interviews

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| Buyer-supplier relationship | Business dealings between B2B companies regarding the acquisition and distribution of products or services |
| Successful buyer-supplier relationship | Long-term win-win business partnerships between B2B companies based on cost and providing product and service information |
| Unsuccessful buyer-supplier relationship | A relationship that exists when both parties have seriously and continuously worked towards reaching a relationship, their collaboration would not lead to mutual advantages and greater achievements but would decrease and turn out to be less synergistic and would lead to a situation of decreasing revenues |
| Stages of the buyer-supplier relationship | Pre-relationship stage, early stage, development stage, and final stage |
| - Stage 1: Pre-relationship stage | The buyer or supplier assesses a potential new supplier or buyer, which may be the outcome of a specific period in an existing relationship |
| - Stage 2: Early stage | Prospective suppliers approach buyers to negotiate or create a detailed description of a buy of (capital) goods |
| - Stage 3: Development stage | A relationship arises as supplies of continually procured products grow |
| - Stage 4: Final stage | Characterised by an expansion of the institutionalisation process towards a level at which business operations are governed by the sector's codes of conduct |
| Reputation | An immaterial property that expresses a vision of a company's honesty, fairness, and commitment that can be subjectively assessed by an external person |
| Essential elements of achieving a reputation | Credibility, transparency, and legitimacy |
| Essential perceived aspects of displaying a reputation | Honesty, fairness, and commitment |

Appendix C. Interview protocol

Script before the interview:

First of all, I want to thank you for your willingness to be part of the interview aspect of my study. As stated before, I am researching to what extent reputation affects the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and to what extent buyers and supplier preserve their reputations. This research aims to document the possible effects of a reputation on the four stages of buyer-supplier relationships and to know to what extent buyers and suppliers preserve their reputations. For this reason, this interview consists of two topics. First, you will be asked about preserving the company's reputation. After this, I will ask you various questions about how important the company's reputation is in the different stages of the buyer-supplier relationship. Finally, I will ask you some finishing questions. Our interview today will last approximately one hour. Your personal opinion is important to me. To preserve your anonymity, your name and company name will be omitted, and your answers will be handled with confidentiality. If you agree, the company name will be displayed as B1 (buyer 1) up to B5 (buyer 5) or S1 (supplier 1) up to S5 (supplier 5). Finally, please know that you can stop the interview at any time.

[review aspects of consent form]

Before we start with the interview, do you agree with me recording our interview today?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you have any questions related to the interview or the content of the interview?

[Discuss questions]

During the interview, it is possible to ask me questions. For example, when something is not clear, please do not hesitate to ask them at any moment. I will be pleased to respond to your questions. I also have a form with the definitions so there will be no misunderstandings (Appendix B). The interview is a semi-structured interview, which means there is a place for probing questions to get more information when it is needed.

Appendix D. Coding scheme of the interviews

| Selective coding | Axial coding | Open coding S1 | Open coding S2 | Open coding S3 | Open coding S4 | Open coding S5 | Open coding B1 | Open coding B2 | Open coding B3 | Open coding B4 | Open coding B5 |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Kind of reputation experience | Good reputation | Good reputation | Good reputation | | Good reputation | | Good reputation | Good reputation | | Good reputation | Good reputation |
| | Honest reputation | | | Honest reputation | | | | | Honest reputation | | |
| | Exclusive and expensive reputation | | | | | Exclusive and expensive reputation | | | | | |
| Importance reputation | Very important | Very important | | Very important | | | Very important | Certainly important | Very important | Very important | Very important |
| | Important | | Important | | Important | | | | | | |
| | Experience more important | | | | | Experience is more important | | | | | |
| Preference of reputation | Good reputation | Good reputation | Good reputation | | Good reputation | Good reputation | | Good reputation | Good reputation | Good reputation | Good reputation |
| | Open and honest reputation | | | Open and honest reputation | | | | | | | |
| | Word-of-mouth reputation | | | | | | Word-of-mouth reputation | | | | |
| Reputation in decision-making process | Credibility | Keeping agreements | | | | | | | | | |
| | Customer satisfaction | Do everything to satisfy customer | | | | | | | | | What do customers think |
| | Customisation | Customisation | | | | | | | | | |
| | Margin | | More margin | | | | | | | | |
| | Function | | | Function | | | | | | | |
| | Customer goodwill | | | | Customer goodwill | | | | | | |
| | Problem solving | | | | | | Responding to reviews | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|------|-------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------|--------------------------|----------------|
| | Investment | Making investments | | | | | | | | Investment | |
| Level of reputation | Five | Five | | Five | | Five | | Five | Five | Five | Five |
| | Four | | Four | | | | | | | | |
| | Between four and five | | | | At a four or five | | Between four and five | | | | |
| Preservation of reputation | Daytime job | Do that every day | Working on that every day | | | Working on that every day | | | | Keeping everything clean | |
| | Enthusiasm | | | | Enthusiasm | | | | | | |
| | Investment | | | | | | Invest in guests | | | | |
| | Training | | | | | | Training | | | Training | Training |
| | Dinstinctiveness | | | | | | | Distinguishing yourself | | | Renew the menu |

| Selective coding | Axial coding | Open coding S1 | Open coding S2 | Open coding S3 | Open coding S4 | Open coding S5 | Open coding B1 | Open coding B2 | Open coding B3 | Open coding B4 | Open coding B5 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Preserving reputation aspects | Credibility | Keeping appointments | Keeping agreements | Credibility | Keeping agreements | Keeping agreements | Credibility | | Sticking to agreements | | |
| | Commitment | Visiting | Commitment | Commitment | Staying in touch and show interest | Inviting and looking at their wishes | Commitment | People need to feel welcome | Being involved | Being committed | Be committed |
| | Communication | Communication | Communication | Communication | Having a lot of contact | | | | | | |
| | Product range | Range of products | | | | Assortment | | | | | |
| | Service | Service | | | Service | | | | | | |
| | Transparency | Transparency | Transparency | Transparency | Be Transparent | | Transparency | Transparent about prices | Transparent | Transparent | Transparent |
| | Honesty | Calling when product is not in stock | | Honesty | Honesty | | Honesty | | Honesty | Honest | Honest |
| | Customer satisfaction | Keep customer satisfied | | Customer satisfaction | | | | | | | |
| | Legitimacy | Not in contact with the police | | Code of conduct | | | Being legitimate | According to the rules | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------------|--|--|--|----------------------------|----------|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Distinctiveness | | | Taking one step more than the competitor | Trendsetter in the market | | Distinguishing yourself | | | Renewing and innovating |
| | Stakeholders | | Concern for employees and stakeholders | | | | Personnel and security | | Staff | |
| | Kindness | | | | | | Customer friendliness | | | Be hospitable and polite |
| | Sustainable entrepreneurship | | Sustainable entrepreneurship | | | | | | | |
| | Specialisation | | Advising customers | | Working with professionals | | | | | Wine or beer advise |
| | Assertiveness | | | Assert ourselves | | | | | | |
| | Fairness | | Fair products and fair prices | Set fair prices | | | | | | |
| | Quality | | | | Quality | Quality | | | Quality | Quality |
| | Training | | | | | Training | | | Training | Training |
| | Trust | | | | | Trust | | | | |
| | Continuity | | | | | | | Continuity | | |
| | Price-quality ratio | | | | | | | Price-quality ratio | Price-quality ratio | |
| | Problem solving | | | | | | | | Dealing with complaints | |
| | Experience | | | | | | | | Experience | |

| Selective coding | Axial coding | Open coding S1 | Open coding S2 | Open coding S3 | Open coding S4 | Open coding S5 | Open coding B1 | Open coding B2 | Open coding B3 | Open coding B4 | Open coding B5 |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Reaching stage 1 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Reputation influential factor stage 1 | Yes | Yes | | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| | No | | No; no choice for supplier | | | | | No; not important to us | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|-----|
| Reaching stage 2 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Reputation influential factor stage 2 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | | | | Yes | | Yes |
| | Less important | | | | | Less important; experience and prices on paper | Less important; you know what you have | | | | |
| | No | | | | | | | No | | No | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Reaching stage 3 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | | Yes |
| | No | | | | | | | | | No | |
| Reputation influential factor stage 3 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | | | | | | Yes |
| | Less important | | | | | Less important; experience more | | | Less important; you experience it | | |
| | No | | | | | | No; you know what you can give | No | | No | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Reaching stage 4 | Yes | | | Yes | Yes | | | | Yes | | |
| | No | No | No | | | No | No | No | | No | No |
| Reputation influential factor stage 4 | No opinion | Cannot say; not reached | | | | | | | | No experience | |
| | Yes | | Yes | | Yes; but changed in experience | | | | | | Yes |
| | Less important | | | | | Less important; depends on the experience | Less important than in first two stages | | Less important; you experience | | |
| | No | | | No; experience more important | | | | No; you experience yourself | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |

| Selective coding | Axial coding | Open coding S1 | Open coding S2 | Open coding S3 | Open coding S4 | Open coding S5 | Open coding B1 | Open coding B2 | Open coding B3 | Open coding B4 | Open coding B5 |
|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Stage 1 reputation aspects | Product range | Product range | | | | | | | | | |
| | Service | Service | | | Service | | | | | | |
| | Delivery | Delivery | | | | | | | | Delivery | Delivery times |
| | Price | | | Price | | | | | Price | | |
| | Credibility | | | Keep your promises; be credible | | Credibility | | | | Comply with conditions | Keeping agreements |
| | Honesty | | | Honesty | | | | | | | |
| | Connection | | | Click | | | | | | | |
| | Quality | | | Quality | | Quality | | | Quality | | |
| | Confidence | | | | Confidence | | | | | | |
| | Customer goodwill | | | | Granted it to us | | | | | | |
| | Belong | | | | Belong to a party | | | | | | |
| | Commitment | | | | Commitment | | | | Commitment | | |
| | Trust | | | | | | Trust | | Trust | | Trust |
| | Price | Price | Price | Price | | Price | Price | Price | | Price | Price |
| Stage 2 reputation aspects | Service | Service | | | | | | | | | |
| | Confidence | Confidence | | | Confidence | | | | | | |
| | Credibility | | Reliability | Keep your promises; be credible | | | | | | | Keeping agreements |
| | Trust | | Trust | Trust | | | Trust | | Trust | | Trust |
| | Experience | | | Experience | Experience | Experience | You know what you have in common | | | | |
| | Honesty | | | Honesty | | Honest | Honesty | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------|---------------|----------|------------|
| Stage 3 reputation aspects | | | Connection | | | | | | | | |
| | | | Quality | | | | | | | | |
| | | | Commitment | | | Commitment; person feels heard | | | Commitment | | |
| | | | Customer goodwill | | | Granted it to us | | | | | |
| | | | Belong | | | Belong | | | | | |
| | | | Communication | | | Point of contact | Communication | | | | |
| | | | Transparency | | | | Transparency | | | | |
| | | | Delivery | | | | | | | Delivery | |
| | Product range | Product range | | | | | Assortment | | | | |
| | Confidence | Confidence | | | | | | | | | |
| | Loyalty | Comes to us again and again | | | | | Loyalty | | | | |
| | Transparency | Transparent | | | | | | | | | |
| | Price | Price | | | | Price | Price | | Price | | |
| | Service | Service | | | | | | | | | |
| | Communication | Communication | | | Contact with employees in the kitchen | | | | Communication | | |
| | Trust | | Trust | Trust | | | Trust | | Trust | | |
| | Credibility | | Reliability | | Keeping agreements | | | | | | |
| | Convenience | | | Convenience | | | | Convenience | | | |
| | Experience | | | Experience | Experience | Experience | You know what you can give | Experience | Experience | | Experience |
| | Customer satisfaction | Customer satisfaction | | Customer is satisfied | | | | | | | |
| | Customer goodwill | | | Grant it to each other | Grant you more | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|--|-------------|--|---------------------------------------|------------|----------|-----------------------|-------------------|--|------------|
| | Commitment | | | Cooperation in the relationship instead of price | Closely committed | | Effort | Be committed | Commitment | | |
| | Quality | | | Quality | | | | | | | |
| | Delivery | | | | | | Delivery | | | | |
| | Distinctiveness | | | | | | | Distinctive character | | | |
| Stage 4 reputation aspects | Credibility | | Reliability | Reliability | Keeping agreements | | | | | | |
| | Trust | | Trust | Trust | | | Trust | | | | |
| | Commitment | | | Commitment | Closely committed | | | Be committed | Involvement | | |
| | Experience | | | Experience | Experience | Experience | | Experience | Experience | | Experience |
| | Honesty | | | Honest | | | | | | | |
| | Quality | | | Quality | | | | | | | |
| | Distinctiveness | | | Distinguishing capacity | | | | Distinctive character | | | |
| | Communication | | | | Contact with employees in the kitchen | | | | Communication | | |
| | Customer goodwill | | | | Grant you more | | | | Customer goodwill | | |
| | Product range | | | | | Assortment | | | | | |
| | Price | | | | | Price | Price | | | | |
| | Convenience | | | | | | | Convenience | | | |

| Selective coding | Axial coding | Open coding S1 | Open coding S2 | Open coding S3 | Open coding S4 | Open coding S5 | Open coding B1 | Open coding B2 | Open coding B3 | Open coding B4 | Open coding B5 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Development reputation supplier | Improved | Improved | Increased | Has grown | Positive | Improved | | Improved | Developed in a good way | Getting better and better | Developed very good |
| Influence change reputation supplier on relationship | Stronger relationship | Stronger relationship | Better relationship | Relationship exists | Improved relationship | Better relationship | | | | Positive relationship | Closer relationship |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|---|-------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | No influence | | | | | | Nothing has changed | No influence | No change; turned into an experience | | |
| Importance reputation supplier in stages | Equally important | Equally important | | | | | | | | | |
| | Most important in stage 1 | | Most important in the first stage | Most important in the first stage | | Most important in stage 1 | Most important in stage 1 | | Most important in stage 1 | In first stage very important | Most important in first stage |
| | Most important in stage 1 and 2 | | | | First two stages the most important | | | | | | |
| | Not important | | | | | | | Not important | | | |
| Development reputation buyer | Improved | Proven to be a very solid and successful business | Developed positively | Has grown | | | Positive | Improved | | | Developed very well |
| | No change | | | | Cannot really say it has improved | I dare not say that | | | No change; you experience it yourself | No change | |
| Influence change reputation buyer on relationship | Stronger relationship | Like to be part of the high level of the business | | | | Positive influence | Has an influence; had several conversations | | Relationship more important | | Improved relationship |
| | No influence | | No influence; experience more important | | No influence | | | No influence | | Relationship has not changed | |
| Importance reputation buyer in stages | Equally important | Equally important | Equally important | Equally important | Important in every stage | Equally important | Equally important | Equally important | Important in every stage | Important in every stage | Equally important |

Appendix E. Findings, conclusion, and discussion about preserving a reputation

E.1 For buyers, them having a good reputation is important because it leads to the attraction of customers, which will, in the end, leads to a greater turnover

The buyers and suppliers were asked if reputation is important to them. As a result, all buyers and suppliers state a reputation is important to them. Accordingly, for all buyers, reputation is very important. In contrast, for two out of five suppliers, reputation is important and for three out of five suppliers, reputation is very important. Supplier 1 states that “If you want to move forward in the future and retain customers, but also make sure you get new customers, a good reputation is very important in our view”. Other suppliers state that reputation is important because customers talk a good reputation through to each other and any potential new customers, which is called word-of-mouth advertising (Supplier 2; Supplier 3). When buyers and potential buyers do not talk about a company properly, they will not buy your products (Supplier 4). Another supplier finds that experience is more important than reputation because then customers experience the supplier delivers good quality and are not as expensive as people think. But this supplier also states that reputation can work against you, for example, when people do not want to work with you as a company because you are known in the company as expensive and exclusive (Supplier 5). Besides, reputation is very important because it is important how this buyer is recognised around their company and the guests (Buyer 1). However, the other buyers state their reputation is important since if you have a good reputation, more customers will come to your company, which has a positive effect on turnover. In contrast, when you do not have a good reputation and a good name, people will not come to you, and your turnover will go downhill (Buyer 2; Buyer 3; Buyer 4; Buyer 5). In conclusion, for suppliers, the reasons differ why reputation is important. For buyers, reputation is important because a good reputation attracts customers, which will lead to a greater turnover. As a result, the reasons why and why not buyers and suppliers think reputation is important are shown in Table 19.

Table 19. Reasons why and why not buyers and suppliers think reputation is important

| Supplier | Reasons why suppliers think reputation is important |
|-------------------|---|
| S1 | To retain and attract customers |
| S2; S3 | Customers talk a good reputation through to others; word-of-mouth advertising |
| S4 | No positive word-of-mouth advertising; buyers will not buy |
| Supplier | The reason why a supplier thinks experience is more important than reputation |
| S5 | Customers experience supplier delivers good quality and are not expensive |
| Supplier | The reason why a supplier thinks reputation can work against you |
| S5 | When people do not want to work with you as a company; known as expensive and exclusive |
| Buyer | Reasons why buyers think reputation is important |
| B1 | Important how buyers are recognised around their company |
| B2; B3; B4; B5 | More customers will come to you; positive effect on turnover |
| B2; B3; B4; B5 | No good reputation and good name; people will not come to you; turnover goes downhill |

E.2 Reputation influences the decision-making processes of buyers and suppliers; for example, customer satisfaction, customer goodwill, problem-solving, and investment are important aspects

The buyers and suppliers were asked if reputation influences their decision-making process. One supplier states they do everything to satisfy the customer and that keeping agreements is important, which is named credibility. However, it is also a piece of customisation because what the customer asks, the supplier tries to fill in as well as possible. In the food industry, making investments for the customers' company happens occasionally. But some customers prefer the highest discount (Supplier 1). Another supplier states reputation influences the decision-making process because they have a better relationship with the customer than only a price relationship, for which they can keep a bit more margin (Supplier 2). Also, another supplier states this person does not want to make the wrong decisions in the job because of the essential role this person has in the company (Supplier 3). Moreover, customer goodwill is important. As a buyer, you must want to belong to a certain supplier with enthusiasm (Supplier 4). However, for a buyer, when there are bad reviews about the company, the buyer will respond to that immediately and set up lines within the company to make sure they do not have to experience that again in the future (Buyer 1). Another buyer also states reputation influences the decision-making process in terms of investment. To keep the buyers' reputation high, you

need to invest. You cannot just go on without investing (Buyer 3). Another buyer claims at everything you do, you will think about what your customers think. That is what you consider to keep your positive brand awareness and reputation (Buyer 5). As a result, for buyers and suppliers, reputation influences the decision-making processes of buyers and suppliers, but all differently. For example, customer satisfaction, customer goodwill, problem-solving, and investment are important aspects of the effect of reputation on the decision-making process. As a result, the aspects of why reputation influences the decision-making processes of buyers and suppliers are shown in Table 20.

Table 20. Aspects why reputation influences the decision-making processes of buyers and suppliers

| Buyer/supplier | Aspects of the influence of reputation on the decision-making process |
|----------------|---|
| S1 | Credibility |
| B5 | Customer satisfaction |
| S1 | Customisation |
| B3 | Investment |
| S2 | Margin |
| S3 | Function |
| S4 | Customer goodwill |
| B1 | Problem-solving |

E.3 Buyers and suppliers think they have a good or high reputation level; the only corresponding aspect is word-of-mouth advertising, which means the information buyers receive about themselves from their guests

The buyers and suppliers were asked about their reputation level. They could choose between one to five, where one is very weak, two weak, three medium, four good, and five high. Most buyers and suppliers chose five as their reputation level, which means they think they have a high reputation level. One buyer and one supplier chose for a four, which means they think they have a reputation level between good and high. However, one supplier chose for a four, which means this supplier finds they have a good reputation. But the reason why the buyers and suppliers think this differs. One supplier states they find they have a high reputation level because they keep their agreements, try to please the customer as much as possible, and take care of subsequent deliveries (Supplier 1). But for this, specialised colleagues and organising activities for customers are important too. Besides, Supplier 2 states they have a good reputation level “Because we are available at all times, no question is too much, and we always answer

our customers' questions, even if the answer is a no. And we are just a party they can trust and rely on". Moreover, another supplier claims they have a high reputation level because research has shown this to be the case. After all, they were elected second out of fifty locations based on customer satisfaction (Supplier 3). Moreover, another supplier mentioned they have a good or high reputation because they are catching up, doing good things, are well recognised, and people also see and experience that (Supplier 4). In addition, another supplier states they have a high reputation level because they are good at everything they do. They serve good quality, good service, a good assortment, and a good price (Supplier 5). However, buyers state they have a high reputation level because of the information they receive about themselves from their guests. But also, when looking at the turnover of the last few years (Buyer 2; Buyer 5). Another buyer claims they have a high reputation level because they offer a good price/quality ratio, a piece of experience, and by being friendly (Buyer 3). Besides, another buyer states they have a high reputation level because they have a little expiration of their staff and many good reviews (Buyer 4). Concludingly, all buyers and suppliers consider they have a good or high reputation level. However, the opinions why they think that differ a lot. The only aspect that corresponds is word-of-mouth advertising, namely the information buyers receive about themselves from their guests. As a result, the reasons why buyers and suppliers think they have a good to high reputation are shown in Table 21.

Table 21. Reasons why buyers and suppliers think they have a good to high reputation

| Supplier | Reasons why suppliers think they have a good to high reputation |
|-----------------|---|
| S1 | Keep agreements; credibility |
| S1 | Specialised colleagues |
| S1 | Organising activities for customers |
| S2 | Available at all times |
| S2 | No question is too much |
| S2 | Party to trust and rely on |
| S3 | Research showed this is the case |
| S4; S5 | Good at what they do; good quality, good service, a good assortment, and a good price |
| Buyer | Reasons why buyers think they have a good to high reputation |
| B2; B5 | Because of the information we receive from our guests |
| B2; B5 | Looking at the turnover |
| B3 | Good price/quality ratio, piece of experience, and friendly |
| B4 | Little expiration of their staff and many good reviews |

E.4 Preserving a reputation is important for buyers and suppliers; for suppliers, it is a daytime job, and providing training is an important activity for buyers

The buyers and suppliers were asked if they are doing something to preserve their reputation. Most suppliers are seeing the preservation of their reputation as a daytime job. That is something they are working on all day and every day. For example, Supplier 1 states that “I work as much as possible with an empty agenda, which means if someone calls me in the morning that they need me today, I try to visit that customer the same day”. But also, Supplier 2 mentioned that “Every day we do what we do and what we can do properly for our customers”. In addition, enthusiasm is an important aspect a supplier has to have to preserve their reputation. You need to enter with enthusiasm every day (Supplier 4). Besides, one buyer claims they invest in their guests to preserve their reputation (Buyer 1). Moreover, most buyers are providing training to employees to preserve their reputation (Buyer 1; Buyer 5). Buyer 5 states that “I always put a lot of time into training the staff, so they know what to do and do not walk around like a headless chicken. So, that is very important”. Additionally, another buyer states keeping everything clean is something they do to preserve their reputation. And if something is defective, it needs to be repaired immediately (Buyer 4). Finally, buyers state that distinctiveness, namely distinguishing yourself and renewing the menu, are things buyers do to preserve their reputation. One buyer states they distinguish their selves through music and different DJ’s that play at the weekend. But also, by introducing new drinks, etcetera (Buyer 2). In conclusion, buyers and suppliers undertake many activities to preserve their reputation. However, for suppliers, most of the time, this is a daytime job. In contrast, for buyers, providing training to employees is the most frequently mentioned activity buyers undertake to preserve their reputation. Consequently, the aspects of activities of preserving a reputation can be found in Table 22.

Table 22. Aspects of activities of preserving a reputation

| Buyer/supplier | Aspects of activities of preserving a reputation |
|-----------------------|---|
| S1; S2; S5; B4 | Daytime job |
| S4 | Enthusiasm |
| B1 | Investment |
| B1; B5 | Training |
| B2 | Distinctiveness |

E.5 The literature about reputation as an essential factor in b2b buyer-supplier decisions is corresponding to the interviews; customer satisfaction, customer goodwill, problem-solving, and investment are important

Existing research of Suh and Houston (2010) showed reputation is an essential factor in business-to-business buyer-supplier decisions.²⁵⁹ That is corresponding to the interviews, in which it became clear that for both buyers and suppliers, reputation influences the decision-making process. However, existing research did not show which aspects are important. In the interviews, it was shown that credibility, customer satisfaction, customisation, investment, margin, function, customer goodwill, and problem-solving are important aspects of reputation in the decision-making process. Credibility is important because it is essential to keep your agreements, customisation is important because the supplier tries to fill in as well as possible what the customer asks, and the margin is important because the supplier can get more margin because of the better relationship. Besides, the function is important because a supplier does not want to make the wrong decisions because of the essential role this person has, and customer satisfaction is important because you must belong to a certain supplier. Moreover, problem-solving is important because when a buyer receives a bad review, the buyer will respond to that immediately, investment is important because you cannot just go on without investing, and customer satisfaction is important because, at everything you do, you will think about what the customer thinks. As a result, for buyers and suppliers, reputation influences the decision-making processes of buyers and suppliers, which is following existing research. However, reputation influences the decision-making processes of buyers and suppliers in the food industry differently, and the aspects have become clear through the interviews, which are credibility, customer satisfaction, customisation, investment, margin, function, customer goodwill, and problem-solving.

²⁵⁹ (Suh & Houston, 2010, p. 744)

Appendix F. Findings, conclusion, and discussion about the effect of reputation on the four stages of a buyer-supplier relationship

F.1 Buyers and suppliers have different opinions about reaching the four stages of the buyer-supplier relationship, which also counts for the influence of reputation on these stages

The buyers and suppliers were asked if they reached the four stages of a buyer-supplier relationship employed in this research. By describing the stages each time, buyers and suppliers could indicate whether they have reached these stages with their specific buyer or supplier. After asking whether the buyers and suppliers have reached the stage with their specific buyer or supplier, the buyers and suppliers were asked whether reputation is an influential factor in this buyer-supplier relationship stage. As a result, Table 23 was created. In this table, it can be seen for each stage whether the five buyer-supplier relationships have reached the stages and whether the buyers and suppliers believed reputation is an influential factor. Besides, the reasons why, why less, or why not reputation influences the stages are included.

Table 23. Reaching the four stages of a buyer-supplier relationship and the influence of reputation

| | Buyer-supplier relationship 1 | Buyer-supplier relationship 2 | Buyer-supplier relationship 3 | Buyer-supplier relationship 4 | Buyer-supplier relationship 5 |
|-----------------------------|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Reached stage 1 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Influence reputation | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Buyer/supplier | Reasons why reputation influences stage 1 | | | | |
| B1; S3 | Word-of-mouth advertising; because of a good reputation, buyers choose specific suppliers | | | | |
| B3; B5 | Cooperating is easier; you will not cooperate with a supplier when its reputation is not good | | | | |
| S4; B4 | No knowledge yet; buyers and suppliers did not know each other and did not know what they can expect from each other | | | | |
| Buyer/supplier | Reasons why reputation does not influence stage 1 | | | | |
| S2 | Obligated to buy from a specific brand | | | | |
| B2 | As a café, not selling good quality products; look at the lowest price | | | | |
| Reached stage 2 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Influence reputation | B: Less S: Yes | B: No S: Yes | Yes | B: No S: Yes | B: Yes S: Less |
| Buyer/supplier | Reasons why reputation influences stage 2 | | | | |
| S2 | Buyers will not choose to buy more products from a supplier if the suppliers' reputation is not good | | | | |
| S3; B5 | It is always important to preserve a good reputation with your buyer or supplier | | | | |
| Buyer/supplier | Reasons why reputation has less/no influence on stage 2 | | | | |
| S5; B1; B3 | The experience takes over the reputation | | | | |
| B2 | For a café, reputation is not an important factor | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Reached stage 3 | Yes | Yes | Yes | B: No S: Yes | Yes |
| Influence reputation | B: No S: Yes | B: No S: Yes | B: Less S: Yes | B: No S: Yes | B: Yes S: Less |
| Buyer/Supplier | Reasons why reputation influences stage 3 | | | | |
| S1; S2 | Reputation is important in every stage of the buyer-supplier relationship; when you do not have a good reputation, the relationship will break apart | | | | |
| B5 | The buyers' reputation is important to get more guests; so, the supplier can sell more to the buyer | | | | |
| Buyer/Supplier | Reasons why reputation has less/no influence on stage 3 | | | | |
| S3; S4; S5; B3 | The experience takes over the reputation | | | | |
| B1 | It is a matter of making sure the supplier maintains the buyer | | | | |
| B2 | For a café, reputation is not an important factor | | | | |
| B4 | Because buyers can buy products everywhere | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Reached stage 4 | No | No | Yes | B: No S: Yes | No |
| Influence reputation | B: Less S: No opinion | B: No S: Yes | B: Less S: No | B: No opinion S: Yes | B: Yes S: Less |
| Buyer/supplier | Reasons why reputation influences stage 4 | | | | |
| S2 | You would not have reached this stage if the reputation is not good | | | | |
| B5 | It is always important to preserve a good reputation with your buyer or supplier | | | | |
| Buyer/supplier | Reasons why reputation has less/no influence on stage 4 | | | | |
| S3; S4; S5; B1; B2; B3 | The experience takes over the reputation | | | | |

F.1.1 All buyer-supplier relationships reached the pre-relationship stage; only one buyer-supplier relationship believed reputation is not an influential factor in this stage

All buyers and suppliers believe they reached stage 1, which is named the pre-relationship stage. However, the buyer and supplier in buyer-supplier relationship 2 think reputation is not an influential factor in this stage. Supplier 2 states reputation is not an influential factor in this stage “Because the buyer was obliged to buy from us because they chose a certain brand”. The buyer mentioned that reputation is not an influential factor in this stage because as a café, you do not have to sell good quality products. Then you only look at the lowest price (Buyer 2). In contrast, the other buyers and suppliers think reputation is an influential factor in stage 1, but they provide different reasons.

Firstly, word-of-mouth advertising is important in the first stage. Buyer 1 mentioned that “We heard from another fellow entrepreneur the supplier is a good supplier for the beverage. That means the supplier has a good reputation with my colleague entrepreneur and stimulates me to go to the supplier for my very first order. If that reputation had been very bad, I would have looked for another supplier”. That is following another supplier, who state their buyer has relied on the good stories they heard about them and that students in the catering school already get information about the good quality of the supplier. As a result, the reputation has allowed suppliers to expand their customer base (Supplier 3). Secondly, when you have a good reputation, it makes cooperating easier. Buyer 3 states that “Of course, you will not cooperate with a company if that company does not have a good reputation”. That is following another buyer, who states a good reputation means you are doing something right, which means it is a lot easier in the relationship than doing things wrong. Finally, in this stage, reputation is also an influential factor because buyers and suppliers did not know each other yet and did not know what they can expect from each other (Supplier 4; Buyer 4).

F.1.2 All buyer-supplier relationships reached the early stage, but almost all opinions about the influence of reputation on this stage are different

All buyers and suppliers believe they reached stage 2, which is named the early stage. One buyer and its corresponding supplier state reputation is an influential factor in this stage. However, four buyers do not agree with their corresponding suppliers about reputation as an influential factor in this stage. All suppliers state reputation is an influential factor in this stage, and one of them thinks it is less important but still important. But for buyers, this is not the case.

Firstly, suppliers state reputation is an influential factor in stage 2 since when your reputation is not good, buyers will not choose to buy more products from you. So, it still has to be a good reputation in this stage (Supplier 2). As a result, reputation remains an important factor in this stage because the relationship should not be dented. It has to be right (Supplier 3). Supplier 5, who believes reputation is less important in this stage, states this is the case “Because then people already know who they are or are going to talk to, so then you are really talking about facts. And if you make an offer, then there are partly several conditions attached to it. And secondly, the quotation consists of the articles and the prices, so then one can already see and experience whether or not we really are as expensive as people think”. Secondly, buyers have different opinions about if reputation is an influential factor in the second stage. Buyers state the influence of reputation in the second stage of the buyer-supplier relationship becomes less because you know what you have in common (Buyer 1; Buyer 3). Another buyer still thinks reputation is not an influential factor, as in the first stage because they own a café and not a restaurant (Buyer 2). Finally, one buyer claims reputation is an influential factor in this stage because it is always important to preserve a good relationship with your buyer or supplier (Buyer 5).

F.1.3 Not all buyer-supplier relationships reached the development stage; also, all opinions about reputation as an influential factor differ

Not all buyers and suppliers believe they reached stage 3, which is named the development stage. One buyer states the buyer-supplier relationship did not reach this stage, but the corresponding supplier states they did reach this stage. The buyer explained they did not reach this stage because of the coronavirus. They had to close twice, which resulted in the fact that it was impossible to purchase more and different products from their supplier. Besides, all buyers do not agree with their corresponding suppliers about if reputation is an influential factor in this stage. All suppliers state reputation is an influential factor in this stage, and one of them believes it is less important but still important. Moreover, three buyers believe reputation is not an influential factor in this stage, one believes it is less influential, and one believes it is an influential factor in this stage.

Firstly, suppliers state that reputation is an influential factor in stage 3 since reputation keeps coming back every stage as an influential factor (Supplier 1). When you do not have a good reputation, then the relationship will break apart (Supplier 2). However, suppliers also state it

is about the paid reputation of the first two stages, namely, the experience (Supplier 3). Supplier 4 states that “The buyer has experienced that the reputation is good, so then it is their own experience instead of them hearing it from other people”. The supplier who believes reputation is less important in this stage states this is the case because it is all about a customer’s experience. For that reason, the experience becomes much more important to the customer than the reputation (Supplier 5). Secondly, buyers have different opinions about if reputation is an influential factor in the second stage. One buyer states, in this stage, reputation is no longer important because it is a matter of making sure the supplier maintains the buyer (Buyer 1). Another buyer still thinks reputation is not an influential factor, as in the first stage because they own a café and not a restaurant (Buyer 2). That is also the case for another buyer, who claims you can buy the products everywhere, so reputation is not important. Moreover, a buyer states reputation is less important because now you see and experience how the relationship works (Buyer 3). However, one buyer states reputation is an influential factor in stage 3 because the buyers’ reputation is important to get more guests. So, the supplier can sell more to the buyer (Buyer 5).

F.1.4 Not all buyer-supplier relationships reached the last stage; also, all opinions about reputation as an influential factor in this stage differ

Not all buyers and suppliers believe they reached stage 4, which is named the last stage. Three buyer-supplier relationships did not reach stage 4, and one buyer-supplier relationship did reach this stage. However, one buyer, the same buyer as in the third stage, states the buyer-supplier relationship did not reach this stage, but the corresponding supplier states they did reach this stage. The supplier explained they did reach this stage because they think you will get to the point where you will offer added value for the buyer. So, if that person is looking for a solution to a problem, you are that solution (Supplier 5). Besides, all buyers do not agree with their corresponding suppliers about reputation as an influential factor in this stage. One buyer and one supplier do not have an opinion about reputation as an influential factor in this stage because they have not reached this stage yet. As a result, two buyers state reputation is less influential, one states it is not influential, one states it is influential, and one has no opinion. Besides, one supplier states reputation is less influential, one states it is not influential, two state it is influential, and one has no opinion.

Firstly, a supplier states reputation is less influential in the third stage because reputation depends on the experience. Reputation only plays a role in the background (Supplier 5). Besides, a supplier mentioned reputation is not important in this stage because you know the relationship is good, and you experience it is good (Supplier 3). Moreover, suppliers claim reputation is still an influential factor in this stage. The first reason is that otherwise, you would not have reached this stage if the relationship has not been good (Supplier 2). But also, Supplier 4 states that “But now it is complete that they know who we are, what we do, what they think is important, and what they like. So, the reputation has changed into self-experience, no longer hearing from other people”. Secondly, two buyers state reputation is less influential in the third stage because, in this stage, you know what you can give to each other, and you will try to do the utmost yourself (Buyer 1). So, reputation changes in an experience because you experience it yourself. That is the same as in the third stage (Buyer 3). Besides, a buyer mentioned reputation is not important in this stage, because you experience yourself the relationship is good, and it is easy (Buyer 2). Moreover, another buyer claims reputation is still an influential factor in this stage because it is always important to preserve a good relationship, just as in the third stage (Buyer 5).

In conclusion, all buyer-supplier relationships reached the two first stages, the pre-relationship stage, and the early stage. However, not all buyers believe they reached the third stage of the buyer-supplier relationship, the development stage. Besides, only one buyer-supplier relationship reached the final stage of the buyer-supplier relationship, the last stage. The other buyers and suppliers did not reach this stage or did not agree with the other party. Moreover, almost all buyers and suppliers stated that reputation is an influential factor in the first stage. In the second stage, fewer buyers and suppliers stated that reputation is an influential factor. That also counts for the third and the last stage. The reason for this is most buyers and suppliers state that reputation changes into the experience.

F.2 All reputations of the suppliers improved during the reached stages; most buyers and suppliers believe this improvement led to a stronger buyer-supplier relationship

Firstly, the buyers and suppliers were asked about how the suppliers’ reputation evolved over the reached stages of the buyer-supplier relationship. All buyers and suppliers believed the suppliers’ reputation improved over the reached stages of the buyer-supplier relationship. However, the reasons differ why they think this. Different suppliers state their reputation has

improved because first, the buyers did not know if the supplier could reach their demands. But now, they can experience they have the right contact with the supplier (Supplier 4). When the buyer needs the supplier, the supplier is there for the buyer (Supplier 2). Besides, other suppliers mentioned their reputation has improved because, for example, they have their own wine import now and specialised employees (Supplier 1). Finally, Supplier 5 states their reputation has improved because “We have certainly disproved the aspect of duration. But also, we have lived up to the aspects of flexibility, reliability, quality, and service”. Moreover, a buyer claims the suppliers’ reputation improved because, as a buyer, you experience the suppliers’ reputation yourself (Buyer 3). But also, buyers state the suppliers’ reputation improved because the supplier tries to change things and to become a greater player (Buyer 2). For example, a supplier started to deliver to the buyer. Buyer 4 states that “In the beginning, it was not professional. But now, it is getting more and more professional, and the delivery is getting more and more extensive”. As a result, the reasons why buyers and suppliers think the suppliers’ reputation evolved can be found in Table 24.

Table 24. Reasons why buyers and suppliers think the suppliers’ reputation evolved

| Supplier | Reasons why suppliers think their reputation evolved over the stages |
|-----------------|--|
| S4 | First, buyers did not know suppliers could reach demands |
| S4 | Now, the experience becomes important |
| S2 | When the buyer needs the supplier; the supplier is there |
| S1 | Own wine important and specialised employees |
| S5 | Disproved the aspect of duration |
| S5 | Lived up flexibility, credibility, quality, and service |
| Buyer | Reasons why buyers think the reputation of their supplier evolved over the stages |
| B3 | Experiencing the reputation of the supplier |
| B2 | Tries to change things and become a greater player |
| B4 | More and more professional |
| B4 | Delivery more extensive |

Secondly, the buyers and suppliers were asked if the improvement of the suppliers’ reputation affected the buyer-supplier relationship. All suppliers believed their improving reputation led to a stronger buyer-supplier relationship. However, not all buyers believed the improving suppliers’ reputation led to a stronger buyer-supplier relationship, but two buyers find this is the case. Moreover, three buyers believed the relationship did not change because of the improving suppliers’ reputation. Also, the reasons differ why the buyers and suppliers think

this. Different suppliers state the relationship is stronger because the buyer experiences the relationship is good. Not only knowing the reputation is good (Supplier 1; Supplier 2). That is also the case for another supplier, who states the buyer bought more from them because they made them feel their reputation is good (Supplier 3). Accordingly, Supplier 4 agrees on this and states that “You get to know each other better and better and experience what the relationship is like”. For example, buyers can experience the products of their supplier are not necessarily more expensive than the products of the competitor (Supplier 5). Besides, the buyers who stated the buyer-supplier relationship got stronger, state this is the case because when the supplier did not include delivery service, they needed to pick everything up from the supplier by themselves (Buyer 4). Besides, another reason is that one supplier moved the office to a city closer to the buyer, which led to the fact that the relationship was easier than before and that products could be delivered faster (Buyer 5). In contrast, the buyers who stated the buyer-supplier relationship did not change because of the improved suppliers’ reputation, stated this is the case because nothing has changed for them, they had nothing to do with it, and it turned into an experience, for which reputation is no longer important (Buyer 1; Buyer 2; Buyer 3). As a result, the effect of improvement of the suppliers’ reputation on the relationship can be found in Table 25.

Table 25. Effect of improvement of the suppliers’ reputation on the relationship

| Supplier | Reasons why suppliers think the relationship got stronger |
|-----------------|--|
| S1; S2; S3; S5 | The buyer experiences the relationship |
| S3 | The buyer buys more |
| S5 | You know each other better |
| Buyer | Reasons why buyers think the relationship got stronger |
| B4 | Introduction of delivery service |
| B5 | Supplier moving the office closer; easier relationship and faster delivery |
| Buyer | Reasons why buyers think the relationship did not change |
| B1 | Nothing has changed |
| B2 | Nothing to do with it |
| B3 | Turned into an experience; reputation no longer important |

In conclusion, all buyers and suppliers believed the suppliers’ reputation improved over the buyer-supplier relationship reached stages. Besides, all suppliers believed their improved reputation led to a stronger buyer-supplier relationship. However, not all buyers believed the improvement of the suppliers’ reputation led to a stronger buyer-supplier relationship.

F.3 Most buyers' reputations improved during the reached stages; also, most buyers and suppliers believe this improvement led to a stronger buyer-supplier relationship

Firstly, the buyers and suppliers were asked about how the buyers' reputation evolved over the reached stages of the buyer-supplier relationship. Three buyers and three suppliers believed the buyers' reputation improved over the reached stages of the buyer-supplier relationship. As a result, two buyers and two suppliers believed the buyers' reputation did not change over the reached stages of the buyer-supplier relationship. However, the reasons differ why they think this. Supplier 1 states that "I think the buyer has really shown that they are really good and have a business out there that I think can survive in a big city. Every time something is added to their assortment and their assortment is expanded". That also counts for another supplier, who stated their buyer started providing dinner as well as lunch, which allowed them to deliver more (Supplier 3). Suppliers also state the buyers' reputation did not change because their buyer already has a strong name and name awareness before they started their relationship (Supplier 4). Besides, buyers state their reputation has improved because they started to sell more over the years, built up good word-of-mouth advertising, and have more customers in the restaurant (Buyer 2; Buyer 5). However, other buyers state their reputation did not change because the company exists for many years (Buyer 4). As a result, the reasons why buyers and suppliers think the buyers' reputation changed or not can be found in Table 26.

Table 26. Reasons why buyers and suppliers think the buyers' reputation changed or not

| Supplier | Reasons why suppliers think the buyers' reputation evolved over the stages |
|-----------------|---|
| S1 | Buyer has shown they are good and have a business that can survive in a big city |
| S1; S3 | Every time expanding assortment |
| S3 | Providing dinner as well as lunch; delivering more |
| Supplier | The reason why suppliers think the buyers' reputation did not evolve over the stages |
| S4 | The buyer already has a strong name and name awareness |
| Buyer | The reason why buyer think their reputation evolved over the stages |
| B2; B5 | Started to sell more |
| B2; B5 | Good word-of-mouth advertising |
| B2; B5 | More customers |
| Buyer | The reason why buyers think their reputation did not evolve over the stages |
| B4 | Buyer exists for many years |

Secondly, the buyers and suppliers were asked if the improvement of the buyers' reputation affected the buyer-supplier relationship. Three suppliers and three buyers believed the

improving buyers' reputation led to a stronger relationship between them. Moreover, two buyers and two suppliers believed the relationship did not change because of the improving buyers' reputation. Also, the reasons differ why the buyers and suppliers think this. Different suppliers state the improving buyers' reputation led to the fact that they could deliver more to them, which, for that reason, has a positive influence on the relationship (Supplier 3; Supplier 5). However, another supplier states the changing buyers' reputation did not influence their relationship because they prefer to experience it themselves. They want to experience if the buyers' reputation is good (Supplier 2). Besides, buyers state their changing reputation did not influence the buyer-supplier relationship because nothing has changed for them (Buyer 1; Buyer 4). Another buyer states their reputation did not affect the relationship, but that they only started buying more from their supplier because of their improved reputation (Buyer 2). Finally, another buyer states their relationship got better because they buy more from their supplier and get more bonuses. For them, the experience is also important. The supplier needs to experience they are a good buyer (Buyer 5). As a result, the information about the effect of (no) change of the buyers' reputation in the relationship can be found in Table 27.

Table 27. Effect of (no) change of buyers' reputation on the relationship

| Supplier | Reasons why suppliers think the relationship got stronger |
|-----------------|--|
| S3; S5 | Could deliver more to them; positive influence on the relationship |
| Supplier | Reasons why suppliers think the relationship did not change |
| S2 | More preferring to experience if the reputation is good |
| Buyer | Reasons why buyers think the relationship got stronger |
| B1; B4 | Buyer buys more from the supplier; supplier gets more bonuses |
| B5 | Experience is important; the supplier needs to see the buyer is a good buyer |
| Buyer | Reasons why buyers think the relationship did not change |
| B1; B4 | Nothing has changed |
| B2 | No effect; only the buyer started buying more because of improved reputation |

In conclusion, most buyers and suppliers believe the buyers' reputation improved over the reached stages of the buyer-supplier relationship. Besides, most buyers and suppliers believed the improved buyers' reputation led to a stronger buyer-supplier relationship.

F.4 The interviews show not all buyer-supplier relationship stages are reached; however, reputation is the most important in the first stage

The four corresponding stages of the development of the buyer-supplier relationships of Ford (1993) and Ford et al. (2003), which are employed in this research, are the pre-relationship stage, early (explanatory) stage, development stage, and final (stable) stage.²⁶⁰ The interviews made clear that all buyer-supplier relationships reached stage 1 and stage 2. However, not all buyers and suppliers believed they reached stage 3 and stage 4. Almost all buyers and suppliers believed reputation is an influential factor in stage 1. Only if you are a café or you have to buy from a specific buyer because you have a contract with a certain brewery, reputation is not an influential factor in this stage. In the second stage, fewer buyers and suppliers stated that reputation is an influential factor. That also counts for the third and the last stage. As a result, reputation is less important in stage 2, stage 3, and stage 4, since most buyers and suppliers state reputation changes into the experience because now you see and experience for yourself.

²⁶⁰ (Ford, 1993, p. 341; Ford et al., 2003, p. 230)