# Mental availability: to what extent is it relevant and measurable for B2B companies?

Author: Lars ter Avest
University of Twente
P.O. Box 217, 7500 AE Enschede
The Netherlands

**ABSTRACT,**
**Purpose** – This research explores the relevance and the measurability of mental availability for B2B companies.
**Design/methodology/approach** – This research largely lays on research of the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute and the B2B Institute and the data is collected by conducting interviews and a focus group in order to get valuable in-depth insights about the relevance and measurability of mental availability for B2B companies
**Finding** – Mental availability can be seen as relevant and measurable based on categorizing the customers of B2B companies in different sets of categories. Next to that, two problems occur for B2B companies: the distinctiveness of those companies can be very much doubted and the fact that it is hard for marketers to convince colleagues of their ideas about mental availability.
**Research limitations/implications** – Since mental availability is not a known concept in B2B, all participants were speculating in some cases.
**Originality/value** – Since there is almost no information known about mental availability in B2B, this research is exploratory. This research supports B2B companies in determining whether mental availability is relevant and measurable.
**Paper type** – Research paper

**Graduation Committee member:**
Dr. R. P. A. Loohuis
Dr. Y. Sahhar

**Keywords**
Mental availability, business-to-business, relevance, measurability

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, many companies and organizations want to collect data about their customers in order to know and improve their position in the market. An important example of information that companies would like to gain from their customers is information about the mental availability. Mental availability is the propensity of a company or brand to come to mind or to be noticed by consumers in consumption or buying situations (Romaniuk, 2013, Sharp, 2010). For companies this is important since they want their brand to come to the customer's mind when the customer is in that specific situation. Product and price still matter for companies but over the years, the main battle gaining more customers is about mental (and physical) availability (Sharp, 2021). An example to better understand the concept mental availability and how it could influence customers is the following one: a question was asked to people about thinking of a safe car and a lot of people said Volvo. However, one person mentioned Tesla. The reason that that person mentioned Tesla was due to the fact Tesla tries to prevent people from a car accident with all their technical gadgets. According to that person, preventing people from an accident is way better than trying to reduce the damage of the people when they are in a car accident. This means that when people are in a specific buying situation, the one of buying a safe car, the propensity of buying a Volvo might decrease while the propensity of buying a Tesla might increase.

The concept mental availability is quite known for business-to-consumer (B2C) companies, but quite unknown for business-to-business (B2B) companies. Therefore, for B2B companies, there is a lack about the measurability of it as well. One way to collect data about the mental availability is by means of a survey or questionnaire. Big companies are able to collect data by means of those surveys or questionnaires with many customers. Those companies, who are able to collect data from many customers, are actually always B2C companies. This is a really successful way for measuring the mental availability for B2C companies. However, for B2B companies, it is way harder to collect such data since their number of customers is way lower (Romaniuk et al., 2021) which means that it is also harder to get valid results for determining the mental availability of that company. In order to get valid results from the analysis of the data, a sufficient number of respondents are needed when conducting a survey or questionnaire. This might not be the case for B2B companies since their number of customers is too low, which is a problem for these companies. Creating this mental availability for B2B companies requires clear branding and distinctiveness (Sharp, 2021). According to Ehrenberg and colleagues, (1997, 2002), successful branding have an effect on existing memory associations that are linked to the brand and it can even create new links. That means that those aspects need to be considered by marketers when trying to increase the propensity of their brand to come to mind of a customer in a specific buying situation.

Although the fact that there is not much known about it, it would be very interesting to know whether mental availability for B2B companies is relevant and measurable. This would be of value for those companies since, the higher the mental availability of a certain company is, the more likely it is that the company will come to mind in a consumption or purchase situation (Romaniuk & Sharp, 2004). Next to that, since the percentage B2B transactions out of the total transactions worldwide is 80% [1], it is important investigate this topic for B2B companies in order to know the relevance and the measurability of mental availability. The problem that is stated before is that it is not known whether mental availability is relevant for B2B companies. Next to that, there is the problem that, for B2B companies, the number of customers is so low that surveys and questionnaires are not relevant for those companies. Therefore, it is difficult for B2B companies to find out what the mental availability of their brand is. So, a method for determining mental availability for B2B companies is missing. Therefore, the goal of this research is to find whether the mental availability is relevant and measurable for B2B companies.

STEM Industrial Marketing Community and Validators together came up with the idea to find out whether mental availability is relevant and measurable for B2B companies. STEM-imc offers online inspiration sessions, studies, training sessions and masterclasses for managers and professionals in the technical B2B-sector who are interested in business development, innovation, marketing, communication and sales. Validators is expert in communication and brand research, looking from the consumer's point of view. They are curious about whether mental availability is relevant and measurable for B2B companies. Therefore, the following research question is developed:

**To what extent is mental availability relevant and measurable for B2B companies?**

This research is done in collaboration with STEM Industrial Marketing Community and Validators. STEM-imc manifests itself emphatically as the knowledge centre and marketing community in the area of industrial marketing, focused on technical B2B companies in the construction, installation sector and manufacturing industry. STEM has well-known and recognized knowledge-related marketing courses supplemented with a variety of skills trainings and bundled in the STEM Industrial Marketing Academy. Furthermore, STEM-imc thinks it is important to apply the gained knowledge in the companies.

Validators is a company that has a passion to make communication controllable and measurable in order to make the sender learn what the effect is on the receiver. Validators provides access to conscious and unconscious brain position in order to let communication get the effect what it is intended for. Validators provides consumers with a voice in the communication strategy. The approach of Validators is the one where the effect on the conscious and unconscious and real behaviour come together. Validators states that if it is measurable what the effects of

[1] https://canvas.utwente.nl/courses/8385/files/2538230?module_item_id=263889

communication are, then that is the starting point on the way of achieving the relevant target group.

This research can help B2B companies to further develop their marketing strategy as mental availability is an important aspect of it (Romaniuk, 2013b). So, when B2B companies know to what extent the mental availability is relevant and measurable, they know better to what extent they can use it in order to better estimate their position in the market. Therefore, this research shows whether mental availability is relevant and measurable for B2B companies and under what circumstances. This is done by conducting explorative research, making use of interviews and a focus group. Out of these data collection, relevant findings will be mentioned and concluded in order to provide B2B companies with valuable information about the relevant and measurability of mental availability in B2B.

# 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 2.1 Mental availability

### *2.1.1 The definition of mental availability*

The term mental availability is central to this research since that is what needs to be measured. Like said before, mental availability is the propensity of a company or brand to come to mind or to be noticed by consumers in consumption or buying situations (Romaniuk, 2013b, Sharp, 2010). It describes the cognitive processes of human memory as a web of nodes that are connected by related links (Anderson & Bower, 1973; Collins & Quillian, 1969). It is important for marketers to take into account that brands can create relevant connections in the minds of consumers. This is the case since existing memories determine what people notice and select when they are in a consumption or buying situation and are therefore faced with a choice between brands (du Plessis, 2005; Franzen & Bouwman, 2001; Nedungadi, 1990). Argued is that the probability that a certain brand would come to a consumer's mind in a consumption or buying situation is higher when a brand is linked to more relevant category signals (Romaniuk & Sharp, 2004). This implies that advertising and other marketing strategies play an important role in linking a brand to more relevant category signals (Bullmore, 1999; Ehrenberg et al., 1981, 1997, 2002; McDonald, 2004; Miller & Berry, 1998).
The mental availability of a certain brand can be measured by using a set of four mental availability metrics (Romaniuk, 2013):

- Mental market share (MMS): this is about the relative size of a certain brand in the mind of the customers. The mental market share can be described as the percentage of the brand's share of associations compared to the total associations between all brands in the tested set within the certain category.
- Associative penetration (Ab): this is about the percentage of people who have at least one association or connection with a certain brand. So with this metric, something about the brand's mental reach across the population of interest can be said. The higher this metric is, the greater the number of customers that have a chance to come up with this brand in mind in a consumption or buying situation.
- Association rate (Aw): this metric shows the average number of associations that consumers have with a certain brand based on the consumers that have at least one association with that brand (as identified by Ab). So this metric provides information about the size of a brand's associative network.
- Share of mind (SoM): this last metric is about the number of mental category associations that consumers have with a certain brand, versus competing brands. The difference between this metric and the MMS metric is that this metric is only calculated for the consumers with at least one brand association (Ab).

### *2.1.2 The importance of mental availability*

Mental availability is important for B2B organizations because it can be seen as an intangible asset of an organization (Sharp, 2021). This is a market-based asset because it costs money to build it and other organizations may purchase it rather than taking the risk and spending the money and time to build their own. According to Sharp, advertising and sales calls work better when there is an existing memory in the mind of the customer. This claim matches with the paper from Romaniuk, who said that mental availability could be measured by, among other things, the percentage of people who have at least one association or connection with a certain brand. An example that Sharp provides is the one about innovation. Innovation is important for organizations, but mental availability is key in order to make the new innovation successful. When talking about the long run, the competition for sales is one of mental availability (Sharp, 2021). Building this mental availability requires clear branding and distinctiveness. Branding is important in order to create brand awareness at potential customers. Distinctiveness makes sure that customers actually think of your company when they are in a buying situation. So, according to Sharp, marketing attention should be focused more on building mental availability in order to make it easier for more customers to buy the product or service and in more buying situations.

## 2.2 Business-to-business marketing

In order to talk about B2B marketing to make a clear story about it, it is important to have a clear definition and description of what B2B marketing exactly is.
In fact, B2B marketing is a process that refers to the marketing of goods and/or services from one company to another [2]. B2B marketing activities are activities of any kind of organization that has exchange relationships with other businesses or organizations (Turnbull & Topcu, 1994). Commerce between different organizations is happening since the first organizations were developed (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2013). Therefore, B2B marketing does exist for millennia. Although the fact that B2B marketing can be traced back to the 1890s, significant and important improvement and contributions to (B2B) marketing theory have actually been made during the last 40 years. The reason for that was due to the shift from

[2] What is B2B Marketing: Definition, Video - Definition. (2021, August 27). SendPulse. https://sendpulse.com/support/glossary/b2b-marketing

economic theory towards behavioural theory in order to investigate industrial marketing behaviour (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2013). Some researchers highlighted serious problems in the regarding the theoretical foundations in the economic theory applied to modern B2B situations. This led to the fact that the field was strengthened by these highlights. As mentioned before, the percentage B2B transactions out of the total transactions worldwide is 80%[1]. Before a certain product reaches the end-customer, it would first be traded many times between organizations via the downstream supply chain. Due to the fact that 80% of the transactions worldwide are B2B transactions, this research is relevant and it is important for B2B companies to know the relevance and the measurability of mental availability.

## 2.3 Mental availability for business-to-consumer companies

In order to determine to what extent mental availability is measurable of B2B companies, it is important to know how the mental availability is measured for B2C companies. Determining the mental availability for B2C companies starts with knowing the category entry points (CEPs) (Validators, 2021). A CEP is a reason or situation for thinking about a certain brand or company. Within the CEPs, there is a distinction between functional CEPs and emotional CEPs. An example of a functional CEP for the energy market is: 'if my living situation changes'. An example of an emotional CEP for the energy market is 'I want everything about my energy supply is arranged well'. The relevance of a certain CEP indicates how many people that certain CEP applies to. This means for the functional CEPs that they are relevant when it happened in the past 6 months or when it is likely to happen in the upcoming 6 months.

Another important aspect is the relevant target group. The relevant target group differs for every CEP since for every single CEP there is a different relevant target group that applies to it.

Furthermore, the mental range is an important aspect and is about the same aspect as the associative penetration described in section (mental availability): the number of people who has at least 1 CEP with a certain brand.

The range of the network is about the average number of CEPs in which a brand has been considered and therefore important for the analysis as well.

With all this information, the mental availability of a certain brand can be determined.

CEPs are the key for brands in order to grow since buyers must create an association with a specific brand in a specific situation. CEPs help with creating these associations. Therefore, it is important for brands to make sure that their potential clients think about their brand in a specific situation.

For the B2C companies, more than 300 respondents (N>300) are used for the analysis in order to measure the mental availability of that specific company.

With that said, there is more or less the problem of this whole research because the goal is to find out how to measure the mental availability for B2B companies which have, most of the time, a way lower number of respondents.

## 2.4 The framework

In order to get a good understanding of what needs to be investigated and what role the theories and literature have in it this, a theoretical framework is needed. For building mental availability, clear branding and distinctiveness is key (Sharp, 2021). Therefore, for measuring the mental availability of an organization, it is important to know how the organization is doing in branding and being distinctive. Branding creates CEPs and that distinctiveness creates distinctive characteristics. The aspects CEPs and distinctive characteristics are key for mental availability (see figure 2). These two aspects can be connected to the four different metrics that were mentioned before: mental market share (MMS), associative penetration (Ab), association rate (Aw), share of mind (SoM) (Romaniuk, 2013). Branding influences three of the metrics: MMS, Ab and Aw. Branding influences the mental market share as branding creates CEPs and the number of CEPs influences the mental market share. Next to that, branding influences the associative penetration and the association rate as branding creates CEPs and the number of CEPs influences the associative penetration and the association rate. When talking about the distinctiveness, this influences both the mental market share and the share of mind. This means that both branding and distinctiveness influences the mental market share. The associative penetration influences the association rate and the share of mind as the associative penetration is about the number of people that have at least one association with the brand or company and the association rate and share of mind is based on all people that have at least one association with the brand or company. The theories of Romaniuk (2013) and Sharp (2021) combined created a sufficient framework that is useful for measuring the mental availability for B2B companies (see Figure 1).

This framework can be better explained by saying that, in the basis, mental availability can be measured by determining the four different metrics of Romaniuk (2013). These four metrics influence the branding and the distinctiveness of a company or brand, which together influence the mental availability. Branding influences the associative penetration, the association rate and the mental market share. Distinctiveness influences the mental market share and the share of mind.

## 2.5 95-5 rule

For B2B marketers, it is important to know that they need to focus on customers that are not in the market. This is a theory of John Dawes (2021) and it is called the 95-5 rule. This theory describes that 95% of your potential customers is not looking for your product or service at the moment. A misunderstanding in B2B is often that you need to advertise for people who are looking for your product or service at the moment. John Dawes, director operations of the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, mentioned that it is important for B2B-companies to advertise for people are currently not looking for your product or service in order to make sure that your potential customers are aware of your product and/or service at the moment that they are looking for it. This way, the propensity that a brand or company come to mind of a customer in a buying situation increases. The 95-5 rule is focused on the long-term instead of the short-term. The intention is not to convince a customer to buy a product or service right now, but the intention is to create associations with potential customers in order to make sure that they know a company or brand in a specific buying situation. That means that revenue will be gained on a longer term. In a report of McIntyre & Coyne (2022) was a quote of Jon Lombardo, Global Research Lead at The B2B Institute, and he mentioned that it is important to convince the finance department prior to the sales department in order to align the interests of the marketing and the sales department. The reason for this is that, for most of the firms, the stock price is calculated by future cashflows instead of current cashflows. Lombardo mentioned the following: *"Future cash flows are very important because most firms – and especially tech – the majority of their stock price is based on future cash flows, not current cash flows. So the idea of the 95-5 rule is powerful in two ways. One is it's a better focus on your external customer, but it's also a better way to talk to your internal customer – the CFO."*

## 2.6 Messaging

Like mentioned before, branding and being distinctive are important aspects for a company or brand when it comes to building mental availability. Next to that, it is important that the message really reaches the customer. This can be explained by the RMB-model (see figure 3). The RMB-model consists of three steps: reach, message and brand. Reach is about reaching all the potential buyers in the category, which actually connects to branding and brand awareness, which is already explained above. The third step of this RMB-model is 'branding', but in this model it relates to the use of distinctive brand assets, which in this report connects very well to the distinctiveness of a company or brand. Then, the only step that needs to be explained is the second step: messaging. Messaging is about creatively making use of advertising with a message that links to the CEPs of a specific brand or company. So, when a company does a good job in terms of branding and distinctiveness, it is important to reach customer in a sufficient way in order to really get the CEPs in the minds of the customers. This can be done by messaging in a sufficient way. It is about trying to make sure that the CEPs that a company wants to create, actually get into the minds of the customers. This way, a company can maximise the propensity that a customer thinks of his/her company in a specific buying situation.

# 3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

## 3.1 Method

In order to develop a proper answer to the research question, it is important to collect a sufficient amount of valid data which can help with answering the research question. Since this topic has not been researched extensively yet, exploratory research would be the best way for developing a proper answer to the research question. In the past, there is no much research done about measuring the mental availability of B2B companies. Exploratory research is about becoming familiar with something by experimenting and testing with it (Stebbins, 2001). The best way of doing this exploratory research is to conduct qualitative interviews. Therefore, secondary data is not collected since the data that came from the interviews is primary data. The reason that qualitative interviews were chosen as the method of this research is based on the assumption that in qualitative research the interviewees can are able to respond on the questions independently and without being biased by responses of other interviewees (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Another aspect that supported the decision of choosing for qualitative interviews is that in-depth insights can be gathered in this way. Qualitative interviews support open answers without pushing the interviewee in any direction. That fully supports the explorative nature of this research. In order to be more specific about the type interviews that were conducted, the interviews were semi-structured in order to get the most (valuable) data out of the interviews in a qualitative way. The interviews were semi-structured as the interview consisted of prepared (open-ended) and unprepared (follow-up) questions (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006).

Next to the interviews, a focus group was conducted. To the general public, focus groups are nowadays thoroughly familiar in the contexts of trying to get to know the 'public opinion' about a certain topic (Silverman, 2004). Today, this way of gathering data is most of the time used for studies in the field of marketing and business (Greenbaum, 1997). At first sight, the focus group methodology is quite simple since it is a way of collecting qualitative data by engaging a small number of people in a group discussion that is focused on the topic of the research (Silverman, 2004). The biggest difference between a focus group and a group interview is that, during a focus group, the moderator is not asking questions to each of the participants individually, but the moderator facilitates the group. The goal during a focus group is to create a discussion between the participants. This method of doing research fit very well to this research as it is a qualitative way of doing research and it can bring very interesting insights when various people are discussing about the topic with each other. This key value of conducting a focus group is the discussion of participants with each other that can lead to interesting insights, other than when just one participant is interviewed.

## 3.2 Data collection

In practice, this exploratory research was done by conducting semi-structured interviews and one focus group.

The interviews were conducted with eleven representatives of real B2B companies and one with a representative of a brand strategy company. With these participants, the goal was to find out whether mental availability is relevant in B2B and whether it is possible to measure the mental availability for B2B companies. In order to gather the most (valuable) data out of the interviews, it was important to, initially, stay close to the concepts of the theory section. The theoretical framework (see Figure 1) was an important tool for developing the prepared interview questions. First of all, it is important for every single company to know whether the company is familiar with the concept mental availability and to what extent they might try to expand it. After that, the different key concepts of mental availability are discussed with the interviewees in order to get their insights about the concepts related to 'their' B2B company or brand strategy company. Next to the answers that were well connected to the theory, insights that just came to mind of the interviewees were just as valuable. These insights could for example come to mind when asking a follow-up question. These insights are just as valuable as the insights that can be connected to the theory, as the nature of this research explorative. The interviews were conducted with eleven B2B companies (and one brand strategy company) which are doing business in the technical industry.

However, that industry is still quite huge and therefore a sufficient variety of companies could have been selected.

For the data collection, an interview scheme with the prepared open-ended questions was developed (see Appendix A). Concerning ethical aspects and data storage, the interviewees were asked in an e-mail before the meeting and orally before starting the interview itself for their consent to record the interview and to use the recording for scientific purposes when writing this research paper. Furthermore, the interviewees were told that all the information and data gathered during the interviews would be treated anonymously.

The focus group was conducted with nine participants. During this focus, mental availability was discussed on different aspects of the concept. The participants could give their opinion via an online tool with their mobile phone. The results of their opinions then appeared on the screen and that is the point where the discussions started. First, seven statements (see appendix B) appeared on their screens and the participants were able to fill out whether they agree with the statement on a scale from 0 to 5. After that, a specific question was asked with already seven given answers (see appendix B). The participants were asked to make a ranking from 1 to 7 about which one would fit the best regarding the question. Lastly, a general question was asked (see appendix B) and the participants could answer this question with only one word. On the screen, every given answer was visible for all of the participants.

## 3.3 Data analysis

After the data collection, the data from the interviews and the focus group was analysed (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013, p. 318). For analysing the data, a coding scheme was used in order to do it in a proper way. Coding was the way to give this research credibility. Coding is useful in order to be confident about the fact that the findings of the data collection are representing the majority of the user feedback. Codes can be defined as the smallest unit of text that conveys the same meaning. After assigning codes to all of the interview transcriptions and the transcription of the focus group, the codes were assigned to different categories in order to be able to detect consistent and overarching themes.

The coding was done in two different rounds. In these rounds, a distinction between deductive and inductive codes was made. The first round includes the deductive codes, these are the codes wherein a codebook is developed as a reference to guide through the process of coding (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013, p. 318). This codebook is based on the theory section and are basically divided in 'relevance' and 'measuring' codes. The second round includes the inductive codes and these codes are purely based on the interviews and focus group themselves. Since the fact that this research is exploratory, the inductive codes are at least as important as the inductive codes.

## 3.4 Codes

The deductive codes are described during the first round. These codes are connected to different theories that are described in section 2 (see appendix C).

The inductive codes are described during the second round. These codes are created and developed during and after the data collection. In this research, that means during and after the interviews and focus group (see appendix D).

# 4. RESULTS

This section includes the results of the data collection related to the research question. In fact, this means that relevant and valuable outcomes and findings about the relevance of mental availability in B2B and how to measure it are described. However, during the interviews some other insights were discussed as well. Therefore, this section includes more than only those two sub-sections. However, before mentioning the findings of the relevance and the measurability of mental availability in B2B, it is valuable to mention the awareness of the concept in B2B first.

## 4.1 Awareness of mental availability in B2B

The awareness of mental availability in B2B is the first aspect that needs to be discussed in this section. This aspect needs to be discussed prior to the relevance and the measuring part since it is important to know whether the concept is already known for B2B companies when you want to talk about the relevance and the measuring of mental availability. During the twelve conducted interviews, no one exactly knew what mental availability was. Some said that they could imagine what it is about but they did not really know what it was, others did not know what it was at all.

"*I can imagine what it is about, but I haven't heard of it before.*"
(Owner of company that creates tools for paper machines)

During the focus group, this question was not asked that specifically due to the setting of a group conversation. However, based on the interviews, it can still be said that the awareness of mental availability in B2B is either low or zero. This is an interesting and important finding when investigating the relevance and measurability of mental availability in B2B since it is now known that almost no one in B2B knows the concept.

## 4.2 Relevance of mental availability in B2B

The first aspect of this research is about whether mental availability is relevant in B2B. Like described previously, science already created a lot of knowledge about mental availability in B2C, but not in B2B. Therefore, it was important to investigate whether mental availability was relevant in B2B. A lot of information about the relevance of mental availability in B2B was gained during the data collection.

First of all, it needs to be mentioned that, since no one knew what the concept mental availability exactly means, the concept was explained well when talking about the participants about relevance of the concept. In order to mention something about the relevance of mental availability in B2B, it is important split it into branding and distinctiveness, the two aspects which are crucial when talking about mental availability (Sharp, 2021). 'Branding' and ‘distinctiveness’ are also codes, but they are used when something in general was said about that topic. Next to those crucial topics, some general information about the importance of mental availability in B2B is provided afterwards.

### *4.2.1 Branding*

In this section, the results and findings related to branding will be discussed. To start talking about purely branding itself, most of the companies put effort in it to increase brand awareness. However, in this research it is more linked to mental availability. When looking at section 2, branding is mostly related to CEPs. Out of the interviews came that all of the companies know in which buying situations customers need to think about their company or brand, although the description of that buying situation was kind of vague. During the focus group, a statement was: “Our company makes use of CEPs in our branding”. The average score for this statement was a 3.9 (see figure 4), which means that the participants think, in general, that they are making use of CEPs in their branding, but there is still room for improvement. One remarkable aspect is the deviation of the given answers (see figure 4). Most of the participants answered a 3 or a 5, which means that some participants think there is a quite a lot of room for improvement, while some participants think that they are doing a perfect job right now. An example of a CEP that was described quite clearly is the following one:

“*In fact, the moment a customer thinks about his *specific product*, he/she should think of us. You can see that in the broadest sense of the word. This could be if he wants to improve his *specific product* or if he/she is thinking about a new production system for his/her products. But also if they want modifications, if they want new *specific products*, if they want variants. Everything that has to do with when he/she is busy with his *specific product*. It is actually a kind of tool that we supply. He cares about the product. If he/she wants to adjust or improve that, then he/she must think: ‘I should consult with *specific company*, because they provide good solutions’.*”
(Key account manager at a manufacturing company)

Next to the CEPs themselves, the participants of the interviews and focus group said something about the importance of CEPs. Most of the participants perceived CEPs something that is important to think about. They realise that when you can maximize the CEPs in the minds of your (potential) customers, the propensity that they think of your company or brand in a buying situation will increase. That is important to get in touch with the customer in time. Otherwise, there is the probability that a potential customer is doing business with a competitor. A reason for not sharing their CEPs to its maximum is the capacity. When a company cannot even handle the workload right now, the company does not see the need to share (more) CEPs. However, most of the companies themselves think that they share their CEPs to its maximum.

“*I think that those CEPs are very valuable because we want to get in touch with our customers in time. We do not want a potential customer to do business with our competitor and that a competitor is offering a solution*”.
(Marketing director at an industrial automation company)

Another aspect that can be related to the importance CEPs is about whether a company offers a standardized product or a customized product. During the interviews, one person mentioned that sharing CEPs are more important when you offer standardized products than when you offer customized products. There are more products which can do the same, which leads to the fact that CEPs and mental availability is more important for those products. This can be related to the fact the number of suppliers does matter for determining the importance of CEPs. During the interviews was mentioned that, when there are a lot of suppliers, pushing your CEPs to (potential) customers is more important than when there are only a few suppliers. The probability that a customer already knows you when there are only a few suppliers is way higher than when there are thousands of suppliers. Therefore, showing and pushing your CEPs is more important for companies who have a lot of competitors.

“*This is not a big market, there are only a few suppliers, then is showing your CEPs less necessary. When you take a look at, for example, bakeries, then you may name around one hundred companies, but if you need to name companies which produce chips machines, then you may be able to name just two companies. The importance depends on the number of suppliers, I see a relationship there.*”
(Key account manager at a manufacturing company)

After talking about the number of suppliers, the number of customers plays a role as well. During the interviews, some participants mentioned that when your customers are quite limited, the importance of sharing CEPs is also limited. All customers that are in the market know them, so sharing CEPs is less important. They mentioned that it is still important, but when the number of customers is way higher, sharing CEPs become more important. However, one participant said that sharing CEPs is even more important when the number of customers is low. The argument for that is that, when you miss a project of one customer, the percentage of missed projects is already quite high as the number of customers is low. This means that sharing CEPs is quite important in order to get a sufficient percentage of projects out of the relatively low number customers.

“*When you miss a project in relatively small market, you rapidly gone.*”
(CEO of a plastic articles producer)

This means that the relationship with a customer needs to be considered as something that is very important regarding sharing CEPs in B2B. Since in B2B there are more long-term relationships between suppliers and customers than in B2C and sometimes switching cost are higher than in B2C, sharing CEPs can be seen as something that is important. Therefore, it is important to know if a company is a strategic partner of the customer or that a customer is just shopping.

“*We have a lot of customers with which we have long relationships and/or where we are preferred supplier. Furthermore, we have customers with which we have a sort of co-creation. I think that the mental availability is already quite high there, but that only approximately 20% of the customers. The other 80%, or in the meantime 70%,*

*who are more shopping, there is the mental availability lower.*"
(Marketing director at an industrial automation company)

The comparison between the B2B industry and the B2C industry is of course always there. During the focus group, the following statement was criticized by the participants: 'Branding is for B2B just as important as for B2C'. Also for this statement, the participants were able to give a score from 0 to 5 and the outcome was quite high: 4.6 (see figure 4). The deviation is quite narrow as the lowest grade that is given is a 3. Therefore, branding for B2B is (almost) as important as branding for B2C.

"*Technical companies often tend to focus only on the content, while we all think that reacting, quality, price and kind of stuff is important as well … I think that the focus is too much on the content*"
(Former CEO of a GEO-data specialist)

Another statement that was criticized by the participants during the focus group was about whether the participants know every possible situation in which a customer should think about their company. The score to this statement was quite low: 2.7 (see figure 4). One example of an answer that was given is that someone mentioned that you never know every possible situation, so a 5 would never right to fill in for this statement. Next to that, there is the problem that some companies offer a lot of products and/or services. That leads to the fact that it is quite hard to identify every single buying situation or CEP.

Regarding the theory of 'messaging' that is described in section 2, it was important and interesting to know what the participants think about the way they share their CEPs (how the message is structured), the channels they use to share them and how their customers perceive those CEPs. Let's first talk about the way CEPs are shared. To be more specific, this is how the message is structured and content of the message. It should not be distracted with the other aspect 'the channels for sharing CEPs'. One specific aspect that has been mentioned various times is that it is important to make the customers aware of the problem that you can fix as a B2B company instead of fully focus on the solution that you, as a B2B company, have. Sometimes, customers do not even realise that they have a problem. When a company is only pushing his solutions, in the form of products and/or services, the customer will not even come in a buying situation at that moment. Therefore, the participants mentioned that it is important to make the customers aware of the problem first. When the customers are aware of the problem that you can fix and they are realising that they are facing that problem, you can offer your solution(s). For B2B companies, it is not about just advertising, but it is about telling a story.

"*We often talk in our own language and about our own products. We often communicate with the names of our products, but if you have problem you do not even know that product, you only know the problem. Actually, you should talk about the problem and then offer the products. Now, a customer only sees solutions, in the form of products, but they do not know which solution fits to their problem. Actually, this is the problem when customers visit us via our website. When a salesman is called by a customer, he will visit the customer to take a look what the problem is and then the possibilities are discussed.*"
(Branding and communication coordinator at a chemicals for textile creating company)

Next to this, the channels that are used to share CEPs are important when you talk about 'messaging'. In order to reach the right people, your target group, it is important to know which channel can be used in order to reach them. Channels that were mentioned by the participants, to share their CEPs, are their websites, LinkedIn, webinars, seminars, magazines, exhibitions, word of mouth or even a third party. Which channel needs to be used, depends on the industry the company is in. The target groups, and how they can be reached best, differs per industry. In order to use the right channel for sharing the CEPs, a company should really investigate in which channel would reach the potential receiver of the messaging at its best. The quote below is from a participant that mentioned that he uses magazines to share his CEPs. Next to that, he mentioned that, when we talk about the way of sharing CEPs, he wants to tell a story in the form of describing customers cases in an article.

"*Yes, by writing articles, we call that content. Not just advertising, but content articles, customer cases and that kind of stuff. We have chosen certain magazines to present us because we think that we can reach our target group in that way. In our industry, companies present themselves within the industry and we do that outside the industry. Our customers read a lot of those management magazines. That is the reason that we think that those magazines are a better place for messages like this.*"
(CEO of a plastic articles producer)

When companies are trying to 'message' their CEPs to their customers, it is important to know how their (potential) customers perceive those CEPs. When those CEPs do not even reach the (potential) customers, it does not even matter to try to share the CEPs. Therefore, it was interesting to know whether the participants know what their (potential) customers think of them. It was interesting to know whether the customers of the participants know what the CEPs of the participants are. This aspect can best be introduced by an example from the focus group. During the focus group, the following question was asked to the participants: "When you think about a fast car, what brand or company do you think of?". Several brands were mentioned and some brands were mentioned multiple times (see figure 5). These answers show how the participants think of certain car brands and/or companies. So, the CEP of wanting to sell a fast car, has received these customers for at least the named brands in figure 5.
Furthermore, what needs to be mentioned is that there is quite a difference between current and potential customers. Some participants mentioned that current customers, customers with which they are already doing business, know quite well what the CEPs of the participants' companies are (see figure 4). However, potential customers do not know, or too little, what CEPs of the participants' companies are. An example of an answer to the question: "To what extent do you think that your customers aware of your CEPs?" is the following one:

"*Partly yes. The customers with which we have done business know about our CEPs, for sure. The world of our customers with which we are not doing business, does not know enough about our CEPs. We want to show those*

*CEPs at potential customers as well, that is very important. Conclusion: it can be done way better.*"
(CEO of a plastic articles producer)

Next to the difference between current and potential customers, there is another important and interesting aspect that needs to be mentioned about customer's knowledge of CEPs. There were a number of participants who said that their customers know their CEPs quite well. However, after that statement, a question was asked about whether customers buy product A at the companies of the participants and visits, for product B, their competitor, while the companies of the participants are selling product B as well. The answer to that specific question was most of the times that the participants realise that such situations occur. That means, that not all CEPs are shown or 'messaged' sufficiently as the customer visits a different company for a product that the companies of the participants are offering as well.

"*I think that it is quite low. We hear from current customers in the market that they, often, do not know what kind of solutions we offer. We get a surprised reaction like: 'oh, are you doing that as well, I did not even know that'. Most of the times, the customers ask for a quotation from another supplier, while we are already doing business with that customer. That customer do not even consider us as they do not know that we are doing that, that is a shame. There is a lot of room for improvement.*"
(Marketing director at an industrial automation company)

The last aspect which should be taken into account when talking about customer's knowledge of CEPs is one that could be best explained by a comparison to the B2C industry. For B2C companies, most of the time there is only one person who decides if a certain product or service is purchased. However, for B2B companies, there are more people involved. When a B2B company wants to sell a product, it could be that multiple persons are involved and need to be convinced. Therefore, when talking about mental availability, CEPs need to be shared with more than just one person.

"*It is crucial to realise that you are dealing with a broader DMU. The decision is not made by the person who buys it, the decision is made somewhere else within the organization. It does not make a lot of sense to manipulate that buyer with mental availability due to the fact the buyer works purely executive ... What often occurs as well is that there are substitutes for a certain product. When I am going to build a house, then I can do that in several ways. When I am a supplier of wood, I need to take into account that it is important to already talk with the engineer of the house. Although the fact that the engineer is not the buyer the wood, it is important to talk with him because he needs to take my wood into his drawing. That is a clear difference with B2C, where there is no difficult chain as this in this example.*"
(founder of a brand strategy agency)

### *4.2.2 Distinctiveness*

Now the branding related aspects, regarding the relevance of mental availability in B2B, are described, it is important to describe the importance of distinctiveness of B2B companies, regarding the relevance of mental availability in B2B. The participants gave some insights about the distinctive characteristics of their companies and the importance of it.

There are different examples of how companies think that they differ from their competitors. There were a few participants that mentioned that they differ from their competitors as they want to help their customers already at the start, at the engineering-phase. They want develop the solution together with the customers in order to deliver the best solutions, with the best products and/or services. They want to be a strategic partner of the customer and not just a supplier. A great example can be read in the following quote:

"*Due to the adding value that we deliver. A lot of competitors, although there are not much, just produce the products that the customers requested and can be seen on the drawing of the customer. We want to help the customer from the start: 'nice that you are doing this, but this is not really good about your drawing and when you do this you save some money. I also see that you have thought about those criteria, but take this into account as well'. We want to work together with customer right from the start and take the role as engineer, that will expand itself automatically. We want our customers to know us very well and that they do not see us as just a supplier but as a serious and strategic partner, we are busy doing that and customers notice that ... It is about the added value that you deliver, the technique that you put in it, to do a lot more than just delivering products. It is a lot more about the service that is delivered at the start of the process.*"
(Product & business development manager of a 3D-print company)

Another aspect that is mentioned during the interviews, is the fact that companies try to be distinctive by circularity and sustainability. Nowadays, circularity and sustainability are hot topics and therefore the participants think that these are aspects in which you can be distinctive and with which you can convince customers to choose for your company rather than choose for a competitor. It could even differ for every industry, as there can be more pressure from the community on circularity and sustainability on one industry than the other. An example is described by a person who is working in the textile industry:

"*If you look at our product portfolio, you can see that we are one of the first companies who have greener versions of existing products. The textile industry are under scrutiny so we really try to find a greener solution which can fit as a substitute of a more polluting solution.*"
(Branding and communication coordinator at a chemicals for textile creating company)

These two are examples of what the founder of a brand strategy agency notices as very important. He mentioned that you can be distinctive by, of courses, the use of your logo, specific colours, the website, communication etc. That are often the aspects that people think of first. However, there are more important aspects for being distinctive compared to competitors, the mental brand identity. That is more about the vision, core values, brand character etc. That is the basis of how a companies or brands presents themselves to (potential) customers.

During the focus group, the following statement was criticized by the participants regarding distinctiveness: "the use of CEPs in branding increases the distinctiveness". This says something about the importance of the use of CEPs in order to be distinctive as a company or brand. The score of this statement was a 4.3 (see figure 4). During the focus group, a distinction within the CEPs is made: there can be CEPs based on the products that a company offers, but also based on vision, core values and brand characteristics of a brand. CEPs based on vision, core values and brand characteristics were seen as more valuable in order to be distinctive than CEPs based on the products that a company offers.

"*The question that arises here is: what do we mean by specific characteristics? Everything can be created as characteristics and how do you categorize that? Is it about your product portfolio or is it about, what I think is more exciting, the characteristics of your brand identity and brand character? We, as a marketing agency, try to present us as a party that is creative and comes up with new insights. For example, we have customers who wants to be seen as innovative. However, in their branding there is almost nothing about innovation. That means that, what is said before, there is a gap between what you would like to do and what you really do. I think that it could always be done better.*"
(Founder of a brand strategy agency)

### *4.2.3 Importance of mental availability in B2B*

In general, the participants of the interviews and focus group see mental availability as something that is important in order to grow as a company and as a brand. They think that it is important that the CEPs of the companies are shared in the right way, via the right channels in order to maximise the propensity that their companies come to mind of the customers when they are in a buying situation. However, some side notes need to be made regarding aspects that the participants seemed as important regarding mental availability in B2B. One aspect is that, most of the participants, do not want to use mental availability as just a number and to just use it for trying to reach a certain level of mental availability. They want to use that mental availability in order to reach other organizational goals.

"*Yes, of course. However, I do not want number just to have numbers, I really want to do something with it. The number should not be the goal, but more like a guideline. I do not want to have a goal of having a specific number. In that case, the number holy, while it is about the consequence.*
(Product & business development manager of a 3D-print company)

Next to that, some participants mentioned that it is important to integrate mental availability throughout the whole company, instead of just throughout the marketing and sales department. The awareness need to be present throughout the whole company in order to make it successful.

"*I would like integrate it further in the organization, at least the awareness of the concept. So, not only sales, but also the more executive function, project management to start with.*"
(Marketing director at an industrial automation company)

Furthermore, one participant mentioned that, for the company that he/she is working for, it is important to look in which regions worldwide they want to integrate the concept of mental availability and in which sectors they want to integrate the concept. In regions and sectors in which companies are doing a good job, it is less important to do a lot with mental availability. It is way more interesting and valuable to take a look at regions and sectors in which companies are not doing a good job or even a bad job and try to do something with mental availability there in order to achieve organizational goals.

"*I think that when find out that you are good job in certain regions that you then go looking for regions where you are not doing a good job. The same goes for sectors.*"
(Branding and communication coordinator at a chemicals for textile creating company)

A few participants mentioned that mental availability does not have the highest priority inside the company. An argument of a participant that mentioned that mental availability does not have priority, is that reputation and customer satisfaction is seen as more important. The concept of mental availability is something for later on.

## 4.3 Measurability of mental availability in B2B

Next to the relevance of mental availability in B2B, the measurability of mental availability in B2B is described. Like mentioned before in this report, problems with validity is something that occurs a lot. This is due to the fact that, most of the times, the number of customers in B2B is relatively low. Therefore, it is important to know what the participants think about the measurability of mental availability in B2B. Like described in section 2, mental availability can be measured based on four metrics: mental market share (MMS), associative penetration (Ab), association rate (Aw) and share of mind (SoM). Therefore, it would make sense to go through those four metrics and describe key findings about how the participants of the particular B2B companies are measuring those metrics right now. However, as might be expected due to the unawareness of the concept to the participants, no one does measure one of the metrics specifically. That means that it makes no sense to go through all of them.

Although the fact that the participants did not measure the four metrics specifically, they still provided some valuable insights about the measurability of mental availability in B2B.

As mentioned above, the four metrics are not measured specifically. So, there are actually no findings about how to measure those metrics. Then, it is interesting to know why it is not measured by the companies of the participants. Furthermore, it is important to know the importance of measuring the mental availability and to know how mental availability should be measured. Therefore, the findings of the data collection will be provided based on these three themes.

### 4.3.1 Reason for not measuring

There are several reasons for the fact that companies do not measure the mental availability. The most important reason for that is that most of the companies just do not have the capabilities to do it. This can be due to the fact that the companies do not have enough employees to do it or they do not have the budget.

"*As marketing team, we are busing with running the website, creating content, organizing seminars, webinars etc. We do not have enough time for these kinds of investigations.*"
(Marketing & communication strategist at a technical trading company)

In addition to the issue of capabilities, participants mention that it would definitely help when there would be a simple tool to use when it comes to measuring mental availability. Right now, most of the companies do not even know how to measure it or it takes too much of their time. When there would be a simple tool to use for measuring mental availability, the barrier for actually doing it would be way lower.

"*I think that it is very important if there would be quite a simple tool to use, especially for sales and marketing. It would save a lot of work and time when you are able to precisely measure which buying needs customers have.*"
(Manager of a metalworking company)

A second reason is that some participants mentioned, for not measuring the mental availability is due to the fact that the whole market know them already. The market is quite specific and then they argue that their company is quite known in that market and that is the reason why they do not measure it.

"*We do not measure it, it is quite a specific market. In that market we are quite a known company.*"
(Founder and CEO of a technical trading company)

A third reason is that some companies do not see measuring mental availability as valuable. A branding and communication coordinator mentioned that, if you work in a commercial company, you need strong arguments why it would be valuable for the company. This is necessary to convince people within the company who are higher in hierarchy, like the CEO. They are, most of the times, too much focused on the product and just doing business since that is what brings money into the company.

"*When you are working in a commercial company, you need strong arguments why something is valuable. I can imagine that, if I take a look at our quite commercial culture, that I can answer this for myself, especially when we go into a new regional market. That way, I can sell it at its best. There are also other departments, sales and product development, those departments have, most of the times, a higher priority.*"
(Branding and communication coordinator at a chemicals for textile creating company)

### 4.3.2 Importance of measuring

The second aspect that is important when talking about the measurability of mental availability in B2B is the importance of it. Key findings about the importance is that some participants would like to measure mental availability and see it as something that is important, while some other participants do not really see the need of measuring it and do not think that it is that important. Remarkable is that, from the participants that were interviewed, marketers sees it as quite important, while other people in the organization – most of the times CEOs – are not fully convinced of the importance of measuring mental availability. An argument that marketers use is that they would like to know what their position is in the market and that they are, based on the measuring of mental availability, can make a better estimation of what that position looks like. An example of what a marketer said is the following:

"*As a marketer, I think it is important to know what your position is. When you enter a new market, a new region, then those insights are very interesting.*"
(Branding and communication coordinator at a chemicals for textile creating company)

Other people in the organization mention that there are other priorities within the organization, there are other things which are more important than measuring mental availability.
"*It is not highest on the priority list ... I would like to measure some aspects, but brand awareness is not the first aspect.*"
(Founder and CEO of a technical trading company)

### 4.3.3 Way of measuring

The way of measuring is a very important aspect for the B2B industry as it is quite difficult to get a valid number of respondents. This problem is already discussed before and there came some interesting insights out of the data collection. To start with the focus group, using the online tool, the participants were asked to rank 7 different ways of measuring. On top the one that would fit the best for measuring mental availability and at the bottom the one that would fit the worst for measuring mental availability. The results of that ranking can be found in figure 6. What can be said of this ranking is that measuring in a qualitative way would be the best as interviews and conversations with customers are on spots one and two. During the focus group, one participant mentioned that when mental availability is measured, very specific information needs to be gained. This is only possible when you make use of qualitative methods.

"*I think that you ask for such specific information, that it can only be done by a real conversation or an interview. Only then you can figure out what a certain person really means by some terms. In a survey you can ask someone: 'do you see us as qualitative?'. Then still some can say yes or no, or on a scale from 1 to 10, but in fact you still know nothing. You should ask follow-up questions like: 'which aspects do you experience as qualitative?', 'what do you mean with qualitative?', or 'when is something qualitative for you?'. When it comes to branding and brand associations, I think you need to be very carefully with terminology and what someone means with a certain statement.*"
(Founder of a brand strategy agency)

Out of the interviews came comparable findings as most of them perceived qualitative methods as the best for measuring mental availability. The issue with that, which is already mentioned above, is the time as conversations with customers and interviews are very time-consuming. Only a few participants thought that quantitative methods, such as surveys, would be a sufficient method for measuring mental availability. One participant mentioned that he would prefer surveys due to time issues although the fact that he realises that having a sufficient number of respondents is quite hard. He mentioned that he rather has something than nothing. Some participants created a distinction between current and potential customers for measuring the mental availability. Even then, they do not all agree with each other as one mentioned that for current customers quantitative methods would be better and for potential customers qualitative methods would be better, while the other mentioned that for current customers qualitative methods would be better and for potential customers quantitative methods would be better.

"*For current customers, you could do it quite easily by sending them a survey ... I think that current customers are willing to fill in a survey. Although the fact that you have a lower number of respondents, I still think that it is trustworthy. For potential customers, the number is way higher. I think you can have quite a sufficient sample by calling or mailing a part of them, where I think calling is the better option.*"
(Marketing director at an industrial automation company)

"*For current customers, the best way to do it is by having a conversation with a cup of coffee. Then you receive a lot of information about what is going on in the market and in that way you can find out what your position is. Potential customers can be approached with a survey.*"
(Sales and marketing manager at a plastic articles producer)

# 5. DISCUSSION

In this section, a reflection of the results is described. Next to that, implications are drawn in this section. Furthermore, a reflection upon the relevance of this research is provided. This is done based on the different aspects from the theoretical framework together with some extra aspects that were created during the data collection.

## 5.1 Awareness of mental availability

Section 4.1 shows that no one exactly knew what mental availability is. Therefore, in order to something with mental availability, it is to make the B2B industry aware of the company first. As long as they do not know exactly what the concept is about, the sense to implement it in the organization is way lower. When a company purposely want to work with CEPs, how they can be shared, what channels are the best to use or even to think about the fact how the customers perceive those CEPs. The same goes for the measurability of mental availability. When companies do not know what mental availability specifically is about, the sense to measure it is way lower. That also means that they want to know how to specifically use it, as the participants mentioned that they do not want to just have a number. A number itself does not mean anything, according to participants. Section 4 shows that the participants want to know whether they can use mental availability in order to achieve other (organizational) goals. In order to maximize the advantages of implementing and measuring mental availability, it is important that B2B companies are fully aware of the concept mental availability.

## 5.2 Relevance and measurability

The relevance and measurability of mental availability in B2B is actually what this whole report is about. Therefore, in this section a reflection on those results are described. Furthermore, this section contains implications related to relevance and measurability. An important outcome from the data collection is that a lot of the mental availability related aspects depends on the customers. It is important know your customers and to categorize them when it comes to the relevance and measurability of mental availability in B2B. Therefore, for this section, several distinctions in customers and customer categories are made.

The relationship with the customer is an aspect that was clearly described in section 4. The importance of mental availability have arguments for both of the following kind of customers: customers with which a company has long relationships and customers who are just 'shopping'. For customers with long relationships, mental availability is very important as it is important to win a project since if you miss one, you miss it for a long time. However, for customers who are shopping, mental availability is very important as you want every customer to constantly buy your product. For these kind of customers, the number of buying situations is way higher. By sharing CEPs, the associations in the mind of a customer can become stronger which will lead to the fact that the propensity that a customer will choose your product in a buying situation will increase. This result can be very well related with explanation of Romaniuk et al. (2021) about types of B2B markets. She mentioned that, since the B2B markets are many and varied, it is useful to classify them. For that, she uses two categories which were described by professors Sharp, Wright and Goodhardt (2002): repertoire categories and subscription categories. The repertoire category consists of customers which can be satisfied by using more than one brand on an ongoing basis. When a customer changes supplier, it does not immediately means that the specific customer stopped buying from the previous supplier, the customer is just 'shopping'. The subscription category consists of customers who are, in general, always buying their products and/or services from the same supplier. For this category, it can be said that when customers changes supplier, there is a high probability that the customer stopped buying from the previous supplier. In order to know how important mental availability is four every single customer, it is very useful to categorize the customers in these two categories.

Next to the difference of customers in relationships, there is a difference between current and potential customers. The first interesting difference, but quite logical one, is about the fact whether customers are aware of the CEPs of the companies. The results show that current customers know the CEPs of their suppliers quite well, while potential customers do not know, or too little, what the CEPs of their potential suppliers are. The interesting aspect about this is that it would be better for B2B companies to focus on potential customers when it comes to sharing CEPs. This can be confirmed by using the theory about the 95-5 rule (Dawes, 2021), which is already discussed in section. That theory states that companies should focus on customers who are not in the market right now. So, companies should focus on customers who are not looking for your product or service at the moment. This part of customers is approximately 95% of the whole market, which means that this part of customer is way higher than the part of customers that is looking for your product or service at the moment. For that reason, it would make sense to share CEPs with potential customers, although they may not be looking for your product or service at the moment. By sharing those CEPs with the, associations with your brand or company is already created for the moment when they are looking for your product or service. This way, the propensity that a customer will choose your company in a specific buying situation will definitely increase.

Another perspective on the difference between current and potential customers is that almost all of the participants mentioned that their current customers do know them, which is not always the case for potential customers. However, like described in section 4, the fact that their current customers do know them is not true as there are problems regarding cross-selling. When a specific company offers products A and B, it happens that a customer buys product A from that specific supplier but buys product B from a competitor of that specific supplier due to the fact that the customer is not aware that that specific supplier is offering product B as well. There is a lack in mental availability there. It is important for companies to keep in mind that when you are doing business with a specific customer, that does not mean that that specific customer really knows you. It is still important to put effort in retaining current customers (Tamaddoni Jahromi et al., 2014). Therefore, it is still important to keep sharing CEPs with those customers and to measure the mental availability for those customers. However, this is not an aspect that needs be focused too much on by companies. This can be argued based on the Double Jeopardy Law (Romaniuk et al., 2021). This theory argues that there is only strategy for a B2B company to grow: gain new customers, expand the customer base. The Double Jeopardy Law explains the relationship between gaining/losing market share and the market penetration and loyalty. Constantly growing is not possible when a company only focuses on loyalty. This theory shows that companies with a smaller market share suffer twice: they have less customers which are less loyal. With this theory in mind, cross-selling is something that companies need to keep in mind, but they do not need to focus too much on it as the key for growing is gaining new customers. When talking about the market penetration and loyal, figure 2 explains quite well how mental and physical availability together are related to shoe aspects.

When it comes to measuring, there is a difference between current and potential customers present as well. In section 4 was described that not all participants agreed with each other about the fact whether measuring mental availability for current and/or potential customers should be done by qualitative or quantitative methods. The struggle that most of the participants were facing are time and capacities issues. Therefore, they are not sure which kind of method would be the best. Qualitative methods are very useful in order to gain in-depth insights when you are measuring mental availability, but this method takes a lot of time that most of the companies do not have. With the use of quantitative methods, companies are not able to gain those in-depth insights, but this method is way less time-consuming. Therefore, it would be a good and interesting option if there would be a tool that could combine the 'in-depth insights' part of the qualitative method with the 'less time-consuming' part of the quantitative method. An example, which was shown during the focus group, can be state of the art investigation methods with voice questions/response. This method could be found at the sixth spot (see figure 6), which could be the case due to the fact that no or not every participant exactly knew what it contains. Therefore, the outcome about that specific method is not quite trustworthy, as it could fix the problems that every participant mentioned during the data collection.

It can occur that companies offer a lot of products and/or services. That means that those companies are acting in a lot of different markets or segments and have a lot of different customers. Next to that, for some of those customers you can be one out of thousands of suppliers and for customers from another market or segment you can be one of five suppliers. The number of customers and the number of suppliers were already mentioned in section 4 and seemed quite important. You need to distinct your customers based on these two aspects. When talking about the number of suppliers, mental availability and sharing CEPs is more important when you know that a specific customer can choose from a thousand suppliers than when a customer can only choose from five suppliers. The probability that a customer will know all the possible suppliers is higher when the number of potential suppliers is relatively low. Therefore, the higher the number of suppliers, the more important sharing CEPs become. Next to the number of suppliers, there is the number of customers. As a company, it is important to know from every customer whether that customer is one of thousands of customers in that specific market or segments or whether that customer is one of only a few customers. The participants argued this aspect in two ways: 'limited customers means that the sharing of CEPs could be limited as well, the number of customers is small and they all know us already' and 'limited customers means less opportunities which means that the sharing of CEPs becomes more important'. When relating those two arguments to the aspect of the number of suppliers, there is only one correct argument: limited customers means less opportunities, which means that the sharing of CEPs becomes more important. The argument of 'limited customers means that the sharing of CEPs could be limited as well, the number of customers is small and they all know us already' is reprehensible as, the number of suppliers can still be huge. So the fact that there are only a few customers in the market does not, by definition, mean that there are only a few suppliers in the market. When there are hundreds of suppliers, it is not obvious whether the customer will know a specific supplier.

Furthermore, customers can be categorized based on the channels they can be best reached on. The results provided insights about what kind of channels are used and are seen as the best by the participants when it is about sharing CEPs. Not every customer should be approached via the same channel, you need to know how you can reach specific customers. An example from a participant was that in his/her industry, the customer companies consist of relatively old people and that, therefore, magazines would better work than social media. For using the right channels, it is important to know the customers, know the target group, in order to make sure that the CEPs really reach the customer. The same goes for the way CEPs are shared, whether it is done by telling a story, outline a problem and show a solution, or just showing the products that can be offered by the supplier. It is important for a company to know its customers well in order to share the CEPs in the right way. The difference between telling a story or just showing the products can be related to the repertoire categories and subscription categories (Sharp, Wright, & Goodhardt, 2002). When customers are part of the repertoire category and they are just 'shopping', it might be enough to just show them your products as they may already know what they need. Next to that, it takes a lot of time to tell them the whole story when keeping in mind that for a repetitive buy, they may switch supplier. When customers are part of the subscription category, it could still be that those customers know what they are looking for, but the probability that they stick to the same supplier is relatively high. Therefore, it is useful to tell them a whole story, to outline a problem which they can recognize and then provide them with the solution.

Next to the fact that it would be very valuable for B2B companies to distinct and categorize their customers, there are two clear problems which need to be fixed as well in order to make mental availability work within the organization. The first one is about the fact that all of the participants thought that they were distinctive compared to their competitors. However, from the results also came that this can be very much doubted. This is due to the fact their distinctive characteristics were mentioned multiple times. Although the fact they are not all acting in the same industry, it is hard to believe that they are really distinctive on the aspects they called as, from the sample of participants that were included in this research, already multiple people mentioned that certain aspect for being distinctive.
The other problem that occurs within B2B companies is that it is hard for the marketers to really get an idea executed as, according to managers of the company, other aspects within the organizations are seen as more important. Especially in commercial companies, it is necessary to have strong arguments why certain aspects would be valuable for the organization. Whether mental availability is important can be very well argued by the 95-5 rule (Dawes, 2021), combined with a quote from Jon Lombardo, Global Research Lead at The B2B Institute. The 95-5 rule focuses on potential customers, customers who are not in the market right now. That means that companies should focus more on long-term leads instead of focussing on short-term leads, which is also the case when you are building mental availability as building mental availability takes a long time (Dawes, 2021). Lombardo mentioned that, as marketing department, it is important to convince the financial department of an organization in order to align the interests of the marketing and sales department (McIntyre & Coyne, 2022). The financial department can be convinced by the argument of focusing on long-term leads as future cash flows have a strong influence on the stock price. The following is what Lombardo exactly said: *"Future cash flows are very important because most firms – and especially tech – the majority of their stock price is based on future cash flows, not current cash flows. So the idea of the 95-5 rule is powerful in two ways. One is it's a better focus on your external customer, but it's also a better way to talk to your internal customer – the CFO."*

This means that it would be very valuable for marketers within the B2B organization to convince the financial department first with the argument of focusing on long-term leads.

## 5.3 Contributions to literature

As already mentioned before, mental availability for B2B companies is not researched extensively yet. Therefore, a lot of new insights were gained during this research. These insights are helpful in order to give B2B companies a clearer perspective on the relevance and measurability of mental availability for B2B companies. Especially about the measurability of mental availability in B2B, this research contributes well to existing literature as there is no literature about it yet. Regarding the relevance of mental availability, most of the conducted researches were quantitative researches. Therefore, this qualitative research contributes to the already existing literature as it provides a lot of new and in-depth insights. Data was gained straight from representatives of B2B companies by conducting interviews and a focus group. This way, this research provides a new perspective on mental availability for B2B companies, compared with the little number of studies that were done in the past.

## 5.4 Limitations and future research

A limitation of this research is that the concept mental availability is (almost) unknown within the B2B industry. So, no participant exactly knew what the concept was about. That means that every participant who provided information and his/her opinion specifically about mental availability, was speculating. For future research, it is important to interview participants who already have (some) experience with the concept mental availability in B2B. This would definitely help to better develop this research.

Another limitation of this research is that most of the participants that were interviewed for this research, are participants who are working in the technical industry. For future research, it would be better to pick participants from several industries in order to get a better idea of the whole B2B-sector.

# 6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research is to answer the research question and therefore to describe the relevance and the measurability of mental availability in B2B. The first conclusion is that the concept mental availability is not known at all and that aspect needs to be worked on first. The overall conclusion of the relevance and measurability is that it should be more relevant than it is right now and that a tool needs to be developed in order to measure it in a quite easy way.
Twelve interviews and a focus group were conducted that led to results that can be concluded. For B2B companies, it is important to know whether mental availability is relevant for their sector and whether it can be measured in order to improve the position in the market.

The most important conclusion is that B2B companies need to know their customers and they need to categorize them in order to decide whether mental availability is relevant and measurable. These customers can be categorized in several ways. The first one is about the relationship that a company has with the specific customer. Next to that, B2B companies need to distinct current customers from potential customers. Furthermore, for every customer needs to be decided whether there is competition. Then there are the channels which are used to reach the customers. Customers can be categorized based on those channels. Two other problems that need to be fixed by B2B companies in order to make mental availability relevant for them is that they need to know whether they are really distinctive compared to their competitors and that marketers in B2B companies need to get the managers convinced about the relevance of mental availability. In addition to these categories and these two problems, B2B companies need to know what to do with it as they do not want just have a number. They want to use mental availability in order to achieve other (organizational) goals. When B2B companies meet those conditions, it is definitely possible to maximise the propensity that customers will think of them in specific buying situations. Therefore, it can be concluded that mental availability is relevant for them in order to grow and to reach organizational goals.

Clear conclusions on the measurability of mental availability for B2B companies are hard to draw. Like mentioned before in this report, for B2C companies, surveys are quite easy to conduct as the number of respondents is relatively high. For most B2B companies this is quite hard as the number of respondents is relatively low. Therefore, it cannot be said that there is a valid result. Next to that, quantitative methods are not useful when a company wants to get in-depth insights about a certain topic, which is needed when measuring mental availability. So, quantitative methods can actually not be used for measuring mental availability in B2B. However, qualitative methods do not fit either as a sufficient way to measure mental availability in B2B, as they are too time-consuming. Therefore, the conclusion is that, for B2B, a tool needs to be developed that meets two conditions that are important for measuring mental availability. The tool needs to have the qualitative aspect in getting in-depth insights and having a valid result out of only a few respondents. Next to that, the tool needs to have the quantitative aspect in being not that time-consuming.

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# 8. FIGURES

## 8.1 Figure 1

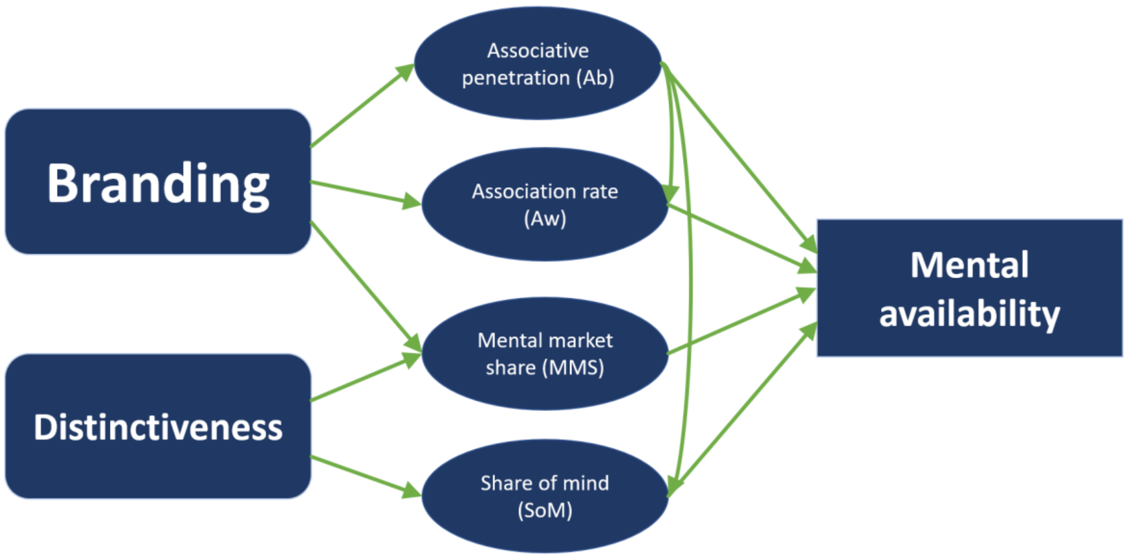


*Figure 1: The theoretical framework*

## 8.2 Figure 2

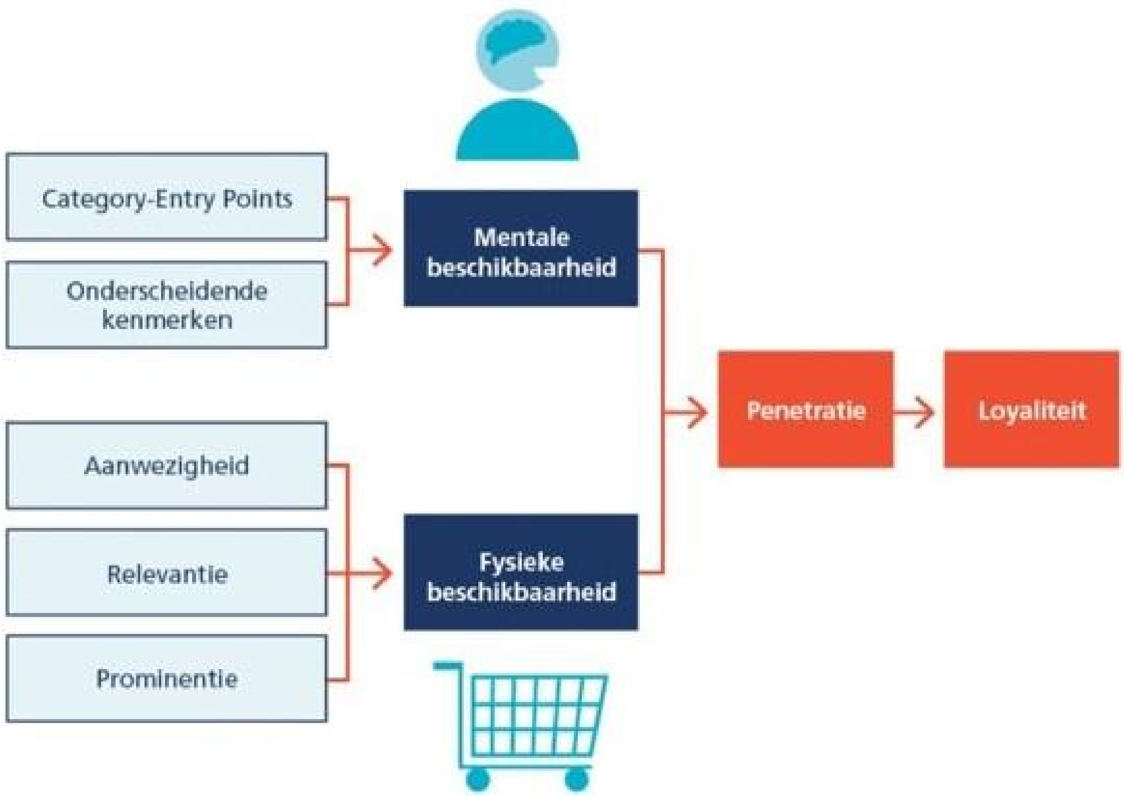


*Figure 2: Mental and physical availability*

## 8.3 Figure 3


*Figure 3: The RMB-model*

## 8.4 Figure 4


*Figure 4: Averages and deviations of certain statements*

## 8.5 Figure 5


*Figure 5: Answers to the question: "When you think about a *fast* car, which brand/company comes to mind?"*

## 8.6 Figure 6


*Figure 6: Ranking of seven answers to question: "Which method/channel do you think is the most useful for measuring CEPs?"*

# 9. APPENDICES

## 9.1 Appendix A: Interview protocol

- Do you agree with the fact that I will record this conversation and use it for research purposes?

**General**
- Can you give a short introduction of your company and your position within the company?

- To what extent does your company try to measure brand awareness?

- To what extent are you and/or your company familiar with the concept of mental availability?

- What is your company's vision on branding in general?

- What is your company's vision of distinctiveness in general?

**Theory related**
- How does your company try to measure mental market share? If the company doesn't, how do you think it could?

- How does your company try to measure associative penetration? If the company doesn't, how do you think it could?

- How does your company try to measure the association rate? If the company doesn't, how do you think it could?

- How does your company try to measure the share of mind? If the company doesn't, how do you think it could?

- What are specific category entry points of your company?

- As what kind of company do you want to be seen by your (potential) customers? What do you generally want to radiate?

- To what extent do you think your customers know that you want to be specific to that type of business?

**Other**
- To what extent do you think your company has to do with mental availability?

- Why do you think mental availability is something your company could see as something more important than it is now?

- How and why do you think mental availability for B2B companies is different from mental availability for B2C companies? And what are the differences when thinking about measuring mental availability? What problems do you think are there?

- What do you think is the best way to measure mental availability for B2B companies? Which aspects are important for measuring mental availability?

- Why would it be valuable for your company to measure mental availability? Why would CEPs be of value to your company?

- Do you ultimately see added value for your company when measuring mental availability? Why?

- To what extent would you like to integrate measuring mental availability in your own company?

## 9.2 Appendix B: Focus group protocol

**Statements**
- Branding is for B2B just as important as for B2C
- The use of CEPs in branding increases the distinctiveness
- Our company makes use of CEPs in our branding
- We know all possible situations where a customer should think about us
- Our company is deliberately working on its appearance
- Our current customers know exactly how we want to show ourselves
- Our potential customers know exactly how we want to show ourselves

**Ranking question**
Question:
- Which method/channel do you think is the most useful for measuring CEPs?

Answers for ranking

- Conversations with customers
- Interviews
- Traditional surveys
- LinkedIn groups
- Market investigation agencies
- State of the art investigation methods with voice questions/response
- Youtube surveys/advertising

**Open question**
When you think about a fast car, which brand/company comes to mind?

## 9.3 Appendix C: Coding overview (deductive codes)

| Code | Full name | Theme | Excerpt from transcript |
|---|---|---|---|
| BVC | B2B vs B2C | Relevance/Measuring | No, I don't think so. I don't think that is necessary. The consumer market consists of more customers which leads to the fact that surveys are easier. |
| CVPC | Current vs potential customers | Relevance/measuring | For current customers, continuing is important in order to keep in mind. Potential or new customers don't know you. Then it is essential that they will become aware of the fact that you exist. |
| BRA | Branding | Relevance | We don't do a lot when talking about active branding. We do promote what we do and what we try to realise, but not specifically brand-focused. |
| COC | CEP of the company | Relevance | At the moment that the customer had a high-tech product developed with which he/she has an issue related to the product life cycle. |
| CSC | Channels for sharing CEPs | Relevance | As a marketing team, we are still busy maintaining the website, creating content, organising seminars, webinars etc. |
| CKC | Customer's knowledge of CEPs | Relevance | I once experienced that I thought that customers knew that we offered certain products, but they didn't know that at all. |
| DIMA | Desirability of integrating mental availability | Relevance | I would like to integrate it further in the organization, at least the awareness of it. Not only for sales, but also more for executive function, project management to start with. |
| DIS | Distinctiveness | Relevance | Competitors offer comparable solutions, but not the picture like we do and that makes us unique. |
| IOC | Importance of CEPs | Relevance | CEPs are important to see if you can create further grow. It can be used to gain a higher market share. |
| IODC | Importance of distinctive characteristics | Relevance | |
| IOMA | Importance of mental availability | Relevance | I think that it needs to become more important and that it needs to be spread throughout the whole company. |
| RNSC | Reason for (not) sharing CEPs | Relevance | I don't have the capacity for that at the moment. |
| WOSC | Way of sharing CEPs | Relevance | What we try to do is to make the customer aware of the problem. When they realise that they have a problem, they will come to us. |
| AW | Association rate | Measuring | We are indeed not measuring that specifically |
| AB | Associative penetration | Measuring | Actually, we do not measure that at the moment. |
| IOM | Importance of measuring | Measuring | Because, this way, we can get a better perspective on our position in the market. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| MMS | Mental market share | Measuring | No, in this B2B-surroundings we don't measure that. |
| RNM | Reason for (not) measuring | Measuring | I don't have the time to send surveys or to call people the whole day. |
| SOM | Share of mind | Measuring | That has not been measured. |
| WOM | Way of measuring | Measuring | For B2B, it could be done more qualitative and for B2C, it can be done more quantitative. |

## 9.4 Appendix D: Coding overview (inductive codes)

| Code | Full name | Excerpt from transcript |
|---|---|---|
| AMA | Awareness of mental availability | I can imagine what it might mean, but could you explain it? |
| CBP | Complexity of buying process | We have a website on which every product/service is visible but not everything receives the customer well. This is because of the complexity. |
| NC | Number of customers | When you miss a project in a relative small market, you're rapidly gone. |
| NS | Number of suppliers | In this market, there are not so many suppliers so then it is less important. |
| PRO | Proactivity | We keep in mind which huge projects are known. That is a trigger for us to talk to that specific customer. |
| RWC | Relationship with customer | We try to get in touch with a customer at the moment that they have an issue. |
| SCPS | Standardised vs custom product/service | I think it matters when you make a standardized product or a product that unique for every single customer. |
| TBM | Type of B2B market | We have a lot of customers with which we have long relationships. There, the mental availability is quite high. However, the other customers are shopping, so there it is lower. |