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B2B Branding Strategies in Emerging Markets: A Systematic Review of
Trust-Building Mechanisms

School of Management
MSc Management

MSc Thesis
Academic Year: 2024 - 2025

Supervisor: Dr. Monica Franco-Santos
October 2025



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MSc in Management

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of MSc Management

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation systematically investigates how business-to-business (B2B) firms in emerging markets develop trust through branding strategies, a critical yet underexplored area in international business research. Using a systematic literature review approach, the study synthesizes findings from 60 peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2025. Following PRISMA guidelines and adopting Tranfield's structured methodology, the review employed the Gioia method for thematic analysis, enabling rigorous coding and theory development across relational, strategic, and institutional dimensions.

The analysis reveals an integrated three-dimensional framework comprising: (1) Relational Trust Partnership, encompassing interpersonal ties, communication transparency, and long-term commitment; (2) Strategic Market Engagement, including value co-creation, collaborative innovation, and culturally adaptive branding; and (3) Institutional Safeguards and Risk Management, combining formal governance with relational mechanisms to address institutional voids.

Findings highlight that successful trust-building in emerging markets depends less on contractual enforcement and more on relationship-centric governance, cultural intelligence, and localized adaptation. The study extends relationship marketing and institutional theory by demonstrating that affective trust often precedes cognitive trust in collectivist settings, challenging Western-centric assumptions.

This research contributes a comprehensive conceptual framework for scholars and practical guidance for managers navigating trust-based branding in high-uncertainty contexts. It emphasizes developing hybrid governance models, cultural intelligence, and ethical, transparent communication to sustain long-term B2B partnerships in emerging economies.

Keywords: B2B branding, trust-building, emerging markets, relationship marketing, institutional theory, systematic literature review

Word count- 15246

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Monica Franco-Santos without whose support and able guidance through the thesis module, I never would have been able to write this thesis. I am also grateful for her considerable patience in my lack of agility in writing this paper and her many useful suggestions.

Secondly, huge thanks to my parents and friends who have always encouraged me and gone above and beyond in helping me pursue my dreams. Their belief in me sustained my motivation during the most demanding moments of this journey. I am also grateful to my friends and peers who provided support, shared ideas, and reminded me to keep perspective and balance.

Finally, a big acknowledgement to Ai and all the online tutoring facilities that kept me sane throughout the process of this research. These technologies enhanced my efficiency and analytical depth, yet the final interpretations, insights, and decisions remain my own. Completing this dissertation has been both humbling and empowering, and I am deeply thankful to everyone who has contributed to this chapter of my academic and personal growth.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Research Context

The contemporary global business landscape has witnessed unprecedented growth in emerging markets (EMs), representing critical arenas for international expansion and strategic development. These economies primarily encompass the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) alongside other significant markets in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. These fundamentally differ from developed economies in their institutional frameworks, governance mechanisms, and business relationship dynamics. As evidence demonstrates, "none of the BRIC nations are governed by rule-based mechanisms. Their governance environment indices are well in the range of what is classified as relation-based or family-based countries" (Li, 2009 as cited in Yang et al., 2017).

Trust has emerged as perhaps the most critical factor determining success or failure in B2B relationships within emerging markets. Unlike developed economies where established legal frameworks provide foundational support for business transactions, emerging markets often require firms to navigate complex webs of informal institutions and relationship-based governance structures. As Graca et al. (2017) observe, "firms in emerging economies gravitate towards relation-based governance where they seek trust forms to make social exchanges possible," while "trust building and cooperation take on interpersonal dimensions as emerging market firms seek implicit soft evidence to protect them from exploitation".

Defining Emerging Markets in This Research

For this study, emerging markets are defined as economies characterized by rapid growth, institutional development, and increasing integration with global markets, while simultaneously experiencing institutional voids, regulatory uncertainty, and relationship-based governance systems. This mainly includes the BRICS economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), where "in transition economies, personal trust substitutes or complements some legal and regulatory deficiencies, including bureaucracies, corruption, and other impediments in legal systems" (Manolova et al., 2007 as cited in Graca et al., 2017). Additionally, the study encompasses Latin American markets, Southeast Asian economies, and other developing economies where similar institutional challenges and relationship-based business practices predominate.

The significance of emerging markets extends beyond their size

They represent dynamic environments where "business people from relationship-focused cultures need to build relationships to achieve effective communication," particularly in Asian markets where "Chinese companies place a high value on relationships and mutual trust" before finalizing transactions (Bartosik-Purgat & Rakowska, 2025). This contrasts sharply with Western approaches where "Americans pay attention to time and represent a high level of pro-transaction behaviour" focused primarily on business efficiency rather than relationship building.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

This systematic literature review addresses how B2B firms in emerging markets employ branding strategies to build trust, synthesizing insights from 60 rigorously selected academic studies to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework. The research draws upon established methodological approaches Tranfield et al. (2003) with PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), and Gioia methodology for thematic analysis.

Main Research Question:

How do B2B firms in emerging markets use branding strategies to build trust according to research published in high quality academic journals?

Sub-Questions:

1. What branding strategies are most commonly adopted by B2B firms in general business contexts?
2. What branding strategies are most commonly adopted by B2B firms specifically in emerging markets?
3. Which of these strategies contribute most effectively to trust-building within B2B branding in emerging market settings?

These questions progress systematically from general understanding of B2B branding practices through specific examination of emerging market adaptations to detailed analysis of trust-building mechanisms, enabling comprehensive understanding while maintaining focus on the unique challenges presented by emerging market contexts.

1.3 Significance and Contributions

This research contributes significantly to both theoretical understanding and practical application. From a theoretical perspective, the study advances knowledge by integrating fragmented literature across B2B branding, emerging markets, and trust-building domains, revealing patterns that have not been comprehensively mapped previously. The evidence shows that "strong brands and effective B2B relationships are the key drivers of firm competitiveness and brand loyalty in emerging markets" (Nyadzayo et al., 2018), yet existing literature lacks comprehensive frameworks explaining how trust mediates this relationship.

The development of an integrated three-dimensional framework encompassing 'Relational Trust & Partnership Framework, Strategic Market Engagement, and Institutional Safeguards & Risk Management' represents a significant theoretical contribution moving beyond traditional approaches. This framework demonstrates how "value creation is collaborative and contextual, which implies that institutions, rules, norms and beliefs and institutional logics play a crucial role in the outcome of exchange processes" (Struwe & Slepnirov, 2021).

From a practical perspective, the research provides evidence-based guidance for managers operating in or considering expansion to emerging markets. The findings reveal critical insights such as how "affective elements have significantly higher impact than cognitive elements" in collectivist cultures (Abosag et al., 2017), challenging Western assumptions about rational decision-making and highlighting the importance of emotional connection in B2B branding strategies.

1.4 Theoretical Foundations

The research draws upon several established theoretical traditions to understand B2B branding and trust-building phenomena. Relationship marketing theory provides foundational insights into long-term oriented, mutually beneficial relationships, emphasizing trust, commitment, and communication as core building blocks. Institutional theory offers crucial perspectives on how formal and informal institutions shape business behaviour, helping explain how firms navigate regulatory environments and cultural norms while building legitimacy with stakeholders.

Social exchange theory contributes insights into reciprocity and relationship dynamics that underpin trust development processes. Research demonstrates that "guanxi relationships are built, maintained, and strengthened using an escalating cycle of

reciprocity, involving giving gifts and providing favours" (Zhang et al., 2021), illustrating how social exchange principles operate in practice. Network theory provides understanding of how firms leverage relationships and partnerships to access resources and capabilities, revealing how "personal communication provides a mechanism for boundary spanners and their organizations to obtain critical information from their counterparts" (Cai et al., 2021).

1.5 Structure and Organization

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters that systematically progress from methodological foundation through empirical analysis to theoretical and practical implications. **Chapter 2** presents the theoretical background in which the theories used in the dissertation are explained **Chapter 3** details the systematic review methodology, including database search strategies, article selection procedures, and analytical frameworks. **Chapter 4** presents descriptive findings about the reviewed literature, examining temporal trends, geographic coverage, and methodological approaches. **Chapter 5** examines thematic findings through systematic application of the Gioia methodology, revealing first-order codes, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions. **Chapter 6** critically discusses the thematic findings, examining their theoretical implications and practical applications. **Chapter 7** synthesizes conclusions and recommendations, providing actionable guidance while acknowledging limitations. **Chapter 8** provides the author's reflective insights on the research process and implications for future research practice.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Background

2.1 The Evolution of Trust in Business Relationships

Understanding trust in B2B relationships requires acknowledgment of a fundamental paradox: while business literature increasingly recognizes trust as critical for organizational success, emerging markets present environments where "none of the BRIC nations are governed by rule-based mechanisms" and instead operate within "relation-based or family-based countries" (Li, 2009 as cited in Yang et al., 2017). This institutional reality creates unique theoretical challenges that traditional Western frameworks struggle to address.

When examining the empirical evidence, a compelling narrative emerges. In developed economies, "quality communication is found to have a greater impact on trust in the USA," while in emerging markets like Brazil, "two-way communication is the factor with the greatest effect on trust" (Graca et al., 2017). This suggests that trust operates through fundamentally different mechanisms across institutional contexts, requiring theoretical frameworks capable of capturing such cultural and institutional nuances.

2.2 Relationship Marketing Theory and Trust Foundations

Relationship marketing theory (Berry, L. L., 1983) provides the foundational understanding that successful B2B relationships transcend transactional exchanges to become collaborative partnerships built on trust, commitment, and mutual value creation. However, the empirical evidence reveals that "studies on trust and commitment in collectivist cultures show that affective elements have significantly higher impact than cognitive elements" (Abosag et al., 2017), challenging Western relationship marketing assumptions.

The theory's emphasis on long-term orientation finds particular resonance in emerging markets where "Chinese companies place a high value on relationships and mutual trust" and "have to trust a business partner before finalizing transactions" (Bartosik-Purgat & Rakowska, 2025). This contrasts sharply with American approaches where companies "pay attention to time and represent a high level of pro-transaction behaviour," demonstrating how relationship marketing principles manifest differently across cultural contexts.

Contemporary research reveals that "participating in service production and provision allows customers to develop a more profound degree of liking which leads to greater levels of affective trust and affective commitment, and ultimately, increased loyalty" (Abosag et al., 2017). This finding extends relationship marketing theory by demonstrating how customer participation creates emotional bonds that transcend rational business calculations.

2.3 Institutional Theory and Market Context

Institutional theory becomes particularly crucial when examining B2B relationships in emerging markets, where "in transition economies, personal trust substitutes or complements some legal and regulatory deficiencies, including bureaucracies, corruption, and other impediments in legal systems" (Manolova et al., 2007 as cited in Graca et al., 2017). This theoretical lens reveals how formal and informal institutions shape business behaviour and relationship development patterns.

The theory's distinction between regulative, normative, and cognitive institutional elements helps explain why "buyers heavily influenced by regulative enforcement place a relatively greater emphasis on formal information sharing in their partnership efforts to build trust," while those in weaker institutional environments "place a relatively greater emphasis on informal information sharing when their legitimacy derives from endogenously enforced moral codes of their private networks" (Barry et al., 2021).

Institutional theory also illuminates how firms navigate institutional voids through relationship building, as evidenced by research showing that "institutional distance prevents parties from accessing knowledge but, when knowledge is obtained and mutual trust is developed, it promotes cross-border knowledge acquisition" (Ho et al., 2018).

2.4 Social Exchange Theory and Reciprocity Dynamics

Social exchange theory contributes essential insights into the reciprocal nature of trust development, explaining how "guanxi relationships are built, maintained, and strengthened using an escalating cycle of reciprocity, involving giving gifts and providing favours" (Zhang et al., 2021). This theoretical framework helps understand

how firms create social capital through repeated interactions and mutual benefit creation.

The theory's focus on reciprocity finds empirical support in research demonstrating that "an exchange party that perceives high levels of fairness in interactions with its partner will be less concerned with exploitation and tend to reciprocate with a reward or favour in the next round of interaction" (Wang et al., 2022). This reveals how social exchange principles operate in practice to build trust over time.

Social exchange theory also explains the emotional dimensions of B2B relationships, where "the affect dimension is defined as the emotional aspect that encompasses rapport, how individuals feel about each other, share a common understanding and bond" (Zhang et al., 2021), demonstrating how business relationships transcend purely economic calculations.

2.5 Network Theory and Relational Capital

Network theory provides understanding of how individual relationships aggregate into broader network structures that create competitive advantages. The empirical evidence shows that "personal communication provides a mechanism for boundary spanners and their organizations to obtain critical information from their counterparts" (Cai et al., 2021), illustrating how network positions enable access to resources and capabilities.

The theory helps explain how trust operates at multiple levels simultaneously, as "interpersonal guanxi at the operational level promotes the firms' choices regarding interfirm trust and relationship-specific investment as interfirm governance strategies" (Zhou et al., 2020). This reveals the complex interplay between individual relationship building and organizational strategy.

Network theory also illuminates collective benefits, as demonstrated by findings that "knowledge exchange and collaboration via horizontal, trust-based linkages between SMEs within a cluster are crucial for the upgrading of locally clustered SMEs" (Gerke et al., 2023), showing how network relationships enable capabilities that individual firms could not achieve independently.

2.6 Value Co-Creation and Collaborative Innovation

Contemporary theoretical developments emphasize that "value creation is collaborative and contextual, which implies that institutions, rules, norms and beliefs and institutional logics play a crucial role in the outcome of exchange processes" (Struwe & Slepnirov, 2021). This perspective extends traditional value chain thinking to recognize that value emerges through interaction and collaboration rather than sequential production processes.

The evidence reveals that "both interfirm cognitive trust and emotional trust were positively correlated to firms' cooperation on environmental innovation" (Liao & Long, 2019), demonstrating how trust enables collaborative value creation in specific domains. This finding suggests that trust operates as both a prerequisite for and outcome of successful value co-creation initiatives.

2.7 Commitment-Trust theory

Morgan and Hunt's (1994) Commitment-Trust Theory provides a foundational framework for understanding relational exchange in business-to-business contexts. The theory posits that trust and commitment are the key determinants of successful relationship marketing, enabling cooperation, reducing transaction costs, and fostering long-term partnerships. Trust refers to confidence in a partner's reliability and integrity, while commitment represents the enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship. This theory is particularly relevant in emerging markets where market uncertainty and institutional voids heighten the need for trust and stability in B2B branding. Applying the commitment-trust lens helps in explaining how firms develop and sustain strong brand partnerships despite the complexities and risks inherent in these markets.

2.8 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Edward T. Hall's High-Context Communication

Understanding how culture shapes trust-building is essential, especially in diverse emerging markets where communication styles and social norms vary widely. Hofstede's (1980) Cultural Dimensions Theory provides valuable insights into these differences by highlighting key cultural values, such as individualism versus collectivism and power distance, which influence how businesses interact and build trust. These dimensions help explain why what works in Western markets may not directly apply to emerging markets with different cultural settings.

Complementing this, Edward T. Hall's (1959) theory of High-Context and Low-Context Communication sheds light on how people communicate beyond words. In high-context cultures, which are common in many emerging markets, communication relies heavily on non-verbal cues, shared backgrounds, and implicit understanding. This can cause misunderstandings with low-context cultures that prefer direct and explicit communication. For example, research indicates that in high-context cultures, gestures and relational cues are often critical to building trust, as seen in concepts like "face" and "mianzi" in Chinese business culture, where maintaining reputation and social harmony is paramount (Bartosik-Purgat & Rakowska, 2025). This underscores the importance of tailoring trust-building strategies to these cultural realities rather than simply transplanting Western business models.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy and Methodological Approach

This systematic literature review adopts a critical realist philosophical stance, recognizing that B2B branding strategies and trust-building mechanisms represent complex social phenomena that exist independently of our knowledge of them while acknowledging that our understanding is inevitably shaped by theoretical frameworks and analytical approaches. This philosophical position enables engagement with both objective patterns in the data and subjective interpretations of meaning while maintaining commitment to methodological rigor and transparency.

The research employs a systematic review methodology that combines the structured approach of Tranfield et al. (2003) with PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines for transparency and the Gioia methodology for thematic analysis. This multi-methodological approach is used to ensure both analytical rigor and interpretive depth, enabling comprehensive examination of complex organizational phenomena while maintaining scientific standards.

This approach was selected for its ability to synthesize large volumes of research while minimizing bias and ensuring comprehensive coverage of relevant literature. Unlike narrative reviews that may be influenced by researcher preconceptions or selective attention to supporting evidence, systematic reviews employ explicit procedures for literature identification, quality assessment, and synthesis that enhance credibility and reproducibility.

3.2 Systematic Review Framework

Following Tranfield et al. (2003), the systematic review was conducted in three distinct phases: planning, conducting, and reporting. The planning phase involved developing research questions, establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria, designing search strategies, and creating protocols for quality assessment and data extraction. The conducting phase encompassed database searches, article screening procedures,

quality evaluation, and data extraction. The reporting phase involved synthesis, thematic analysis, and framework development.

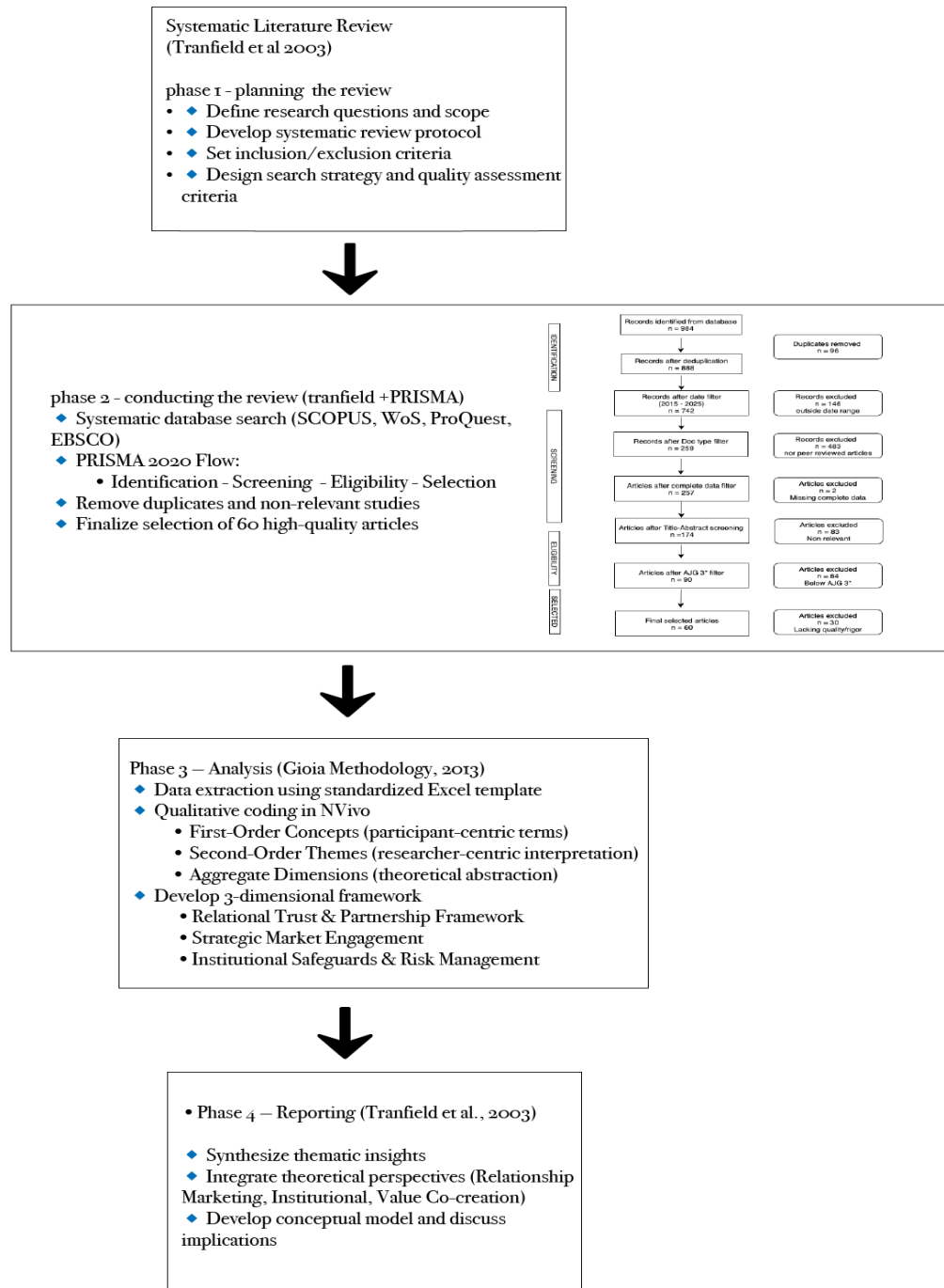


Fig. 1 : Review Process

3.2.1 Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted across four leading academic databases - SCOPUS, Web of Science, ProQuest, and EBSCO. These were chosen for their extensive coverage of business, management, and marketing research. During the preliminary search stage, it became evident that very few studies directly addressed the intersection of B2B branding strategies, trust-building mechanisms, and emerging market contexts. To account for this, a broad search strategy was developed. Boolean search strings were iteratively refined to capture diverse terminologies without losing focus on the core concepts. The main search string combined terms related to B2B branding, emerging markets (including BRIC countries and major economies such as China, Brazil, and India), and trust or relationship-building constructs.

Additional keywords such as “brand strategy,” “brand management,” “institutional trust,” “relational governance,” and “guanxi” were included to ensure comprehensiveness. The search syntax was adapted to each database’s requirements and executed systematically. Exported search results, including full bibliographic records and abstracts, provided a solid foundation for screening and thematic analysis.

For transparency and reproducibility, the detailed search strings and their iterative refinements are documented in the appendix.

3.2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria Type	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Context	B2B branding, trust mechanisms, and organizational relationships in emerging markets	Studies focusing solely on B2C contexts or developed markets
Focus/Thematic	Direct relevance to branding strategies or trust-building mechanisms	Absence of branding, trust, or relationship elements
Language	English language publications	Non-English language unless essential translation available
Date Range	Publications from 2015–2025	Outside 2015–2025

Document Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference papers, books, book chapters, dissertations
Quality/Ranking	AJG (Academic Journal Guide) 3-star or higher ranked journals	Journals below AJG 3-star or insufficient methodological rigor
Methodological	Clear empirical basis or strong theoretical/conceptual contribution	Insufficient methodological detail, unclear relevance, missing data
Accessibility	Full-text access available	Full text not accessible after reasonable attempts

Tab 1 : Inclusion and exclusion criteria

3.3 PRISMA Flow and Article Selection Process

The article selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 framework to ensure methodological transparency, replicability, and analytical integrity. A comprehensive search across four major databases SCOPUS (579 records), Web of Science (336), ProQuest (26), and EBSCO (43) resulted in identifying 984 records. After removing 96 duplicates, 888 unique studies were retained for screening. Applying the publication year filter (2015–2025) refined the dataset to 742 records, and restricting the search to peer-reviewed journal articles yielded 259 studies. Two papers lacking complete bibliographic or methodological details were excluded, resulting in 257 valid articles for detailed title and abstract screening.

Following this, 174 studies were identified as conceptually relevant and methodologically sound. To ensure quality and academic credibility, only journals ranked AJG 3★ or higher were considered, reducing the dataset to 90 high-quality papers. A final full-text evaluation based on research design, transparency, and theoretical contribution resulted in the removal of 30 articles, leaving 60 studies for the final synthesis. This process required sustained intellectual effort like iterative database queries, constant quality verification, and critical interpretation. The meticulous, multi-stage approach reflects both the rigour and depth of labour underpinning a high-quality systematic literature review, ensuring that every

retained article meaningfully contributes to the trust-branding framework developed in this dissertation.

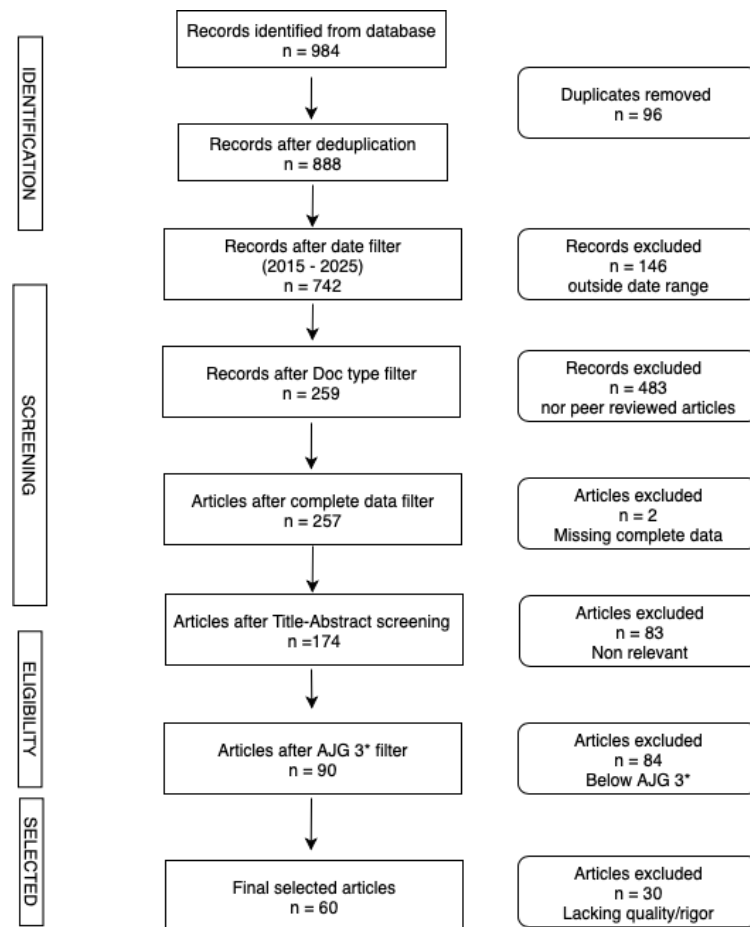


Fig 2 : PRISMA 2020 flow of article selection for review

3.4 Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

The data extraction process was carried out systematically to ensure comprehensive capture of relevant information from the final sample of 60 articles. A standardized data extraction template was developed in Microsoft Excel, comprised fields for bibliographic details (authors, titles, journals, publication years, volume/issue), study characteristics (research design, data collection methods, sample description, geographic focus), theoretical frameworks employed, key empirical and conceptual findings, specific trust-building and branding strategies identified, and indicators of methodological quality.

Given the nature and scale of this dissertation, the data extraction was performed exclusively by the researcher, with continuous consultation and guidance from the supervisor to ensure accuracy, consistency, and completeness. While a dual-independent extraction process was not feasible, rigorous piloting of the extraction template and regular supervisory reviews were employed as mitigating mechanisms to limit bias and maintain data integrity.

Quality assessment was conducted through criteria adapted to suit the diverse methodologies of included studies. For quantitative research, considerations included sample size adequacy, measurement validity and reliability, appropriateness of statistical analyses, and robustness of findings interpretation. Qualitative studies were assessed in terms of data collection rigor, transparency of analytical procedures, strength of theoretical contributions, and trustworthiness factors including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. NVivo 12 software was employed to facilitate data management and support qualitative coding across large textual datasets. This software enabled systematic organization and retrieval of coded segments, facilitating detailed thematic analysis.

3.5 Thematic Analysis: Gioia Methodology

The qualitative analysis employed the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013), which is particularly well-suited for examining complex organizational phenomena and developing theoretical frameworks from empirical evidence. This methodology provides systematic procedures for moving from empirical observations to theoretical abstractions while maintaining grounding in evidence.

3.5.1 First-Order Analysis

First-order analysis involved identifying concepts that remained closely aligned with the language and perspectives of participants as reported in the reviewed studies. This stage focused on preserving the authentic voice of practitioners and researchers while avoiding premature theoretical interpretation. The analysis utilized both explicit statements and implicit meanings to develop comprehensive understanding of how trust-building and branding strategies were conceptualized and implemented.

3.5.2 Second-Order Analysis

Second-order analysis involved grouping related first-order concepts into theoretically informed themes that represent higher levels of abstraction while maintaining clear connections to empirical evidence. This analytical stage required moving beyond descriptive coding to interpretive categorization that reveals underlying patterns and mechanisms.

Seven second-order themes emerged through iterative analysis and refinement:

1. Trust-Building Mechanisms

This theme encompasses the fundamental processes and practices through which firms develop confidence and reliability in B2B relationships. Trust-building mechanisms represent core competencies that enable sustained relationship development and collaborative value creation.

2. Partnership and Relationship Development

This theme captures strategies and approaches for building long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships that transcend individual transactions. Partnership development requires systematic investment in relationship building, mutual understanding, and collaborative governance.

3. Strategic Value Co-Creation

This theme represents collaborative approaches to value creation that leverage complementary capabilities and shared resources. Value co-creation requires trust, commitment, and sophisticated coordination mechanisms to achieve mutual benefits.

4. Communication Transparency and Ethics

This theme encompasses communication practices and ethical standards that support trust development and relationship quality. Transparent, honest communication serves as both a trust-building mechanism and a foundation for collaborative relationship development.

5. Branding Strategies and Market Adaptation

This theme captures how firms adapt their branding approaches to local contexts while maintaining strategic coherence. Market adaptation requires understanding cultural norms, institutional requirements, and stakeholder expectations.

6. Institutional Support and Credibility

This theme addresses how firms build legitimacy and credibility through institutional relationships and compliance mechanisms. Institutional support provides external validation while reducing transaction costs and relationship risks.

7. Risk and Opportunistic Behaviour Management

This theme encompasses strategies for identifying, preventing, and managing various forms of opportunistic behaviour and relationship risks. Effective risk management enables deeper trust and more extensive collaboration.

3.5.3 Aggregate Dimensions

Finally, the third abstraction cycle led to the development of three aggregate dimensions encompassing the second-order themes: Relational Trust & Partnership Framework, Strategic Market Engagement, and Institutional Safeguards & Risk Management. This was done to illustrate the interconnectedness of relational, strategic, and institutional dimensions in contemporary B2B branding and trust-building research in emerging markets.

Aggregate Dimension 1: Relational Trust & Partnership Framework

This dimension synthesizes trust-building mechanisms, partnership development, and communication transparency into a comprehensive framework for relationship-based branding. The dimension captures how firms build, maintain, and leverage trust relationships as strategic assets.

Aggregate Dimension 2: Strategic Market Engagement

This dimension integrates branding strategies, market adaptation, and value co-creation into frameworks for strategic positioning and collaborative advantage. The

dimension represents proactive approaches to market engagement that create sustainable competitive advantages.

Aggregate Dimension 3: Institutional Safeguards & Risk Management

This dimension combines institutional support and risk management into comprehensive approaches for navigating complex institutional environments. The dimension captures both defensive and proactive strategies for managing institutional challenges while building credibility and legitimacy.

3.6 Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence

Following guidelines established by Thau and Katila (2025) for ethical AI use in academic research, this study incorporated AI-assisted tools for specific analytical tasks while maintaining human oversight and interpretation for all substantive decisions.

AI applications were limited to:

- Literature Search Optimization: AI tools assisted in keyword expansion and search string refinement to ensure comprehensive database coverage while maintaining relevance to research objectives.
- Administrative Tasks: AI assisted with reference formatting, citation checking, and basic data management tasks that required accuracy but not interpretive judgment.
- Quality Assurance: AI tools provided consistency checking for coding procedures and helped identify potential errors or omissions in data extraction and analysis.
- Writing: AI tools were used to polish and write the draft in academic tone. This was done by using the inputs provided by the researcher after extensive researching through the articles and coding. This was performed to overcome challenges of grammatical errors and lack language/writing proficiency.

Consistent with Thau and Katila (2025), AI technologies were employed as co-research assistants to enhance efficiency in data processing and literature management. However, all actions, decisions, interpretations, and movements of the

AI were fully owned and directed by the author, ensuring that human judgment and contextual understanding remained central to the research process

3.7 Methodological Rigor and Trustworthiness

Multiple strategies were employed to ensure methodological rigor and trustworthiness throughout the research process. Systematic documentation provided complete audit trails of all procedures, decisions, and analytical steps. Since the research was conducted by a single researcher, iterative refinement of analytical procedures was used to continuously improve based on emerging insights and challenges. Supervisory oversight was sought regularly to provide external validation of methodological choices and analytical interpretations. Triangulation was achieved by integrating multiple data sources, theoretical perspectives, and analytical approaches to strengthen confidence in findings. Due to limitations with time and needs of the research, member checking was not explicitly conducted for this study.

3.8 Limitations and Boundary Conditions

Several limitations require acknowledgment and consideration in interpreting findings. Some of them are as follows

- Language restriction to English- language publications may exclude important insights from local research contexts and non-English scholarship.
- Temporal focus on recent literature (2015-2025) may miss important historical developments and long-term trends.
- Database selection may create coverage gaps, though the four databases employed provide comprehensive coverage of relevant literature.
- Journal ranking criteria may exclude emerging perspectives published in newer or specialized journals, though the AJG 3* threshold ensures quality and credibility.
- Subjective elements inherent in qualitative coding and interpretation may influence findings, due to single reviewer involvement. systematic procedures minimize this risk. Contextual complexity in emerging markets may limit generalizability across different institutional and cultural contexts.

These limitations were addressed through careful interpretation of findings, explicit acknowledgment of scope boundaries, and recommendations for future research that can address identified gaps and constraints.

Chapter 4: Descriptive Findings

4.1 Overview of the Literature Landscape

The systematic search and selection process yielded 60 high-quality articles that provide comprehensive coverage of B2B branding and trust-building phenomena in emerging markets. These studies span the period from 2015 to 2025, representing a decade of scholarly advancement in understanding these complex organizational phenomena. The articles are drawn from leading journals in marketing, international business, and organizational studies, ensuring both theoretical rigor and practical relevance.

The selected literature demonstrates remarkable diversity in methodological approaches, theoretical perspectives, and empirical contexts, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of B2B branding research and the heterogeneity of emerging market environments. Studies range from in-depth qualitative case analyses of specific relationship development processes to large-scale quantitative investigations of trust antecedents and outcomes across multiple markets and industries.

4.2 Temporal Distribution and Research Evolution

Analysis of publication patterns reveals significant evolution in research focus and methodological sophistication over the study period. Early studies (2015-2017) predominantly focused on establishing basic relationships between trust and performance outcomes while documenting the distinctive characteristics of emerging market contexts. These foundational studies provided essential groundwork for understanding how institutional environments and cultural factors influence B2B relationships.

The middle period (2018-2020) witnessed increased attention to mechanism identification and process understanding, with studies employing more sophisticated analytical techniques to examine how trust develops over time and how different branding strategies contribute to relationship quality. This period also saw growing integration of institutional theory perspectives and increased attention to digital technology's impact on relationship building.

Recent research (2021-2025) demonstrates growing theoretical sophistication and methodological innovation, with studies employing advanced analytical techniques,

longitudinal designs, and mixed-methods approaches to examine complex interactions among trust, branding, and performance outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic's impact becomes evident in recent studies examining relationship resilience and adaptation strategies during crisis periods.

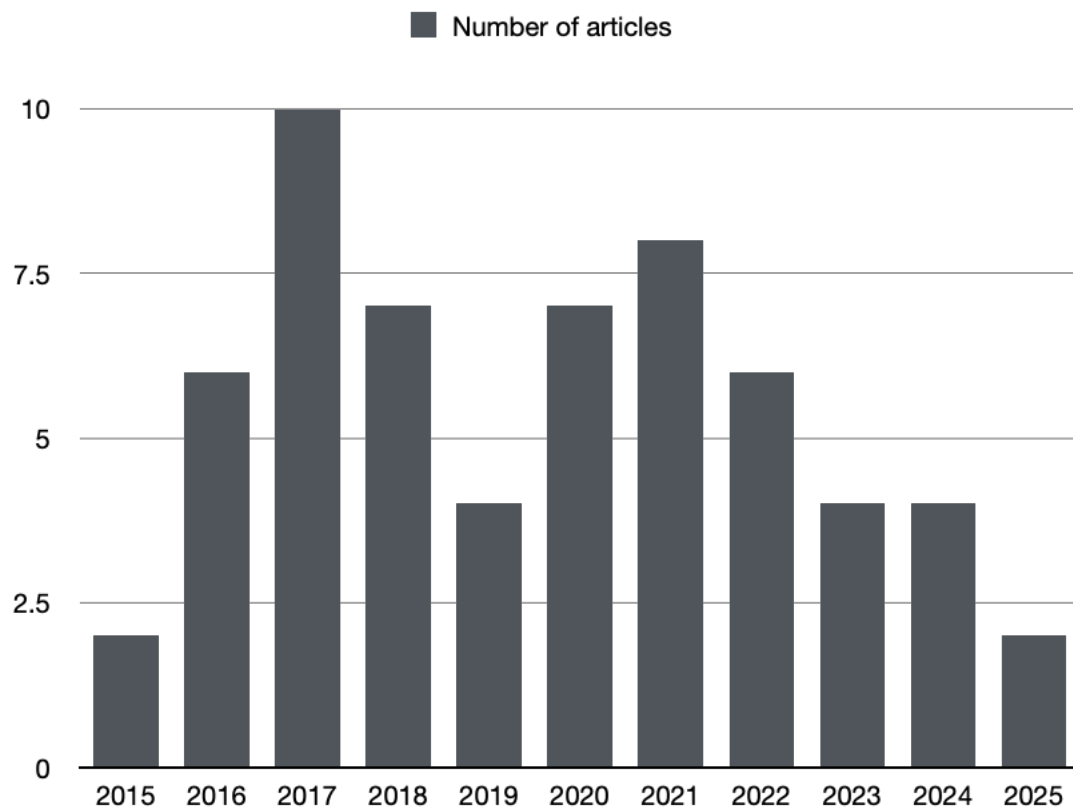


Fig. 3: Graphical representation of publication distribution across years

This distribution trend 2015-2017: 18 articles (30%), 2018-2020: 23 articles (38%), 2021-2025: 19 articles (32%) indicates sustained scholarly interest with some concentration in the middle period, suggesting growing recognition of the topic's importance followed by theoretical consolidation in recent years.

4.3 Geographic Coverage and Regional Focus

The reviewed studies provide comprehensive coverage of major emerging markets, with particular concentration on the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China) that have received extensive academic attention. However, the sample also

includes studies from other significant emerging markets, enabling broader understanding of regional variations and commonalities.

China represents the most frequently studied context (21 articles, 35%), reflecting both its economic significance and the distinctive characteristics of Chinese business culture, particularly the role of guanxi networks in relationship development. Studies of Chinese markets often emphasize relationship-based governance, long-term orientation, and the integration of formal and informal institutional mechanisms.

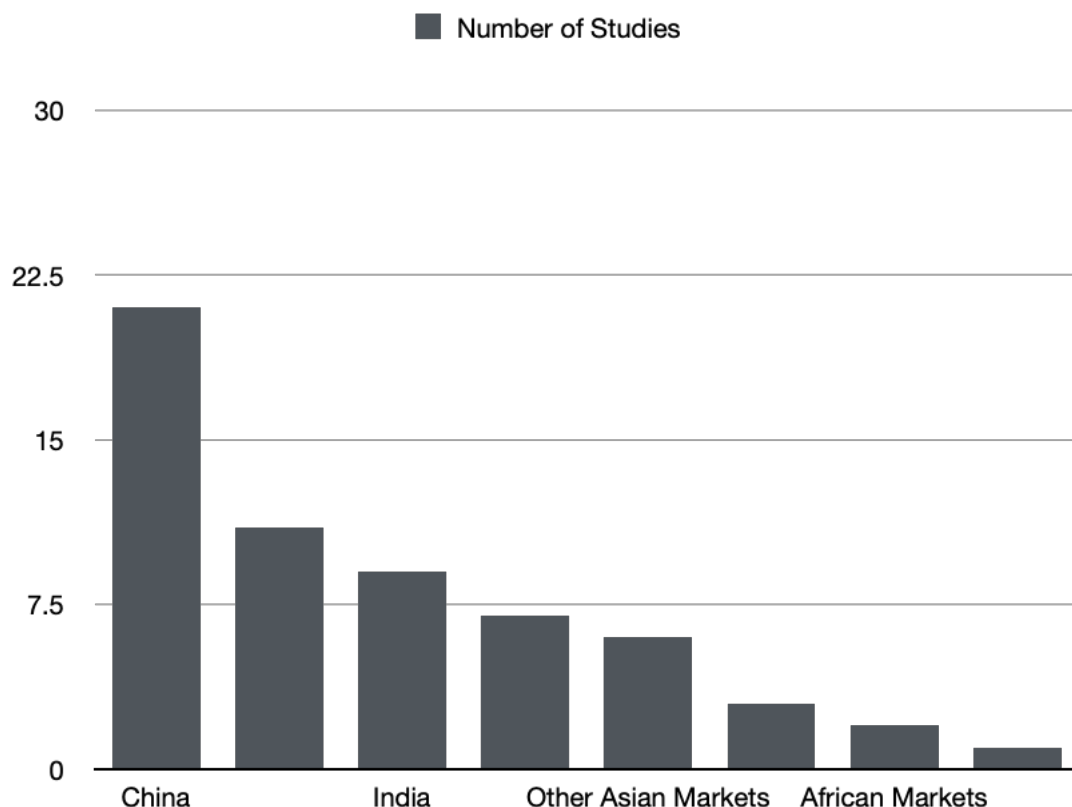


Fig. 4: Graphical representation of geographical coverage of the studies

Brazil accounts for 11 articles (18%), with research typically focusing on communication patterns, institutional uncertainties, and adaptation strategies. Brazilian studies frequently examine how firms navigate regulatory complexities while building trust through interpersonal relationships and cultural sensitivity.

India is represented by 9 articles (15%), with studies often examining the role of personal relationships, family networks, and cultural adaptation in trust development. Indian research frequently highlights the importance of patience, relationship investment, and cultural understanding in successful B2B branding.

Russia accounts for 7 articles (12%), with research typically focusing on institutional transitions, uncertainty management, and the evolution of business practices in post-transition contexts. Russian studies often examine how firms adapt Western business practices to local institutional and cultural contexts.

Other emerging markets (19 articles, 31%) include studies from various Asian, Latin American, and African contexts, providing broader perspectives on emerging market dynamics while highlighting both commonalities and regional specificities.

Emerging Market Region	Number of Studies	Key Focus Areas
China	21	Guanxi networks, institutional trust
Brazil	11	Two-way communication, relationship governance
India	9	Personal relationships, cultural adaptation
Russia	7	Institutional voids, formal-informal balance
Other Asian Markets	6	Digital adaptation, value co-creation
Other Latin American	3	CSR, local identity creation
African Markets	2	Partnership development, risk management
Cross-Regional Studies	1	Comparative institutional analysis

Table 3 : Distribution of studies across emerging markets

4.4 Industry and Sectoral Analysis

The reviewed literature spans multiple industry sectors, reflecting the broad applicability of B2B branding and trust- building concepts while revealing sector-specific patterns and challenges. Manufacturing and industrial goods represent the

largest category (25 articles, 42%), encompassing automotive, machinery, chemicals, and other heavy industry sectors. These studies typically emphasize quality assurance, technical competence, and long-term partnership development as key trust-building mechanisms. Manufacturing sector studies often highlight the importance of reliability, technical expertise, and supply chain integration in building trust relationships. The evidence reveals that manufacturing firms frequently rely on certification, compliance demonstration, and technical support as primary branding strategies, while emphasizing consistent quality and delivery performance as trust-building mechanisms.

Technology and telecommunications sectors account for 14 articles (23%), examining how digital platforms, innovation capabilities, and technological partnerships affect trust development and branding strategies. Technology sector studies often focus on collaborative innovation, intellectual property protection, and platform-based relationship building.

These studies reveal distinctive challenges related to rapid technological change, intellectual property concerns, and the need for continuous innovation collaboration. Trust-building in technology sectors often requires demonstration of technical competence, protection of proprietary information, and effective management of innovation partnerships.

Professional services sectors represent 11 articles (18%), including consulting, financial services, logistics, and other knowledge-intensive industries. Service sector studies typically emphasize expertise demonstration, relationship quality, and customization capabilities as key branding and trust-building elements.

Service sector research reveals the particular importance of interpersonal relationships, cultural sensitivity, and customization capabilities in building trust. These studies often highlight how service firms must demonstrate expertise while adapting their approaches to local contexts and client expectations.

Agriculture and food processing account for 7 articles (12%), examining how quality assurance, supply chain transparency, and sustainability practices contribute to trust development in global food systems. These studies often emphasize certification, traceability, and social responsibility as key branding elements.

Energy and natural resources sectors represent 3 articles (5%), focusing on large-scale infrastructure projects, joint ventures, and government relationships in resource

extraction and energy development. These studies typically examine long-term partnership development and institutional relationship management.

4.5 Methodological Approaches and Research Designs

The literature reveals a diverse methodological landscape, indicating maturation in B2B branding and trust research. Qualitative approaches predominate (52%), with case studies being particularly prevalent. These studies capture contextual nuances, process dynamics, and cultural factors critical to understanding trust development. Mixed-methods research accounts for 28%, leveraging both qualitative insights and quantitative breadth, enabling generalization alongside a rich contextual understanding. Quantitative studies (20%) employ surveys, structural equation modelling, and advanced statistical techniques to test hypotheses and validate theoretical relationships, contributing to generalizable knowledge that complements qualitative findings.

4.6 Emerging Themes and Future Research Directions

The analysis of literature revealed a number of important themes shaping the future of B2B branding and trust in emerging markets.

Digital transformation is emerging as a dominant topic, focusing on how digital platforms, social media, and e-commerce technologies are influencing traditional ways of building business relationships. While digital tools provide new opportunities for better communication and wider market access, the research cautions against replacing personal interactions outright. Instead, firms that successfully blend digital innovations with established relationship-building practices are more likely to build lasting trust.

Another growing area is sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Emerging market stakeholders increasingly expect companies to demonstrate genuine environmental and social commitment. Studies suggest that CSR initiatives tied closely to a firm's core business strategy can strengthen trust and create competitive advantage.

The impact of recent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has highlighted crisis resilience and adaptation as critical areas of research. Trust relationships appear vital in helping firms and their partners navigate disruptions, enabling them to maintain strong cooperation even under stress.

Finally, the challenge of managing cross-cultural differences while integrating global consistency with local adaptation remains prominent. Research points to the importance of developing cultural intelligence and deep local knowledge to ensure that global B2B branding strategies resonate effectively across diverse markets.

These themes reflect the increasing complexity that companies and researchers face in this dynamic field. Addressing technological changes, social expectations, crisis impacts, and cultural diversity will be key to advancing both theory and practice in B2B branding and trust in emerging markets.

Chapter 5: Thematic Findings

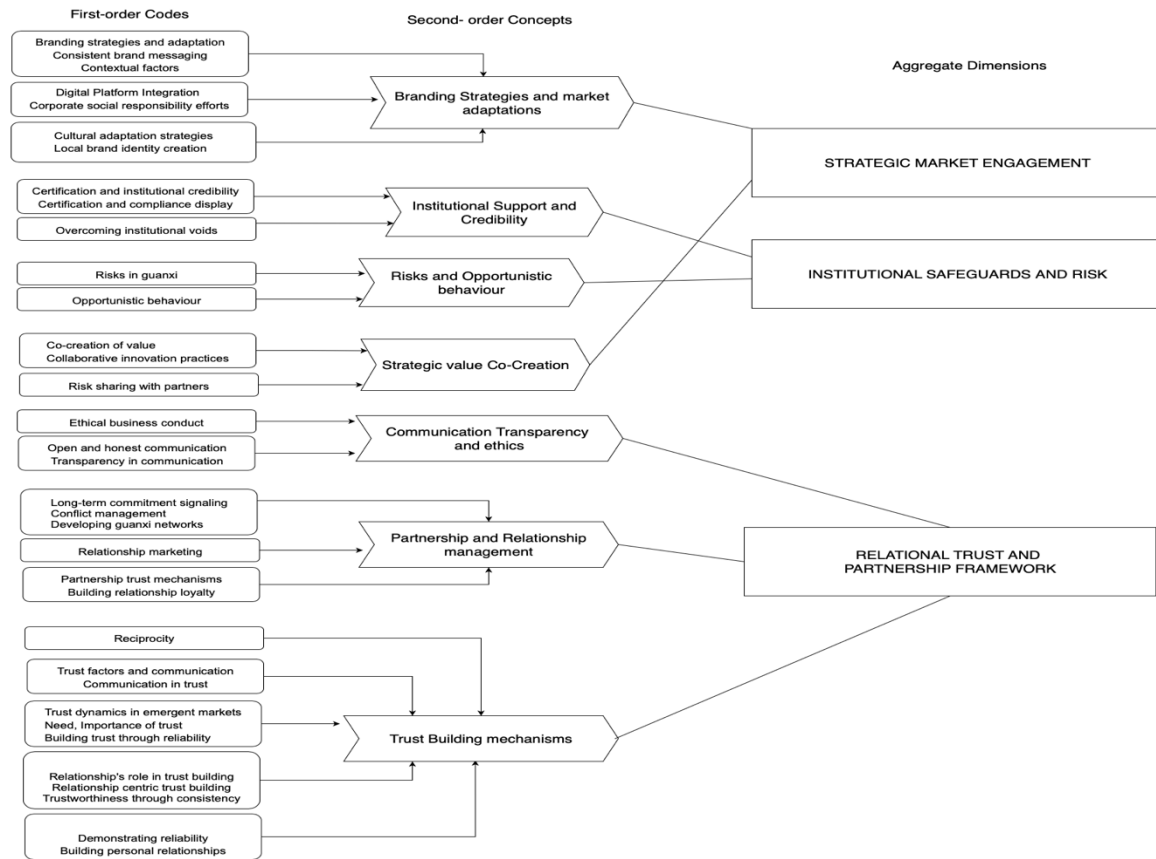


Fig.5 : Resulting framework of Gioia methodology

The rigorous application of the Gioia methodology to the systematic analysis of 60 high-quality studies, revealed the comprehensive thematic findings that address the research questions regarding how B2B firms in emerging markets employ branding strategies to build trust. The analysis reveals a sophisticated three-dimensional framework comprising 33 first-order concepts, 7 second-order themes, and 3 aggregate dimensions that capture the complex interplay between relational, strategic, and institutional factors in trust-building and branding processes.

5.1 Analytical Framework and Theoretical Structure

The thematic analysis reveals a comprehensive three-dimensional framework for understanding B2B branding strategies and trust-building mechanisms in emerging markets. It demonstrates clear hierarchical relationships while maintaining empirical grounding throughout all levels of analysis. Each aggregate dimension encompasses multiple second-order themes that share conceptual coherence and strategic focus,

while each second-order theme synthesizes related first-order concepts representing specific practices, mechanisms, or outcomes identified in the reviewed studies.

This analytical framework reveals both the complexity and systematic nature of trust-building and branding processes in emerging markets. The evidence demonstrates that successful approaches require simultaneous attention to multiple dimensions rather than focusing on individual factors in isolation. This framework challenges several foundational assumptions in relationship marketing and institutional theory, necessitating critical theoretical reconsideration. Most significantly, the evidence reveals a trust formation paradox where interpersonal trust demonstrates positive influences on emotional attachment but exhibits direct negative influence on performance outcomes (Berger et al., 2018). This paradox contradicts established trust models and suggests that trust operates through culturally embedded mechanisms that cannot be captured by universal Western frameworks.

5.2 Aggregate Dimension 1: Relational Trust & Partnership Framework

The Relational Trust & Partnership Framework represents the foundational infrastructure through which B2B firms establish, develop, and maintain trust based relationships in emerging market contexts. This dimension synthesizes three interrelated second-order themes – Trust Building Mechanisms, Partnership and Relationship Development, and Communication Transparency and Ethics, into a coherent framework that captures the essential relational elements of successful B2B branding strategies.

The evidence reveals that relational approaches to branding and trust-building are not merely supplementary to other strategic considerations but represent fundamental requirements for success in emerging markets. Unlike developed markets where institutional frameworks provide substantial support for business relationships, emerging markets require firms to invest heavily in relationship development as a core strategic capability and competitive advantage.

5.2.1 Trust-Building Mechanisms

Trust-building mechanisms encompass the fundamental processes, practices, and capabilities through which firms develop confidence, predictability, and reliability in B2B relationships. The evidence reveals that trust development in emerging markets

requires sophisticated understanding of both cognitive and affective dimensions, with particular emphasis on interpersonal connections, relationship history, and cultural adaptation.

The distinction between cognitive trust (based on competence and reliability assessments) and affective trust (based on emotional bonds and care) proves crucial for understanding trust development in emerging markets. Multiple studies demonstrate that "affective elements have significantly higher impact than cognitive elements" in building loyalty and long-term commitment, particularly in collectivist cultures characteristic of many emerging markets (Abosag et al., 2017). This finding challenges traditional relationship marketing theory, which often emphasizes cognitive trust elements such as competence demonstration and reliability signalling.

The empirical evidence extends relationship marketing theory by revealing that "Service quality positively influences customer liking, which generates affective trust and affective commitment, ultimately increasing behavioural loyalty (Abosag et al., 2017). This relationship demonstrates that affective elements significantly outweigh cognitive components in collectivist cultures. Hence, effective B2B branding must incorporate systematic approaches to emotional connection building rather than relying solely on rational value propositions.

Communication quality and frequency emerge as fundamental trust-building mechanisms, though their optimal forms vary significantly across cultural contexts. The research provides compelling evidence of cultural variation, demonstrating that "quality communication is found to have a greater impact on trust in the USA, while two-way communication is the factor with the greatest effect on trust in Brazil" (Graca et al., 2017). This finding highlights the critical importance of cultural adaptation in communication strategies, suggesting that effective trust-building requires deep understanding of local communication norms and preferences.

Furthermore, the evidence reveals that communication effectiveness depends not only on frequency and quality but also on socialization and relationship context. Studies show that "frequency of communication and socialization are also found to have indirect, but important distinct roles in the flows of communication in both countries" (Graca et al., 2017). This finding suggests that trust-building communication must

extend beyond formal business interactions to encompass social relationship development and personal connection building.

Personal relationship development represents a cornerstone of trust-building in emerging markets, with evidence consistently demonstrating the importance of interpersonal connections that transcend formal business roles. The research shows that "getting to know suppliers and their employees outside the workplace is important in fostering two-way communication between buyers and suppliers" (Graca et al., 2017). This finding indicates that effective B2B branding must include systematic investment in personal relationship building rather than relying solely on organizational or product-based differentiation.

The reliability demonstration mechanism appears consistently across multiple studies as a fundamental trust-building approach. The evidence shows that firms must consistently demonstrate their ability to meet commitments, deliver promised outcomes, and maintain predictable performance standards. This reliability extends beyond product or service delivery to encompass communication consistency, relationship behaviour, and ethical conduct across all interactions.

The findings provide strong support for social exchange theory's emphasis on reciprocity and mutual benefit creation as trust-building mechanisms. The evidence indicates that trust-building is most effective when it involves mutual investment and benefit creation rather than one-sided efforts. Studies demonstrate that "an exchange party that perceives high levels of fairness in interactions with its partner will be less concerned with exploitation and tend to reciprocate with a reward or favour in the next round of interaction" (Wang et al., 2022). This validates social exchange theory's core premise while revealing how reciprocity operates specifically in emerging market contexts.

5.2.2 Partnership and Relationship Development

Partnership and relationship development encompasses the strategic approaches and operational capabilities through which firms build long-term, mutually beneficial relationships that transcend individual transactions or projects. The evidence reveals that successful partnership development requires systematic investment in relationship building, sophisticated understanding of partner needs and capabilities, and development of collaborative governance mechanisms.

Guanxi networks and relationship-based governance emerge as paradigmatic examples of partnership development in emerging markets. The evidence provides extensive documentation of how relationship-based governance substitutes for or complements formal institutional mechanisms in many emerging market contexts. As noted in multiple studies, "guanxi is explained as a complex cultural construct deeply rooted in China that revolves around the exchange of favours to build trust and deep connections" (Bartosik-Purgat & Rakowska, 2025). Moreover, "Chinese buyers have significantly lower perceptions of trust, commitment, communication and cooperation when they only have modest guanxi with their suppliers' representatives" (Yen & Abosag, 2016). While Western theory suggests that trust can be built through professional competence demonstrations, the evidence shows that without guanxi interpersonal, socially embedded ties even competent Western suppliers face systematic disadvantages in building B2B relationships.

The research demonstrates that similar relationship-based practices exist across diverse emerging markets, with evidence of "Indian jaan-pehchaan, Brazilian jeitinho, and Russian svyazi" serving comparable functions in their respective cultural contexts (Barry et al., 2021). This finding suggests that while specific practices vary, the underlying principle of relationship-based governance represents a common adaptation to institutional uncertainties characteristic of emerging markets.

This evidence provides strong support for institutional theory's predictions about how firms adapt to institutional voids. However, the findings extend institutional theory by demonstrating that relationship-based governance is not merely a substitute for formal institutions but often operates as a complementary mechanism that enhances the effectiveness of formal governance structures. The research shows that "in transition economies, personal trust substitutes or complements some legal and regulatory deficiencies, including bureaucracies, corruption, and other impediments in legal systems" (Manolova et al., 2007 as cited in Graca et al., 2017).

Long-term commitment signalling represents a crucial partnership development strategy that distinguishes successful firms from those focused on short-term transactional relationships. The evidence reveals multiple mechanisms through which firms signal long-term commitment, including relationship-specific investments, collaborative planning processes, and explicit commitment statements. Studies

demonstrate that "affective commitment positively improves loyalty in customer-service provider relationships" while "affective trust positively increases loyalty in customer service provider relationships" (Abosag et al., 2017).

The development of partnership loyalty requires sustained attention to relationship quality and mutual value creation rather than merely avoiding relationship problems. The evidence shows that loyalty emerges from positive relationship experiences, mutual benefit achievement, and demonstration of genuine care for partner success. Research indicates that "liking can act to enhance relationships" and leads to "a propensity for individuals to remain in relationships" (Abosag et al., 2017).

Contract design and relationship flexibility present complex challenges in partnership development, with evidence suggesting that optimal approaches balance formal governance with relationship flexibility. Studies demonstrate that "contract adjustment has an inverted-U-shaped relationship with relationship continuity in the aftermath of exchange disruptions" (Zhang et al., 2018), suggesting that moderate levels of contractual adaptation enhance relationship resilience while excessive flexibility may undermine relationship stability.

5.2.3 Communication Transparency and Ethics

Communication transparency and ethics encompass the principles, practices, and standards that govern information sharing, relationship behaviour, and decision-making processes in B2B relationships. The evidence reveals that transparent and ethical communication serves multiple functions, including trust building, relationship quality maintenance, conflict prevention, and collaborative coordination.

Information sharing and transparency emerge as fundamental requirements for trust development, with evidence demonstrating strong relationships between transparency levels and trust outcomes. Research shows that "the deeper the mutual trust between firms, the higher the level of information shared among them" (Liao & Long, 2019), indicating positive feedback loops where transparency builds trust while trust enables greater transparency. "Firms possessing unique and valuable knowledge are often protective of it and may hesitate to openly share critical know-how, fearing loss of competitive advantage" (Gupta et al., 2025). The paradox of knowledge-based trust presents a fundamental challenge for B2B branding in knowledge-intensive industries. Hence, brands must balance transparency (trust-building) with competitive

secrecy (strategic protection) requiring sophisticated information governance approaches.

The evidence reveals that transparency signalling serves important functions in emerging markets where institutional uncertainty may create concerns about partner reliability and intentions. Studies show that "firms may articulate their expectations, assumptions, and concerns of the relationship, which generates cues for their counterparts to make sense of their competence and professionalism as well as their intentions and hidden agendas" (Shen et al., 2019).

The findings challenge traditional communication theories that emphasize standardized communication approaches by demonstrating that effective transparency requires cultural adaptation. The research reveals that "Bidirectional information exchange decreases perceptions of secrecy while helping resolve disputes, align goals, and uncover value-creating opportunities (Graca et al., 2017)" but the optimal forms of two-way communication vary significantly across cultural contexts.

These differential communication effects challenge the universalist assumptions underlying global B2B branding strategies. The evidence suggests that communication as a trust-building mechanism operates through culturally specific pathways, requiring brands to develop context-sensitive rather than standardized communication approaches.

5.3 Aggregate Dimension 2: Strategic Market Engagement

The Strategic Market Engagement dimension encompasses the strategic approaches and capabilities through which B2B firms position themselves effectively and create value collaboratively within emerging market environments. This dimension synthesizes two critical second-order themes- Branding Strategies and Market Adaptation and Strategic Value Co-Creation, into frameworks that enable firms to succeed in dynamic, uncertain, and culturally complex market conditions.

5.3.1 Branding Strategies and Market Adaptation

Branding strategies and market adaptation encompass the approaches through which firms develop and communicate their value propositions while adapting to local cultural, institutional, and competitive contexts. The evidence reveals that successful adaptation goes far beyond superficial localization to encompass fundamental strategic alignment with local stakeholder expectations, institutional requirements, and cultural norms.

Cultural adaptation and sensitivity emerge as fundamental requirements for effective B2B branding in emerging markets. The research provides compelling evidence of cultural variation in business practices and relationship expectations. Studies demonstrate that "business people from relationship-focused cultures need to build relationships to achieve effective communication" while noting significant differences between cultures, as "Americans pay attention to time and represent a high level of pro-transaction behaviour" while "the Chinese tend to be more partnership-focused" (Bartosik-Purgat & Rakowska, 2025).

This evidence strongly supports Hall's high-context versus low-context communication framework and Hofstede's individualism-collectivism dimension. However, the findings extend these theories by demonstrating how cultural dimensions specifically manifest in B2B branding contexts. The research reveals that "representatives of high-context cultures more often use different kinds of gestures which are sometimes misunderstood by others" and "value trust and relationships among people (including in business)" (Bartosik-Purgat & Rakowska, 2025).

Digital platform integration and technological adaptation represent increasingly important branding strategies that enable firms to reach broader audiences while maintaining the personal relationship elements crucial in many emerging markets. Studies show that "companies move to the adoption and implementation of new technologies both in the communication with the market and business partners" (Bartosik-Purgat & Rakowska, 2025).

Corporate social responsibility and community engagement emerge as significant branding strategies that serve multiple functions in emerging markets. Research demonstrates that "perceived CER [Corporate Environmental Responsibility] is also an effective tool to counter the negative effects of crisis spillover" (Ouyang et al.,

2020), indicating that environmental and social responsibility initiatives can enhance brand credibility and trust while providing crisis resilience.

5.3.2 Strategic Value Co-Creation

Strategic value co-creation encompasses the collaborative approaches through which firms work with partners, customers, and stakeholders to create mutual value that exceeds what individual organizations could achieve independently. The evidence reveals that value co-creation in emerging markets requires sophisticated coordination mechanisms, trust-based governance, and cultural sensitivity.

The research demonstrates that "value creation is collaborative and contextual, which implies that institutions, rules, norms and beliefs and institutional logics play a crucial role in the outcome of exchange processes" (Struwe & Slepnirov, 2021). This finding extends value co-creation theory by demonstrating how institutional contexts shape collaborative value creation processes.

Collaborative innovation and knowledge sharing emerge as critical value co-creation mechanisms. The evidence shows that "both interfirm cognitive trust and emotional trust were positively correlated to firms' cooperation on environmental innovation" (Liao & Long, 2019), demonstrating how trust enables collaborative value creation in specific domains.

The findings provide strong support for network theory's emphasis on relationship-based value creation while revealing specific mechanisms through which networks operate in emerging markets. The research demonstrates that "knowledge exchange and collaboration via horizontal, trust-based linkages between SMEs within a cluster are crucial for the upgrading of locally clustered SMEs" (Gerke et al., 2023).

5.4 Aggregate Dimension 3: Institutional Safeguards & Risk Management

The Institutional Safeguards & Risk Management dimension encompasses the mechanisms and strategies through which firms navigate institutional uncertainties, manage relationship risks, and create governance structures that enable sustainable collaboration despite weak formal institutions. This dimension synthesizes two interconnected second-order themes - Institutional Support and Credibility and Risks and Opportunistic Behaviour, into comprehensive risk management frameworks.

5.4.1 Institutional Support and Credibility

Institutional support and credibility encompass the formal and informal mechanisms through which firms establish legitimacy, access institutional resources, and build credibility with stakeholders in emerging market contexts. The evidence reveals that institutional navigation requires sophisticated understanding of both formal institutional mechanisms and informal institutional practices.

The research demonstrates that "in transition economies, personal trust substitutes or complements some legal and regulatory deficiencies, including bureaucracies, corruption, and other impediments in legal systems" (Manolova et al., 2007 as cited in Graca et al., 2017). This finding supports institutional theory's predictions about how firms adapt to institutional voids while revealing specific mechanisms through which adaptation occurs.

Contract design and governance mechanisms emerge as critical institutional safeguards that help firms manage relationship risks while building trust. The evidence shows that "contracts and trust are the most traditional and typical control mechanisms used in supply chains in China" (Yang et al., 2017), revealing how formal and informal governance mechanisms operate simultaneously.

The findings challenge transaction cost theory's assumption that contracts and trust represent alternative governance mechanisms. Instead, the evidence reveals that "channel managers can structure exchanges by devising detailed contracts that align incentives and demonstrate commitment, which helps build trust in a relationship" (Wang et al., 2023). This suggests that contracts and trust often complement rather than substitute for each other.

5.4.2 Risks and Opportunistic Behaviour

Risk management and opportunism control encompass the strategies and mechanisms through which firms identify, prevent, and respond to opportunistic behaviour while maintaining collaborative relationships. The evidence reveals that effective risk management requires balanced approaches that protect against exploitation while enabling relationship development.

The research demonstrates various approaches to opportunism control, with evidence showing that "trust constrains partner opportunism and improves exchange

performance" (Wang et al., 2022). However, the findings reveal complex relationships between different governance mechanisms and their effectiveness in different contexts.

5.5 Theoretical Integration and Critical Assessment

The three-dimensional framework revealed through this thematic analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how B2B firms in emerging markets use branding strategies to build trust. The framework demonstrates that successful approaches require integrated attention to relational, strategic, and institutional dimensions rather than focusing on any single factor in isolation.

Integration of Theoretical Perspectives:

The findings reveal significant interactions between the theoretical frameworks employed in this research. While relationship marketing theory effectively explains the relational dimension, institutional theory provides crucial insights into the institutional dimension, and social exchange theory illuminates the reciprocal nature of trust-building processes. However, none of these theories alone adequately captures the complex, multi-dimensional nature of trust-building in emerging markets.

The evidence demonstrates that trust serves both as a prerequisite for advanced collaboration and as an outcome of successful relationship building. This dual role creates positive feedback loops where initial trust-building enables enhanced cooperation, which generates greater value and further strengthens trust relationships. However, these feedback loops also indicate vulnerability to trust breakdowns that can undermine years of relationship building investment.

Limitations of Existing Theory:

The findings reveal several limitations in existing theoretical frameworks. Traditional relationship marketing theory, while valuable for understanding relational mechanisms, underestimates the importance of institutional and cultural adaptation. Similarly, institutional theory, though helpful for understanding institutional navigation, provides insufficient guidance for relationship-building processes. The integrated framework addresses these limitations by demonstrating how theoretical perspectives must be combined to understand the full complexity of emerging market contexts.

Cultural and institutional contexts moderate all three dimensions, requiring firms to adapt their approaches while maintaining strategic coherence. The evidence consistently shows that successful B2B branding in emerging markets requires sophisticated understanding of local contexts combined with systematic approaches to relationship building, value creation, and risk management.

5.6 Implications for Research and Practice

The integrated framework extends existing theory by demonstrating how relational, strategic, and institutional factors interact to create comprehensive approaches to trust development and brand building. This integration challenges traditional approaches that often treat these factors as separate concerns while providing practical guidance for developing capabilities that address the complex realities of emerging market business environments.

For practitioners, the framework reveals that successful B2B branding in emerging markets requires simultaneous investment in relationship building capabilities, strategic adaptation mechanisms, and institutional navigation skills. The evidence demonstrates that firms cannot simply transfer developed market approaches to emerging markets but must develop culturally sensitive, institutionally appropriate strategies that build trust through multiple mechanisms.

For researchers, the framework provides a foundation for future investigations into the complex relationships between branding, trust, and institutional contexts. The evidence reveals numerous opportunities for deeper investigation into specific mechanisms, cultural variations, and industry-specific adaptations of the general framework.

The framework's emphasis on the interconnected nature of trust-building dimensions suggests that future research should adopt more holistic approaches that examine relationships between different theoretical perspectives rather than treating them as competing explanations. This integrated approach may prove valuable for understanding other complex organizational phenomena in emerging market contexts.

Chapter 6: DISCUSSIONS

This systematic literature review has generated significant insights into how B2B firms in emerging markets employ branding strategies to build trust, revealing a sophisticated three-dimensional framework that challenges conventional approaches while providing evidence-based guidance for both theoretical development and practical application. The discussion examines theoretical contributions, practical implications, and critical analysis of the findings while acknowledging limitations and identifying future research directions.

6.1 Theoretical Contributions and Knowledge Advancement

The research makes several significant theoretical contributions that advance understanding of B2B branding and trust- building in emerging markets while extending established theories to new contexts and applications. The integrated three-dimensional framework developed through rigorous analysis demonstrates how relational, strategic, and institutional factors interact to create comprehensive approaches to trust development and brand building that transcend traditional theoretical boundaries.

6.1.1 Extension of Relationship Marketing Theory

The research extends relationship marketing theory by revealing the central role of trust as both antecedent and outcome in B2B branding processes, creating dynamic feedback loops that traditional linear models cannot capture (Abosag et al., 2017; Graca et al., 2017). Unlike previous research that often treats trust as a static variable or simple mediator, this study demonstrates the complex, multidimensional nature of trust development with cognitive and affective components requiring different strategies and yielding different outcomes. The evidence reveals that in emerging markets, "Emotional trust formation supersedes rational-cognitive frameworks through mechanisms where firms exhibit concern for partner interests and maintain good communication (Liao & Long, 2019), creating deeper relational bonds than performance-based evaluations." This finding requires reconceptualization of trust-building strategies to emphasize emotional connection, personal relationship development, and cultural sensitivity alongside traditional competence and reliability demonstration.

The framework contributes to relationship marketing theory by demonstrating how cultural context fundamentally shapes relationship-building approaches rather than merely influencing their implementation. The evidence of significant variation in communication patterns, relationship norms, and trust-building mechanisms across emerging markets suggests that relationship marketing theory must incorporate cultural adaptation as a core strategic capability rather than a tactical consideration (Bartosik-Purgat & Rakowska, 2025; Graca et al., 2017).

6.1.2 Integration of Institutional Theory Perspectives

The research advances institutional theory by demonstrating how firms proactively engage with institutional environments rather than merely adapting to institutional constraints. The Institutional Safeguards & Risk Management dimension reveals sophisticated strategies for building legitimacy, accessing institutional resources, and influencing institutional development that extend beyond traditional institutional theory's emphasis on conformity and isomorphism (Barry et al., 2021; Manolova et al., 2007 as cited in Graca et al., 2017).

The finding that mixed governance approaches combining formal and informal mechanisms often prove most effective challenges institutional theory's tendency to treat different institutional elements as substitutes rather than complements (Wang et al., 2023). The evidence suggests that successful firms develop capabilities for simultaneously managing regulatory compliance, cultural adaptation, and relationship-based governance in integrated approaches that leverage multiple institutional logics.

The framework extends institutional theory by revealing how institutional engagement serves trust-building functions that create competitive advantages rather than merely ensuring legitimacy and survival. This perspective suggests that institutional theory must incorporate strategic considerations and competitive dynamics rather than focusing primarily on legitimacy and conformity concerns (Barry et al., 2021).

6.1.3 Development of Value Co-Creation Theory

The research contributes to value co-creation theory by demonstrating how trust mediates the relationship between collaborative capabilities and value creation outcomes, revealing complex interdependencies that require sophisticated management approaches (Struwe & Slepnirov, 2021; Wang et al., 2022). The evidence

shows that trust serves as both a prerequisite for successful collaboration and an outcome of collaborative value creation, creating positive feedback loops that can enhance competitive advantage but also create vulnerability to trust breakdowns.

The finding that collaborative innovation requires sophisticated coordination mechanisms that balance openness with protection extends value co-creation theory beyond simple cooperation models to encompass competitive dynamics and intellectual property concerns (Liao & Long, 2019). This extension is particularly important in emerging markets where institutional protection for intellectual property may be limited.

The framework advances value co-creation theory by revealing how cultural factors influence collaboration effectiveness and how different cultural contexts require different approaches to partnership development, knowledge sharing, and benefit distribution. This cultural sensitivity extends value co-creation theory beyond universal models to context-specific applications (Gerke et al., 2023).

6.2 Critical Analysis and Theoretical Tensions

While the research reveals comprehensive patterns and mechanisms, several theoretical tensions and critical perspectives merit discussion and further exploration. These tensions reflect the complexity of emerging market environments and the challenges of developing unified theoretical frameworks that encompass diverse contexts and practices.

6.2.1 Formal versus Informal Governance Mechanisms

The relationship between formal contracts and informal trust relationships presents ongoing theoretical and practical challenges that resist simple resolution (Wang et al., 2023). The evidence reveals complex interactions rather than straightforward substitution or complementarity relationships, with studies showing that contracts and trust have complementary between-dyad effects but substitutive within-dyad effects.

This complexity suggests that the timing and sequencing of governance mechanisms may be crucial, with different approaches proving optimal at different stages of relationship development. Initial relationship building may benefit from informal, trust-based approaches that demonstrate good faith and cultural sensitivity, while mature

relationships may require formal structures to manage increasing complexity and interdependence.

The tension extends beyond practical implementation to theoretical understanding, challenging transaction cost economics' emphasis on governance mechanism selection and relationship marketing theory's focus on trust development. The evidence suggests need for more sophisticated theoretical frameworks that explain dynamic interactions among governance mechanisms rather than static choices between alternatives.

6.2.2 Cultural Universality versus Contextual Specificity

The research reveals fundamental tension between universal relationship-building principles and culture-specific implementation requirements. While certain mechanisms—such as reliability demonstration, transparent communication, and mutual benefit creation—appear universally important, their implementation varies dramatically across cultural contexts with different communication styles, relationship norms, and business practices (Bartosik-Purgat & Rakowska, 2025; Graca et al., 2017).

This tension has important implications for multinational firms seeking to develop consistent approaches across diverse emerging markets while adapting effectively to local contexts. The evidence suggests that successful firms develop meta- capabilities that enable cultural adaptation while maintaining core strategic principles and brand consistency.

The theoretical challenge involves developing frameworks that accommodate both universal principles and contextual variation without losing analytical precision or practical utility. Simple contingency approaches may be insufficient, requiring more sophisticated understanding of how universal principles manifest differently across contexts while maintaining their essential characteristics.

6.2.3 Relationship Investment versus Efficiency Concerns

The emphasis on relationship building and trust development in emerging markets creates potential tensions with efficiency concerns and short-term performance pressures that characterize much of modern business practice. The evidence consistently shows that effective relationship building requires sustained investment

over extended time periods, creating challenges for firms facing quarterly earnings pressures or rapid growth requirements.

This tension reflects deeper questions about sustainable competitive advantage and the appropriate balance between relationship investment and operational efficiency. The evidence suggests that relationship investments often generate superior long-term returns but may require different performance metrics and evaluation approaches than traditional efficiency-focused measures.

The theoretical implication involves reconceptualizing performance measurement and strategic evaluation to incorporate relationship assets and trust development alongside traditional financial and operational metrics. This reconceptualization may require new accounting approaches and stakeholder communication strategies that help investors and other stakeholders understand relationship investment value.

6.3 Practical Implications and Strategic Recommendations

The research yields significant practical implications for managers, consultants, and organizations involved in B2B branding and emerging market strategies. The integrated framework provides evidence-based guidance for developing comprehensive approaches to trust-building and brand development while highlighting critical capabilities and strategic considerations.

6.3.1 Strategic Framework Implementation

Integrated Approach Development: Organizations should develop integrated approaches that simultaneously address relational, strategic, and institutional dimensions rather than treating them as separate functional concerns. This integration requires cross-functional coordination and senior leadership commitment to relationship-based strategies that may require longer investment horizons than traditional approaches.

Cultural Intelligence Capabilities: The evidence demonstrates that cultural adaptation is not merely helpful but essential for emerging market success (Bartosik-Purgat & Rakowska, 2025). Organizations should invest in cultural intelligence development through training programs, local hiring, cultural immersion experiences, and systematic study of local business practices and relationship norms.

Relationship Portfolio Management: Successful firms develop sophisticated approaches to relationship portfolio management that balance deep investment in key relationships with appropriate diversification and risk management. This balance requires clear criteria for relationship prioritization, systematic relationship development processes, and ongoing relationship performance evaluation.

6.3.2 Organizational Capability Development

Trust-Building Competencies: Organizations should develop trust-building as a core organizational capability that encompasses both individual relationship skills and organizational processes and systems. This capability development requires systematic training, clear guidelines and standards, performance measurement systems, and organizational cultures that support relationship-based approaches.

Adaptive Capabilities: The dynamic nature of emerging markets requires organizational capabilities for sensing environmental changes and adapting strategies and operations accordingly. These capabilities encompass market intelligence systems, flexible organizational structures, rapid decision-making processes, and learning-oriented cultures that encourage experimentation and adaptation.

Collaborative Capabilities: Effective value co-creation requires organizational capabilities for managing complex collaborative relationships that balance cooperation with competition while protecting intellectual property and competitive advantages (Liao & Long, 2019). These capabilities include partnership management systems, intellectual property protection processes, collaborative innovation frameworks, and conflict resolution mechanisms.

Institutional Navigation: Organizations need capabilities for understanding and navigating complex institutional environments that include formal regulations, informal cultural norms, and relationship-based practices. These capabilities require legal and regulatory expertise, government relations capabilities, cultural sensitivity, and ethical frameworks for appropriate institutional engagement.

6.3.3 Implementation Recommendations

Relationship Investment Strategies: Organizations should allocate significant resources to relationship development while maintaining clear expectations and performance metrics for relationship investments. This allocation should include

dedicated relationship management personnel, relationship development budgets, and systematic approaches to relationship building and maintenance.

Communication Strategy Development: The evidence demonstrates that communication effectiveness requires cultural adaptation and relationship context understanding (Graca et al., 2017). Organizations should develop communication strategies that balance global consistency with local adaptation while maintaining transparency, honesty, and cultural sensitivity.

Risk Management Integration: Risk management should be integrated with relationship development rather than treated as a separate concern. "Guanxi institution could be considered a double-edged sword, it may create discrepancies between boundary spanners' personal interests and their organizations' business interests" (Cai et al., 2021). While this study emphasizes trust-building benefits, emerging evidence reveals potential dark sides of relationship-centric approaches. Personal relationships may conflict with organizational interests, creating ethical and strategic dilemmas that require careful management in B2B branding strategies. This integration involves developing monitoring systems that preserve trust while providing early warning of potential problems, dispute resolution mechanisms that preserve relationship value, and diversification strategies that manage relationship risks.

6.4 Policy Implications and Institutional Development

The research has significant implications for policymakers, government officials, and institutional actors involved in economic development and international business facilitation. The findings suggest several areas where policy interventions and institutional development could enhance business relationship development and trust-building effectiveness.

6.4.1 Institutional Framework Development

Regulatory Clarity and Consistency: The evidence demonstrates that regulatory uncertainty creates additional challenges for relationship building and trust development (Barry et al., 2021). Policymakers should prioritize regulatory framework development that provides clear, consistent, and predictable rules while minimizing bureaucratic complexity and corruption opportunities.

Dispute Resolution Mechanisms: Effective formal dispute resolution mechanisms can complement relationship-based governance while providing backup protection when relationship-based approaches are insufficient. These mechanisms

should be accessible, efficient, and culturally appropriate while maintaining high standards of fairness and professionalism.

Industry Association Support: Government support for professional industry associations and certification bodies can provide important institutional infrastructure for trust-building and credibility development. This support should emphasize independence, professionalism, and international standard compliance while avoiding excessive government control or political interference.

6.4.2 International Business Facilitation

Cultural Bridge-Building: Government agencies and educational institutions can play important roles in facilitating cultural understanding and relationship building between international firms and local partners. This facilitation might include cultural training programs, business matchmaking services, and educational exchanges that build mutual understanding and relationship foundations.

Information and Transparency: Government efforts to improve business information availability, regulatory transparency, and institutional clarity can reduce uncertainty and facilitate more effective relationship building. These efforts should emphasize accuracy, accessibility, and regular updating while avoiding excessive bureaucracy or information overload.

6.5 Research Limitations and Future Directions

This systematic review has several limitations that suggest opportunities for future research while requiring careful interpretation of findings and recommendations. The focus on English-language publications from high-ranking journals may exclude important insights from local research contexts and emerging scholarly perspectives, particularly from researchers publishing in local languages or newer journals.

The temporal limitation to recent literature (2015-2025) provides comprehensive coverage of current research while potentially missing important historical developments and long-term trends that could inform understanding of relationship

evolution and institutional development processes. Future research should examine longer-term patterns and historical contexts that shape current practices and outcomes.

The systematic review methodology, while rigorous, may not capture the full complexity and contextual nuance of B2B relationships in emerging markets that ethnographic or other intensive research approaches might reveal. Future research would benefit from complementary methodological approaches that provide deeper cultural and contextual understanding.

6.5.1 Priority Research Opportunities

Digital Transformation Impact: The increasing importance of digital technologies in B2B relationships presents significant opportunities for research examining how traditional relationship-building mechanisms adapt to digital environments while maintaining effectiveness and cultural sensitivity. "Supplier involvement mediates the positive effect of IT resources on the focal firm's performance only when there is a high level of mutual trust" (Miao et al., 2018).

The intersection of digital transformation and trust-building presents a frontier area for B2B branding research. Evidence shows that traditional trust mechanisms become prerequisites for technology-mediated collaborations, suggesting that digital B2B branding strategies must prioritize relationship-building before technological integration."

Sustainability Integration: Sustainability is increasingly becoming a key consideration in business-to-business relationships. In future research, it will be important to explore how environmental and social initiatives influence the development of trust and affect branding outcomes. This is especially relevant in diverse cultural settings where sustainability practices and expectations might differ. Studies so far indicate that both cognitive and emotional trust can positively impact firms' cooperation on environmental innovation. However, research in this area is still limited and needs expansion. Understanding if sustainability creates stronger and longer-lasting trust compared to traditional approaches would be valuable. It would also be crucial to investigate how companies, especially in emerging markets, balance sustainability objectives with immediate business pressures.

This could reveal tensions brands face when trying to be responsible while also remaining competitive. Using longitudinal research designs could help capture how sustainability trust develops and evolves over time. Such studies will provide deeper insights into how sustainability initiatives truly shape branding success and relationships in global supply chains as firms face increasing environmental accountability.

SME Perspectives: Most of the current literature focuses on large firms, but small and medium-sized enterprises or SMEs face unique challenges when building brands and developing trust. Future research should pay more attention to how SMEs create branding strategies while managing resource constraints not commonly faced by larger companies. Evidence from industrial clusters shows that SMEs often rely on trust-based collaborations with local businesses to overcome these limitations. Understanding these localized and network-driven approaches could provide fresh perspectives that differ from those of big firms. Additionally, the role of digital platforms in helping SMEs build brands and trust deserves exploration. Technology may offer new opportunities for SMEs to compete and grow that were previously unavailable due to limited resources or networks. Qualitative studies and detailed case research would be well suited to uncover the nuances of SME relationship-building processes, especially in emerging markets.

Longitudinal Relationship Development: Most existing studies capture snapshots of business relationships at a single point in time. This approach misses important insights about how relationships develop, change, and endure over time. Future research should focus on studying the evolution of trust and branding in long-term business relationships. Different types of trust, such as cognitive and affective, could change in importance as relationships mature. Understanding what helps maintain partnerships or leads to their breakdown could provide essential practical knowledge. It is also necessary to study how formal contracts and informal personal relationships interact over the lifespan of a business relationship. Longitudinal research using methods like panel data or digital communication records could give a rich view of these processes and show how relationship-building strategies need to adapt as time

passes. This type of work would help brands better understand how to sustain valuable partnerships.

Trust repair and disruption recovery: "Apologies are effective in managing unstable competence-based disruptions, while integrity failures involve increased risk of opportunism" (Yuan et al., 2024). The analysis revealed that most B2B branding literature focuses on trust building rather than trust repair. This methodological insight suggests future research should examine dynamic trust processes, including how brands recover from relationship disruptions through specific recovery strategies.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The systematic literature review has undertaken a comprehensive investigation into how business-to-business firms operating in emerging markets can strategically employ branding approaches to cultivate trust. This phenomenon that represents one of the most critical yet theoretically underdeveloped domains in international business scholarship. Through rigorous synthesis of 60 high-quality peer-reviewed articles spanning 2015 to 2025, this research has unveiled a sophisticated three-dimensional framework that fundamentally reconceptualizes our understanding of trust-building mechanisms in institutional environments characterized by regulatory uncertainty, relationship-based governance, and cultural complexity. The investigation reveals that successful B2B branding in emerging markets transcends conventional Western paradigms, demanding integrated approaches that simultaneously address relational, strategic, and institutional dimensions through culturally intelligent & context-sensitive strategies.

7.1 Synthesis of Core Findings and Theoretical Implications

The central contribution of this dissertation lies in the development and empirical validation of an integrated three-dimensional framework comprising Relational Trust Partnership, Strategic Market Engagement, and Institutional Safeguards Risk Management. This framework represents a departure from fragmented, single-dimension approaches that have historically dominated B2B branding literature, offering instead a holistic lens through which scholars and practitioners can comprehend the complex interdependencies between relationship dynamics, strategic positioning, and institutional navigation.

7.1.1 The Primacy of Affective Trust in Collectivist Contexts

Perhaps the most theoretically disruptive finding concerns the predominance of affective trust over cognitive trust in emerging market B2B relationships. The evidence consistently demonstrates that in collectivist cultures characterizing major emerging economies, emotional connection, interpersonal bonding, and relationship quality exert significantly greater influence on partnership outcomes than rational assessments of competence or reliability. This finding directly challenges foundational assumptions in Western relationship marketing theory, which has traditionally privileged cognitive trust dimensions and rational decision-making frameworks. The

theoretical implication is profound ‘trust formation in emerging markets operates through culturally embedded mechanisms that cannot be adequately captured by universal models developed in Western institutional contexts’.

This affective trust predominance manifests through specific mechanisms including personal relationship cultivation extending beyond formal business interactions, reciprocal favour exchange embedded in cultural constructs such as Chinese *guanxi*, Brazilian *jeitinho*, and Indian *jaan-pehchaan*, and communication patterns emphasizing two-way dialogue and socialization over information efficiency. The strategic consequence for B2B branding is equally significant—firms cannot rely solely on technical competence demonstrations or rational value propositions but must systematically invest in emotional connection building and relationship cultivation as core branding capabilities.

7.1.2 The Strategic Reconceptualization of Institutional Environments

The Institutional Safeguards Risk Management dimension advances institutional theory by demonstrating that emerging market firms engage proactively with institutional environments rather than merely adapting defensively to institutional constraints. The evidence reveals sophisticated hybrid governance approaches that strategically combine formal contractual mechanisms with informal relationship-based safeguards, creating governance architectures tailored to specific institutional contexts. This finding extends institutional theory beyond its traditional emphasis on conformity and isomorphism toward recognition of institutions as strategic resources that firms can leverage for competitive advantage.

Critically, the research exposes a fundamental governance paradox: while emerging markets suffer from institutional voids and regulatory deficiencies, relationship-based governance mechanisms do not simply compensate for institutional weaknesses but constitute sophisticated strategic capabilities that generate sustainable competitive advantages. This reframing challenges deficit-based conceptualizations of emerging market institutions. Thus, Suggesting that relationship-centric approaches represent evolved adaptations to institutional complexity rather than suboptimal solutions to institutional inadequacy.

7.1.3 Value Co-Creation as Dynamic Trust Mechanism

The Strategic Market Engagement dimension reveals value co-creation not merely as an outcome of trust but as a dynamic mechanism through which trust simultaneously deepens and extends. The evidence demonstrates bidirectional causality that, trust enables collaborative innovation and knowledge sharing, while successful collaboration reciprocally strengthens both cognitive and affective trust dimensions. This finding extends value co-creation theory by revealing feedback loops and path dependencies that traditional linear models fail to capture. The practical implication is that firms should conceptualize value co-creation initiatives not only as operational strategies but as strategic trust-building investments that compound over relationship lifecycles.

7.2 Critical Evaluation and Theoretical Tensions

Despite the comprehensive framework developed, several theoretical tensions and unresolved contradictions warrant critical examination. First, the trust formation paradox identified in the literature, where interpersonal trust demonstrates positive influences on emotional attachment but direct negative influences on performance outcomes. This suggests that trust operates through more complex causal pathways than current theory acknowledges. This paradox potentially indicates that affective trust, while essential for relationship continuity, may create path dependencies or reduce objective performance evaluation, introducing efficiency costs that offset relational benefits.

Second, the relationship between formal and informal governance mechanisms remains theoretically ambiguous. The evidence demonstrates that hybrid approaches combining both dimensions prove most effective. But the optimal balance appears highly context-dependent, varying across cultural contexts, industry sectors, and relationship stages. This contextual sensitivity challenges efforts to develop generalizable theoretical principles while simultaneously highlighting the importance of configurational approaches that examine how governance elements interact rather than treating them as independent variables.

Third, the framework reveals a potential strategic dilemma between relationship investment requirements and efficiency imperatives. The evidence consistently indicates that effective trust-building in emerging markets demands sustained relationship investment over extended timeframes. This tension raises fundamental

questions about sustainable competitive advantage and the appropriate metrics for evaluating relationship-based strategies that generate long-term value through mechanisms not captured by traditional financial performance indicators.

7.3 Practical Implications and Strategic Guidance

For practitioners, this research yields actionable insights across multiple strategic dimensions. Organizations entering or expanding within emerging markets must develop cultural intelligence capabilities as core competencies rather than peripheral considerations. This requires systematic investment in cultural training, local talent acquisition, immersive cultural experiences, and continuous learning about local business practices and relationship norms. The evidence unequivocally demonstrates that cultural adaptation is non-negotiable for emerging market success. Firms cannot simply transfer developed market approaches but must fundamentally reconceptualize their branding strategies through culturally sensitive lenses.

Integrated relationship portfolio management emerges as a critical organizational capability. Successful firms strategically balance deep investment in key relationships with appropriate diversification and risk management, developing clear prioritization criteria, systematic relationship development processes, and ongoing performance evaluation mechanisms that incorporate both relational and financial metrics. This balanced approach addresses the efficiency-relationship tension by focusing intensive relationship investment on strategically critical partnerships while maintaining transactional approaches for less strategic relationships.

Hybrid governance architecture development represents another essential capability. Organizations should design governance systems that strategically combine formal contractual protections with informal relationship-based safeguards, tailoring governance configurations to specific institutional contexts, partnership types, and relationship stages. This requires sophisticated understanding of how different governance mechanisms interact and complement each other rather than treating formal and informal approaches as mutually exclusive alternatives.

Furthermore, firms must reconceptualize performance measurement systems to incorporate relationship assets and trust development alongside traditional financial and operational metrics. This reconceptualization may require new accounting approaches and stakeholder communication strategies that help investors and other

external stakeholders understand the value creation logic of relationship-based strategies that generate returns over longer time horizons than purely transactional approaches.

7.4 Research Limitations and Boundary Conditions

Several limitations constrain the generalizability and completeness of these findings. The focus on English-language publications from high-ranking journals may systematically exclude valuable insights from local-language scholarship and emerging research platforms, potentially introducing Western bias despite efforts to incorporate emerging market perspectives. The temporal focus on 2015-2025, while providing contemporary relevance, may miss important historical developments and long-term evolutionary patterns that shape current practices.

Methodologically, the systematic review approach, while ensuring rigor and comprehensiveness, necessarily synthesizes secondary studies rather than generating primary empirical data. This creates distance from the lived experiences of B2B relationship managers and may miss contextual nuances that ethnographic or other intensive research approaches would capture. Additionally, the predominance of cross-sectional research designs in the reviewed literature limits understanding of how trust and branding strategies evolve across relationship lifecycles, institutional transitions, and market maturation processes.

The framework's applicability may vary across different emerging market contexts, industry sectors, and firm sizes. Most reviewed studies focus on large firms operating in BRIC nations, potentially limiting applicability to small and medium enterprises or emerging markets outside the BRIC group that face different institutional challenges and possess different resource capabilities.

7.5 Future Research Directions

Several promising research directions emerge from this synthesis. Longitudinal relationship development studies represent a critical priority, examining how trust types (cognitive versus affective) evolve across relationship stages, how formal and informal governance mechanisms interact over partnership lifecycles, and what factors enable relationship resilience versus relationship dissolution. Such research

would provide dynamic understanding currently absent from predominantly cross-sectional literature.

Digital transformation impact constitutes another frontier area. The increasing penetration of digital platforms, social media, e-commerce, and artificial intelligence in B2B relationships creates both opportunities and challenges for trust-building that current literature has barely begun to address. Research examining how traditional relationship-building mechanisms adapt to digital environments while maintaining cultural sensitivity and emotional connection would provide essential guidance for contemporary practice.

SME perspectives deserve greater scholarly attention, as small and medium enterprises face unique challenges and opportunities in B2B branding that differ substantially from large firm contexts. Understanding how resource-constrained SMEs build brands and develop trust through network-based, collaborative approaches could reveal mechanisms not evident in large firm studies.

Finally, trust repair and disruption recovery research would address a critical gap. Current literature overwhelmingly focuses on trust building rather than trust restoration following relationship disruptions. Understanding how brands recover from trust violations, what recovery strategies prove effective across different disruption types, and how relationship history moderates recovery effectiveness would provide essential insights for managing the full relationship lifecycle.

7.6 Concluding Reflections

This systematic literature review fundamentally reconceptualizes B2B branding in emerging markets as a multidimensional phenomenon requiring simultaneous mastery of relational, strategic, and institutional dimensions. The integrated framework developed challenges Western-centric theoretical assumptions, extends established theories to emerging market contexts, and provides evidence-based guidance for practitioners navigating institutional complexity and cultural diversity. As emerging markets continue rapid evolution amidst digital transformation, sustainability imperatives, and institutional development, the centrality of trust and relationship sensitivity in shaping successful global business futures becomes ever more apparent.

The research underscores that competitive advantage in emerging markets ultimately derives not from superior products or efficient operations alone, but from sophisticated relationship management capabilities that build lasting trust through culturally intelligent, institutionally adaptive, and strategically coherent branding approaches.

CHAPTER 8 : PERSONAL REFLECTION

8.1 My Learning Journey

Undertaking this systematic literature review on B2B branding strategies in emerging markets has been far more than an academic exercise. This has been a profound journey of intellectual, methodological, and personal transformation. Standing at the verge of completion of the thesis and the course I would say the transformational effect it had on me is immense. All I would say is that I am grateful for the experience.

At the outset, I must critically examine my foundational assumptions that significantly shaped this research journey. The choice of doing an SLR arose from the need to spend much time on injury recovery and physical immobility. I assumed that making a SLR would be the easiest, but it was nothing short of a roller coaster ride. The choice of taking up 'B2B branding' for my thesis was made aligning to my career goal of building up a B2B conglomerate. Initially, I assumed that trust in B2B relationships was primarily a rational, contract-based phenomenon where cognitive assessments of competence and reliability dominated the decision making processes. This Western-centric assumption reflected my little experience, book based knowledge and limited international exposure. However, systematic engagement with emerging market literature revealed the profound inadequacy of this assumption. The consistent evidence of affective trust mechanisms, cultural relationship networks like *guanxi* and *jeitinho*, and the primacy of interpersonal bonding over analytical assessments fundamentally challenged my conceptual framework.

This assumption revision process exemplifies what Moon (1999) describes as mental processing applied to "relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution." Recognizing and critically evaluating these assumptions was essential for developing cultural intelligence and avoiding ethnocentric bias in my theoretical synthesis.

8.2 Methodological Learning

8.2.1 Understanding Research Methodology as Transformative Process

Applying Tranfield et al.'s (2003) systematic review framework, alongside PRISMA guidelines and the Gioia methodology, provided my first experience with methodological rigor at scale. Initially, I viewed methodology as a procedural

constraint. Every decision required documentation, every exclusion needed justification, and every analytical step demanded transparency. However, through reflective practice, I recognized that systematic methodology serves as a causal mechanism for generating reliable knowledge rather than merely ensuring compliance.

The cause-effect relationship became clear: rigorous systematic processes (cause) produce methodologically sound findings (effect) that enable theoretical contributions and practical applications. This understanding transformed my approach from mechanical compliance to strategic methodological thinking. As Gray (2007) notes, this represents "the bridge between experience and learning," where process understanding enhances outcome quality. I am now much driven to be process focussed and this has instilled belief in me that "when you get the process right, result follows".

8.2.2 Qualitative Analysis and Theoretical Development

Applying the Gioia methodology represented the steepest learning curve, requiring me to distinguish between immediate causes and underlying effects in trust-building processes. For example, I learned to differentiate between cultural practices like *guanxi* (observable cause) and their strategic effects on competitive advantage and relationship stability (long-term outcomes).

The progression from first-order concepts through second-order themes to aggregate dimensions taught me to identify causal mechanisms rather than merely describing patterns. Each analytical level revealed different cause-effect relationships: first-order concepts captured immediate behavioural causes, second-order themes identified strategic effects, and aggregate dimensions revealed systemic outcomes. This hierarchical causality thinking significantly enhanced my analytical sophistication.

8.3 Cultural Learning and Global Perspective Development

My learning from the Effective Cross-Culture module proved instrumental in understanding emerging market dynamics. Theoretical frameworks such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Hall's communication contexts, and Trompenaars' cultural orientations provided essential analytical lenses for interpreting empirical findings. However, I initially assumed these frameworks were universally applicable

without considering their Western origins and potential limitations. I also regarded them as purely theoretical, not appreciating their real life significance.

Critical reflection revealed that these theories, while valuable, required cultural adaptation rather than direct application. This recognition aligns with institutional theory's emphasis on context-dependent mechanisms and relationship marketing theory's focus on cultural embeddedness. The cause-effect relationship became clear: cultural context (cause) shapes trust mechanisms (immediate effect) which influence business outcomes (long-term effects).

The systematic comparison of trust-building mechanisms across China, Brazil, India, and Russia challenged my Western-centric assumptions about efficiency and relationship governance. Initially, I viewed relationship-based systems as compensatory mechanisms for institutional weaknesses (cause) that produced suboptimal business outcomes (effect). However, extensive evidence revealed these systems as sophisticated strategic capabilities (cause) that generate sustainable competitive advantages (effect).

8.4 Theoretical Integration and Framework Development

8.4.1 Managing Theoretical Complexity

This research demanded integration across multiple theoretical traditions relationship marketing, institutional theory, social exchange theory, and value co-creation theory. Initially, this plurality seemed contradictory rather than complementary. However, developing meta-cognitive awareness helped me recognize that different theories illuminate distinct causal mechanisms within the same phenomenon.

The cause-effect relationships became apparent through theoretical triangulation: social exchange theory explains reciprocal trust mechanisms (cause-effect chain), institutional theory reveals environmental influences on governance choices (contextual causes), and relationship marketing theory demonstrates how trust builds competitive advantage (strategic effects). Understanding these theoretical linkages enabled framework development that captures complex causality rather than simple correlations.

8.4.2 Framework Development as Theoretical Contribution

Developing the three-dimensional framework - Relational Trust & Partnership Framework, Strategic Market Engagement, and Institutional Safeguards & Risk Management, required identifying causal relationships between relational inputs, strategic processes, and institutional outcomes. This framework development process exemplifies Gray's (2007) concept of "proactive critical reflectivity," where theoretical abstraction emerges from systematic empirical analysis.

8.5 Technology Integration and Ethical Considerations

Following Thau and Katila's (2025) framework for ethical AI use, I integrated AI tools while ensuring human-led decision-making for all substantive analysis. This experience revealed important cause-effect relationships: AI assistance (input cause) enhanced analytical efficiency (immediate effect) but required human judgment for theoretical interpretation (necessary mediating factor) to produce valid conclusions (ultimate outcome).

Ethical considerations were more complex than expected, requiring ongoing reflection on transparency, attribution, and bias prevention. This process reinforced institutional theory's emphasis on normative compliance, showing me that research integrity is about making deliberate responsible choices on the usage of technology.

8.6 Professional Development and Career Applications

This research experience developed in me, what I recognize as meta-capabilities for professional practice. These are cultural intelligence, systematic analytical thinking, theoretical integration, and methodological rigor. These capabilities represent the causal factors that will influence my effectiveness in international business contexts, particularly in emerging markets where cultural sensitivity and relationship-building skills are essential.

The cause-effect relationship extends beyond academic competence, it goes to practical application. enhanced cultural intelligence (cause) will improve my relationship-building effectiveness (immediate effect), which will generate better business outcomes (long-term effect) in international assignments. This understanding guides my career planning toward roles requiring cross-cultural competence and strategic thinking.

8.6.2 Future Research and Consulting Applications

The methodological skills developed through systematic review and thematic analysis provide foundational capabilities for future empirical research, including primary data collection, mixed-methods studies, and longitudinal relationship analysis. Though it may not be useful to my life specifically to do research, the theoretical framework will be useful in my professional/business environment. Be it consulting applications in cultural intelligence training, crafting relationship management strategy, and international market entry planning, this will be of great use to me.

These applications reflect Gray's (2007) emphasis on "active application of concepts in practice," bridging academic learning with professional value creation. The causal mechanism operates through knowledge transfer: theoretical understanding (cause) informs practical recommendations (immediate effect) that improve organizational performance (ultimate outcome).

8.7 Critical Self-Assessment and Continued Development

8.7.1 Acknowledging Limitations and Bias

Despite significant learning, I recognize important limitations in my analytical approach. Single-researcher coding introduces potential bias despite methodological rigor, and my cultural background may influence interpretation despite conscious efforts toward objectivity. Through this process, I learnt how easily personal bias can shape interpretation, even with rigorous methods. Working alone made me more aware of my cultural lens, teaching me the value of collaboration and local insight in future research. I also learnt to balance analytical precision with ethical awareness when using AI and theory. These experiences strengthened my confidence in applying relationship marketing and institutional theory beyond academia. I will use these insights to guide evidence-based consulting and to design strategies that build trust and cross-cultural understanding in emerging market contexts.

The theoretical grounding in relationship marketing, institutional theory, and cross-cultural management provides frameworks for addressing complex business challenges in emerging markets, while methodological skills enable evidence-based decision-making and strategic planning.

8.8 Conclusion: Transformation Through Critical Reflection

This systematic literature review represents a transformative learning experience that fundamentally altered my understanding of trust, culture, and international business. The process exemplifies Moon's (1999) conception of reflective learning as "emancipation or transformation of personal, social, or other situations" through critical examination of assumptions and systematic knowledge development.

The journey from initial Western-centric assumptions to culturally intelligent theoretical integration demonstrates how academic research can serve as a vehicle for personal and professional transformation. Moving forward, I carry enhanced capabilities for cultural analysis, theoretical thinking, and methodological rigor that will inform both future research contributions and professional practice in international business contexts.

I am confident that the cause-effect relationships identified throughout this reflection 'from assumption examination through theoretical integration to professional application' will provide me a roadmap for continued development, As both scholar and practitioner in the dynamic field of international business and cross-cultural relationship management.

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APPENDIX

- Ethical research consent declaration



1 August 2025

Dear Mr Peter Sivakumar ,

Reference: CURES/26193/2025

Project ID: 29654

Title: B2B Branding Strategies in Emerging Markets: A Systematic Review of Trust-Building Mechanisms and Market Contexts (2010–2024)

We are pleased to inform you that you have successfully declared that your research project is a **Literature Review – based solely on openly available literature which is in the public domain, and you are undertaking desk-based research not involving any other form of data or information.**

You have also confirmed that your project **does not meet** any of the literature review specified exceptions, listed both within the relevant section of the CURES form and below:

1) Your supervisor has requested that you apply for approval through CURES because:

- The journals or data are in a sensitive area (please discuss this with your supervisor)
- The project will be embargoed i.e. **will not be publicly available via the Cranfield library immediately or longer term**

2) Approval is/will be specifically required by another external body e.g. journal publishers

Therefore, **you do not require ethical approval** and your CURES application will be automatically closed.

Please keep a copy of this letter safe, if this exception is in relation to your thesis project, you will need to include a copy with your final thesis submission.

If you have any queries, please contact CURES Support.

We wish you every success with your project.

Regards,

CURES Team

- Bibliometric table

Authors	Article Title	Source Title	Publication Year	DOI	AJG_Rating
Gu, Flora F.; Wang, Danny T.; Wang, Jeff Jianfeng; Rindfleisch, Aric	Relationship ambidexterity in buyer-supplier relations	JOURNAL OF THE ACADEMY OF MARKETING SCIENCE	2025	10.1007/s11747-024-01071-4	4*
Sheng, Shibin; Zhou, Kevin Zheng; Li, Julie Juan; Guo, Zhaoyang	Institutions and opportunism in buyer-supplier exchanges: the moderated mediating effects of contractual and relational governance	JOURNAL OF THE ACADEMY OF MARKETING SCIENCE	2018	10.1007/s11747-018-0582-9	4*
Gupta, Suraksha; Yan, Chaonan; Wang, Yichuan; Zhang, Minhao; Ozdemir, Sena; Koufopoulos, Dimitrios N.	What makes local retailers commit to multinational brands: Evidence from multinational brand-retailer dyads in emerging markets	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2025	10.1016/j.indmarman.2025.06.002	3
Liu, Yi; Gao, Wei	Which is more effective for platform performance: Punishments or incentives?	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2023	10.1016/j.indmarman.2023.03.003	3
Bartosik-Purgat, Malgorzata; Rakowska, Wiktoria	Cross-cultural business-to-business communication - the experiences of Polish companies with the Chinese and Americans	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EMERGING MARKETS	2023	10.1108/IJOEM-01-2022-0013	3
Wang, Mengyan	Fairness asymmetry,	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING	2022	10.1016/j.indmarman.2022.07.013	3

g; Sheng, Shibin; Zhou, Kevin Zheng	changes in mutual trust, and supplier performance in buyer-supplier exchanges in China: A dyadic view	MANAGEMENT			
Barbieri, Paolo; Paulraj, Antony; Eltantawy, Reham; Prodi, Giorgio	Understanding the governance of high-performing international buyer-supplier relationships in China using complexity-based contingencies	JOURNAL OF PURCHASING AND SUPPLY MANAGEMENT	2022	10.1016/j.pursup.2022.100794	3
Barry, James M.; Graca, Sandra S.; Khare, Virginie Pioche; Yurova, Yuliya, V	Examining institutional effects on B2B relationships through the lens of transitioning economies	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2021	10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.09.012	3
Cai, Shaohan; Jun, Minjoon; Wang, Xiaoyan; Yang, Zhilin	On boundary spanners and interfirm embeddedness: The role of guanxi institution in China	JOURNAL OF PURCHASING AND SUPPLY MANAGEMENT	2021	10.1016/j.pursup.2021.100671	3
Kingshott, Russel P. J.; Chung, Henry F. L.; Putranta, Martinus Parnawa; Sharma, Piyush; Sima, Herbert	Religiosity and psychological contracts in Asian B2B service relationships	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2021	10.1016/j.indmarman.2021.07.010	3
Wang, Na; Ma, Shuang; Wang, Yonggui	Uniting in the letter but breaching in the spirit: Contract	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2021	10.1016/j.indmarman.2021.07.009	3

	flexibility and interfirm collaboration based on the Contracts as Reference Points Theory				
Wang, Mengyang; Zhang, Qiyuan; Zhou, Kevin Zheng	The Origins of Trust Asymmetry in International Relationships: An Institutional View	JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL MARKETING	2020	10.1177/1069031X19898492	3
Rungsithong, Rapeeporn; Meyer, Klaus E.	Trust and knowledge sharing in context: A study of international buyer-supplier relationships in Thailand	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2020	10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.04.026	3
Zhou, Jing; Zhang, Chuang; Shen, Lu; Zhou, Kevin Zheng	Interpersonal guanxi and partner extra-role behavior: Mediating role of relational and transactional governance strategy	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2020	10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.03.022	3
Liu, Yi; Chen, Daniel Q.; Gao, Wei	How does customer orientation (in)congruence affect B2B electronic commerce platform firms' performance?	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2020	10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.02.027	3
Wang, Liwen; Jin, Jason Lu; Zhou, Kevin Zheng	Institutional forces and customer participation in new product development: A Yin-Yang perspective	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2019	10.1016/j.indmarman.2019.01.015	3
Liu, Yi; Huang, Ying; Fan, Hua	Influence tactics, relational conditions, and key account	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2018	10.1016/j.indmarman.2018.02.013	3

	managers' performance				
Zhang, Chun; Bai, Xuan; Gu, Flora F.	Contract learning in the aftermath of exchange disruptions: An empirical study of renewing interfirm relationships	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2018	10.1016/j.indmarman.2018.01.005	3
Miao, Fred; Wang, Guangping; Jiraporn, Pornsit	Key supplier involvement in IT-enabled operations: When does it lead to improved performance?	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2018	10.1016/j.indmarman.2018.05.002	3
Graca, Sandra Simas; Doney, Patricia M.; Barry, James M.	An institutional view of the communication flows between relation-based and rule-based countries	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EMERGING MARKETS	2017	10.1108/IJoEM-12-2014-0206	3
Yang, Wei; Gao, Yu; Li, Yao; Shen, Hao; Zheng, Songyue	Different roles of control mechanisms in buyer-supplier conflict: An empirical study from China	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2017	10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.04.002	3
Lee, Gukseong; Shin, Geoncheol; Haney, Mark H.; Kang, Mingu; Li, Shuting; Ko, Changsuk	The impact of formal control and guanxi on task conflict in outsourcing relationships in China	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2017	10.1016/j.indmarman.2016.08.007	3
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	Across Relationship Length				
Xie, En; Liang, Jie; Zhou, Kevin Zheng	How to enhance supplier performance in China: An integrative view of partner selection and partner control	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2016	10.1016/j.indmarman.2016.01.004	3
F-Jardon, Carlos M.; Pagani, Regina Negri	Is collective efficiency in subsistence clusters a growth strategy? The case of the wood industry in Obera, Argentina	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EMERGING MARKETS	2016	10.1108/IJoEM-11-2013-0197	3
Barnes, Bradley R.; Leonidou, Leonidas C.; Siu, Noel Y. M.; Leonidou, Constantinos N.	Interpersonal Factors as Drivers of Quality and Performance in Western-Hong Kong Interorganizational Business Relationships	JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL MARKETING	2015	10.1509/jim.14.0008	3
Murphy, William H.; Li, Ning	Government, company, and dyadic factors affecting key account management performance in China: Propositions to provoke research	INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT	2015	10.1016/j.indmarman.2015.05.007	3
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Wang, Liwen; Jin, Jason Lu; Yang, Defeng	The interplay of contracts and trust: untangling between- and within-dyad effects	EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF MARKETING	2023	10.1108/EJM-12-2021-0934	3
Gerke, Anna; Benson-Rea, Maureen; Odlin, Denis	SME upgrading in emerging market clusters: The case of Taiwan's bicycle industry	JOURNAL OF BUSINESS RESEARCH	2023	10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113967	3
Cislaghi, Tatiane Pellin; Wegner, Douglas; Vieira, Luciana Marques	How do governance and relational rents evolve during the maturity stages of supply chains?	SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT-AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL	2022	10.1108/SCM-07-2020-0296	3
Shen, Lu; Zhang, Chuang; Teng, Wenbo; Du, Nan	How do business and political Networking shape overseas dispute resolution for state-owned enterprise from emerging economies	INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS REVIEW	2022	10.1016/j.ibusrev.2021.101888	3
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Freeman, Susan	capability and trust among SMEs in transitional economies				
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Margaret J.; Rajaguru, Rajesh	markets: An emerging market perspective				
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E, Mandi; Zhang, Qiyuan; Zhou, Kevin Zheng; Zhang, Chuang	Interfirm trust and subsidiary performance of emerging market multinational enterprises: an examination of contingent factors	ASIA PACIFIC JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT	2024	10.1007/s10490-022-09851-8	3
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Shen, Lu; Zhou, Kevin Zheng; Zhang, Chuang	Is Interpersonal Guanxi Beneficial in Fostering Interfirm Trust? The Contingent Effect of Institutional- and Individual-Level Characteristics	JOURNAL OF BUSINESS ETHICS	2022	10.1007/s10551-020-04665-4	3
Ouyang, Zhe; Yao, Chris Nengzhi; Hu, Xi	Crisis spillover of corporate environmental misconducts: The roles of perceived similarity, familiarity, and corporate environmental responsibility in determining	BUSINESS STRATEGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT	2020	10.1002/bse.2474	3

	the impact on oppositional behavioral intention				
Liao, Zhongju; Long, Siying	Can interfirm trust improve firms' cooperation on environmental innovation? The moderating role of environmental hostility	BUSINESS STRATEGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT	2019	10.1002/bse.2249	3
Um, Ki-Hyun; Kim, Sang-Man	The effects of supply chain collaboration on performance and transaction cost advantage: The moderation and nonlinear effects of governance mechanisms	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PRODUCTION ECONOMICS	2019	10.1016/j.ijpe.2018.03.025	3
Ho, Mia Hsiao-Wen; Ghauri, Pervez N.; Larimo, Jorma A.	Institutional distance and knowledge acquisition in international buyer-supplier relationships: The moderating role of trust	ASIA PACIFIC JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT	2018	10.1007/s10490-017-9523-2	3

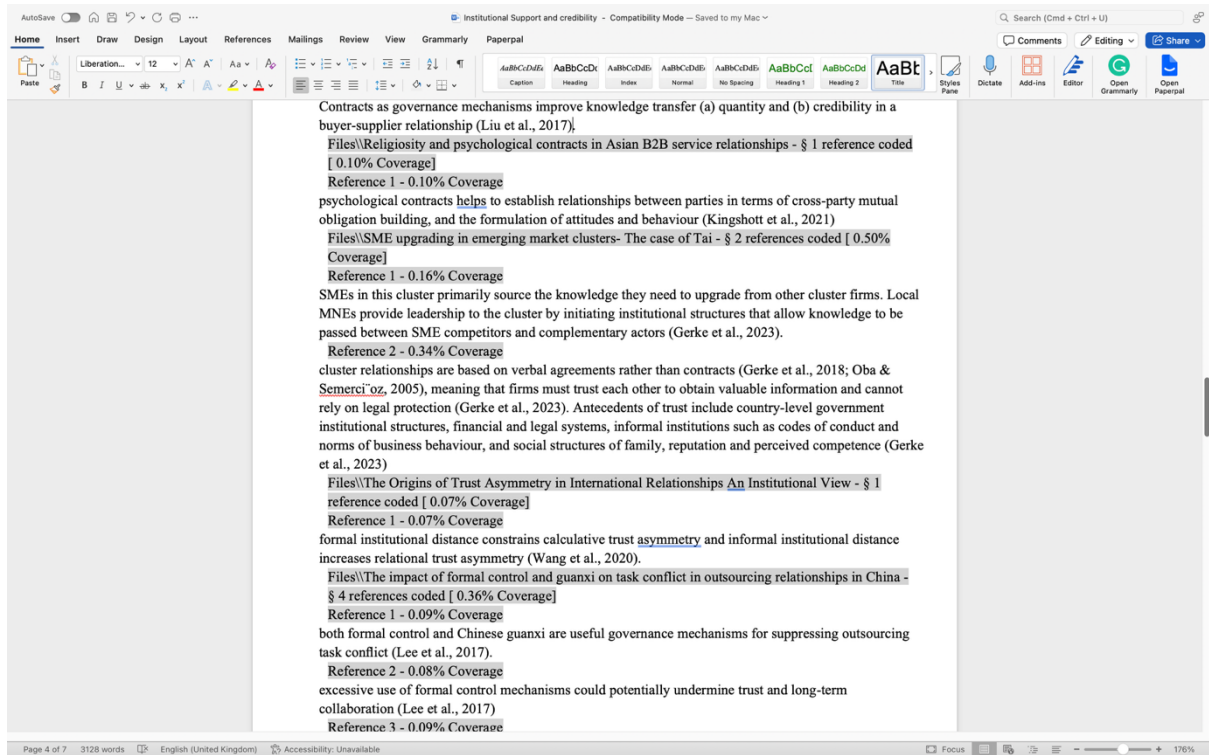
- NVIVO Coding process and resulting coded content

The screenshot shows the NVivo software interface. On the left is a navigation pane with sections: IMPORT (Data, Files, File Classifications, External), ORGANIZE (Coding, Codes, Cases, Notes, Sets), EXPLORE (Queries, Visualizations, Maps). The top toolbar includes Home, Edit, Import, Create, Explore, Share, and Modules. Below this are icons for Clipboard, Item, Organize, Visualize, Code, Autocode, Uncode, Code In Vivo, Spread Coding, Case Classification, File Classification, and Workspace.

The main workspace displays two articles side-by-side:

- Left Article:** Title "Maturity stages of supply chains". Authors "Tatiana Pellis Colaghi, Douglas Wignier and Luciana Marques Vieira". It discusses Governance mechanisms in supply chains (SCs) as being highly addressed in the literature, citing Alvarez et al., 2010; Hernández-Espalardo et al., 2010; Dutta and Roy, 2013; Heide et al., 2014; Tachizawa et al., 2015; Ke et al., 2015). However, regarding the use of formal or informal mechanisms, prior studies have viewed the different relationship stages, which leaves room for a process approach that examines the different roles of formal and informal mechanisms throughout the different maturity stages of intraorganizational relationships (IORs). A lack of understanding of the differences across stages involving buyers and suppliers may lead to inefficient management of the collaborative process by focal firms. This paper also incorporates empirical evidence from emerging countries, such as Brazil, where there is no economic or regulatory incentive towards sustainability, especially in the food production sector. The study makes a theoretical contribution to the relational view (RV) by showing how effective governance facilitates the generation of relational rents (Dyer and Singh, 1998; Dyer et al., 2018). The change in the use of governance mechanisms can have an influence on the generation of relational rents and the continuity of the relationship. Even so, a reduction in power asymmetry by the buyer may permit governance based on the greater use of informal mechanisms. This generates relational rents and value in relationships by differentiating them from competing dyads. The study also contributes to the theory by showing that relational inertia may lead to a regression in maturity levels and hinder relational rents for the partners. The paper, after this introductory section, proceeds by presenting the theoretical background of the study in Section 2. Section 3 focuses on the method used in the study. Section 4 draws conclusions and Section 5 discusses final remarks and suggests areas for further study.
- Right Article:** Title "Supply Chain Management: An International Journal". Volume 27 - Number 3 - 2022 - 369-382. It begins with "perhaps be even more in the long run worthwhile than short term gains. Therefore, it is necessary to further specify the term 'relational rent' by taking the 'intangible benefits' into account in a way that is based on empirical evidence. Buggemund and Burtle (2012) also provide four dimensions that help to illustrate how participants in IORs perceive the value thereof: personal, financial, knowledge and strategic. This estimation changes according to the variability of institutional conditions, as well-governance mechanisms exist. Therefore, the following section explores the role of governance mechanisms for generating relationship value and relational rents."

At the bottom of the workspace, a status bar indicates: "The RV was revisited in 2018 to offer a dynamic perspective".



- Search protocol and yielded results

Databases	Boolean search strings	Total excl duplicates
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("B2B branding" OR "business-to-business brand*" OR "industrial brand*" OR "corporate brand*" OR "B2B marketing") AND ("emerging market*" OR "developing countr*" OR "Global South" OR "Asia" OR "Africa" OR "Latin America") AND ("trust" OR "brand trust" OR "trust-building" OR "relationship marketing" OR "credibility" OR "reputation" OR "brand loyalty") AND PUBYEAR > 2009 AND PUBYEAR < 2027 AND PUBYEAR > 2009 AND PUBYEAR < 2026) – 542 (TITLE-ABS-KEY (("B2B" OR "business-to-business" OR "industrial marketing" OR "interfirm" OR "buyer-supplier" OR "key account") AND ("branding" OR "brand" OR "brand equity" OR "brand management" OR "corporate reputation" OR "relationship marketing" OR "brand image" OR "brand identity") AND ("trust" OR "trust-building" OR "brand trust" OR "relational trust" OR "partner trust" OR "credibility" OR "reliability" OR "confidence" OR "integrity") AND ("emerging market" OR "developing country" OR "BRICS" OR "China" OR "India" OR "Brazil" OR "South Africa" OR "Mexico" OR "Asia" OR "Africa" OR "Latin America")) AND (PUBYEAR > 2009 AND PUBYEAR < 2025) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) – 34 papers TITLE-ABS-KEY ("B2B branding" OR "business-to-business brand*" OR "industrial brand*" OR "corporate brand*" OR "B2B marketing") AND ("emerging market*" OR "developing countr*" OR "Global South" OR "Asia" OR "Africa" OR "Latin America") AND ("trust" OR "brand trust" OR "trust-building" OR "relationship marketing" OR "credibility" OR "reputation") AND PUBYEAR > 2009 AND PUBYEAR < 2027 AND PUBYEAR > 2009 AND PUBYEAR < 2027 AND PUBYEAR > 2009 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "re") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ch") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "cp")) – 515	579
WOS	TS=("B2B" OR "business-to-business" OR "industrial marketing" OR "interfirm" OR "buyer-supplier" OR "key account") AND TS=("branding" OR "brand" OR "brand equity" OR "brand management" OR "corporate reputation" OR "relationship marketing" OR "brand image" OR "brand identity") AND TS=("trust" OR "trust-building" OR "brand trust" OR "relational trust" OR "partner trust" OR "credibility" OR "reliability" OR "confidence" OR "integrity")	

	AND TS=("emerging market" OR "developing country" OR "BRICS" OR "Asia" OR "Africa" OR "Latin America" OR "China" OR "India" OR "Brazil" OR "South Africa" OR "Mexico")90 results TS=("B2B" OR "business-to-business" OR "industrial marketing" OR "interfirm" OR "buyer-supplier" OR "key account") AND TS=("trust" OR "trust-building" OR "brand trust" OR "relational trust" OR "partner trust" OR "credibility" OR "reliability" OR "confidence" OR "integrity") AND TS=("emerging market" OR "developing country" OR "brick" OR "Asia" OR "Africa" OR "Latin America" OR "China" OR "India" OR "Brazil" OR "South Africa" OR "Mexico") – 483	336
Proquest	("B2B" OR "business-to-business" OR "industrial marketing" OR "interfirm" OR "buyer-supplier" OR "key account") 2nd row ("branding" OR "brand equity" OR "brand management" OR "corporate reputation" OR "relationship marketing" OR "brand image" OR "brand identity") 3rd row ("trust" OR "trust-building" OR "brand trust" OR "relational trust" OR "partner trust" OR "credibility" OR "reliability" OR "confidence" OR "integrity") 4th row ("emerging market" OR "developing country" OR "BRICS" OR "Asia" OR "Africa" OR "Latin America" OR "China" OR "India" OR "Brazil" OR "South Africa" OR "Mexico") FULL text Peer reviewed Time span n01-01-2010 to 13-09-2025 = 29 results	26
EBSCO	((("B2B" OR "business-to-business" OR "industrial marketing" OR "interfirm" OR "buyer-supplier" OR "key account") AND ((("branding" OR "brand equity" OR "brand management" OR "corporate reputation" OR "relationship marketing" OR "brand image" OR "brand identity")) AND ((("trust" OR "trust-building" OR "brand trust" OR "relational trust" OR "partner trust" OR "credibility" OR "reliability" OR "confidence" OR "integrity")) AND ((("emerging market" OR "developing country" OR "BRICS" OR "China" OR "India" OR "Brazil" OR "South Africa" OR "Mexico" OR "Asia" OR "Africa" OR "Latin America"))	43
Combined excluding duplicates (Cumulative)		888