Industrial Marketing Management 97 (2021) 274–285

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Industrial Marketing Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/indmarman

Creating trust and commitment in B2B services

Oliver Alexander Gansser[a,d,*], Silvia Boßow-Thies[a,b], Bianca Krol[a,c]

[a] ifes Institute, FOM University of Applied Sciences, Germany
[b] Schäferkampsallee 16a, 20357 Hamburg, Germany
[c] Leimkugelstraße 6, 45141 Essen, Germany
[d] Arnulfstraße 30, 80335 München, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
B2B services
Trust
Commitment
Drivers of trust

ABSTRACT

In an ever-changing environment, business relationships are becoming increasingly complex. This particularly applies to the business-to-business (B2B) service sector due to its intangible nature. The combination of personal and organizational relationships further increases this complexity. However, trust can reduce uncertainty and complexity and help maintain commitment. Based on structural equation modeling and a sample of 1692 participants, this study provides insights into the drivers of trust in organizations and salespersons and their impact on commitment. The results show that both are important, but trust in a salesperson far surpasses the effect of trust in an organization. Furthermore, reputation and service quality influence trust in an organization, while social skills and low selling orientation affect trust in a salesperson. In summary, to the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to provide a comprehensive trust model in the B2B service market, and it might serve as a guide for future research.

1. Introduction

In a dynamic world, business relationships are becoming increasingly complex and uncertain. This is especially true for service providers because of the unique features of their offers. Similar to service marketing, the term service is defined and marked by the four so-called IHIP characteristics: intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability (Edgett & Parkinson, 1993; Moeller, 2010; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1985). To further intensify uncertainty and complexity, business relationships are between buying and selling companies and between different salespersons and their counterparts. Unlike in B2C, buyers in the B2B context must often evaluate even more and different and complex aspects of services (Doney, Barry, & Abratt, 2007), with potential more considerable sums of investments. These circumstances increase the probability and risk of wrong decision making (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2016).

However, trust has the potential to reduce the exceptionally high uncertainty and complexity of B2B service relationships. Thus, trust is one of the important tools of relationship marketing available to service providers to achieve and maintain customer commitment, as well as an economic success (Chumpitaz Caceres & Paparoidamis, 2007; Doney et al., 2007; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Guenzi & Georges, 2010; Watts, 2015; Zaheer, McEvily, & Perrone, 1998). The investigation of trust at an inter-organizational and inter-personal level and its drivers in the B2B service context could provide valuable management insights.

B2B relationships are determined in B2B marketing and inter-organizational research as a research unit within several studies (Ashnai, Henneberg, Naudé, & Francescucci, 2016; Huemer, 2014; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Palmatier, Dant, & Grewal, 2007). While several B2B relationship studies focus on either or both levels of trust, that is, inter-personal and inter-organizational levels, research focused on B2B service relationships that explores both attitudinal trust constructs is missing. To address this research gap, we focus on B2B service relationships in our study, especially exploring the role of trust on the inter-personal and inter-organizational levels, respective antecedents, and impact of both trust levels on commitment.

In the following sections, we present our conceptual framework and derive our hypotheses. Next, we present our research methodology, including data collection and sampling, and construct measurements of our research model. Subsequently, we calculate our path analysis to estimate our model and test the corresponding hypotheses by applying partial least squares (PLS) path modeling (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). Finally, we discuss the theoretical and managerial implications of the research and offer directions for further research.

* Corresponding author at: Arnulfstraße 30, 80335 München, Germany.
E-mail addresses: oliver.gansser@fom.de (O.A. Gansser), silvia.bossow-thies@fom.de (S. Boßow-Thies), bianca.krol@fom.de (B. Krol).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2021.07.005
Received 14 August 2020; Received in revised form 19 May 2021; Accepted 14 July 2021
Available online 10 August 2021
0019-8501/© 2021 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

2. Conceptional framework

2.1. Theoretical background

Trust is particularly crucial for relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). According to Lewis and Weigert (1985), trust allows for uncomplicated social interaction, which would otherwise not be possible due to excessive complexity and uncertainty. This is particularly true for services. Services are often characterized by the four, although often criticized, IHIP dimensions – intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability (e.g., Edgett & Parkinson, 1993; Zeithaml et al., 1985). Owing to its intangibility, unlike products, services cannot be seen or touched before purchase; therefore, customers often do not know what to expect until the service is actually provided, and even then, evaluation might be difficult (Coulter & Coulter, 2002; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). The quality and nature of service can vary depending on the provider, customer, and timing. This heterogeneity in service output is a particular problem for labor-intensive services.

Additionally, the inseparability of production and consumption includes simultaneous production and consumption that characterizes most services. As a fourth characteristic, services cannot be stored (perishability); hence, supply and demand is often difficult to synchronize (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Due to these dimensions, customers' potential mispurchases are more likely to occur (Tam & Wong, 2001; Watts, 2015; Wilson et al., 2016). However, trust plays an important role in assessing the quality of this exchange (Fang, Palmatier, Scheer, & Li, 2008). When customers trust their service providers, they are generally willing to take greater risks.

A uniform definition of trust has not been established in marketing and market research literature due to industry-specific and investigative-specific orientation and lack of reference to the results of previous studies thus far (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Moorman, Deshpande, & Zaltman, 1993). However, in the 1990s, a conative approach to the definition of trust emerged with following central components: confident expectations concerning the behavior of the trustee and the willingness to be vulnerable in the relationship, as well as to trust in the goodwill of others (Doney et al., 2007; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Moorman et al., 1993; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Therefore, operationalizing trust as a trustor's investment and a trustee's return of investment in general, their evaluation within different networks can even be simulated through the trust game (Kumar, Capraro, & Perc, 2020).

Vulnerability arises because suppliers can establish strategies and rules that negatively influence customer product cost and quality (Doney & Cannon, 1997). Therefore, trust is expressed in assessing a business partner's reliability and integrity (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and, thus, contributes to reducing perceived vulnerability (Svensson, 2004). Morgan and Hunt (1994) found a negative relationship between trust and the intention to end a particular contact immediately.

The trustee distinguishes between inter-personal trust and system trust (Coulter & Coulter, 2002). System trust refers to an industry or a company (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

In this context, there is a broad discussion of the two terms, reliance and (inter-organizational) trust in the literature. Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992) conclude that "however if one is willing to rely on a partner without holding a belief about that partner's trustworthiness, reliance may be more a function of power and control than trust" (p. 315). Cowles (1997) further determines the extent to which behavior might be regarded as trust as a function of risk faced by a customer and the extent to which a customer must rely on the performance of the supplier. This implies that an act of trust occurs if a customer faces risk and/or must rely on the supplier. As mentioned above, the customer's risk of entering a relationship with a service provider is higher than that with a manufacturer of products. According to Cowles, the threshold for trust behavior is reached much faster in high-risk settings, even if the reliance is low.

Mouzas, Henneberg, and Naudé (2007) discuss reliance as a possible complementary construct of trust, and they develop a new measurement scale for reliance (Jiang, Henneberg, & Naudé, 2010). They distinguish between these two constructs to focus on the more rational aspects of inter-organizational relationships. The authors assume that the inter-organizational aspects of trust (i.e., reliance) are based on objective criteria and mention, for example, expected benefits and proven capability (Blois, 1999; Jiang, Henneberg, & Naudé, 2011; Mouzas et al., 2007). Therefore, reliance does not contain an emotional element, but a rational standard that describes the institutionalized rules of business life. Unlike reliance, trust contains affective elements and can only be granted by individuals (Blois, 1999). However, as every company has employees, this is an indirect way to trust a company. A customer trusts indirectly through the organization and directly through the employees. The trust of two people at the inter-personal level between two organizations impacts the relationship at the inter-organizational level (Ashnai et al., 2016). Thus, trust between individuals has a positive effect on trust between organizations (Mouzas et al., 2007). Our research focuses more on emotional than non-rational formal or contractual levels.

The effects of institutional trust are an increase in perceived quality, results, and satisfaction; a higher degree of cooperation; and the intention to stay in the relationship (Bennett & Robson, 2004; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In addition to inter-organizational trust, a well-maintained social network derives personal trust, that is, from person to person (Bennett & Robson, 2004; Zaheer et al., 1998). Inter-personal connections created by individuals' interactions can further strengthen the relationship between the two companies behind them (Wilson, 1995). Research results show that information is perceived to be more valuable by people with whom a relationship of trust exists (Moorman et al., 1992). In business customer markets, the corporate culture, compensation system, and training programs partially determine a salesperson's behavior. From buyers' perspective, the contact person's action best reflects the values and attitudes of suppliers. The less experience available with a supplier, the more the vendor's behavior determines the trustworthiness of an organization. Furthermore, the trustworthiness of an organization may affect the character presumption of a new contact partner for the customer (Doney & Cannon, 1997).

In the literature, trust is considered a mediator between the driving forces of a relationship and its consequences (Guenzi & Georges, 2010) and is an important determinant of engagement (Chumpitaz Caceres & Paparoidamis, 2007; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, it is one of the most critical relationship marketing tools available for service companies to gain and maintain customers' commitment (Watts, 2015). Commitment exists when a partner attaches importance to a relationship that they want to invest in it in the long term (Chumpitaz Caceres & Paparoidamis, 2007; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Chenet, Dagger, and O'Sullivan (2010) determine that trust increases services' differentiation and, thus, influences commitment. Apart from the effort to repurchase a product or service, the preferential achievement's support also counts to the commitment (Oliver, 1999). Measurable manifestations of commitment are the brand's preference, intention to continue to rely on it, and resistance to competitive influences (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996).

Overall, several studies for the B2C industry were conducted on trust in salespersons and organizations (e.g., Coulter & Coulter, 2002; Doney et al., 2007; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Moorman et al., 1993; Zaheer et al., 1998). Empirical studies in the B2B context focus either predominantly on institutional trust (e.g., Chumpitaz Caceres & Paparoidamis, 2007; Friman, Gärling, Millett, Mattsson, & Johnston, 2002; Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 1995) or inter-personal trust (e.g., Friend, Johnson, & Sohi, 2018; Hartmann, Plouffe, Kohsuwan, & Cote, 2020; Lussier & Hall, 2018), and these studies are conducted predominantly in a manufacturing setting (e.g. Jiang, Henneberg, & Naudé, 2012). Nevertheless, a few studies address both levels of trust in B2B relationships (e.

g., Ashnai et al., 2016; Qi & Chau, 2013; Webb, Henneberg, & Forkmann, 2017).

Therefore, our study aims to investigate the key drivers of trust in salespersons and organizations, with a clear focus on the service sector. We also aim to explain the influence of trust on commitment. In particular, we focus on the following three research objectives: (1) to develop and test a framework of important drivers of trust in salespersons and (2) trust in service organizations and (3) to investigate the relationship between trust in salespersons and organizations. Here, we consider that there are inter-personal and inter-organizational trust effects between these two trust constructs and the impact of these two trust constructs on commitment.

2.2. Hypotheses development

Based on the objectives of our study, our hypotheses can be grouped into three different blocks related to the various areas of the conceptual model. The first block deals with latent variable trust in an organization and its antecedents, while the second one focuses on the individual level, namely, on the drivers of the construct trust in a salesperson. Further, the third block concentrates on the relationship between the different facets of trust and commitment. Each of these three blocks contains several hypotheses, which we explain in more detail in the following section.

We illustrate the research model, including the hypothesized links, in Fig. 1.

2.2.1. Drivers of trust in an organization

Regarding the first building block, based on a literature review, we assume that four different constructs drive trust in organizations: reputation, service and product quality, flexibility, and duration of the relationship (with the organization).

Reputation – The image, credibility, and competency of a company represent the public image, that is, an organization's reputation. Reputation describes a company's credibility in dealing with customers, employees, or other stakeholders and resources. The intangibility of services creates a high degree of uncertainty regarding the service itself. Hence, reputation is particularly important to ensure a more assessable service. The more positive ratings an organization receives for its performance, the more the customers judged its reliability, the higher the chance of winning customers' trust. Doney and Cannon emphasize reputation as a critical success factor in trust building (Doney & Cannon, 1997). They support the findings of Anderson and Weitz (1989) and Ganesan (1994). Anderson and Weitz (1989) discuss a company's reputation and its impact on trust, while Ganesan regard credibility as one dimension of trust. When a company has a bad reputation, the trust of the partners working with it also decreases. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

H1. A higher level of reputation leads to an increase in trust in the organization.

Service and product quality – In addition to reputation, the perceived service, as well as product and service quality, might drive trust in the service provider's organization. The quality of service typically cannot be assessed before it is used. In addition, services are perceived as heterogeneous in output because of their high variability in delivery. Performance depends on a company's employees as the service delivery process is inseparably linked to the provider. Hence, neither of these factors helps reduce risk. The higher the perceived quality of the offered services and products, the lower the uncertainty of the outcome of the special business relationship. Therefore, the quality of services and products can be regarded as a factor that influences an organization's construct of trust. Overall, relatively few studies have focused on this relationship. Chumpitaz Caceres and Paparoidamis (2007), Chiou and Droge (2006), Doney et al. (2007), or Kennedy, Ferrell, and Leclair (2001) confirm a direct or indirect influence on trust in this case. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2. A higher level of service and product quality leads to an increase in trust in the organization.

Flexibility – Whether an organization is willing to adapt or make customer-specific decisions depends on its flexibility. The flexibility of services is accompanied by the special characteristics of the heterogeneity of services. Flexibility can be defined as the willingness to make adjustments due to changing circumstances (Aulakh, Kotabe, & Sahay, 1996). According to Cannon and Homburg (2001), flexibility characterizes business partners when they react to and meet changing customer requirements through adjustments. This underlines the inseparable character of the services. For long-term profitable business relationships, companies must also be prepared to make adjustments for the benefit of their customers (Doney & Cannon, 1997). By meeting customer requirements, the customer will, thus, become more patient toward the supplier. Thus, flexibility can contribute to the business relationship's consolidation (Homburg, Giering, & Menon, 2003), and

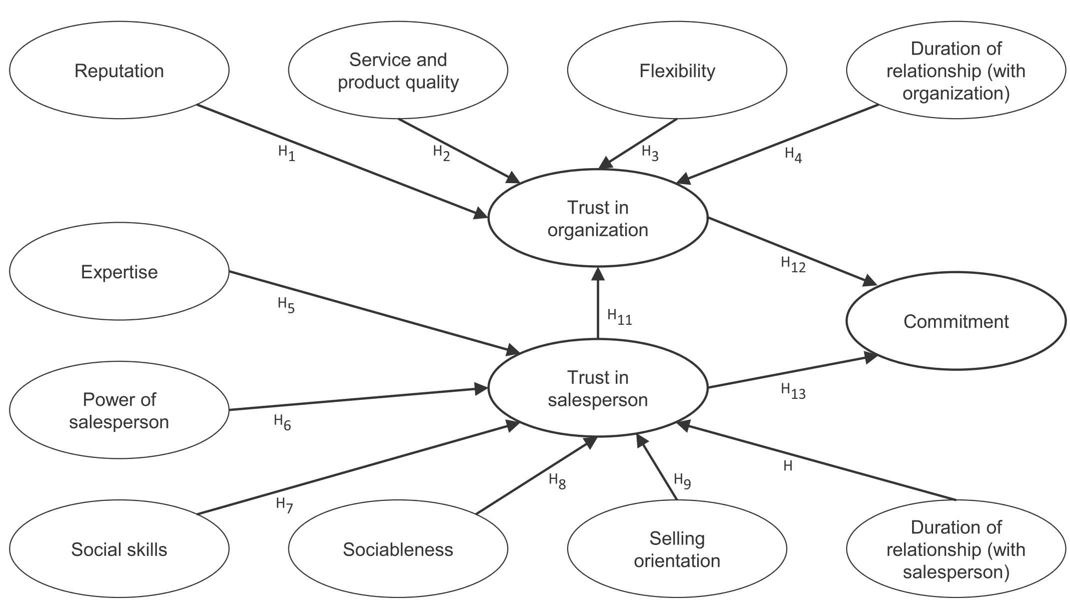

Fig. 1. Theoretical model and hypotheses.

both sides are prepared to enter a long-term business relationship. The connection between an organization's flexibility and trust in the organization can be deduced from the individuality inherent in flexibility (Koufaris & Hampton-Sosa, 2004). An organization's ability to meet the needs of its customers creates trust because customers feel better understood. This leads to a relationship based on mutual trust. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H3. A higher level of flexibility leads to an increase in trust in the organization.

Duration of relationship (with the organization) – Due to regulatory and globalization challenges, companies seek to leverage their experience in the past for further transactions. Therefore, they attempt to establish long-term business relationships (Anderson & Weitz, 1989). This also reduces the risks associated with the IHIP characteristics of services. Anderson and Weitz (1989) emphasize that long-standing business relationships between organizations are more likely to be continued than those in a short period. The authors emphasize some conclusions regarding long-term business relationships. One of these conclusions relates to an increase in trust between organizations (Paulssen, Leischnig, Ivens, & Birk, 2016).

Furthermore, they highlight that, in a long-standing business relationship, the contact between customers and service providers is intensified, and the result is a comparable basis of trust. Based on the learning theory and transaction cost theory, it is well-known that the duration of a business relationship positively impacts trust in organizations, as both parties have already invested time and resources in this relationship (Doney & Cannon, 1997). This creates a psychological barrier to terminate business relationships. Moreover, a longer business relationship implies a more profound knowledge of the partner's specific needs, which can be addressed individually. Two further aspects in this context come from Squire, Cousins, and Brown (2009): while transferring knowledge between both parties, the length of relationship positively affects transparency and quality. Parties that cooperate over a long time tend to exchange high-quality information with each other. Another characteristic of the length of a relationship relates to the formation of routines and norms that act as a protective mechanism against opportunistic behaviors. In addition, processes can be made more straightforward in the case of longer business relationships. Based on these arguments, we hypothesize the following:

H4. A longer duration of a business relationship leads to an increase in trust in the organization.

2.2.2. Drivers of trust in a salesperson

Because of the previously mentioned IHIP characteristics of services, we assume that the greater the share of service in offering goods and services, the more important the salesperson becomes. Interaction with a salesperson makes the service more evaluable. Services such as consulting, unlike physical products, are created by people. However, people always have heterogeneous characteristics and abilities, and the characteristics of salespersons have an impact on trust in them. These characteristics probably vary more than the product's characteristics. This refers to the second building block of the overall model. According to the literature review, we assume that the following six different constructs drive trust in a salesperson: expertise, power of salespersons within their organization, social skills, sociableness, selling orientation, and duration of the relationship (with the salesperson).

Expertise – Expertise can be defined as salespersons' ability, based on their know-how or technical competence, to address particular problems (Guenzi & Georges, 2010). Customers often lack sufficient technical knowledge or essential information. Therefore, access to a salesperson's perceived expertise provides additional value. The perceived know-how of a salesperson has the potential to lower the uncertainties of the outcome of the relationship. Transaction costs are reduced through the capability process by increasing the confidence that the partners can deliver on their promises due to the perceived capabilities (Doney & Cannon, 1997). Thus, expertise functions as insurance and can be considered a driver of a salesperson's trust. Empirically, expertise as a driver of trust has received some attention (e.g., Crosby et al., 1990; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Guenzi & Georges, 2010; Moorman et al., 1992; Wood, Boles, & Babin, 2008). This relationship is also supported by the results of Swan's meta-analysis (Dowding, John, & Biggs, 1994). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5. A higher level of expertise leads to an increase in trust in the salesperson.

Power of salespersons within their organization – In addition to the perceived expertise, another driver that might reduce the uncertainty of the outcome of a relationship is the actual power of salespersons within their organization. The higher the control over organizational resources of salespersons, the higher the probability that they can fulfill their promises, resulting in an increase in trust in salespersons (Crosby et al., 1990; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Swan & Nolan, 1985). This reasoning leads to the following hypothesis:

H6. A higher level of power leads to an increase in trust in the salesperson.

Social skills – Buyers assign positive intentions to suppliers they like (Rotter, 1980). Sympathy is, in turn, due to the empathy of a person (Swan & Nolan, 1985). This includes the extent of a sincere, deliberate, and caring attitude of a salesperson, as evidenced by the person's social skills (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Guenzi and Georges (2010) determine the direct influence of sympathy on the intention to recommend. Other studies indicate the high importance of salespersons' social competence on the trust that the customers bring toward them (Doney & Cannon, 1997). The positive influence can be explained by the fact that the customers would appreciate when the contact people care about them and do not only focus on selling services.

Furthermore, the contact person's empathy allows more information to be exchanged between business partners (Aggarwal, Castleberry, Ridnour, & Shepherd, 2005). The increased exchange of information leads to a reduction in insecurity, leading to higher trust in the contact person (Kwon & Suh, 2004). For this reason, we hypothesize the following:

H7. A higher level of social skills leads to an increase in trust in the salesperson.

Sociableness – There is empirical evidence that frequent contact with customers contributes to business development and confidence building. Thus, each contact provides customers with additional information that helps them predict the provider's future behavior with greater certainty (Crosby et al., 1990). Doney and Cannon (1997) suggest that between-human friendship or favorable acquaintance can help clients better understand the provider's intentions. The contacts' social conditions provide a platform for a better understanding of information flows, personal relationships, and the mutual perception of each other's needs. Crosby et al. (1990) report that private interactions have a positive influence on trust in salespersons. Based on social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), inter-personal communication moves from relatively shallow, non-intimate business levels to deeper, more intimate private levels. Therefore, we assume that both levels have an impact on trust and hypothesize the following:

H8. A higher level of sociableness leads to an increase in trust in the salesperson.

Selling orientation – In addition to the outlined constructs, selling behavior might be another characteristic of a salesperson that influences trust and, finally, the success of a relationship. There are different ways salespersons cultivate relationships with customers to maintain and develop their businesses (Crosby et al., 1990; Kennedy et al., 2001). The customers expect that the salespersons act according to their objectives.

However, from the perspective of the salesperson, it might be beneficial to act opportunistically. Showing high-pressure selling behavior leads to an increase in uncertainty. Assume that salespersons are more interested in following their agenda, rather than finding the best solution from the customer's perspective.

According to Crosby et al. (1990), Guenzi and Georges (2010), and Tam and Wong (2001), we can hypothesize that the selling orientation of a salesperson will have a negative impact on trust in this salesperson. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H9. A higher level of selling orientation leads to a decline in trust in the salesperson.

Duration of the relationship (with the salesperson) – Working together on a regular basis reduces uncertainties as both learn how the other party reacts under certain circumstances and how to anticipate those reactions. In accordance with the remarks on the construct duration of the relationship with the organization, the involved parties start to act according to set expectations. As customers learn through experiences to what extent they can trust their counterpart, the duration of relationships should increase trust (Anderson & Weitz, 1989; Burchell & Wilkinson, 1997; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Rotter, 1967). Following this logic, we hypothesize the following:

H10. A longer relationship duration with the salesperson leads to an increase in trust in the salesperson.

2.2.3. Influence of trust on commitment

According to the relationship marketing literature, trust also influences commitment in the service sector (Chumpitaz Caceres & Paparoidamis, 2007). Owing to the IHIP characteristics of services, the influence of trust on commitment should be particularly considered. The influence of trust on commitment is justified by the exchange theory, which addresses social interaction within individuals regarding the exchange of rewards and costs (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). A business relationship with high commitment level results in a sustainable competitive advantage, which, in the best-case scenario, is designed in a manner that it is difficult for competitors to imitate or eliminate (Day, 2000). However, the strength and existence of a direct influence of organizational trust and inter-personal trust on commitment are evaluated quite differently in the literature (Zaheer et al., 1998). According to Doney and Cannon (1997), the factors influencing trust in an organization, on the one hand, and the salesperson are reciprocal to each other.

Furthermore, a positive correlation of the constructs trust in salesperson and trust in organization has been empirically proven in other studies (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Zaheer et al., 1998), and an institutionalization process implies that trust in the salesperson has a particularly positive influence on trust in the organization (Ashnai et al., 2016; Blois, 1999). The relationship between trust in organizations and commitment has already been the focus of several studies. Morgan and Hunt (1994) describe both constructs as decisive influencing factors for relationship marketing in their commitment-trust theory. Moreover, this connection has been confirmed in further studies on trust and commitment (Doney & Cannon, 1997). Chumpitaz Caceres and Paparoidamis (2007) also hypothesize that trust and an excellent personal relationship positively influence commitment. Hence, a significantly strong influence of trust on commitment can also be emphasized here. For this reason, we examine both the impact of trust in an organization and trust in a salesperson on commitment and the impact of trust in the salesperson on that in the organization. Therefore, we formulate the following three hypotheses:

H11. A higher level of trust in a salesperson leads to an increase in trust in her / his organization.

H12. A higher level of trust in an organization leads to an increase in commitment to this organization.

H13. A higher level of trust in a salesperson leads to an increase in commitment to her / his organization.

3. Research methods

3.1. Data collection and sampling

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a survey of service companies that demonstrate a high consulting intensity level in Germany. These are communication consulting firms, business consulting firms, IT consulting firms, and personnel consulting firms. We selected these four types of service companies because (a) in these sectors, relationships are generally constructed through intensive cooperation with a salesperson and (b) a high fluctuation of employees is observed in these sectors. Nevertheless, the relation to an organization might also be important. We conducted a preliminary study with 75 customers of these types of service companies to confirm the scales' validity and relevance of the examined factors. The main survey was conducted as part of three Master of Science lectures in Essen, Hamburg, and Munich. The 221 students in the courses were all employees in sales and marketing departments. The analysis unit is the relationship between purchasing and service companies (suppliers). Because our students complete a part-time study program at FOM University of Applied Sciences (Master of Sales Management), many of them have access to decision makers in companies who are responsible for purchasing services. These decision makers were asked to participate in our survey. Our students were given the instruction that each of them should approach at least six decision makers who were responsible for purchasing one of the four services (communication consulting, business consulting, IT consulting, and personnel consulting). To ensure the validity of the results, we instructed the respondents to focus on one particular relationship with a service company when they fill out the survey. To avoid survivorship bias we addressed satisfied business relationships and dissatisfied relationships. To capture this, the questionnaire was labeled: service providers you would like to continue working with in the future (i.e., satisfied) and service providers you would not like to work with in the future (i.e., dissatisfied). Additionally, the front page of the questionnaire included the following information for the respondents: "Please think now of a specific contract where several providers were seriously under discussion and where the choice fell on a provider with whom you would like to continue working (satisfied group) / not working with (dissatisfied group) in the future. This may be a supplier you are currently working with or have worked with in the past." To achieve a high degree of standardization in addressing the respondents, the students used a uniform sample letter to address the contact person.

We had 1770 responses (a response rate of 33.4%), of which 1692 could be used. Among these, 41.7% refer to communication consulting firms, 15.6% to business consulting firms, 29.1% to IT consulting firms, and 12.7% to personnel consulting firms. The survey took place between November 23, 2016, and January 17, 2017, and, as an incentive, respondents were promised a summary of the results in the form of a report. The questionnaire was filled out by executive board members (9.6%), employees with managerial responsibility (38.7%), and employees without managerial responsibility (51.4%) in the industry (28.6%), trading (19.5%), and service sector (51.4%). The median respondent firm had 180 employees.

According to Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) and MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Podsakoff (2011), there are a few main approaches for eliminating and reducing the main causes of common method bias (CMB) in advance or the design of data collection. We protected the respondents' anonymity, reduced the respondents' apprehension over their responses, randomized the question order, adopted the scale items to our research subject, avoided double-barreled questions, selected respondents with sufficient experience, and pretested the survey instrument by a representative group of respondents. In addition, we chose Harman's single-factor test (Harman, 1976) to assess the existence of a CMB in our data. This approach indicates that common method variance is negligible. The common latent factor explained 48% of the variance. This is lower than 50% of the variance – indicating the absence of serious CMB (Chang, van Witteloostuijn, & Eden, 2010).

3.2. Measure development and assessment

We considered all items as manifestations of an underlying latent variable, except for two single-item constructs: the duration of the relationship with the organization, respectively salesperson. We measured seven out of eleven latent variables in a reflective way. These are trust in organization, trust in salesperson, commitment, reputation, power of a salesperson within their organization, social skills, and selling orientation. We used formative measures for the remaining constructs, service and product quality, flexibility, expertise, and sociableness. To ensure that the queried constructs refer to service aspects, an introductory sentence was placed before each item block in the questionnaire: "To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the service provider (the contact person) in general?" The first section focused on organizational aspects, while the second section emphasized on the salesperson. Both sections had the same structure, and the respondents had to answer questions on trust and the factors influencing trust. The third section dealt with commitment to the relationship. To avoid item order effects, we rotated the items in each section. For all constructs, we adapted the established measurement scales. A six-point Likert scale, ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "6 = strongly agree," was used to assess all measurement items for the reflective and formative constructs. The constructs and their respective measurement items are listed in Tables 1 and 3.

Commitment – Following Chumpitaz Caceres and Paparoidamis (2007), we understand commitment as a relationship that exists if partners are convinced that the relationship is important enough to be applied on a permanent and profitable long-term basis. We adopted their three-item scale to measure commitment.

Trust in organization – Zaheer et al. (1998) define trust in an organization as inter-organizational trust. In this case, confidence in an organization depends on trust in the partner organization's employees. Thus, we adopted their five-item scale to measure trust in an organization. Because the standardized indicator loading of one item was below 0.7, we had a four-item measurement solution regarding trust in an organization.

Trust in salesperson – To measure trust in a salesperson, we adopted the five-item scale of Zaheer et al. (1998). They define interpersonal trust as the trust placed by the customer in the salesperson in charge. Owing to a lack of indicator reliability, we removed one item from the five-item measurement scale. The standardized indicator loading for one item was less than 0.7.

Reputation – Doney and Cannon (1997) define reputation as the extent to which companies and individuals involved in business processes classify a supplier as honest and interested in customers' well-being. Thus, we adopted their three-item measurement scale.

Service and product quality – In B2B markets, the service and product can be regarded as essential factors within the purchase decision-making process (Dertouzos, Lester, & Solow, 1989). As several quality dimensions exist, we used a five-item formative construct covering administrative services, commercial services, service delivery, service quality, and information aspects.

Flexibility – We regard flexibility as suppliers' willingness to customize their services depending on customers' needs. As we observe different dimensions of flexibility, we created a three-item formative scale based on these various aspects, adapted from Heide's (1994) measures and Doney and Cannon (1997).

Duration (of the relationship with the organization / salesperson) – In business connections, trust is built over time. Anderson and Weitz (1989) discover that trust in an organization expands with the length of relationship. Specifically in the context of consulting services, the influence of the relationship duration on trust seems conceivable. In this context, we included two duration constructs in our model. One refers to the relationship with the organization and the other to the relationship with the salesperson. We measured duration as a single-item construct in line with the study of Anderson and Weitz (1989).

We supposed that two groups of concepts influence trust in a salesperson. On the one hand, we found constructs that describe the characteristics of salespersons, such as their expertise, social skills, as well as the relative selling orientation or position of power in the respective

Table 1
Reflective constructs, item loadings, AVE, Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability.

Construct with items	Loading	AVE	Alpha	CR
Commitment		0.86	0.92	0.95
We feel connected to the service provider.	0.93			
We defend our service provider in front of colleagues and external partners.	0.93			
We are very proud to have this company as a service provider.	0.92			
Trust in organization		0.58	0.64	0.80
The service provider…				
… doesn't keep its promise. (r)	0.61			
… increases his own profit to our disadvantage. (r)	0.81			
… is always fair in negotiations.	0.84			
Trust in salesperson		0.78	0.91	0.93
The contact person…				
… always behaves as expected.	0.89			
… has always been fair in negotiations.	0.92			
… is trustworthy.	0.93			
… acts in our interest, even if it could be detrimental to the contact person.	0.79			
Power of salesperson within their organization		0.84	0.90	0.94
The contact person…				
… has a high assertiveness within the own organization.	0.91			
… is one of the service provider's most important sales representatives.	0.90			
… has great influence in its own organization.	0.93			
Reputation		0.76	0.84	0.91
The service provider…				
… has a reputation for honesty with customers.	0.92			
… has a reputation for taking the best possible care of its customers.	0.91			
… has a bad reputation in the industry. (r)	0.80			
Selling orientation		0.78	0.93	0.95
The contact person…				
… is trying to sell as much as possible rather than satisfying us.	0.86			
… doesn't hold it that well in their sales pitch with the truth.	0.88			
… tries to persuade us to buy, even if it doesn't meet our needs.	0.91			
… exaggerates in the presentation of its own products to make them appear more attractive.	0.89			
… prefers quick contracts to long-term customer satisfaction.	0.88			
Social skills		0.78	0.91	0.93
The contact person…				
… is friendly.	0.87			
… is courteous.	0.91			
… creates a pleasant atmosphere of cooperation.	0.92			
… is always fully involved.	0.83			
Duration of relationship (with salesperson)				
We have been working with the contact person since…	1	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Duration of relationship (with organization)				
We have been working with the service manager since…	1	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

firm. On the other hand, further variables can be illustrated as characteristics of a particular relationship with salespersons. Constructs such as preferred sales activity type or length of the relationship with the salesperson belong to the second group (Doney & Cannon, 1997).

Expertise – Expertise can be outlined as people's ability to fulfill their promises (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Guenzi & Georges, 2010). Regarding expertise as an index, the construct was measured on a two-item formative scale accounting for the salesperson's professional competence and portfolio-specific knowledge (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Guenzi & Georges, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2001).

Power of salesperson – We define salespersons' power as their ability to control the organizational resources required for delivery under the agreements (Swan & Nolan, 1985). We used the three-item scale of Doney and Cannon (1997) because of its high reliability.

Social skills – Social skills in service contexts or likeability refer to inter-personal liking. We define these constructs as the extent to which individuals can be regarded as friendly, courteous, and pleasant and the way they pay attention, in line with the study of Guenzi (2002) and Coulter and Coulter (2002). We adapted their reflective scales to measure social skills.

Sociableness – Regular contact (be it business or private) allows the service person to get to know the salespersons in many different situations to better assess their behavior in the long term. To measure this contact, we used the two-item formative scale of Doney and Cannon (1997).

Selling orientation – Selling orientation can generally be observed as the level of high-–/low-pressure selling tactics (Holden, 1994). We adapted the five-item reflective scale of Guenzi and Georges (2010) that covers various aspects of the underlying construct.

We measured the duration (length of the relationship) as a single-item construct in years and months. Similar to Anderson and Weitz (1989), we used the logarithm of the number of months.

3.3. *Outer model estimation and evaluation*

The measurement model was tested for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The reliability of the reflective multi-item scales was measured using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), as presented in Table 1.

Cronbach's alpha values for all reflective constructs exceeded the value of 0.7 required by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), with one exception (trust in organization, 0.61). Bagozzi and Yi (1988) recommend at least three indicators for the latent variables. For each reflective construct, there were at least three indicators that had sufficiently high loadings.

As presented in Table 1, the composite reliability values range from 0.80 to 0.95 and, thus, also exceed the common threshold value of 0.6 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). In summary, all reliability criteria showed internal consistency.

Convergence validity is indicated when all loadings on the latent variables are statistically significant (Dunn, Seaker, & Waller, 1994). For all reflective measurement models, the item loadings on the latent constructs were highly significant ($p < .001$). The range of AVE values of the individual constructs is between 0.58 and 0.86 and exceeds the required threshold of 0.5 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Thus, all measurement models used were reliable and indicated a fulfilled convergence validity.

A confirmatory factor analysis was performed to test the latent variables' unidimensionality (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). This was conducted for all reflective constructs (i.e., commitment, trust in organization, trust in salesperson, power of salesperson within their organization, reputation, selling orientation, social skills). The measurement models of the constructs showed an acceptable fit with the following global quality values: chi-square statistics = 1418.41, df = 254, $p < .001$, GFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.057, NFI = 0.95, NNFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.96, RNI = 0.96, IFI = 0.96, and SRMR = 0.043. GFI and AGFI should be as close to 1 as possible, NFI and CFI $\geq$ 0.9, RMSEA $\leq$ 0.08, and SRMR for well-fitting models measuring less than 0.05 (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008).

To evaluate the discriminant validity of the latent constructs, the Fornell-Larcker criterion, cross-loadings of the indicators, and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion were used. As presented in Table 2, the Fornell-Larcker criterion is fulfilled (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, evaluation of the descriptives showed no anomalies.

According to the cross-loading criterion, discriminant validity occurs when each indicator loads higher on its latent construct than on other constructs (Kawecki & Ebert, 2004), what was fulfilled here. The HTMT, with a value of 0.89, is higher than the most conservative threshold of 0.85 at trust in salesperson only. However, all HTMT values are significantly less than 1, indicating the existence of discriminant validity; hence, all relationship pairs in the model differ empirically (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014). Overall, all criteria for the quality assessment of reflective measurements were fulfilled. The constructs are unidimensional, reliable, and valid.

An indicator's relevance and significance in the context of formative measurement of the constructs were determined by assessing the weights and their significance (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019). Table 3 lists the formative construct-scale items.

There are no uniform threshold values in the literature regarding the minimum requirement for the value of the weight. Lohmöller (1989) suggests minimum values between 0.1 and 0.2, depending on the literature source (Kawecki & Ebert, 2004). Except for two items, this is fulfilled for all formative constructs. All indicator weights of formative measurement models are positive and significantly different from zero. To determine the significance of the indicator, the t-values from the bootstrapping algorithm were used for the weights. Two diagnostic statistics are beneficial for evaluating the impact of multicollinearity on estimates in structural equation models: the variance inflation factor (VIF) and condition indices (CI). VIFs are based on correlations between independent variables. Low VIF values (usually less than 5) indicate that collinearity problems could be neglected (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). To identify correlating items through variance decomposition, the condition index can be calculated in addition to the VIF (Götz, Liehr-

Table 2
Mean, SD, inter-construct correlations, and square roots of AVE along the diagonal in bold.

Construct	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Commitment	3.53	1.48	**0.93**										
2 Trust in organization	4.03	1.16	0.61	**0.76**									
3 Trust in salesperson	4.12	1.24	0.79	0.66	**0.88**								
4 Power of salesperson	3.99	1.33	0.51	0.36	0.48	**0.92**							
5 Reputation	4.57	1.10	0.67	0.59	0.68	0.44	**0.87**						
6 Selling orientation	2.59	1.32	−0.63	−0.63	−0.70	−0.33	−0.59	**0.88**					
7 Social skills	4.74	1.09	0.64	0.51	0.74	0.41	0.62	−0.57	**0.88**				
8 Service	4.04	1.22	0.78	0.63	0.80	0.48	0.73	−0.61	0.70	n.a.			
9 Flexibility	3.75	1.34	0.71	0.55	0.72	0.49	0.62	−0.56	0.59	0.73	n.a.		
10 Expertise	4.70	1.21	0.62	0.50	0.68	0.53	0.60	−0.53	0.65	0.69	0.56	n.a.	
11 Sociableness	3.53	1.26	0.58	0.36	0.54	0.40	0.44	−0.33	0.54	0.54	0.49	0.44	n.a.

Table 3
Formative constructs, item weights, t-values, VIF, and condition indices.

Construct with items	Weights	t-values (one-tailed)	VIF	CI
Service and product quality				13.96
The service provider…				
… informs in advance about his offer.	0.14	3.72	1.88	
… delivers high-quality services.	0.44	9.51	2.16	
… offers a very good administrative service.	0.08	1.70	2.54	
… offers very good advice before concluding the contract.	0.27	5.92	2.58	
… always adheres to the promised time agreements.	0.25	5.62	2.32	
Flexibility				12.30
The contact person…				
… is ready to adapt its services to our specific needs.	0.56	0.89	2.54	
… is willing to adapt its processes to our needs.	0.44	0.73	2.91	
… is prepared to make specific investments for us.	0.08	1.85	3.85	
Expertise				13.70
The contact person…				
… has a very high level of expertise.	0.76	18.34	2.46	
… knows our own product portfolio very well.	0.28	6.07	2.46	
Sociableness				7.56
The contact person…				
… conducts regular business talks with us.	0.89	35.56	1.24	
… conducts regular private conversations with us.	0.21	5.47	1.24	

Gobbers, & Krafft, 2010). High condition indices (usually greater than 30) indicate the presence of collinearity (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012). The VIF values of the formative constructs ranged between 1.24 and 3.85. Furthermore, all the condition indices of the formative constructs were less than 30. Thus, the VIF and CI do not suggest any multicollinearity. Therefore, a proper measurement can be assumed for the formative constructs.

4. Results

4.1. Inner model estimation and evaluation

After finding a valid measurement model, we analyzed the structural model in the next step by examining the explanatory power of the entire model and the predictive power of the independent variables (Hulland, 1999; Kawecki & Ebert, 2004). Notably, we did not find unobserved heterogeneity within the data, which could have affected our results' explanatory power. Checking for possible latent classes, we considered a one-to-ten-segment solution due to the model's complexity, in addition to the theoretical upper bound of 28, given a minimum sample size of 48. By re-running FIMIX-PLS for 2–10 segments, we could examine various information criteria that applied for different segment solutions (Hahn, Johnson, Herrmann, & Huber, 2002). Considering the efficacy of various information criteria (Sarstedt, Becker, Ringle, & Schwaiger, 2011), we mainly focused on AIC3 (Bozdogan, 1994) as well as CAIC (Bozdogan, 1987). While the smallest value of AIC3 was retained for a two-segment solution, CAIC implied 10 different clusters. Additional analyses revealed that further information criteria, such as AIC4 (Bozdogan, 1994) and BIC (Schwarz, 1978), also accounted for different solutions, an eight- and two-cluster solution. Examining the relative segment sizes across the FIMIX-PLS solutions showed that choosing more than five classes was not reasonable.

Nevertheless, our analysis revealed a normed entropy statistic below 0.5, for each of the two- to five-segment solutions (Ringle, Sarstedt, & Mooi, 2010). Therefore, we have a sample that is potentially homogeneous so that we can analyze the data on an aggregate level (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Gudergan, 2018). Furthermore, we checked the latent constructs in the path model for multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2012) and did not perceive any problem as all VIF values were less than 4.

We assessed the explanatory power by inspecting the adjusted R^2 of the primary dependent variables based on a homogeneous dataset with no multicollinearity issues. In our model, the respective independent variables explain 72% of the variation in the performance of the construct trust in salesperson and 56% of trust in organization and 64% of latent variable commitment. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) was used to evaluate the overall model fit of the proposed research model. The SRMR value of 0.06, which is below the suggested threshold of 0.08 and, thus, implies a good model fit for PLS path models (Henseler, Hubona, & Ray, 2016).

Regarding the high explanatory power (Kawecki & Ebert, 2004), we analyzed the predictive power of the independent variables by examining the significance and magnitude of the standardized estimates of the path coefficients. Further, we summarized the model estimation results, providing direct effects, standard errors, t-values, and significant levels obtained by applying a nonparametric bootstrapping routine. Overall, these findings provide profound support for the hypothesized model. The path coefficients, significance levels, and variances explained are shown in Fig. 2.

4.2. Hypothesis testing

Focusing on the first block of the model, we found support for H_1 and H_2, which refer to the positive impact of reputation ($\beta_1 = 0.19, p < 0.01, f^2 = 0.04$) and service quality ($\beta_2 = 0.16, p < 0.01, f^2 = 0.02$) on trust in organization. However, the results showed significant, but neglectable, influences of flexibility and the duration of relationship on trust in organization. Regarding the second block of our hypothesized model, we examined those constructs influencing trust in salesperson. Overall, we found support for all our hypotheses, H_5–H_{10}, with varying strength of impact. Selling orientation ($\beta_7 = -0.35, p < 0.01, f^2 = 0.27$), as well as social skills ($\beta_8 = 0.30, p < 0.01, f^2 = 0.14$), exhibited a stronger impact than expertise ($\beta_5 = 0.19, p < 0.01, f^2 = 0.06$) or sociableness ($\beta_9 = 0.14, p < 0.01, f^2 = 0.04$). Meanwhile, there was only a minor influence of the constructs power ($\beta_6 = 0.08$, $p < 0.01$, $f^2 = 0.01$) or duration of relationship with salesperson ($\beta_{10} = 0.04$, $p < 0.01$, $f^2 = 0.01$).

We found that the third block of our model is strongly supported. Both links on trust were positive and highly significant. Trust in salesperson, as well as trust in organization, impacted the commitment of the relationship, although with a difference in relative strength, trust in organization ($\beta_{12} = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$, $f^2 = 0.05$), and trust in salesperson ($\beta_{13} = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$, $f^2 = 0.58$). There was also a positive relationship between trust in salesperson and trust in organization ($\beta_{11} = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$, $f^2 = 0.1$), and this, therefore, supported the hypothesis (H_{11}).

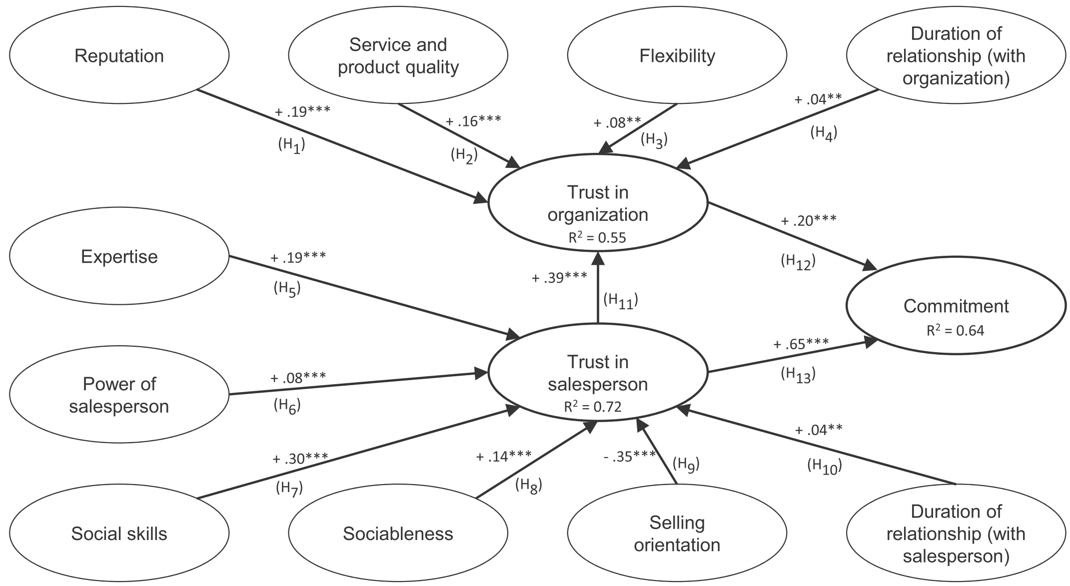

Fig. 2. Path analysis results. ***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$ (one-tailed); $n = 1692$.

5. Discussion

5.1. Summary of contribution

In this study, we focused on an important aspect of B2B services, that is, creating trust. Based on structural equation modeling and a sample of 1692 participants, our research revealed that trust drivers in organizations and salespersons and their impact on commitment are important for establishing trust. Moreover, trust in a salesperson far surpasses the effect of trust in an organization. Reputation and service quality also influence trust in an organization, while social skills and low selling orientation affect trust in a salesperson.

Unlike in B2C transactions, there is a much more multi-layered complexity in the relationships between trading organizations and trading individuals in B2B transactions. In addition, transactions in B2B involve larger volumes. In contrast to manufacturers, decision makers face additional risks in the service sector because services are also characterized by the IHIP characteristics, such as intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability. We focused on B2B service relationships and examined the variables influencing trust at the interpersonal and inter-organizational levels and the effects of both levels of trust on commitment. As there are no studies regarding this topic, our study fills this research gap.

The results of our study support all 13 hypotheses. Reputation has a significant positive influence on trust in organization (H1). This is in accordance with the literature, as reputation is one of the most crucial trust-building influence variables in the B2B context (Anderson & Weitz, 1989; Doney & Cannon, 1997). Consequently, reputation can reduce the uncertainty that exists, especially in B2B services, due to intangibility and has a positive influence on inter-organizational trust. In our study, reputation has the most extensive influence on trust in organization compared to the other influencing variables. The next most significant influence on trust in organization is service and product quality (H2). This result is also in line with the literature, which states that higher service and product quality payed particular attention to the reduction of risk in business relationships (Chiou & Droge, 2006; Chumpitaz Caceres & Paparoidamis, 2007; Doney et al., 2007; Kennedy et al., 2001). Inter-organizational trust also depends on a company's employees due to the inseparability of the processes of service provision with the provider, specifically in B2B service relationships. In the case of the influence of flexibility on trust in an organization, our data show a significant effect (H3). However, it is only half as large as that for service and product quality. This positive influence is also in line with the literature (Koufaris & Hampton-Sosa, 2004), and it supports the heterogeneous and inseparable nature of B2B service relationships. The more flexible the providers respond to changing customers' requirements, the greater their trust in the organization. This simultaneously implies greater benefits due to the willingness to change and adapt (Doney & Cannon, 1997) and strengthening of the business relationship (Homburg et al., 2003). As expected, the duration of business relationships also influences organizational trust (H4). This influence is significant, but minimal, compared to other factors, such as reputation, service and product quality, and flexibility. Nevertheless, the data support transaction cost theory and learning theory (Doney & Cannon, 1997) and reduce the risks associated with the IHIP characteristics, such as intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability of B2B service relationships.

In the case of the variables influencing trust in a salesperson, we formulated a total of six hypotheses. Again, all directions of effect are those we could expect in agreement with the literature. In addition, we assumed that, because of the IHIP characteristics of B2B service relationships, the larger the share of the service in the range of goods and services, the more important the seller becomes. Thus, trust in a salesperson is influenced by the personal characteristics of the salesperson. Intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability are closely related to the personal characteristics of people and salespersons. In our study, selling orientation is the most significant and most substantial influence on trust in the salesperson. We found that the higher the salesperson's selling orientation, the lower the trust in the salesperson (H9). Theoretically, we can explain this by the unwillingness to trust a person if they only pursue their interests. From the customer's perspective, a problem-solving approach is preferred (Crosby et al., 1990; Guenzi & Georges, 2010; Tam & Wong, 2001). A not less crucial influencing variable is social skills. Our results suggest that the higher the salesperson's social skills are rated, the higher the trust in salesperson (H7). Among social skills, we subsumed the salesperson's factual and substantive presence and the ability to create a friendly atmosphere. The positive influence of these skills on trust in the salesperson is consistent with the existing literature related to this topic (Aggarwal et al., 2005; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Guenzi & Georges, 2010; Kwon & Suh, 2004; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Rotter, 1980; Swan & Nolan, 1985). We observe a somewhat weaker but still highly significant influence on expertise and sociableness. The higher the expertise, the higher the trust in the salesperson (H5). It is undisputed in the literature that high expertise of a salesperson significantly reduces the risk of a bad investment, thereby causing lower transaction costs (Crosby et al., 1990; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Dowding et al., 1994; Guenzi & Georges, 2010; Moorman et al., 1992; Wood et al., 2008). The higher the sociability of the salespersons, the higher the trust in them (H8). This result is consistent with Crosby's et al. (1990) findings and supports Altman and Taylor's (1973) social penetration theory. However, the regularity of conversations at the business level is significantly more critical than at the personal level. Our weights on the formative measure indicate that the business level is three times more important than the personal level. Similar to the findings of Crosby et al. (1990), Doney and Cannon (1997), and Swan and Nolan (1985), we observe the salespersons' assertiveness and influence within their organization as having a significant impact on trust in that person. The higher the power of the salespersons within their organization, the higher the trust in them (H6). However, the strength of the effect is more than four times lower than that of the selling orientation. Our data support the hypothesis that a salesperson's relationship length increases trust in the salesperson (H10). Participants learn through experiences how much they can trust their counterparts (Anderson & Weitz, 1989; Burchell & Wilkinson, 1997; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Rotter, 1967). Regarding the impact on trust in an organization, the length of relationship is significant but equally low as that on trust in an organization.

Our results on the relationship between trust and commitment are consistent with the findings of previous studies and with theories on social exchange theory, according to Thibaut and Kelly (1959) and commitment-trust theory according to Morgan and Hunt (1994). Our results show a significant relationship between trust and commitment, starting from the inter-organizational and inter-personal levels and between trust in a salesperson and trust in an organization. The influence of trust in a salesperson has a significant positive influence on trust in their organization (H11). Trust in an organization has a significant positive influence on commitment (H12), and trust in a salesperson has a significant positive influence on commitment (H13). The effect sizes of these three relationships support the results of Ashnai et al. (2016). Trust in a salesperson has a relatively strong influence on trust in an organization. However, the influence of trust in a salesperson on commitment is more than three times higher than that of trust in an organization. Our study underlines the extraordinary importance of business relationships with salespersons.

5.2. Management implications

In summary, the findings of our research suggest several implications for practitioners of B2B service providers. First, the trust in an organization and a salesperson are important drivers of the buyer's commitment to the relationship. However, trust in a salesperson outperforms the impact of trust in an organization. Thus, in B2B services, it is the person, rather than the organization, that creates trust. This result has many implications for retaining and hiring good employees with various or key customer contacts. Investing in the satisfaction of their employees and creating an affective, conative, and cognitive commitment to the employer seems to be the right way to bind employees and their customers. This appears even more important for Generation Y, which generally exhibits a higher readiness to change employers.

Second, our study reveals drivers that build trust and provide insights into the direction such efforts might take. Reputation, service, and product quality were found to be the primary drivers of trust in an organization. Creating a brand based on trust and high ethical standards in business through image-building techniques, such as advertising and public relations, could be the way forward. Our study shows that service and product quality primarily provide high-quality services that count, followed by giving good advice before signing a contract and adherence to the agreed time contracts. Excellent administrative services do not have a significant impact or the potential to create a competitive advantage. Flexibility to adapt their services or processes to meet consumers' needs does not seem to have a high impact on trust in organizations. Trust in a salesperson can grow over a more extended period, but does not need to. Our findings make it possible to create trust quite quickly, providing an opportunity to bind new customers with the help outlined in the findings.

Regarding the question of how to create trust in salespersons, it is important to form a team with a high level of expertise and, even more importantly, with low-pressure selling tactics, social skills, and right level of sociableness. In addition to hiring the "right" people, managers could use our results and trust-building processes to guide their training efforts. Organizations should design training programs that help salespersons to become updated, improve their expertise and social skills, and become more competent and successful at using low-pressure selling tactics. In addition, organizations might have to rethink and adapt the existing incentive and remuneration system by not focusing on sales volume per se, but on trust-building behaviors. Furthermore, organizations must create a "work climate" based on honesty and belief in others' actions and words. Therefore, this is not about creating new friendships with customers. Our findings suggest that salespersons should conduct regular business talks, rather than regular private conversations, to create a professional atmosphere. Similar to trust in an organization, trust in a salesperson does not have to be the result of a long-term relationship only. Trust can be created quickly, which also implies a great opportunity to bind new customers. Overall, focusing on business ethics provides an effective mechanism for enhancing trust in B2B service relationships.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

There are several limitations to our findings and the implications derived from this study. Nevertheless, as no research has examined a comprehensive model of the different dimensions of trust in the B2B service market, this study might guide future research opportunities.

First, while we incorporated various antecedents of trust in the hypothesized model, potentially relevant variables could have been incorporated to intensify the explanatory power of our proposed model. Therefore, future research could extend our findings in this manner. Second, our study had an explorative character. Focusing on B2B relationships within the service market, we analyzed various relationships with communication, business, personnel, or IT-consultancies. Because of these settings, it was impossible to derive a representative sample in this case. Future research should focus on these issues. Third, we asked the purchasing side only; nevertheless, trust was a reciprocal relation. Future research should also focus on suppliers. Additionally, we focused only on the German B2B service market. Therefore, it is essential to note that our findings on building trust in salespersons, organizations, or commitment may also not be generalized to different cultural settings. Moreover, future research should emphasize on the role culture plays in the focused aspects of buyer–seller relationships in the service industry. Cross-cultural research in this context should provide useful managerial implications. Furthermore, we did not focus on the development of trust over time. As the actual pandemic has further increased uncertainty, it can be assumed that the importance of trust, its antecedents, and the impact on commitment will become even crucial. Therefore, the influence of this exogenous shock would be interesting to explore. A longitudinal study should highlight whether the drivers of different dimensions of trust vary in their impact across different process stages. Understanding the dynamics of trust can help us understand why relationships grow, change, or decline.

References

Aggarwal, P., Castleberry, S. B., Ridnour, R., & Shepherd, C. D. (2005). Salesperson empathy and listening: Impact on relationship outcomes. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 13*(3), 16–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2005.11658547.

Altman, I., & Taylor, D. A. (1973). *Social penetration: The development of interpersonal relationships*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Anderson, E., & Weitz, B. (1989). Determinants of continuity in conventional industrial channel dyads. *Marketing Science, 8*(4), 310–323. https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.8.4.310.

Ashnai, B., Henneberg, S. C., Naudé, P., & Francescucci, A. (2016). Inter-personal and inter-organizational trust in business relationships: An attitude-behavior-outcome model. *Industrial Marketing Management, 52*(2016), 128–139. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2015.05.020.

Aulakh, P. S., Kotabe, M., & Sahay, A. (1996). Trust and performance in cross-border marketing partnerships: A behavioral approach. *Journal of International Business Studies, 27*(5), 1005–1032. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490161.

Bagozzi, R. P., & Yi, Y. (1988). On the evaluation of structural equation models. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 16*(1), 74–94. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02723327.

Bennett, R. J., & Robson, P. J. A. (2004). The role of trust and contract in the supply of business advice. *Cambridge Journal of Economics, 28*(4), 471–488. https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/28.4.471.

Blois, K. J. (1999). Trust in business to business relationships: An evaluation of its status. *Journal of Management Studies, 36*(2), 197–215. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00133.

Bozdogan, H. (1987). Model selection and Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC): The general theory and its analytical extensions. *Psychometrika, 52*(3), 345–370. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02294361.

Bozdogan, H. (1994). Mixture-model cluster analysis using model selection criteria and a new informational measure of complexity. In *Proceedings of the first US/Japan conference on the frontiers of statistical modeling: An informational approach* (pp. 69–113). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-011-0800-3_3.

Burchell, B., & Wilkinson, F. (1997). Trust, business relationships and the contractual environment. *Cambridge Journal of Economics, 21*(2), 217–237. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.cje.a013667.

Cannon, J. P., & Homburg, C. (2001). Buyer-supplier relationships and customer firm costs. *Journal of Marketing, 65*(1), 29–43. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.65.1.29.18136.

Chang, S.-J., van Witteloostuijn, A., & Eden, L. (2010). From the editors: Common method variance in international business research. *Journal of International Business Studies, 41*(2), 178–184. https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2009.88.

Chenet, P., Dagger, T. S., & O'Sullivan, D. (2010). Service quality, trust, commitment and service differentiation in business relationships. *Journal of Services Marketing, 24*(5), 336–346. https://doi.org/10.1108/08876041011060440.

Chiou, J. S., & Droge, C. (2006). Service quality, trust, specific asset investment, and expertise: Direct and indirect effects in a satisfaction-loyalty framework. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 34*(4), 613–627. https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070306286934.

Chumpitaz Caceres, R., & Paparoidamis, N. G. (2007). Service quality, relationship satisfaction, trust, commitment and business-to-business loyalty. *European Journal of Marketing, 41*(7/8), 836–867. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560710752429.

Coulter, K. S., & Coulter, R. A. (2002). Determinants of trust in a service provider: The moderating role of length of relationship. *Journal of Services Marketing, 16*(1), 35–50. https://doi.org/10.1108/08876040210419406.

Cowles, D. L. (1997). The role of trust in customer relationships: Asking the right questions. *Management Decision, 35*(4), 273–282. https://doi.org/10.1108/00251749710169657.

Crosby, L. A., Evans, K. R., & Cowles, D. (1990). Relationship quality in services selling: An interpersonal influence perspective. *Journal of Marketing, 54*(3), 68–81. https://doi.org/10.2307/1251817.

Day, G. S. (2000). Managing market relationships. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 28*(1), 24–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070300281003.

Dertouzos, M. L., Lester, R. K., & Solow, R. M. (1989). *Made in America. Regaining the productive edge*. Cambridge, MA (USA): The MIT Press.

Doney, P. M., Barry, J. M., & Abratt, R. (2007). Trust determinants and outcomes in global B2B services. *European Journal of Marketing, 41*(9/10), 1096–1116. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560710773363.

Doney, P. M., & Cannon, J. P. (1997). An examination of the nature of trust in buyer-seller relationships. *Journal of Marketing, 61*(2), 35–51. https://doi.org/10.2307/1251829.

Dowding, K., John, P., & Biggs, S. (1994). Tiebout: A survey of the empirical literature. *Urban Studies, 31*(97), 767–797. https://doi.org/10.1080/00420989420080671.

Dunn, S. C., Seaker, R. F., & Waller, M. A. (1994). Latent variables in business logistics research: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Business Logistics, 15*(2), 145–172. https://doi.org/10.1007/3-7908-1636-1_11.

Edgett, S., & Parkinson, S. (1993). Marketing for service industries. *The Services Industries Journal, 13*(3), 19–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069300000048.

Fang, E., Palmatier, R. W., Scheer, L. K., & Li, N. (2008). Trust at different organizational levels. *Journal of Marketing, 72*(2), 80–98. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.72.2.80.

Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research, 18*(1), 39–50. https://doi.org/10.2307/3151312.

Friend, S. B., Johnson, J. S., & Sohi, R. S. (2018). Propensity to trust salespeople: A contingent multilevel-multisource examination. *Journal of Business Research, 83*, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.09.048.

Friman, M., Gärling, T., Millett, B., Mattsson, J., & Johnston, R. (2002). An analysis of international business-to-business relationships based on the commitment – Trust theory. *Industrial Marketing Management, 31*(2002), 403–409. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0019-8501(01)00154-7.

Ganesan, S. (1994). Determinants of long-term orientation in buyer-seller relationships. *Journal of Marketing, 58*(2), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.2307/1252265.

Gerbing, D. W., & Anderson, J. C. (1988). An updated paradigm for scale development incorporating unidimensionality and its assessment. *Journal of Marketing Research, 25*(2), 186–192. https://doi.org/10.2307/3172650.

Götz, O., Liehr-Gobbers, K., & Krafft, M. (2010). Evaluation of structural equation models using the partial least squares (PLS) approach. In *Handbook of partial least squares* (pp. 691–711). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-32827-8_30.

Guenzi, P. (2002). Sales force activities and customer trust. *Journal of Marketing Management, 18*, 749–778. https://doi.org/10.1362/0267257022780606.

Guenzi, P., & Georges, L. (2010). Interpersonal trust in commercial relationships. *European Journal of Marketing, 44*(1/2), 114–138. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561011008637.

Hahn, C., Johnson, M. D., Herrmann, A., & Huber, F. (2002). Capturing customer heterogeneity using a finite mixture PLS approach. *Schmalenbach Business Review, 54*(3), 243–269. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03396655.

Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2017). *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE PublicationsSage CA.

Hair, J. F., Risher, J. J., Sarstedt, M., & Ringle, C. M. (2019). When to use and how to report the results of PLS-SEM. *European Business Review, 31*(1), 2–24. https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-11-2018-0203.

Hair, J. F., Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., & Gudergan, S. P. (2018). *Advanced issues in partial least squares structural equation modeling*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE PublicationsSage.

Hair, J. F., Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., & Mena, J. A. (2012). An assessment of the use of partial least squares structural equation modeling in marketing research. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 40*(3), 414–433. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-011-0261-6.

Harman, H. H. (1976). *Modern factor analysis* (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hartmann, N., Plouffe, C. R., Kohsuwan, P., & Cote, J. A. (2020). Salesperson influence tactics and the buying agent purchase decision: Mediating role of buying agent trust of the salesperson and moderating role of buying agent regulatory orientation focus. *Industrial Marketing Management, 87*, 31–46. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.02.023.

Heide, J. B. (1994). Interorganizational governance in marketing channels. *Journal of Marketing, 58*(1), 71–85. https://doi.org/10.2307/1252252.

Henseler, J., Hubona, G., & Ray, P. A. (2016). Using PLS path modeling in new technology research: Updated guidelines. *Industrial Management and Data Systems, 116*(1), 2–20. https://doi.org/10.1108/IMDS-09-2015-0382.

Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2014). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 43*(1), 115–135. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-014-0403-8.

Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sinkovics, R. (2009). The use of partial least squares path modeling in international marketing. *Advances in International Marketing, 20*, 277–319. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1474-7979(2009)0000020014.

Holden, R. K. (1994). *An exploratory study of trust in buyer-seller relationships*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International Dissertation Services.

Homburg, C., Giering, A., & Menon, A. (2003). Relationship characteristics as moderators of the satisfaction-loyalty link: Findings in a business-to-business context. *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing, 10*(3), 35–62. https://doi.org/10.1300/J033v10n03_02.

Hooper, D., Coughlan, J., & Mullen, M. R. (2008). Structural equation modelling: Guidelines for determining model fit structural equation modelling: Guidelines for determining model fit. *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods, 6*(1), 53–60. https://doi.org/10.21427/D7CF7R.

Huemer, L. (2014). Creating cooperative advantage: The roles of identification, trust, and time. *Industrial Marketing Management, 43*(4), 564–572. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2014.02.011.

Hulland, J. (1999). Use of partial least squares (PLS) in strategic management research: A review of four recent studies. *Strategic Management Journal, 20*(2), 195–204. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199902)20:2<195::AID-SMJ13>3.0.CO;2-7.

Jiang, Z., Henneberg, S. C., & Naudé, P. (2010). Exploring trust vis-à-vis reliance in business relationships: A qualitative analysis in the UK construction industry. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning, 28*(6), 706–722. https://doi.org/10.1108/02634501011078110.

Jiang, Z., Henneberg, S. C., & Naudé, P. (2011). The importance of trust vis-à-vis reliance in business relationships: Some international findings. *International Marketing Review, 28*(4), 318–339. https://doi.org/10.1108/02651331111149921.

Jiang, Z., Henneberg, S. C., & Naudé, P. (2012). Supplier relationship management in the construction industry: The effects of trust and dependence. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 27*(1), 3–15. https://doi.org/10.1108/08858621211188920.

Kawecki, T. J., & Ebert, D. (2004). Conceptual issues in local adaptation. *Ecology Letters, 7*(12), 1225–1241. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1461-0248.2004.00684.x.

Kennedy, M. S., Ferrell, L. K., & Leclair, D. T. (2001). Consumers' trust of salesperson and manufacturer: An empirical study. *Journal of Business Research, 51*(1), 73–86. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(99)00039-9.

Koufaris, M., & Hampton-Sosa, W. (2004). The development of initial trust in an online company by new customers. *Information and Management, 41*(3), 377–397. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2003.08.004.

Kumar, A., Capraro, V., & Perc, M. (2020). The evolution of trust and trustworthiness. *Journal of the Royal Society Interface, 17*(169), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2020.0491rsif20200491.

Kumar, N., Scheer, L. K., & Steenkamp, J.-B. E. M. (1995). The effects of perceived interdependence on dealer attitudes. *Journal of Marketing Research, 32*(3), 348. https://doi.org/10.2307/3151986.

Kwon, I.-W. G., & Suh, T. (2004). Factors affecting the level of trust and commitment in supply chain relationships. *The Journal of Supply Chain Management, 40*(2), 4–14. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-493X.2004.tb00165.x.

Lewis, J. D., & Weigert, A. (1985). Trust as a social reality. *Social Forces, 63*(4), 967–985. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/63.4.967.

Lohmöller, J.-B. (1989). Predictive vs. structural modeling: PLS vs. ML. In *Latent variable path modeling with partial least squares* (pp. 199–226). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-52512-4_5.

Lussier, B., & Hall, Z. R. (2018). Cooperation in B2B relationships: Factors that influence customers' perceptions of salesperson cooperation. *Industrial Marketing Management, 69*, 209–220. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.09.019.

MacKenzie, S. B., Podsakoff, P. M., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2011). Construct measurement and validation procedures in MIS and behavioral research: Integrating new and existing techniques. *MIS Quarterly, 35*(2), 293–334. https://doi.org/10.2307/23044045.

Moeller, S. (2010). Characteristics of services – A new approach uncovers their value. *Journal of Services Marketing, 24*(5), 359–368. https://doi.org/10.1108/08876041011060468.

Moorman, C., Deshpande, R., & Zaltman, G. (1993). Factors affecting trust in market research relationships. *Journal of Marketing, 57*(1), 81–101. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11936-017-0520-z.

Moorman, C., Zaltman, G., & Deshpande, R. (1992). Relationships between providers and users of market research: The dynamics of trust within and between organizations. *Journal of Marketing Research, 29*(3), 314–328. https://doi.org/10.2307/3172742.

Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing, 58*(3), 20–38. https://doi.org/10.2307/1252308.

Mouzas, S., Henneberg, S., & Naudé, P. (2007). Trust and reliance in business relationships. *European Journal of Marketing, 41*(9/10), 1016–1032. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560710773327.

Nunnally, J. C., & Bernstein, I. H. (1994). *Psychometric theory* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Oliver, R. L. (1999). Whence consumer loyalty? *Journal of Marketing, 63*(1999), 33–44. https://doi.org/10.2307/1252099.

Palmatier, R. W., Dant, R. P., & Grewal, D. (2007). A comparative longitudinal analysis of theoretical perspectives of interorganizational relationship performance. *Journal of Marketing, 71*(4), 172–194. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.71.4.172.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1985). A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research. *Journal of Marketing, 49*(4), 41–50. https://doi.org/10.2307/1251430.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. *Journal of Retailing, 64*(1), 12–40.

Paulssen, M., Leischnig, A., Ivens, B. S., & Birk, M. M. (2016). Relational norms in customer–company relationships: Net and configurational effects title. *Journal of Business Research, 69*(12), 5866–5874. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.101.

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(5), 879–903. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879.

Qi, C., & Chau, P. (2013). Investigating the roles of interpersonal and interorganizational trust in IT outsourcing success. *Information Technology & People, 26*(2), 120–145. https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-09-2012-0088.

Ringle, C. M., Sarstedt, M., & Mooi, E. A. (2010). Response-based segmentation using finite mixture partial least squares. In R. Stahlbock, S. Lessmann, & S. F. Crone (Eds.), *Data mining. Special issue in annals of information systems* (8th ed., pp. 19–49). New York: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1280-0_2.

Rotter, J. B. (1967). A new scale for the measurement of interpersonal trust. *Journal of Personality, 35*(4), 651–665. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1967.tb01454.x.

Rotter, J. B. (1980). Interpersonal trust, trustworthiness, and gullibility. *American Psychologist, 35*(1), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.35.1.1.

Rousseau, D. M., Sitkin, S. B., Burt, R. S., & Camerer, C. (1998). Not so different after all: A cross-discipline view of trust. *Academy of Management Review, 23*(3), 393–404. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.1998.926617.

Sarstedt, M., Becker, J.-M., Ringle, C. M., & Schwaiger, M. (2011). Uncovering and treating unobserved heterogeneity with FIMIX-PLS: Which model selection criterion provides an appropriate number of segments? *Schmalenbach Business Review, 63*(1), 34–62. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03396886.

Schwarz, G. (1978). Estimating the dimension of a model. *The Annals of Statistics, 6*(2), 461–464. https://doi.org/10.1214/aos/1176344136.

Squire, B., Cousins, P. D., & Brown, S. (2009). Cooperation and knowledge transfer within buyer-supplier relationships: The moderating properties of trust, relationship duration and supplier performance. *British Journal of Management, 20*(4), 461–477. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2008.00595.x.

Svensson, G. (2004). Vulnerability in business relationships: The gap between dependence and trust. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 19*(7), 469–483. https://doi.org/10.1108/08858620410564418.

Swan, J. E., & Nolan, J. J. (1985). Gaining customer trust: A conceptual guide for the salesperson. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management, 5*(2), 39–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.1985.10754400.

Tam, J. L. M., & Wong, Y. H. (2001). Interactive selling: A dynamic framework for services. *Journal of Services Marketing, 15*(5), 379–396. https://doi.org/10.1108/EUM0000000005656.

Thibaut, J. W., & Kelly, H. H. (1959). *The social psychology of groups, New York*.

Watts, H. (2015). Predicting customer retention in discrete and continuous services. In O. Gansser, & B. Krol (Eds.), *Markt- und Absatzprognosen* (pp. 89–106). Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-04492-3_5.

Webb, J., Henneberg, S., & Forkmann, S. (2017). The role of corruption for the dark side of buyer-supplier relationships. *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings, 2017*(1). https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2017.275.

Wilson, A., Zeithaml, V. A., Bitner, M. J., & Gremler, D. D. (2016). *Services marketing: Integrating customer focus across the firm* (3rd ed., p. 538). London: McGraw-Hill Education.

Wilson, D. T. (1995). An integrated model of buyer-seller relationships. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 23*(4), 335–345. https://doi.org/10.1177/009207039502300414.

Wood, J. A., Boles, J. S., & Babin, B. J. (2008). The formation of buyer's trust of the seller in an initial sales encounter. *The Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 16*(1), 27–39. https://doi.org/10.2753/MTP1069-6679160102.

Zaheer, A., McEvily, B., & Perrone, V. (1998). Does trust matter? Exploring the effects of interorganizational and interpersonal trust on performance. *Organization Science, 9*(2), 141–159. https://doi.org/10.2307/2640350.

Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L., & Parasuraman, A. (1996). The behavioral consequences of service quality. *Journal of Marketing, 60*(2), 31–46. https://doi.org/10.2307/1251929.

Zeithaml, V. A., Parasuraman, A., & Berry, L. L. (1985). Problems and strategies in service marketing. *Journal of Marketing, 49*(2), 33–46. https://doi.org/10.2307/1251563.

Oliver Gansser, (Dr., University of Augsburg), Professor of Marketing, FOM University of Applied Sciences, oliver.gansser@fom.de.

Silvia Boßow-Thies, (Dr., University of Kiel), Professor of Marketing, FOM University of Applied Sciences, silvia.bossow-thies@fom.de.

Bianca Krol, (Dr., University of Duisburg-Essen), Professor of Economics, FOM University of Applied Sciences, bianca.krol@fom.de.