

INVESTIGATING THE ANTECEDENTS OF RELATIONSHIP STRENGTH IN B2B
MARKETS: TURKISH PLASTICS INDUSTRY CASE

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PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical codes. I also declare that, as required by the rules and conduct, have fully cited referenced all material results that are original in this work.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an attempt to investigate the antecedents of relationship strength in industrial markets by proposing a structural model comprised of empathy, salesperson skills, reliance, and perceived value as the constructs. The research involves first, flexible qualitative interviews with the key decision makers of several industrial companies' in the plastics industry in Turkey and then, quantitatively exploring the relationships between these constructs with the data collected from 109 respondents from B2B companies. Smart PLS was used to test the hypotheses and to analyze the relationships amongst the proposed constructs. The research is unique in the sense that relatively new constructs such as empathy and reliance that were not contemplated deeply in the B2B literature before were employed. The results indicate that reliance and perceived value are the key antecedents of relationship strength in B2B markets. Reliance was found to emerge as consequences of cognitive components of empathy and salesperson's professional skills (salesmanship skills), while affective drivers such as affective empathy, interpersonal and technical skills of salesperson were not found to have any significant effect in the formation of reliance and relationship strength. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by proposing a holistic framework for the formation of relationship strength in B2B marketing. Managerial implications of the study and proposed theoretical framework were discussed in detail.

Key words : B2B Marketing, Industrial Markets, Relationship Strength, Empathy, Reliance, Salesperson Role in B2B

ÖZET

Bu tez, empati, satış elemanı becerileri, bel bağlama (güvenç) ve algılanan değer değişkenlerinden oluşan yapısal bir model önererek endüstriyel pazarlarda ilişki gücünün öncüllerini araştırma girişimidir. Araştırma, önce Türkiye'de plastik sektöründe faaliyet gösteren çeşitli endüstriyel şirketin kilit karar vericileri ile esnek nitel görüşmeler ve ardından B2B şirketinde çalışan 109 katılımcıdan toplanan verilerle bu yapılar arasındaki ilişkilerin nicel olarak araştırılmasını içermektedir. Hipotezleri test etmek ve önerilen yapılar arasındaki ilişkileri analiz etmek için Smart PLS kullanılmıştır. Araştırma, daha önce B2B literatüründe derinlemesine irdelenmeyen empati ve güvenç gibi nispeten yeni kavramların kullanılması bakımından benzersizdir. Sonuçlar, B2B pazarlarda güvenç ve algılanan değer in ilişki gücünün temel öncülleri olduğunu göstermiştir. Güvenç ve empatinin bilişsel bileşenlerinin ve satış elemanının mesleki becerilerinin (satışçılık becerileri) sonucu olarak ortaya çıktığı, duygusal empati, satış elemanının kişisel temel iletişim ve teknik becerileri gibi dinamiklerin güvenç ve ilişki kuvveti oluşumunda anlamlı bir etkisinin olmadığı tespit edilmiştir. Çalışma, B2B pazarlamada ilişki gücünün oluşumu için bütünsel bir çerçeve önererek mevcut bilgi birikimine katkıda bulunmaktadır. Çalışmanın yönetsel çıkarımları ve önerilen teorik çerçeve detayları ile tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler : B2B Pazarlama, Endüstriyel Pazarlar, İlişki Kuvveti, Empati , Güvenç, B2B Pazarlarda Satış Elemanının Rolü.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFFEMP	Affective Empathy
B2B	Business to Business
B2C	Business to Consumer
COGEMP	Cognitive Empathy
INTPER	Interpersonal Skills of Salesperson
PERVAL	Perceived Value
REL	Reliance
RELPERF	Relationship Performance
RS	Relationship Strength
SALE	Salesmanship Skills of Salesperson
TECH	Technical Skills of Salesperson

1. INTRODUCTION

One function of marketing as an applied science is to try to explain and influence how consumers and firms behave in the market (Teck et.al.,2006). The classical models of marketing had been based on the application of economic theories to produce precise predictions but, they relied on the assumption of rationality of buyers. These theories until mid-20th century have overlooked the effects of psychological and behavioral considerations of humans in economic decisions, until Kahneman and Tversky (1982) changed this paradigm. As an economic exchange, buying and selling activities emerge as interactions amongst the people. The extent to which these activities are driven by rational considerations and the extent to which they are stimulated by subjective motives has been a fundamental question to address in the field of marketing. No matter whether the underlying factors behind a purchase decision is cognitive or affective, the process is managed through a continuous communication process between the buyer and seller, resulting in formation of bonds and, ultimately development of a relationship (Moore et al.,2012). Therefore, it is essential to understand the factors in the ways how the communication is managed to attain a strong relationship.

Studies examining the behavioral and social aspects of buying and selling relationships have been mostly investigated in the B2C context. According to the Equity Search report of Goldman Sachs (2018), the total global B2C volume is estimated to be \$ 24 trillion while the total B2B volume is predicted as 5X the volume of B2C: \$ 127 trillion. Based on these estimates, one might expect to see academic attention that is proportional to these figures, but it is not the case (Lilien, 2015). B2B publications in the top marketing journals remained very rare until late 90s and B2B research appeared mostly in specialized

journals focusing only on B2B markets (Reid and Plank, 2000). Thus, the area is believed to be relatively underexplored and is still quite open for new research activities.

During the past several decades B2B Markets dynamics have started resembling more and more to consumer markets dynamics with an apparent rise in the heterogeneity of the demand that is urging them to focus more attention on relationships with the customers. One of the ultimate goals of the companies in the industrial markets is to achieve and sustain high level of relationship strength to have a consolidation on the volume, price, and margins. In the industrial business context of our modern era in which the product and service offerings have become plenty in a highly competitive environment, the sales organizations consider better ways to manage their relationships with the customers (Dixon and Tanner, 2012), seek to adopt and profit from relational selling strategies (Dwyer et al., 1987) and to build loyalty bonds between the seller and the buying firm. The loyalty bonds stem from utilitarian, affective, symbolic, or obligatory attachments (Moore et al. 2012). The vulnerability of these bonds determines the strength of the relationship. In another words, relationship strength is a *“measure of the combination of the economic ties and social bonds between the buying and selling parties”* (Donaldson and O’ Toole, 2000).

In order to achieve a successful relationship marketing, two factors (1) relationship commitment and (2) trust should be simultaneously established (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Relationship commitment is the *“enduring desire of the business partners who want to work on maintaining it indefinitely”*, that represents the genuine willingness of the parties to work together to attain a sustainable relationship. Trust, as a central tenet of customer retention defined as the *“willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence”* entails the behavioral intention of the partners to “rely on” each other. However, trust’s scope in business relationships has not been very clear. Its domain is not completely specified, and its conceptual dimensions remained rather ambiguous (Solomon and Flores, 2001). In

addition, trust is a rather subjective and perceivable concept that is mostly valid for interpersonal relationships. In the organizational context, the choices of purchase decisions based on the personal perceptions may deviate from organizational interests. As relationships between organizations are unchangeably driven by mutual interests and risk evaluation, applying the notion of trust to B2B relationships might be doubtful (Sebenius, 1992). To eliminate these doubts, reliance as a more factual and a distinct construct than trust, with better explanatory power reflecting the rational dynamics of the B2B markets is suggested (Mouzas et al., 2007).

Another important factor in bond building in an inter-company relationship is the roles of the salespeople. Salespeople are the ones responsible for initiating the contacts, communicating the sales messages, and bringing the feedback of the customers back to his/her company. This process between the buyer and seller requires a certain time for the parties to assess each other's capabilities and needs, as such, the buyer becomes confident in suppliers' competency, fulfilling the agreements and meeting the expectations. The sellers in business markets usually interact with skilled professional buyers at evaluating competitive offerings (Kotler and Keller, 2012, pp 9). Furthermore, as B2B customers move from "buying products" to "buying solutions", a producers' salesforce qualifications in responding and managing the relationship to create a differentiation to gain competitive advantage assume a special importance (Ulaga and Kohli, 2018). Although there're several factors proposed to identify salespeople qualifications, a three dimensional factorization is the most salient one, in which salesperson skills, interpersonal skills and technical skills are proposed to describe the construct (Rentz et al., 2002).

Similar to interpersonal relationships, the route for setting up a strong relationship between the firms goes through a process of communication that is a two ways action comprising of listening and speaking. In business context, good communication is further

than just listening and speaking, but also anticipating the likely thoughts, feelings, and the response of the other party in advance. In fact, it ultimately involves seeing things from the others' point of view, which in turn evokes the definition of the concept of "empathy". When customers have the feeling that salespeople empathize with them, they believe that seller is interested in helping them with their problems and concerns rather than focusing on the pure selling (Ahearne et al., 2007). Despite empathy is a well-known concept in the field of psychology, research activities involving empathy and how it is related to expected sales performance in B2B relationship marketing remained rather underexplored (Nwamaka et al., 2018).

Finally, the main prerequisite in building and sustaining a strong relationship in any buyer-seller dyad is the value as perceived by the customer, which is termed as "*the fundamental basis for all marketing activity*" (Holbrook, 1994, p. 22). Especially in business context, all the relationship marketing efforts become null if the value element is not captured causing the customers not to feel being treated equitably based on the ratio of their perceived outcome to inputs (Oliver and De Sarbo, 1988). In other words, the balance of benefits and sacrifices determines the value captured by the parties. Companies usually assess this ratio of outcome to inputs by making comparisons with their competitors' offerings via cognitive comparison process. This process usually encapsulates the two key measurable factors, price and quality.

The word "relationship" has been one of the key concepts that lie in the core of marketing and, unsurprisingly the number of academic works around the concept in the marketing literature are countless. However, the works that focus on relationship strength and its antecedents in B2B until recent time are very few. Furthermore, most of these studies focus either just on economic or solely on behavioral explanation of the exchange relationship. The extant literature examining the antecedents of relationship strength as a new construct

considering both domains are very rare. A content analysis based on the list of empirically validated studies (Barry et al.,2008) on relationship strength reveals that only 4 papers out of 27 focus on both social and economic antecedents. Therefore, the area is still quite open for further studies examining the antecedents of relationship strength in social and economic domains.

Like relationship strength, reliance as a “nuanced substitute” of trust is also a relatively new construct suggested and conceptualized by Mouzas et al.(2007) to overcome the shortcomings of trust in understanding the business relationships in the interorganizational level. The only empirically validated study existing in the literature on reliance is the work of Zhizhong et al.(2013) in which the effect of reliance on relationship quality was examined in the construction business in the UK.

It is noted that, a very few previous studies used constructs of relationship strength and reliance in marketing. Furthermore, although several studies were made on the individual concepts such as reliance and relationship strength, these studies were carried out usually in B2C, retail, and services context. Surprisingly, no studies were presented in the B2B markets proposing and testing a holistic model to explain reliance and relationship strength. In a similar manner, although the construct of empathy has been worked out in areas of personal selling, retail and services business, it had never been tested in industrial markets as a key antecedent of relational outcomes. So, it is apparent that there's a gap in the literature to be filled. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the antecedents of relationship strength by developing and testing a model to explain “reliance” and “relationship strength” in B2B markets. The study also seeks to reveal the relative importance of each construct in explaining relationship strength. The model is constructed on two main pillars: objective component that is embedded in perceived value, and subjective components embedded in the constructs: empathy and salesperson skills. The study considers a slightly different view compared to

the previous works, in which relatively new construct relationship strength was tried to be explained with reliance and perceived value together with the inclusion of salesperson empathy that were considered in a single model which were not jointly considered in the previous studies.

Thus, this research seeks to address the following questions:

1. Can empathy, as a psychological latent variable with affective and cognitive dimensions, be incorporated to explain the formation of reliance and relationship strength in B2B markets?
2. What is the relationship between Salesperson Skills and Empathy in B2B markets?
3. What is the role of the salesperson empathy and salesperson skills to form reliance and strong relationship with the customers in B2B markets?
4. What is the relationship between perceived value (as an economic antecedent), and relationship strength?
5. What is the relative importance of individual constructs in the formation of relationship strength?

This study is composed of two parts. The first part is qualitative in nature, in which semi-structured face to face interviews were conducted with six purposefully selected industrial company key decision makers to develop an understanding for the concepts and the development of relationships within the proposed framework. The second part of the study is quantitative, and it involves testing a model that employs perceived value, salesperson skills” and empathy as the key drivers of reliance and relationship strength.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, detailed construct definitions and a review of the relevant literature are presented.

2.1. A brief overview of relationship marketing in B2B

Despite the topic of organizational exchange of goods and services is as old as human history, contemporary B2B marketing as an academic concept has existed only since early 1900s (Levin and Johnston, 1997). The first academic focus in this area was made in the 19th century by John Wanamaker (1838 –1922). Wanamaker was an American merchant and a political figure who took a different revolutionary perspective in merchandizing business by using scientific techniques. He had been remembered with his famous “Little Handbook of Philadelphia”, in which incorporation of social and behavioral aspects of economic exchange were implicitly incited by directing attention to customer relationships (Wanamaker, 1899). Wanamaker’s views had later been associated with concepts like “mutuality”, “customer orientation”, “customer trust”, “customer perspective taking” and inspired many scholars prevalently (Tadajewski, 2008). After Wanamaker, it took almost forty years to see an academic research paper in the field of industrial marketing, and these papers incorporated very little from a behavioral theory (Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013).

Relationship marketing is defined as “attracting, maintaining and enhancing customer relationships” with the target of augmenting loyalty bonds of existing customers while, targeting to transform prospect customers into regular ones through customization of offerings such as differential pricing, high service quality and, increasing performance of marketing and sales employees (Berry, 1983). Relationship marketing benefits both customers and firms and comprises of three layers (Berry, 1995):

- i. Designing pricing incentives to secure customer loyalty.
- ii. Development of social bonds involving customization and personalization of the relationships.
- iii. Offering structural solutions to specific customer problems

Although social bonding might not cover up the non-competitiveness of a product, it can help foster customer loyalty by driving competitive advantage, when the differences between the core products offered by different suppliers are not substantially different (Crosby and Stephens, 1987).

Relationship marketing takes the perspective towards internalizing the reciprocity of the status between buyer and seller (Czepiel, 1990). Thus, for a relationship to exist, perceived benefits extracted out of a business exchange should be mutually shared (Barnes, 1994). In this relationship, the fulfillment of promises based on trust plays a key role (Grönroos, 1990).

The scope of relationship marketing is not only limited with the customer relationships, but covers all forms of marketing activities that refer to directing, developing, and maintaining fruitful relational exchanges with suppliers and forming an internal partnerships (Hunt and Morgan, 1994).

Although it is common agreement that relationship marketing (also titled as “transactional marketing”) is different than traditional marketing, no general theory of relationship marketing is available and probably will never be. However, its foundations can be built on three interrelated but distinct theoretical approaches (Henning and Hansen, 2000):

- i. Behavioral perspective that is highly associated with relational constructs such as trust, satisfaction, internal relationships, as well economic evaluation of customer retention (loyalty).

- ii. Network approach involves inter-organizational perspective taking in which the firms are viewed as complex networks of interacting social systems. This approach usually embraces B2B markets (Low, 1996).
- iii. New institutional approaches that are based on modern economic theories focusing on the goal of cost minimization, such as agency theory (e.g. Backhaus et al., 1996) ; Söllner, 1994) and transaction cost theory (e.g. Kleinaltenkamp, 1994; Mishra et al., 1998) to depict and explain inter-organizational relationships.

The relationship marketing efforts clearly aim the outcome of customer retention or loyalty. The success of these efforts is determined by several key variables. The key variables that are mostly proposed in the relationship marketing context are customer satisfaction (or perception of quality), trust, and commitment (Henning and Hansen, 2000).

Customer satisfaction is the perceived emotional or empathic reaction of the customers to their expectations (e.g., Oliver 1988; Rust et al., 1996; Yi 1990). Similarly, the quality perception of the customers can be considered as the same perception as satisfaction with respect to the service (e.g., Zeithaml et al., 1988; Rust and Oliver, 1994).

Trust is the customers' evaluation on the degree of the honesty, sincerity and reliability of the provider (Zaltman et al., 1992; Morgan and Hunt, 1994) which is particularly important under uncertainty (Grönroos, 1994).

Commitment is the long-term orientation of the buyers based on emotional considerations as well as the opinion that the termination of the relationship will be more costly (switching cost) than trying to maintain it (e.g., Geyskens *et al.*, 1996; Zaltman et al., 1992; Söllner, 1994).

Like for all marketing efforts, although a successful relationship marketing practice requires the efficient and effective use of classical marketing tools described by 4P, given the richness and complexity of marketing today, the holistic approach to marketing (people,

process, program, and performance) that encompasses today's modern marketing realities should also be embraced in relationship marketing activities (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Overall, marketing success is achieved through relationship success with drivers of customer closeness, customer retention, and independence (Diller, 1995). The success of a relationship in business is determined by the combination of behavioral and attitudinal factors such as commitment, trust, cooperation, communication and joint relational investments (Palmatier et al., 2007). While trust and commitment stay in the center of building successful relationship, positive past interactions and strong personal relationship characterized by reciprocity, liking, high level of empathy, and, acceptance of power sharing play an important role in achieving relational success (Abosag and Lee, 2013).

2.2. Empathy

The Oxford dictionary defines empathy as “*the ability to imagine and understand the thoughts, perspective, and emotions of another person*” (Oxford Learners Dictionaries, n.d). A more comprehensive definition is given as “*the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner*” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

In socio-psychological context, empathy is defined as “*an ability to understand and experience someone else's feelings and to adopt someone else's viewpoint*” (Colman, 2015). The word empathy originates from the German word meaning “projecting into” (Ganczarek et al., 2018). That's why, in the daily language the word empathy can be considered as the ability to place yourself in someone else's shoes. Empathy helps people build social connections via understanding others' thoughts and feelings, so that the parties can act appropriately to build stronger social connections, which is essential for both psychological and physical well-being (Khajeh et al., 2014).

There are numerous studies on the concept of empathy in academic literature. Most of these works were carried out within the scope of the disciplines of psychology, and education. Field specific content analysis based on the data in CSA Illumina research database by Miaskiewicz, (2008) reported the results shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the Content Analysis by Using keyword Empathy (Miaskiewicz,2008)

Discipline	Number of Journals with title Including the Word "Empathy"	
Psychology	1347	50%
Education	1221	45%
Medical	106	40%
Social	47	5%

As it could be seen, although the entrance of the term “empathy” into terminology of science is not so new, the concept of empathy in social works and in marketing remained rather limited.

Scholars approached empathy from two different perspectives (Plank et al., 1996). Some scholars viewed it as a personality trait (e.g., Wispe, 1987) while some others treated it as a process (e.g., Reik, 1949; Rogers, 1957). Viewing empathy as a trait requires the categorization of people as either being capable of empathizing with others, or to act indifferently to empathetic messages (Plank et al., 1996). This approach leads to considering empathy mostly as an affective concept. On the other hand, treating empathy as a process has the fallback to limit the construct to the act of “cognitive understanding” of other people, that makes it indistinguishable from the concept of “communication” (Comer and Drollinger,1999). No matter whether empathy is viewed as a trait or process, it has both affective and cognitive dimensions (Davis, 1983). Cognitive dimension covers identifying and understanding other person’s perspective, while affective dimension refers to feelings and emotions (Fredrick et.al., 2007). In another words, the affective and cognitive dimensions of empathy are complementary to each other in which the cognition is the “act” whereas “affect”

is the “energizing” parts of the empathy that take place in all the phases of empathizing and should be measured separately as the two are likely to have different effects (Piaget, 1981).

The works examining empathy in B2B research are rather limited in number. A taxonomic work (Duleep, et al., 2018) in the field of sales personal selling covering the prevalent papers between 1977 and 2017 listed 25 studies. An examination of the list unveils that there’s an incoherency in conceptualizing and operationalizing the construct empathy. Only three studies conceptualized and measured empathy as a multi-dimensional construct and, only one study (e.g., McBane, 1995) examined empathy in B2B domain. So, there’s a gap in the literature regarding studies on empathy in industrial markets.

Earlier works on empathy in business relationships usually considered empathy as a unidimensional construct and these studies reported conflicting findings. For example, a study investigating the effect of empathy on sales success (Tobolski and Kerr, 1952) revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between the two constructs, while another one found a negative relationship between empathy and job performance (Lamont and Lundstrom, 1977) suggesting that a successful salesperson is not sensitive to the others’ feelings and reactions. Likewise, Pilling and Eroğlu (1994) reported empathy as a significantly important factor for successful sales interactions, while Dwson et al. (1992) found that there’s no significant relationship between empathy and successful sales. This suggests that the conceptualizing empathy as a unidimensional construct might be misleading, as the positive and negative associations under cognitive and affective dimensions offset the effects of each other. Although the unidimensional studies on empathy provide indicators on interrelations between empathy, trust, and successful sales, none of these works clearly differentiate whether affective or cognitive drivers play more important role. Thus, multidimensional conceptualization of empathy by integrating the body of knowledge from psychology with the

existing marketing literature would have a greater explanatory power than unidimensional approaches (McBane, 1995).

Empathy in relationship marketing necessitates to understand the other party's situation, needs, and wants; to savvy the other party's business, strengths, weaknesses, and personality; and possesses a general assessment of the other party (Yau, *et.al.*,2000). In B2B markets, salespeople are the first contacts to interact with the customer and they play a key role in building intimacy, rapport, loyalty, credibility, and trust. As empathy augments a person's ability to communicate with others bodily and verbally, and adopt behaviors that are convenient for the conditions, a salesperson showing and developing empathy towards the customers by perspective taking can better understand their needs, since they will have the ability to see situation from the customer's point of view (Itani & Inyang, 2014).

Empathy is closely related to the active listening ability of salespersons (Aggarwal et al.,2005). Active listening is a complex process comprised of behavioral and cognitive actions with three components: sensing, evaluating and responding (Steil et al., 1980). The message from the other party is first received and attended (sensing), then cognitively processed and interpreted (evaluation) and finally reacted (responding). As a trait, empathetic behavior of the salesperson via active listening positively affects building trust and satisfaction (Ramsey and Sohi, 1997). Also, communicational difficulties in an exchange can be overcome via empathetic active listening that will help build trust (DeRuyter and Wentzels, 2000).

Empathy and trust are two similar, interrelated, but distinct constructs in such a way that empathy acts as a direct antecedent of sales effectiveness, otherwise impacts trust positively to lead sales effectiveness (Plank and Spaulding, 2007) as shown in Figure 1.

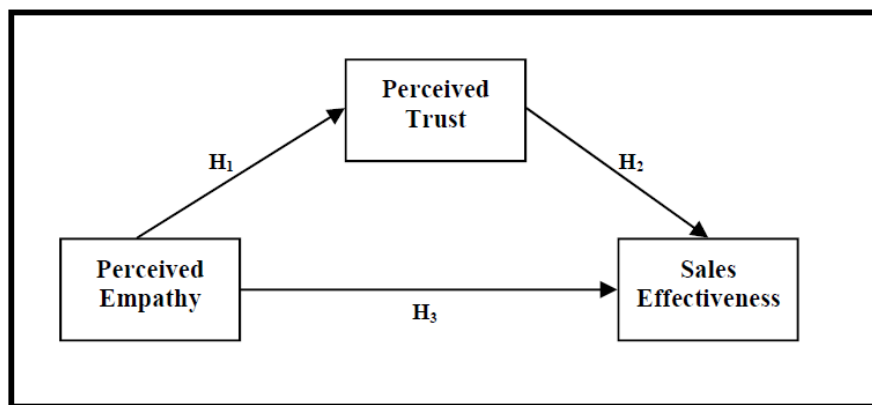


Figure 1. Theoretical Model Linking Empathy, Trust, and Sales Effectiveness
(Plank and Spaulding, 2007).

Likewise, empathy has a direct positive impact on customer loyalty and intervening effect on customer commitment and satisfaction (Bahadur et al., 2018).

Multifaceted approaches to empathy reported confirmatory results of the above conclusions. For example, Limbu et al.(2015) investigated empathy as a multi-dimensional construct comprised of perspective taking (cognitive empathy) and empathic concern to lead adaptive selling behavior, relational and sales outcome. Empathic concern identifies the psychological and emotional aspects in a buyer-seller encounter that involves putting yourself into the other parties' position with *altruistic* motivations (Batson, 2009). The concept of *altruism* strongly evokes affective empathy, but it does not fully capture affective aspects as a substitute of affective empathy, as affections are not driven only by altruistic motives, but also being able to sense the likely feelings and thoughts of the empathized party consciously. Although cognitive empathy and nonverbal immediacy have positive influence on relationship performance, affective empathy does not have any significant effect on real sales outcomes, suggesting that emotional contagion and affective empathy do not lead to success in sales in a B2B setup (McBain, 1995).

Any business exchange process involves conflicts on an interorganizational and interpersonal level usually due to the unalignment of the goals of the parties. In

interorganizational context, empathy can help minimize or resolve conflicts (Harvey,1998). Likewise, conflict and empathetic behavior suggests a negative relationship in interpersonal level, meaning that the higher empathy, the lower conflict (Baron, 1993). Thus, empathy can act to mitigate conflicts in a B2B setting to lead successful sales. In this setting, the effect of interpersonal conflict plays a relatively unimportant but an interesting role (Plank and Reid, 2010).

Although extant academic literature on empathy are different in terms of dimensional approach to the concept (unidimensional, multifaceted), context (B2C, B2B), and relational outcomes (trust, loyalty, commitment, sales performance, service quality, conflict resolution) they all seem to agree that empathy positively contributes to business relationship positively. The studies that considered empathy as two-dimensional construct confirmed that cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy impact sales and relational positive outcomes differently (e.g. Homburg et al., 2009; Wieseke et al.,2012; McBane, 1995) while the impact of cognitive empathy is stronger than affective empathy in most cases (e.g. Duleep et al., 2018; McBane, 1995; Limbu et al, 2016; McBain, 1995). The importance of affective empathy will be more impactful once the salesperson develops a trustful and gratifying relationship with the customer. The customer then will become more inclined to develop a personal relationship with the salesperson forming a platform for transparent and easier business dealings and transactions (Main et al., 2017).

Overall, both on interpersonal and interorganizational level, empathy is a part of day-to-day business activities. It is measurable and can be learned. Empathy pays, and it pays best when it comes from the top management (Parmar, 2015).

2.3. Trust and Reliance

Trust has been in the scope of different branches of social sciences such as social psychology, sociology, economics, and marketing (Doney and Cannon, 1997). Each discipline has its own look into the definition, nature, and the processes of trust.

The dictionary meaning of trust is given as “*to have confidence in somebody; to believe that somebody is good, sincere, honest, etc.*” (Oxford Learners Dictionary, n.d). In marketing context, trust is defined as “*one party’s belief that its need will be fulfilled in the future by actions undertaken by the other party*” (Anderson and Weitz, 1989). Another definition is given as “*willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence*” (Zaltman, et al., 1992). Likewise, trust is the “*confidence in exchange partner’s reliability and integrity*” (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). All these trust definitions put emphasize on positive beliefs and expectation in order to reach a state in which parties rely on each other confidently.

There are two key motivational components behind the formation of trust: (1) gaining credibility based on the reliability of the exchange partners’ words or written statements and, (2) benevolence of the partners that is the extent to which one partner is sincerely concerned with the exchange partner’s well-being (Doney and Cannon, 1997).

Although trust is usually conceived in interpersonal dyads, the literature suggests that people can develop trust in organizations (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and in institutions (Lewis and Wcigert, 1985). Therefore, research activities in marketing focus on two sources of trust: (1) supplier companies, and (2) suppliers’ salespeople. Studies that are focusing on supplier companies examined trust mostly in relation to the likely outcomes, such as commitment (Dwyer et al., 1987 ; Morgan and Hunt, 1994), long term and sound relationship (Ganesan, 1994; Hakansson et al., 2004), and eagerness to stay in a relationship (Anderson and Weitz, 1989). Studies that focus on the salespeople of the suppliers examined the role of salesperson

in trust building. Although “trust in a supplier “ and “trust in supplier's salesperson” are related, they represent different concepts. An ongoing good relationship with a trusted supplier can be endangered by the sales representative of the company who is untrustworthy (e.g., Kelly and Schine 1992). Conversely, a trustworthy salesperson might lose the customer commitment and loyalty if the management policies urge the supplier to make decisions not in the best interest of the customer (e.g., Schiller 1992). Similarly, in a relationship where the level of interdependence of the buyer and seller firms and switching cost are low, a salesperson can act to catalyze the relationship positively and might help endure the relationship (Doney and Cannon, 1997). This situation can be seen from the resource based view of the firm in which trustworthiness of the salespeople or the firm is considered as an intangible asset to create differentiation and to gain competitive advantage (Barney J. B., 1986).

The essence of industrial buyers’ trust in the salesperson is dependent on the promises of the salesperson and has mainly four psychological determinants: emotional, cognitive, intentional and buyer behavioral (Swan and Nolan, 1985). The emotional component is relevant to feeling developed for the salesperson as secure or insecure. The cognitive element is the belief of the buyer whether the salesperson will or will not honor a promise. Intentions are the near future plans (such as placing an order) of the buyer stimulated by the trust or mistrust perception of the salesperson. Buyer behavior is the reflection of trust in choosing amongst the competing salespeople. Overall, trust in a salesperson calls for a set of attributes such as likeability, competence, customer orientation and dependability (Swan et al., 1984).

As trust is identified as a psychological state involving subjective judgements (e.g., benevolence, faith, fairness, and honesty) of the individuals in a relationship, it is difficult to extend its coverage to organizational context that are free of emotions and feeling (James et

al. 1988). As opposed to the assertions of Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Lewis and Wcigert (1985), some scholars suggest that the use of the term *interorganizational trust* is arguable since organizations as the entities cannot trust a human or nonhuman entity (e.g., Blois 1999; Mouzas et al., 2007). Trust should be considered in an interpersonal relational exchange, while business exchange mostly involves inter-organizational trade-off based on mutual risk assessment and interest in which the concept of trust cannot fully capture rational aspects of the business requirements (Sebenius, 1992). Therefore, trust as a fundamental construct is troublesome in the conceptualization for B2B relations as there are many examples of business relationships established in the B2B markets which are not based on trust but on collaboration and interdependence, and they keep continuing (Lambe et al., 2000). This trouble emerges as a basic issue in reifying the firm on interorganizational level (Atiyah, 1979). Therefore, a better construct that has a higher explanatory power both etymologically and conceptually than trust to reflect the mutual interdependency of B2B relationships is sought. The new construct proposed is “*reliance*” as a more rational substitute for trust (Mouzas et al., 2007).

The word *reliance* etymologically stems from the verb “-rely on”. Unlike trust, it does not evoke emotiveness but strongly associates with rational considerations. Although the concept has indirectly and superficially been studied in regard to concepts such as inter-organizational trust, mutual dependence, stated commitment (Anderson and Narus, 1990) and associated with notions like reasonable expectations (Steyn, 1997) and proven capability (Blois, 1999) in different contexts, the number of studies employing *reliance* as a separate construct to conceptualize and operationalize as an antecedent of positive relational outcomes in business relationship are literally very few.

Reliance brings a new rational standard in organizational exchange, whose function is characterized by “*the extent to which the exchange partners can be relied on to deliver its*

promises, thus fulfilling the focal firm's specific needs" (Mouzas et al., 2007). This function bypasses the contrast of trust and mistrust in business relationships in achieving relationship quality by eliminating the emotive paradigm of trust. In fact, trust in B2B marketing necessitates both inter-personal and inter-organizational relationships on rational grounds. This leads to a challenge for the researchers in business relationships in two ways. The first challenge is to isolate reliance from interchangeably used construct "dependence" which refers to an obligation to preserve the relationship because of a scarcity of alternative options. The second challenge is to operationalize the two different but related constructs in a measurement model.

Not the function, but the definition of reliance is made as "*the positive expectations held by organization members that the focal organization's specific needs will be fulfilled by its exchange partner given the proven capability and/or exchange standards in place*". (Zhizhong et al., 2013). This definition emphasizes three important rationality features of reliance as economic and predictive rationality as well as the enforceability. Economic rationality reflects the pursuit of the companies to look for resources that they cannot create themselves (Van de Ven and Walker, 1984). This does not involve emotions and attitudes but rather expected benefits, costs and risk assessment avoiding the emotions and attitudes in business relationship. Predictive rationality reflects the confidence built on the proven capabilities of the exchange partners. In this context, it differs from the concept of dependence as the firms seek predictable outcomes based on standard objective information (Marsh and Dibben, 2005). This is also different from trust which is generally based on vague evidence or verbal assurance of feelings (Blois, 1999). Enforceability is an integral feature of reliance that involves the reduction of potential risks via written legal agreements, contracts, and monitoring mechanisms as well as institutionalized documents of business interactions (Mouzas, et al., 2007). Table 2 lists the differences in conceptualization of reliance by

attributing to its rational and inter-organizational nature versus the inherent limitations attached to the use of trust (Mouzas et.al,2007).

Trust as an old and fundamental concept has been playing a key role in marketing theories such as commitment and trust theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and social exchange theory (Dwyer et al., 1987). Dependence on the other hand has its foundation on power dependence theory (Molm, 1991). In business markets, as great emphasis is placed on building and sustaining a longer term relationship based on cost associated analysis, reliance is supported mostly by transaction-cost theory (Heide and John, 1992; Williamson, 1985).

Overall, trust, reliance and dependence are similar, interrelated but separate concepts. Based on mutual interests and rationality, both dependence and reliance are more pertinent to interorganizational relationships, while trust remains to be an affective concept that is more applicable for interpersonal relationships (Zhizhong et al., 2013). Despite the apparent importance of reliance as a relatively new concept, academic attention focusing on particularity of trust and emphasizing reliance are extremely limited, so there's a gap in the relevant literature (Liu, 2018).

Table 2. Conceptualization and Differentiations of Trust and Reliance (Mouzas et al., 2007)

Trust	Reliance
Beliefs	Agreement
Sentiments	Institutions
Attitude	Conduct
Morality	Interest
Emotions	Rationality
Inter-personal	Inter-organizational
Dependency	Complementary
Vulnerability	Certainty
Risk	Calculability
Voluntary	Penalties
Unenforceable	Enforceable

2.4. Perceived Value in B2B

The meaning of value as a word is “the regard that something is held to deserve”; “the importance, worth, or usefulness of something” (Oxford Learners Dictionaries, n.d.). In the marketing context, value as a concept emerged long ago. The term *value* mainly appears in two different noun phrases in marketing: *customer value* or *perceived value*. Both phrases in fact depict the same concept which are measured by a self-reported set of items that evaluates the customer’s perception or evaluation of value (Raquel and Angelas, 2007). If marketing is considered as an exchange process in which exchange is defined as a “transaction between two parties trading something of value in return for something of greater value” (Kotler, 1991), the “value” *concept* provides the foundation for all marketing activities and deserves the attention of every marketing researcher (Holbrook, 1996).

The extant researches on perceived value are founded on different marketing theories such as “transaction cost economics” (e.g., Williamson, 1985; Heide and John, 1988), “social exchange theory” (Bagozzi, 1975), “political economy paradigm” (Arnt, 1983) and “mental accounting” (Thaler, 1999). No matter on which theory the concept is founded, all the prominent researches focus on the knowledge on antecedents and consequences of perceived value (Hansen et al., 2008), .

Classical view of customer value is built upon the evaluation of the utility of products or services on the perception of what is received in return of what is compromised (Zeithaml, et al., 1990). Similar definitions were made as “the ratio of outcome to input of the customer’s to that of the provider’s” (Oliver and De Sarbo, 1988); or “the trade-off between overall benefits received to total sacrifices” (Monroe, 1991). Benefits are economic, relational and, social while sacrifices are composed of cost, effort, time, risk, and convenience (Grewal et al., 1998). Likewise, customer value is “the difference between what the customer wants to get and to give” (Heskett et al., 1994). More comprehensive definition that is highly relevant

for the industrial markets is made as “*the trade-off between the multiple benefits and sacrifices of a supplier’s offering, as perceived by key decision makers in the customer’s organization and taking into consideration the available alternative suppliers’ offerings in a specific-use situation*” (Uлага and Chacour, 2001). Thus, companies can increase value by either reducing the sacrifices or, increasing benefits (Samudra et al.,2018).

Many researchers, while acknowledging the “benefits and sacrifices scheme”, approach the concept from a slightly different perspective as compared to the classical view, in which the perceived value is considered as an important precursor of relational outcomes such as loyalty, relationship effectiveness and relationship strength. Perceived value characterized by price and quality has influence on relational outcomes such as repurchase intention, search for alternatives (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and it acts as a complementary driver of satisfaction. That is to say, perceived value is a better predictor of behavioral outcomes (such as repurchase, alternative seeking and word -of -mouth) than satisfaction in business marketing. Positioned at the core of buyer seller relationship (Ravald and Gronroos , 1996), perceived value is positively related to customer loyalty as a direct antecedent of customer loyalty in B2B services (Sharma et al., 2001; Lam et al., 2004). Similarly, perceived value is one of the main drivers of relationship effectiveness (Sheth and Sharma, 1997). The switching cost of moving to another supplier acts as a moderator between value and satisfaction and to attain loyalty, while the relationship between the perceived value and satisfaction is mediated by satisfaction (Yang and Peterson,2004).

The relationship between perceived value and loyalty differs depending on the type of market environment (Fiol et.al. ,2009). In markets where the number of suppliers is limited (less than five), the effect of perceived value on loyalty is stronger compared to the markets where there is a greater number of suppliers are too many lowering the switching cost. Also, in the service industries it is not only the price and the quality, but also subjective drivers such

as company reputation, information sharing, and flexibility has influence on perceived value that in turn negatively affects the search of alternatives (a loyalty measure) resulting in high relationship strength. (Hansen et al, 2008).

From B2B perspective, customer value can be created either in the form of superior product or service, or by adapting the existing offerings to the altering needs of the customers (Flint et al., 2011). Likewise, customer value can be derived from high product quality, value for money (price), effective communication, as well as the availability of a variety of product choices (Mbango, 2017). These drivers, in turn, determine whether the customer is satisfied or not (Lapierre et al., 1999; Spiteri & Dion, 2004).

Perceived value is a reciprocal concept where the value captured by the parties in a business exchange should match the expectations of both business partners, so that the parties can jointly benefit from the relationship mutually (Konhauser, 2007).

There're mainly two main research streams in operationalizing perceived value (Sanchez et al., 2006). The first approach examines value as a unidimensional construct solely from a utilitarian perspective, comprised of benefits and costs. Benefits can be categorized as "core benefits" such as product quality and services, and "add-on" benefits such as additional services to add value, while costs are "purchasing price", "cost of acquisition" and "operations costs" (Menon et al., 2005). The second stream concerns mostly consumer markets and considers perceived value as a multi-dimensional construct with several interrelated dimensions such as cognitive, emotional, functional, social etc. A short summary of different multidimensional approaches examined by different scholars is given in Table 3. It seems that there's a common agreement on separating the construct into cognitive (functional, cost related) and affective (social, psychological, emotional) dimensions.

Table 3. Multidimensional approaches to perceived value (Sanchez et al.2006)

Author	Dimensions
Sheth et al. (1991a, b)	Social Value Emotional Value Functional Value Epistemic Value Conditional Value
Groth (1995a, b)	Cognitive: Perceived Utility Psychological Internal External
Grönoos (1997)	Cognitive Emotional (Psychological)
de Rutter et al. (1997)	Emotional Dimension or Intrinsic Values Functional Dimension or Extrinsic Value Logical Dimension
Sweeney et al. (1999)	Social Value Emotional Value Functional Value (Price/Value for money) Functional Value (Performance/quality) Functional Value (Versatility)
Sweeney and Soutar (2001)	Functional Dimensions (Economic and Quality) Social Dimension Emotional Dimension

Unidimensional approaches to perceived value were criticized for being too simplistic especially for consumer markets (de Ruyter et al., 1997). The same thought is also true for B2B markets as well, since multidimensional models with cognitive and affective variables are needed to truly understand organizational buying decisions (Eggert and Ulaga, 2002). Similarly, the drivers of perceived value were identified as products, service, and relationship (Lapierre,2000).

Perceived value has not only remained in the scope of the area of marketing but also in supply management and purchasing (Lindgreen and Wynstra, 2005). In this field, two opposite forms of purchasing behaviors have emerged: transactional and relational. In transactional form of purchasing the buyer company reaches out to the potential competing

suppliers and pushes all of them to improve their performance on pricing in the buyer's favor. In the relational approach, the buyer focuses on co-operation with the suppliers, and aims to have a sustainable relationship with the suppliers for a longer term by focusing on the total cost rather than only on the price. This approach has been gaining more ground during the last several decades. However, there are still purchasing managers that are basing their decisions on price rather than the total value of the products (Anderson et al., 2000). Table 4 shows the main differences between these two approaches (Axxelsson and Wynstra, 2002). This differentiation is important as it looks into the concept of value and value creation process through relationships (Lindgreen and Wynstra, 2005).

Table 4. Transactional versus relational marketing and purchasing behavior, (Axelsson and Wynstra, 2002)

Perspective	Transactional	Relational
Competition	Many alternatives	One or few alternatives
Tactical focus	Every deal is a new business; no one benefits from past performances; market exchanges are independent and discrete	A deal is part of a relationship and, the relationship is part of a networks: dependent, ongoing market exchanges
Relationship attitude	Exploit the potential of competition; anonymous and efficient market	Exploit the potential of cooperation; numerous market networks
Temporal horizon	Short term, arm's length, avoid coming too close	Long term, tough demand, joint development
Organizational Structure	Hierarchical, functional organization	Cross-functional process-based organization
Renewal	Effective renewal through partner changes, choose the most efficient supplier at any time	Effective renewal through collaboration and teamwork; combine resources and knowledge
Innovation imperative	Buying standardized products	Buying capabilities; customized products
Services	Services augment the core product	Services are basis for differentiation
Orientation	Price orientation, to achieve favorable prices in well specified products; marketing through the 4Ps	Cost and value orientation, to achieve low total cost of supply; develop new value; marketing through relationships, networks, interactions

Overall, despite many views of perceived value emerged, there seems to be a common agreement in the literature about several characteristics regarding B2B (Mencarelli and Riviere, 2015). First, from both interorganizational and intraorganizational view, the perception of value might differ depending on the different perceptions of different people and units in an organization (Uлага and Chacour, 2001). Second, most scholars consider value as a ratio of cost and benefit (Kumar and Grisaffe, 2004). Third, value perception is relative to the competition that requires the determination of key performance indicators of a firm based on a benchmark study amongst the leading competitors (Uлага and Chacour, 2001). Finally, perceived value is a dynamic cognitive variable (Eggert et al., 2006)

2.5. Salespersons' skills

Regardless of the selling environment, salespeople are the company's personal connection to the customers, and they assume specific tasks such as prospecting, targeting, communicating, closing the sale, servicing the customers, collecting information about the market, and allocating the right products to the right customer (Kotler and Keller, 2012, pp.554).

Today's marketing environment has become so competitive that it necessitates to create a competitive advantage by differentiating themselves, products, and service. Salespeople who create this differentiation are more successful in building good customer relationships, intimacy, and bringing new business to their companies by excelling the sales performance (Alnakhi et al., 2021).

Salespeople should possess basic skills to perform the required tasks of the sales job and these skills are important variables in the effectiveness of selling performance (Ohiomah et al., 2019). These variables, in the order of importance are identified as personal factors,

selling skills, role variables, aptitude, motivation, and organizational/environmental factors (Churchill et al., 1985).

The topic of selling skills has been studied by numerous authors and they are examined as the predictor of sales performance in different selling contexts. Skills like salesperson professionalism, empathy, and merchandise salability are important predictors of future sales presentations and placing an order in a retail settings. (Pilling and Eroglu, 1994). Empathetic behavior and active listening of a salesperson can facilitate personal selling progress (Comer and Drollinger, 1999). Active listening as a dimension of communication quality and adaptive selling features of the salesperson also positively affects the value co-creation and sales performance (Alnakhi et al.,2021). Communication styles of the salesperson also influence the sales performance (Williams and Spiro, 1985). Emotional intelligence has positive effect on adaptive selling behavior (Mostafaa and Kasmanic, 2022). Similarly, salesperson expertise (e.g., Doney and Cannon, 1997) and benevolence behavior (Sirdeshmukh,et al.,2002) of the salesperson impact the formation of trust positively. Likewise, salesperson expertise is one of the necessary drivers of trust. Ganesan's (1994).

A specific study on the relationship between trust and salesperson skills was studied within the Chinese cultural context called “Guanxi “ (Lee and Dawes, 2005). Guanxi in Chinese means “pass the gate and connect”. It is about building social networks and influential relationships based on reciprocity involving returning a favor that will be beneficial for both parties in a business setting. Salespersons who show expertise and status are likely to establish long terms orientation with the customers. In this specific cultural context, expertise is a more important trait than status.

No work has been done to categorize salesperson skills as a holistic concept until Rentz et al. (2002), who combine and refine the knowledge accumulated since Walker et al. (1977) and categorize salesperson skills under three main dimensions as (1) interpersonal

skills, (2) salesmanship skills, and (3) technical skills. Although a long list that is comprised of traits as communication skills, knowledge possession, sales presentation skills, flexibility, adaptability, empathy, cooperative skills, honest behavior, and time management skills to enhance sales performance, is suggested recently (Ben Amor, 2019), the dimensions of Rentz et al.(2002) has mostly been used in marketing studies to depict selling skills and sales performance (e.g., Ohiomah et al.,2019; Wachner et al., 2009; Pettijohn et al., 2007). In the next sections, these dimensions are described.

2.5.1. Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills are social skills that help understand, persuade and get along with others (Churchill et.al., 1985; Dawson et al., 1992). These skills also embody verbal and non-verbal communication abilities that ease the dealings with different people in building and maintaining high level of relationship quality (Verbeke, et al., 2011). In the selling context, these skills are itemized as speaking skills, nonverbal communication, regulating of emotions and ability to control and adapt to a sales situation (Rentz et al., 2002).

Preserving successful ongoing interpersonal relationships between salespersons and the buying company's decision makers is key to ensure the growth of B2B companies (e.g., Ahearne et al., 2005; Palmatier et al., 2007). Such interpersonal relationships can easily be disrupted either by managerial decisions (e.g., organizational restructurings, change of account management strategies, regional re-assignments) or through individual decisions such as the salesperson leaving the company or retirement. This might result in a loss of customer knowledge, loss of interpersonal trust, increase uncertainty and even loss of revenue (Bendapudi and Leone, 2002). Protecting and restoring disrupted customer relationships to avoid loss of revenue is one of the top-three management priorities (Schmitz et al., 2020).

2.5.2. Salesmanship Skills

Salesmanship skills mainly concern the skills of a salesperson to manage customers and to perform his tasks professionally. These skills are itemized as prospecting customers, qualifying the prospects and the ability to service the account, to present the sales message and to close the sale (Rentz et al., 2002). In another words, salesmanship skills represent skills in persuading customers to buy, thus they are important in making sales presentation and finalizing the sale (Manning and Reece, 2004) as salesmanship skills and sales performance are positively related (Ohiomah et al., 2019).

2.5.3. Technical Skills

In the sales literature technical skills are identified with different terms such as selling or selling related knowledge (Miao and Evans, 2012; Verbeke et al., 2011), knowledge breadth (Carter et al., 2014), industrial and organizational knowledge (Groza et al., 2016). A precise description of technical skills in business markets is the knowledge of the salesperson on the market, benefits of these products and processes, competency in company services and procedures as well as that of the competitors” (Rentz et al., 2002) . This knowledge is essential for the salesperson’s performance (Carter, et al., 2014). Salespeople equipped with knowledge and technical capabilities are more familiar with the capability of their companies and are able to better understand the needs and expectations of the customers, and grasp important information related to their customers (Rapp et al., 2006).

Overall, the companies in both retail and industrial markets have been investing in continuous training programs to enhance and develop the skills of their salesforce (Leach et al., 2005). U.S. companies are reported to spend \$7.1 billion annually on training salespeople, and an average salesperson spends about 33 hours in trainings in a year (Lorge, 1998).

Although the training programs vary in content (such as effective communication, relationship building, persuasion, role playing, body language, product trainings, technical trainings etc.)

these training topics can be classified under two general areas: selling skills and selling knowledge (Johnston and Marshall 2006).

2.6. Relationship Strength in Business Markets

As social beings, humans interact and connect to each other. The connections can be affective such as liking, love, friendship or, cognitive, based on rationality and mutual interests of the parties. These connections in time lead to a series of interactions called relationships (Hinde, 1976). A business relationship can be defined as *“the connections that exist between all entities that engage in commerce including the relationships between various stakeholders in any business network, such as those between employers and employees, employers and business partners, and all the companies a business associate with.”* (Investopedia, 2021).

Customer relationships is one of the most valuable assets of a company that might account for up to 20% of a firm's overall market value (Binder and Hanssens, 2015). Therefore, its retention has utmost importance in revenue recognition, as improving retention rates by 5% can increase the profits by about 25-95% (Gallo, 2014). Furthermore, the U.S. companies are reported to spend around \$11 billion annually to manage customer relationships and increase customer retention in B2B (Avery et al., 2014).

Relationships in business, especially in the context of intercompany relationships, are explained with different relationship theories. These theories are founded either on economic or on behavioral aspects (Donaldson and O'Toole, 2000). Economic theories such as agency theory (Ross, 1973; Bergen et al., 1992) and transaction-cost economics (Williamson, 1985) explain the exchange relationship on the assumption of that the goal of the firm is to remain independent with key variables as price, power, risk avoidance, and opportunism. On the other hand, behavioral theories focus on the social structures and interdependencies such as social exchange theory (Granovetter, 1985) or resource dependency theory (Pfeffer and

Salancik, 1978). These theories embrace variables such as trust, commitment, cooperation, mutuality and in studying relationship styles in business context (Aldrich, 1979; Hakansson, 1982).

Several models and frameworks have been contemplated for the understanding of dyadic working relationships between companies in industrial markets (Anderson et al., 1994). These studies define and conceptualize “relationship” around different delineator constructions such as “relationship quality (e.g., Crosby et al., 1990; Walsh et al., 2010; Athanasopoulou, 2009), “relationship performance” (e.g., Lages et al., 2007; Ganesan, 1994), “relationship strength” (e.g., Barry et al., 2008 ; Moore et al., 2012; Donaldson and O’Toole, 2000; Shi et al. (2009).

Relationship quality which is first proposed by Crosby et al., (1990) and, is defined as *“the degree of satisfaction to all the relationship from the perceived perspective of the buyer”* (Huntley, 2006) is the most used construct in the literature with 64 studies between 1987 to 2007 (Athanasopoulou, 2009).

Relationship quality helps the seller assess the nature and the intensity of the relationship with the customer to develop a competitive advantage (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002; Wong et al., 2007). The use of relationship quality specifically facilitates this assessment in particular settings (Palmatier et al., 2007) such as in the case of a B2B dealings where the size is reasonably bigger, (Lendrevie et al., 2003) , situations involving complex decision making process (Malaval, 1996), in certain businesses settings where interpersonal interactions are important (O’Malley and Tynan, 2000) or situations involving high uncertainty, opportunistic behaviors and vulnerability (Berry, 1983; Crosby et al., 1990).

Antecedents of relationship quality are dependent on the context studied and the dimensions of the context (Ghazeli and Akrou, 2012). These antecedents can be grouped into four major categories (Athanasopoulou, 2009). The first category embodies antecedents

related to behavioral characteristics of relational partners (Boles et al., 2000). These are features like competency and ethical behavior of the salespeople (Lagace et al., 1991), seller expertise (Crosby et al., 1990; Wray et al., 1994), reputation and size of supplier firm (Doney and Cannon, 1997), the level of centralization and formalization of firms (Dwyer et al., 1987), customer orientation (Baker et al., 1999), etc. The second category covers concepts like the duration of the relationship (Bejou et al., 1996), the partners dependence (Van Bruggen et al., 2005), communication quality (Morgan et Hunt, 1994), cooperation (Ruyeter et al., 2001), conflict handling (Selnes, 1998), equity (Kumar et al., 1995), trust (Moorman et al., 1992) commitment (Selnes, 1998; Ndubisi, 2006). The third category includes the offer characteristics, such as service quality, product performance and after-sales service (e.g., Ruyeter et al., 2001; Roberts et al., 2003). The fourth category concerns the environment (e.g., economic, political, social, and technological) around the partners in exchange (e.g., Kumar et al., 1995). In B2B relationship, the antecedents generally considered are seller expertise, its size and reputation, the relationship length, the degree of formalization, the characteristics of the offer, the conflict handling, the quality of communication and cooperation (Athanasopoulou, 2009).

Although a different terminology has been used to assess the outcome of a relationship yet there's little consensus on what to measure (Bove and Johnson, 2001). Relationship quality has been viewed synonymously with other similar constructs (i.e. relationship strength) by many authors (e.g. Gregoire et al., 2009; Palmatier et al., 2006; De Wulf et al., 2001; Ellis and Beatty, 1995; Beatty et al. 1996) as they both emphasize an overall assessment of relationship towards the relational outcome such as commitment, trust and satisfaction. The same argument is valid for the proposal of a higher order construct "relationship performance" by Lages et al. (2007).

As an alternative, the construct “relationship strength” is suggested (Bove and Johnson, 2001) which describes the magnitude of a relationship between the customer and salesperson, while relationship quality remains to identify the magnitude of relationship between the firms (Bove and Johnson, 2001). Another approach suggests quantifying the strength of a relationship with a formula by considering relationship strength as the moderator variable of relationship quality, buying intention and, buying behavior (De Cannie’re et al. ,2009). Depending on the length of relationship, order frequency and the number of periods to expect to get an order (number of seasons), the formula yields a value changing from one to nine as a numerical expression of relationship strength as shown below:

$$\text{Relationship Strength} = \frac{\text{Length of Relationship} \times \text{Regularity of Relationship}}{\text{Number of Seasons}} + 1$$

While acknowledging the positive effect of relationship strength on buying behaviors and relationship quality, it also confirmed that the constructs of relationship quality and relationship strength are related but separate constructs. Similarly, relationship quality is distinguished from relationship strength by acting as an important antecedent of relationship strength (Barry et al. (2008).

Relationship strength is positioned in the core of the sequences extending from customer satisfaction to relationship profitability (Storbacka, et al, 1994). The framework basically incorporates sequences connected to each other with four links. The first link deals with the relation between perceived value (benefits versus sacrifices) and satisfaction. The second link depicts the relation between satisfaction to relationship strength. The third link is concerned with the relation between relationship strength and relationship longevity and the fourth link deals with how relationship longevity leads to relationship profitability.

Although relationship strength has been used in the literature of social networks and social psychology for decades, the use of it in marketing has been rather recent and thus rare. Strength in material sciences is defined as an inclusive property reflecting the stability and the cohesiveness to bind the material together (Lincoln, 1982). Parallel to this definition relationship strength in marketing is defined as “*the extent to which the partners are bound and reflects the ability of the relationship to resist both internal and external challenges*”. (Shi et.al, 2009). This definition also supports the view of Hausman (2001) on the concept.

Relationship strength is conceptualized with three dimensions: affective, cognitive and conative strength (Shi et al., 2009). Affective strength is the emotional attachment to a salesperson or to his/her firm, cognitive strength is the belief of the relational partners from an economic perspective on the worthiness to maintain the relationship and, conative strength is the degree of inclination of the business partners to discontinue the relationship.

Relationship strength between firms is strongly associated with the formation of loyalty bonds (Moore et al., 2012). There are four main types of mutually non-exclusive bonds that act as the key antecedents of relationship strength: utilitarian, affective, symbolic, and obligatory loyalty bonds. They coexist with varying degrees with respect to any specific customer- provider relationship. Utilitarian bonds reflect the perceived benefits and rewards in reply to the question: “What is in it for me?” (Kelman, 1958). Affective bonds are emotions related; reply to the question: “Do I feel good about it?”. These bonds might impact the strength of a customer-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998). Symbolic bonds are related to Keman’s (1958) discussion of identification and are based on the ability to express one’s self concept through a relationship (i.e., “Who I think I am?”). Obligatory loyalty bonds are based on the obligations associated with the relationship, i.e. “What do I have to do?” (Allen and Meyer, 1990).

Relationship strength based on belief and action components is defined as “the assessment and measurement of the belief and action components inherent in a relationship. The belief components measure behavioral processes while the action components measure economic content” (Donaldson and O’Toole, 2000). A representative schema (See Fig 2) explains the relationship structures amongst industrial companies, emerges as the only study that classified the relationship structures in industrial buying to date. The schema combines belief and actions components of a relationship to categorize the construct of relationship strength.

		ACTION COMPONENT	
		High	Low
BELIEF COMPONENT	High	BILATERAL	RECURRENT
	Low	HIERARCHICAL (Supplier or buyer dominant)	DISCRETE or OPPORTUNISTIC

Figure 2 Relationship Matrix of Donaldson and O’Toole (2000)

This classification provides an important tool to classify B2B relations. In contrast to the previous studies that have single theoretical perspectives tending to follow either purely socially oriented (i.e. motivational investment, Dwyer et al., 1987; instrumental value, Whetten and Leung, 1979), or purely economic oriented perspectives (i.e., resource dependency, Lincoln, 1982), the schema combines the two perspectives to determine the structure of a relationship in a matrix form and is mostly grounded on relational governance theory (Zaheer and Venkatraman, 1995).

Another conceptualization of relationship strength is comprised of three antecedents: relationship quality, switching cost and perceived value (Barry et al., 2008). Relationship quality as a separate construct than relationship strength (i.e., Storbacka et al., 1994) is formed of affective dimensions such as trust, satisfaction and, commitment, while switching cost and perceived value represents the economic antecedents.

Relationship strength also refers to the ties between the exchange partners to reflect the mutual ability of the parties to sustain the relationship despite the presence of internal and external challenges (Hausman, 2001). Grounded on commitment and trust theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), the dimensions are confirmed to be shared commitment, mutual trust and an additional construct called relationalism. Relationalism is a new construct in the literature that refers to the normative belief of the partners that the interfirm relationships are precious and essential for the survival and the success of organizations embodying concepts such as solidarity, mutuality and flexibility (Boyle, et. Al, 1992).

Overall, determination of relationship types, structures, and understanding the dimensions and antecedents to attain a strong relationship in business markets is important in marketing and selling activities to be able to design CRM strategies (Lages et.al, 2007).

3. HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH MODEL

3.1. Empathy and reliance

Although there are not many specific works in the literature relating empathy and reliance, extant literature on empathy in psychology and marketing suggests that empathy is closely related to trust. Empathy as positive feelings results in the formation of trust in business relationships (Aggrawall et al., 2005). Similarly, empathy is found to have a significant impact on both trust and perceived effectiveness (Spaulding and Planck, 2007). Empathy as a sub-dimension of emotional intelligence is correlated with team performance and cohesiveness in which cohesiveness can further be associated with trust (Rapisarda, 2002). Empathy is also critical for establishing trust for better communication (Urban et al., 2009), therefore they are complementing each other (Wan Afezah Wan Abdul Rahman, 2016). Overall, trust addresses the degree to which the parties can *rely on* the integrity of the partners (Callaghan et al., 1995, p. 60). *Relying on the integrity of the partner* indirectly points to rational form of trust and can be substituted with reliance to reflect the rational dynamics of a business setting (Mouzas, et al., 2007). So, like the relationship between empathy and trust, there are good reasons to think that empathy and reliance should also be positively related to each other. Additionally, it is important to use the two integrated dimensions of empathy (cognitive and affective) that work together to complement each other by combining social and motivational expertise (Smith, 2006). Also, using two-dimensional empathy is more preferable to avoid deceptive results due to the offsetting effect of unidimensional approach (Dwson et al., 1992).

Therefore, the first two hypotheses that account for both cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy are advanced as:

- H1: Cognitive empathy affects reliance positively and significantly in business markets.

H2: Affective empathy affects reliance positively and significantly in business markets

3.2. Salesperson Skills and Reliance

For many companies in B2B, salespersons are important marketing tools acting as the interface between the firms and the customers. They perform a boundary spanning role in this interface (Baldauf and Cravens, 2002). Considering this pivotal task, companies try to employ skilled salespeople to ensure continuous sales growth (Churchill et al., 2000). Moreover, researchers have also stressed the importance of salesperson's skills on salesperson performance (Churchill et. al., 1985; 2000; Rentz et. al., 2002). The relationship between salesperson skills and intercompany reliance is not specifically studied in the literature. However, there're many works that examined the role of the some components of salespeople traits in intercompany trust in different selling contexts (e.g., Williams and Spiro 1985; Ganesan ,1994; Pilling and Eroglu ,1994; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Alnakhli et al, 2021; Ohiomah, et al.,2019; Verbeke et al., 2011; Walker et al., 1977; Lee and Dawes ,2005). These works provide evidence that individual traits and skills such as communication styles, possession of knowledge, customer orientation, ability to connect to the customer, empathetic behavior are strongly and positively related to the formation of trust and performance outcomes. These skills are categorized as interpersonal skills, salesmanship skills and technical skills (Rentz et al., 2002).

3.3. Interpersonal Skills and reliance

Interpersonal skills concern a mental communication process such as active listening, speaking, verbal and non-verbal communication, (Rentz et al., 2002), as well as the extent to which a salesperson is perceived as likeable and friendly by the customer (Nicholson et al., 2001). Findings of Swan et el. (1999) support the notion that interpersonal skills of a salesperson impact trust positively. Interpersonal traits such as openness, conscientiousness

and agreeableness in an intracompany context are also found to impact the formation of trust positively (Inanir, 2022). Conversely, findings of Guenzi and Georges (2008) in banking business context evidence that the likeability does not have any significant effect on trust. Building on the above, it is worthwhile to test the following hypothesis posited as:

H3: Interpersonal skills affect reliance positively and significantly in business markets.

Salesmanship skills concern objective professional acts of salespersons such as prospecting new customers, qualifying existing customers by uncovering and understanding their needs, customizing and presenting solutions, handling customer objections and questions regarding the proposed solution, and ability to close the sale (Rentz et al., 2002). Extant studies agree that the salesmanship skills have a positive impact on relational outcomes such as customer satisfaction, performance and loyalty (e.g., Williams and Spiro, 1985; Futrell, 2006; Leigh and Summers, 2002; Guenzi and Georges, 2008). Furthermore, in a relatively recent study it is confirmed that the salesmanship skills positively affect sales performance (Ohiomah et al., 2019). The qualitative interviews also supported the importance of the salesperson who works brings the best service to the buying companies. Therefore, salesmanship skills are expected to impact reliance. So, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H4: Salesmanship skills affect reliance positively and significantly in business markets

Technical skills refer to the knowledge of a salesperson on the market, own company's procedures, products, benefits, services and sales policies as well as that of competitors (Rentz et al., 2002). This knowledge is important in achieving sales performance and is confirmed to impact sales performance positively in different settings (e.g., Verbeke et al., 2011; Miao and Evans, 2012; Groza et al., 2016; Ohiomah et al., 2019). Conversely, a study investigating the effect of technical skills on sales performance found inconsistent

results depending on the data set and measures (Plouffe et al., 2009) while another one found no influence (Basir, et al., 2010). Regarding the relationship between technical skills and trust, only one study showed that salesperson expertise as a direct significant predictor of trust (Doney and Cannon, 1997). Hence, there is a need for further investigation to clarify some conflicting results from earlier studies although they're not directly related to reliance. Accordingly, it is required to test the relationship between technical skills and reliance in the industrial markets by hypothesizing as follow:

H5: Technical skills affect reliance positively and significantly in business markets

3.4. Perceived Value and Relationship strength

In a buyer-seller relationship, it is essential to deliver superior value by including the customers' perspective to their own evaluation of value to have a longer-term relationship (Ravald and Grönroos, 1996). Moreover, relationship specific investment via offering value is confirmed to have a salient effect on the customer's perception of the seller's commitment (Anderson and Weitz, 1992). This will foster a long-term customer orientation of the (Ganesan 1994) that in turn recalls the concept of relationship strength. If the value perceived by the business partners in an exchange is high, they're more motivated to sustain the relationship (Singh et al., 2005). Perceived value as an economic concept leads to the formation of high relationship strength through attaining commitment and satisfaction in B2B context (Storbacka et al., 1994). Furthermore, perceived value is found to be a direct antecedent of both relationship quality and relationship strength in B2B markets (Barry et al., 2008). Thus, perceived value with determinants made up of price and quality is expected to positively impact relationship strength in B2B industrial markets too. So, it is hypothesized as:

H6: Perceived value has significant positive effect on relationship strength.
in business markets.

3.5. Reliance and relationship strength

Developing strong relationships in B2B markets is an ultimately desired business state for both parties. This view is supported by the qualitative interviews in which almost all the participants made attribution to the importance of the concepts of sustainability, long term and strong relationship to define their desired state with the suppliers. Moreover, for a relationship to exist commitment and trust of the parties is required to co-exist (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust has been in the core of the social exchange theory and is one of the most important concepts among the prevalent marketing theories (Dwyer et al., 1987). In particular, a partnering relationship is mainly characterized by trust (Levin and Johnston, 1997). Thus, to label a relationship as “strong”, it is necessary that the buyer has developed high level of confidence in suppliers’ ability to meet the expectations, keep the promises, fulfilling the commitments and demonstrating competency, so that the buyer can “rely on” the supplier (Barry et al., 2008). One important component of achieving a strong relationship is to ensure the existence of rational form of trust (reliance) for B2B markets (Mouzas et al., 2007). As the concept of reliance is partly grounded on commitment and trust theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) in which trust is an indispensable part of a sound relationship, as trust does, it makes sense to consider reliance as an important driver of relationship strength in buyer-seller dyad in B2B. Therefore, the last hypothesis of this study is proposed as:

H7: Reliance has a significant positive effect on relationship strength in business markets.

Based on the above hypotheses, the research model was constructed as shown in Figure 3.

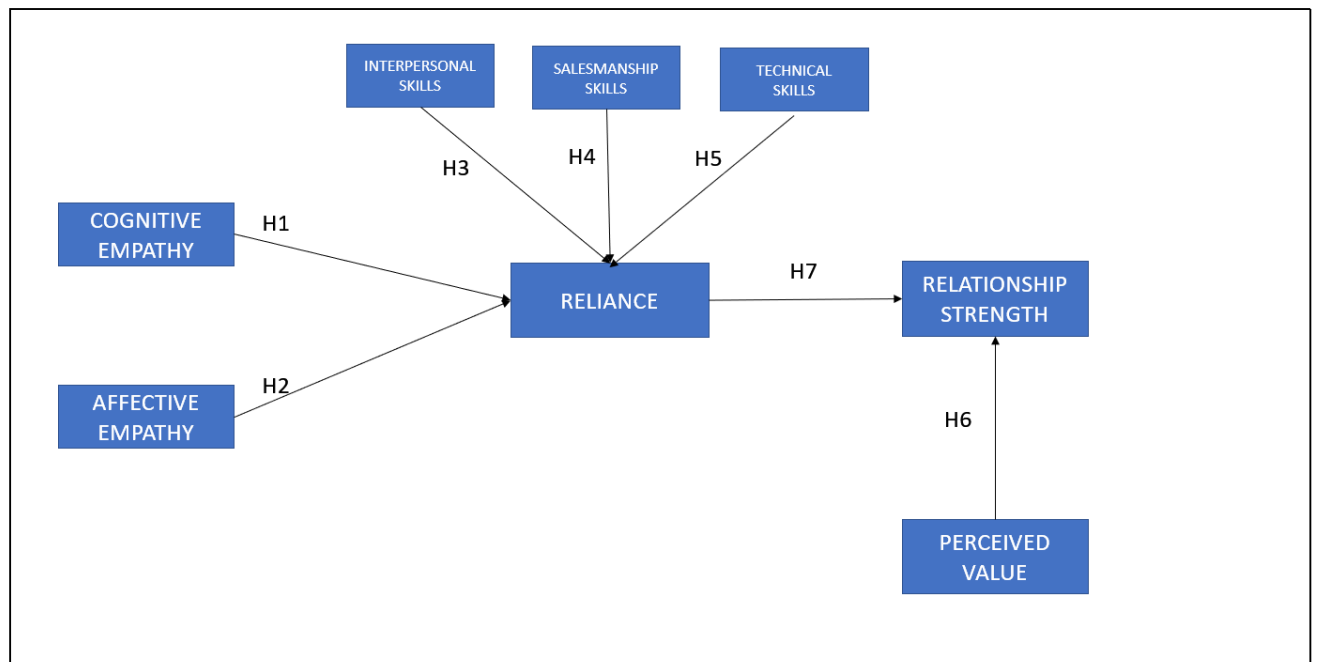


Figure 3. The Research Model

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

There has been an apparent movement towards mixed method designs in many fields of social sciences (Harrison and Reilly, 2011). By using mixed method approaches, researchers can obtain better insight about a research phenomenon than either qualitative or quantitative approaches alone (Palinkas et al., 2011). In mixed method research design, three essential points need to be addressed: (1) priority, (2) implementation, and (3) integration (Creswell et al., 2003). Priority is about which method (quantitative or qualitative) will prevail in the study to explain a phenomenon. Implementation is about how the sequential order of the study is organized (e.g. chronological, one following another, or concurrently). Integration refers to the phase of a study to combine quantitative and qualitative data. In this study, priority was given to the quantitative method. In the *implementation*, chronological order was employed. The *integration* of the qualitative and quantitative results was done in the discussion section. Overall, this study consists of two sections:

1. A qualitative part that involves semi-structured interviews to explore participants' in-depth views to guess the significant predictors of relationship strength in business markets.
2. A quantitative part that involves the measurement and evaluation of responses from purposefully selected respondents via questionnaire and testing the research hypotheses in a single model to provide a general understanding of the research problem.

The research steps followed in this study are presented in Figure 4.

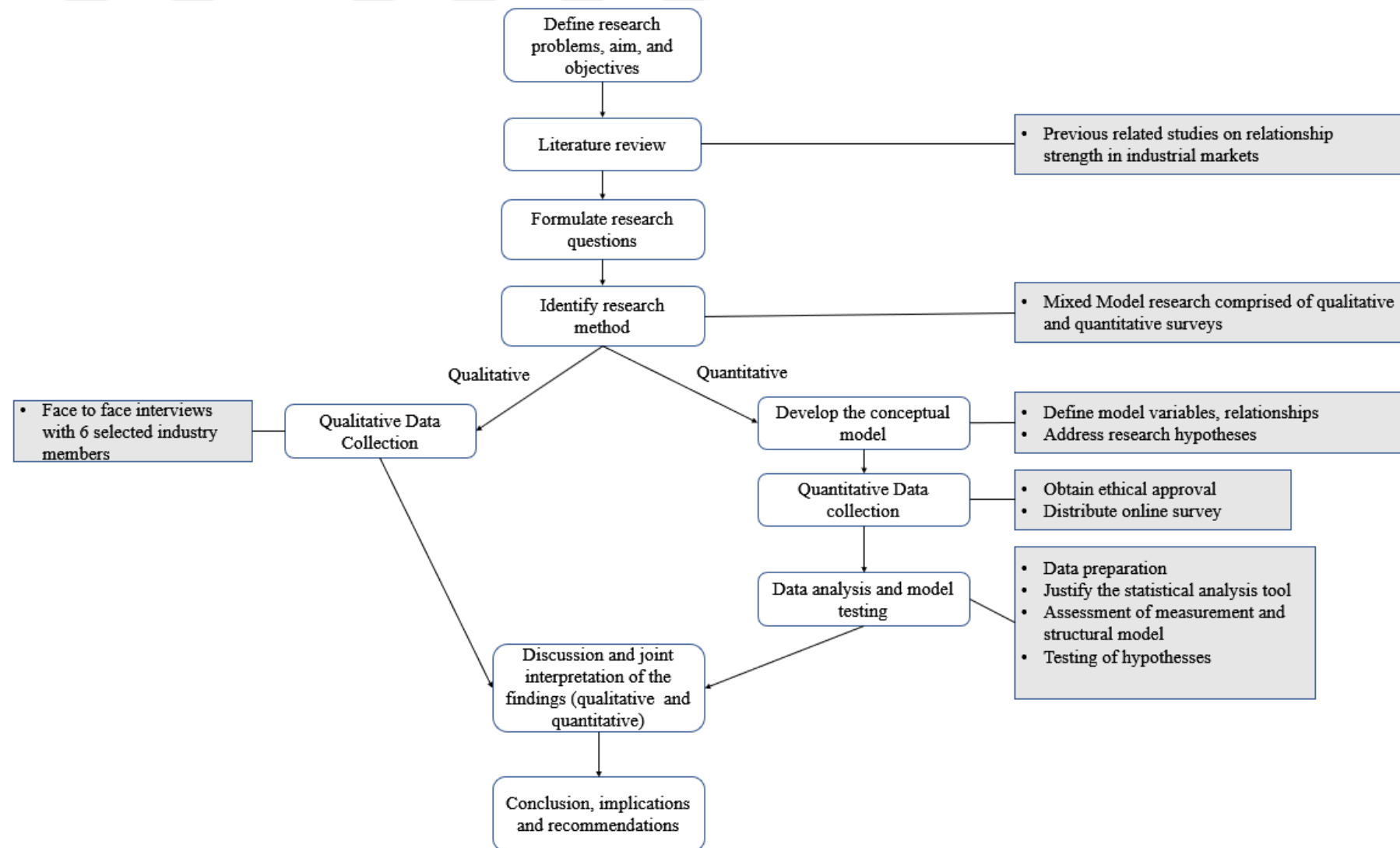


Figure 4. Research Steps

4.1. Qualitative Part

Qualitative methods involve an ongoing and repetitive way of obtaining a comprehensive understanding of a research phenomenon to reach a theoretical saturation until the point where no new substantive information is captured (Miles and Huberman 1994). In the first part of this research, qualitative interviews with the key decision makers of six different manufacturing companies in plastics processing industries in Turkey were carried out between August to November, 2020 to understand their expectations from their potential suppliers. Furthermore, it was also tried to address the question of how an ideal relationship between buyer and seller should ultimately be. Purposive sampling method that involves identifying samples which are relevant to the research questions was used. The companies were selected from the members list of PAGEV (Turkish Plastics Research and Development Foundation) based on their size (annual turnover greater than TRY 25.0 million) and also based on the ease of reachability of the key decision makers. The basic characteristics of the respondents are given in the table below (Table 5).

Table 5. Respondent Characteristics

ID	POSITION	AGE	EDUCATION /PROFESSION	COMPANY SIZE (\$ MILLION REVENUE IN 2022)
F1	Supply Chain Manager	54	B.Sc. in Food Engineering	240
M1	Finance Manager	57	B.Sc. in Electrical Engineering	112
M2	Managing Director	52	MBA in Business Admin.	32
M3	Procurement Director	42	MS in Industrial Engineering	180
M4	Purchasing Manager	49	B.Sc. in Mechanical Engineering	96
M5	Owner	62	MBA in Business Admin.	58

Each interview was conducted in a semi-structured way, lasted for about 45 minutes, and recorded with the permission of the interviewees. After an explanatory brief on the aim of the study and the interviews, the conversations were initiated with an introduction question: “*Can you please tell me about the most important points that you consider in choosing your suppliers?*”. Then, the interviewees were let speak without any interruption. The key words that came out that are in the context of this study were then reflected onto them to further elaborate just as in a psychodynamic study in which the respondents were encouraged to verbalize their thoughts freely. After having a total of six interviews, no further interviews were conducted as the participants did not exhibit any different substantive information during the conversations. The findings of the qualitative study are presented in section 5.1.

After the qualitative part of the work was completed, the quantitative part of the research comprising of scales selection, data collection, and the analysis and the interpretation of the findings were carried out.

4.2 Quantitative Part

4.2.1. Measurement scale and questionnaire

After the construction of the research model, the measurement scales to capture the constructs of this study within the theoretical framework were sought. Measurement items previously evaluated for acceptable levels of validity and reliability were used. For the construct empathy, a multidimensional scale (cognitive and affective) by Dulep et al. (2019) tested in B2B context is used. For the relatively new construct reliance, the only scale available by Zhizhong et al. (2013) with four items was employed. For perceived value, three items unidimensional scale reflecting only price and quality perceptions of the industrial buyers is chosen (Eggert and Ulaga, 2002). For salesperson skills, the three-dimensional scale that jointly measures salesmanship, interpersonal and technical skills by Rentz et al. (2002),

and for relationship strength unidimensional scale by Barry et al. (2008) were deployed. A summary of the selected scales is given in the table below (Table 6)

Table 6. Scales

CONSTRUCT(S)	DIMENSIONS	REF	No. of Items
EMPATHY	Cognitive Empathy	Duleep et al. (2018)	6
-	Affective Empathy	"	6
RELIANCE	Unidimensional	Zhizhong et al. (2013)	4
PERCEIVED VALUE	Unidimensional	Eggert and Ulaga (2002)	3
SALESPERSON SKILLS	Salesmanship	Rentz et al. (2002)	5
	Inter-personal	"	5
	Technical	"	5
RELATIONSHIP STRENGTH	Unidimensional	Barry et al.(2008)	5

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After the scale selection, all the scales were translated from English to Turkish (See App II) and adapted for the context of the study. Before sending the questionnaire to the respondents, a final check was performed by submitting the translated version of the items to a few academicians and potential respondents for their review and corrections so that misinterpretations are minimized, and face validity can be increased.

A pre-test to check the reliability of the scales was performed with the data collected initially from 52 respondents by checking Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. Cronbach's Alpha values that are greater than 0.7 are considered acceptable (George and Mallery, 2003, p. 231). The results are presented in Table 7. The figures show that, other than the factor reliability of relationship strength (RS: Cronbach's Alpha =0.471) all other values are above the suggested threshold of 0.7. If the measuring item RS4 is deleted from the scale, the reliability goes up to 0.697. To ensure an acceptable level of reliability, the item RS4 is disregarded in further analysis.

Table 7. Pre-test results for reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha
COEGMP	0.908
AFFEMP	0.877
REL	0.909
PERVAL	0.833
RS	0.471
INTPER	0.933
SALE	0.895
TECH	0.895

4.2.2. Sampling

Judgement (purposive) sampling is a sampling method usually applied in B2B research that involves identifying samples that are relevant to the research questions in which the researcher selects the sample population subjectively that appears appropriate in his/her judgement to be representative of the population (Ghauri et al., 2008). This study employs purposive sampling method. PAGEV (Plastic Research and Development Foundation) is one of the leading nongovernmental organizations in Turkey. It has over 600 trustees and around 1,750 member companies that covers around 88% of the plastics business in Turkey. Turkish plastic sector employs about 250,000 employees to create a turnover about \$ 34 billion turnover. The member companies of PAGEV include polymer manufacturers, plastic goods manufacturers, plastic processing equipment builders, service providers, importers, resellers and distributors (PAGEV, n.d.). A list of member companies was reached upon request to PAGEV. Then the list was subject to a filter to subjectively determine the sample population. The companies whose size is bigger than “Small Size Enterprises” defined by the government as: “enterprises that employ more than 50 people with annual net turnover less than TRY 25 million” (Resmi Gazete, 18.11.2005,25997) were focused. So, the research targets medium to big sized Turkish companies as the sample population. The final list was comprised of 132 potential reachable respondents in different key decision-making positions in their companies. These roles were categorized as:

1. Owners / partners
2. Purchasing manager/ responsible
3. Production managers/responsible
4. Technical manager
5. R&D managers
6. Sales and marketing managers
7. Others

The respondents were also categorized by their business model as either manufacturer or as agent/distributor. They were also requested to indicate their company's structure as either corporate or family owned. Demographic variables such as gender and education were also included in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered online using five item Likert scale items (See App I). After the questionnaire was sent, regular reminders (once every week) between August to November 2021 have been made to the ones who had not yet responded to the questionnaire. Out of 132 respondents, 112 returned their replies (Response Rate=84.8%). Three replies that were detected to be inconsistent or incomplete were disregarded from the sample data. Therefore, the final analysis was done by using the replies from 109 respondents on a total of 39 items.

5.FINDINGS

5.1. Findings of qualitative part

Almost all the respondents were observed to categorize their expectations in descending order of importance as follow:

1. Sustainability long term relationship
2. Price
3. Quality
4. Good communication

Interestingly, the interviewees attributed more importance to maintaining long term relationship than the price and quality. For example, the supply chain manager of the company Polinas clearly stated: *“My goal with a supplier is to be able to build a long-term, open and healthy relationship. The price and the quality are of course important. But I do not want my supplier to be with me today, and to disappear the next day when the circumstances are not favorable”*. Similarly, F1 from company Polibak made the comment: *“Of course our primary objective is to control our costs without a compromise on quality. However, if I have the feeling that our relationship with a supplier will not be a regular one, we start looking for a replacement with whom we believe we can develop continuous and longer-term relationship.”* M4 from company Superfilm said: *“I expect my supplier to be with me in good days and bad days.”*

As the conversations continued with free associations, the respondents were observed to have a common agreement on the concept of good communication as well. For example, M3 from Polinas said that *“To achieve a sustainable intercompany relationship, transparent and honest communication is essential. I should trust my supplier.”* This comment indicated the importance of developing trust via open communication in a buyer-seller relationship. M1 from company Abco made the statement on trust: *“I am fully aware that trust in business is*

not like trust with a friend or family. What I mean by trust is to be able to have open communication with the supplier. Of course, this depends on the personality and the professionalism of the salesperson visiting us.”, mentioning the importance of the salesperson in trust building. M5 from company Sümer said that *“Trust to the salesperson is important. We should be ensured that our company information should not be shared with our rivals.”* A direct comment that emerged during the interviews came from M2. from company Noki: *“Like intercountry relationships, there’s no place for affections or emotions in business life. Companies as entities are all focusing on their financial interests. It would be of course good to develop and have social bonds and friendships between the salesmen and the decision makers at buyers. But this can only help ease the open communication.”*. Referring to the salesperson, he further commented that: *“I do not like too talkative salespersons. They are more likely to make false promises to grasp an order.”* emphasizing the communication quality and the importance of listening.”

The keywords that emerged prominently out of the interviews are listed in Table 8.

Table 8. The list of concepts/words emerged out of qualitative interviews

COMPANY		ABCO	NOKI	POLIBAK	POLINAS	SUPERFILM	SÜMER
PERSON IDENTIFIER (M: Male, F:Female)		M1	M2	F1	M3	M4	M5
POSITION		Finance Manager	Managing Director	Supply Chain Manager	Procurement Director	Purchasing Manager	Owner
C O N C E P T S	Sustainable Business				X	X	
	Continuous Relation						X
	Relationship Quality			X			
	Sustainability		X				
	Turst			X	X		X
	Honesty				X		
	Salesperson	X		X	X		
	Transparency				X		
	Value				X		
	Price		X	X			X
	Quality	X		X		X	X
	Cost	X				X	
	Compromise			X			
	Win Win	X			X		
	Mutual Interest	X					X
	Understand						X
E M E R G E D	Communication Quality		X		X		
	Talking/Listening		X				
	Affections		X				

After conducting 6 interviews, it was seen that collecting and analyzing additional information would not make any further contribution to the framework, then it was concluded that the theoretical saturation has been reached. Based on the findings from the qualitative interviews and the literature survey, the main framework for the research could then be constructed.

The concepts and words that emerged out of the interviews were associated with the major constructs of the study as follows.

Table 9. Construct related to the associations

CONSTRUCT	ASSOCIATIONS
Empathy	affections, emotions, win-win, listening, talking, understand, salesperson
Salesperson Skills	talking, listening, trust, honesty, good communication Salesperson
Reliance	trust, mutual interests, win-win
Perceived Value	price, cost, value, quality
Relationship Strength	continuous relation, sustainable business, transparency

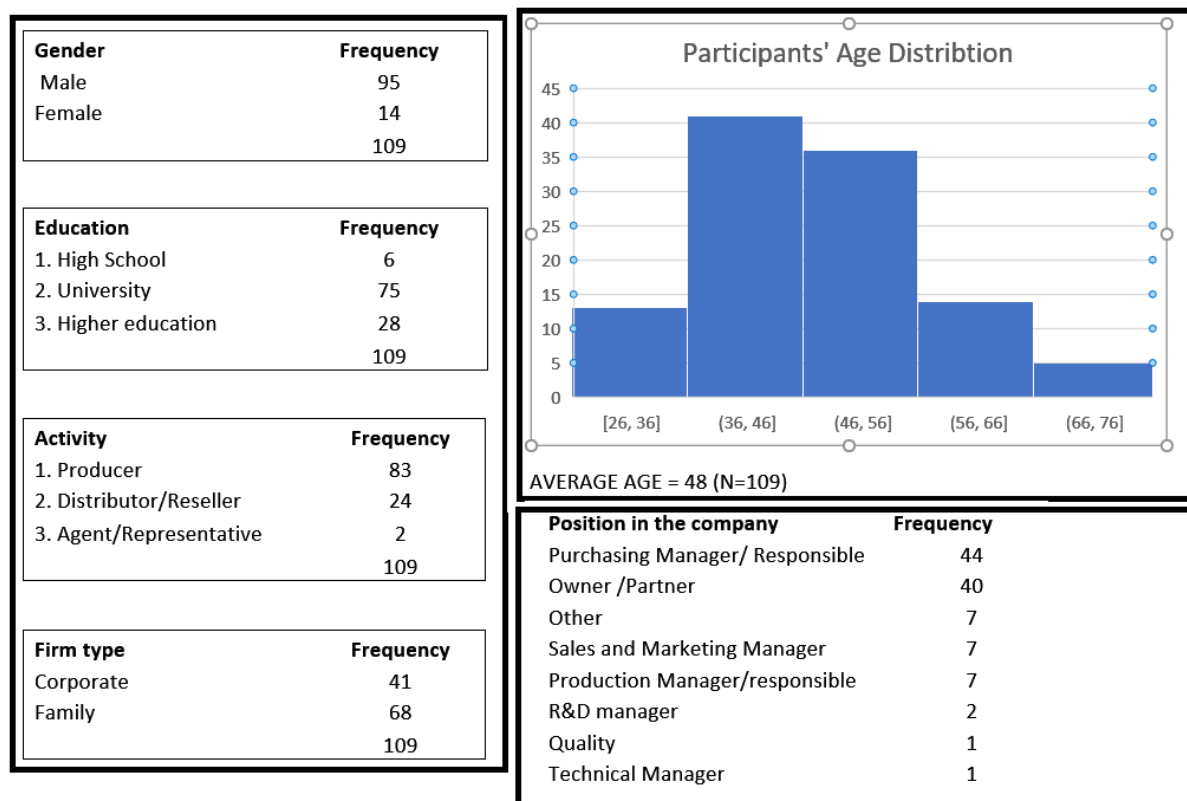
In the preparation of the above table for associations, it can be noticed that one single association might be relevant to more than one construct. This is an indication of interrelatedness of the concepts to be used in the model development. In this study, while sticking onto the theoretical framework, the nearest connotations of the associations to the best matching constructs were tabulated. The findings of the qualitative part of the study will be discussed in the discussion section (Section 6).

5.2. Findings of quantitative part

5.2.1. Demographics

Descriptive statistics of the sample population are summarized in the following table (Table 10).

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics



It is noticeable that the educational level of the sample population is quite high, while the female managers are significantly lower than the male managers.

Means and standard deviations of the respondents replies by items are also presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Variables

	Item	Mean	Deviation
COGEMP	The salesperson understands my needs from my perspective.	3.850	0.951
	The salesperson asks questions to understand my needs and concerns.	4.050	0.975
	The salesperson refers to what is most important to me.	3.850	0.921
	The salesperson recognizes me and my role in this organization.	4.170	0.908
	The salesperson fully comprehends my concerns	3.770	0.987
	The salesperson can identify how things look from my perspective	3.500	1.006
AFFEMP	The salesperson has greater affection toward me.	3.890	0.985
	The salesperson usually senses what I am feeling.	3.830	0.961
	When I am hurt or upset, the salesperson can recognize my feelings exactly, without becoming upset him/herself.	3.720	1.019
	The salesperson can predict how I will feel	3.680	1.017
	The salesperson can tell if I am masking my true emotions	3.450	1.142
	The salesperson can recognize my emotions.	3.440	0.907
REL	We are confident with this supplier's ability to fulfill our agreements.	4.080	1.029
	We are confident that this supplier is competent at what they are doing.	4.140	0.876
	The performance of this supplier can always meet our expectations.	4.020	0.793
	We have faith in the supplier's ability to fulfill their promises.	4.160	1.002
RS	It is likely that we will be doing business with this supplier over the next few years	4.050	0.937
	We are continually on the lookout for another supplier to replace this supplier (reverse)	3.600	1.210
	We find it necessary to be cautious with this supplier (reverse)	3.740	1.075
	Our relationship with this supplier deserves our maximum effort to maintain	3.800	1.304
PERVAL	Compared to alternative repair shops, this supplier services a larger volume of component parts	3.630	0.988
	Compared to the price we pay, we get reasonable quality	4.130	0.747
	Compared to the quality we get, we pay reasonable price	3.960	0.804
	The purchasing relationship delivers us superior net value	4.130	0.893
INTPER	Ability to express yourself nonverbally	3.500	0.919
	Ability in general speaking skills	4.010	0.799
	Awareness and understanding of the nonverbal communication of others	3.880	1.052
	Ability to control and regulate nonverbal displays of emotion	3.830	0.986
	Ability to manipulate others to control the situation	3.870	1.055
	Ability to prospect for customers	3.790	0.903
SALE	Ability to qualify prospects.	3.960	0.981
	Ability to close the sale	4.060	0.911
	Ability to present the sales message	3.900	0.849
	Ability to service the account	4.140	0.799
	Knowledge of customers' markets and products	4.090	0.977
TECH	Knowledge of your own company's procedures	3.860	0.947
	Knowledge of competitors' products, services, and sales policies	3.830	0.898
	Knowledge of product line, including product features and benefits	3.980	1.000
	Knowledge of customers' operations (e.g., store and shelf layout, employee training, etc.)	3.810	1.084
	AGE	47.7	10.113

5.2.2. Normality of the data

First, the data were checked for normality by using SPSS. By default, SPSS reports the results of the two tests to check on the normality of the data: (1) The Shapiro–Wilk test and, (2) Kolmogorov-Smirnova. For both tests, null hypothesis states that data are taken from normal distributed population. When $P < 0.05$, null hypothesis is rejected, and data are called not- normally distributed (Garth, 2008, pp. 66). The results of the test were tabulated in Table 12 below.

Table 12. Test of Normality

df=109		Kolmogorov-Smirnova		Shapiro Wilk	
FACTOR	ITEMS	Statistic	Sig.	Statistic	Sig.
COGNITIVE EMPATHY	COGEMP1	0.268	0.00	0.858	0.00
	COGEMP2	0.27	0.00	0.813	0.00
	COGEMP3	0.27	0.00	0.86	0.00
	COGEMP4	0.252	0.00	0.799	0.00
	COGEMP5	0.216	0.00	0.878	0.00
	COGEMP6	0.206	0.00	0.896	0.00
AFFECTIVE EMPATHY	AFFEMP1	0.278	0.00	0.834	0.00
	AFFEMP2	0.214	0.00	0.864	0.00
	AFEMP3	0.197	0.00	0.881	0.00
	AFEMP4	0.266	0.00	0.853	0.00
	AFEMP5	0.182	0.00	0.893	0.00
	AFEMP6	0.218	0.00	0.872	0.00
RELIANCE	REL1	0.285	0.00	0.771	0.00
	REL2	0.245	0.00	0.808	0.00
	REL3	0.353	0.00	0.746	0.00
	REL4	0.282	0.00	0.753	0.00
RELATIONSHIP STRENGTH	RS1	0.315	0.00	0.778	0.00
	RS2	0.264	0.00	0.844	0.00
	RS3	0.301	0.00	0.844	0.00
	RS4	0.244	0.00	0.823	0.00
	RS5	0.305	0.00	0.854	0.00

df=109		Kolmogorov-Smirnova		Shapiro Wilk	
FACTOR	ITEMS	Statistic	Sig.	Statistic	Sig.
COGNITIVE EMPATHY	COGEMP1	0.268	0.00	0.858	0.00
	COGEMP2	0.27	0.00	0.813	0.00
	COGEMP3	0.27	0.00	0.86	0.00
	COGEMP4	0.252	0.00	0.799	0.00
	COGEMP5	0.216	0.00	0.878	0.00
	COGEMP6	0.206	0.00	0.896	0.00
AFFECTIVE EMPATHY	AFFEMP1	0.278	0.00	0.834	0.00
	AFFEMP2	0.214	0.00	0.864	0.00
	AFEMP3	0.197	0.00	0.881	0.00
	AFEMP4	0.266	0.00	0.853	0.00
	AFEMP5	0.182	0.00	0.893	0.00
	AFEMP6	0.218	0.00	0.872	0.00
RELIANCE	REL1	0.285	0.00	0.771	0.00
	REL2	0.245	0.00	0.808	0.00
	REL3	0.353	0.00	0.746	0.00
	REL4	0.282	0.00	0.753	0.00
RELATIONSHIP STRENGTH	RS1	0.315	0.00	0.778	0.00
	RS2	0.264	0.00	0.844	0.00
	RS3	0.301	0.00	0.844	0.00
	RS4	0.244	0.00	0.823	0.00
	RS5	0.305	0.00	0.854	0.00

As none of the observations' statistical significance are greater than $p = 0.05$, the data are not normally distributed. Dealing with non-normal data might require remedial steps such as applying non-linear transformation techniques to the variables. This option might sometimes help sample data approximate a normal distribution. However, this might also alter the relationship between the variables and impedes a healthy interpretation. To avoid this challenge, a better option is to use a method of estimation that does not assume normal data distribution. (Finney and DiStefano, 2006).

5.2.3. Tool of data analysis

Smart PLS, a soft modeling approach to structural equation modelling, is used to test the model which requires statistical multivariate analysis that simultaneously analyzes

multiple variables. Smart PLS that does not require any assumption about the distribution of data emerged as a statistical procedure for structural modeling and has been used by marketing researchers for the last decades (Wong, 2010). Furthermore, unlike any other covariance-based analysis, Smart PLS relies on a nonparametric bootstrapping procedure to test coefficients for their significance (Hair et al., 2017). The software, with its high predictive accuracy emerges as a preferable option when the application has a little theory available (Wong, 2010). Especially in B2B research, where the sample size is usually small (less than 250 observations), Smart PLS should be preferred to achieve acceptable levels of statistical power; already 100 observations can be sufficient for a certain quality of measurement model (Reinartz, et al., 2009). Basic steps of Data Analysis with Smart PLS are given in the Figure 5.

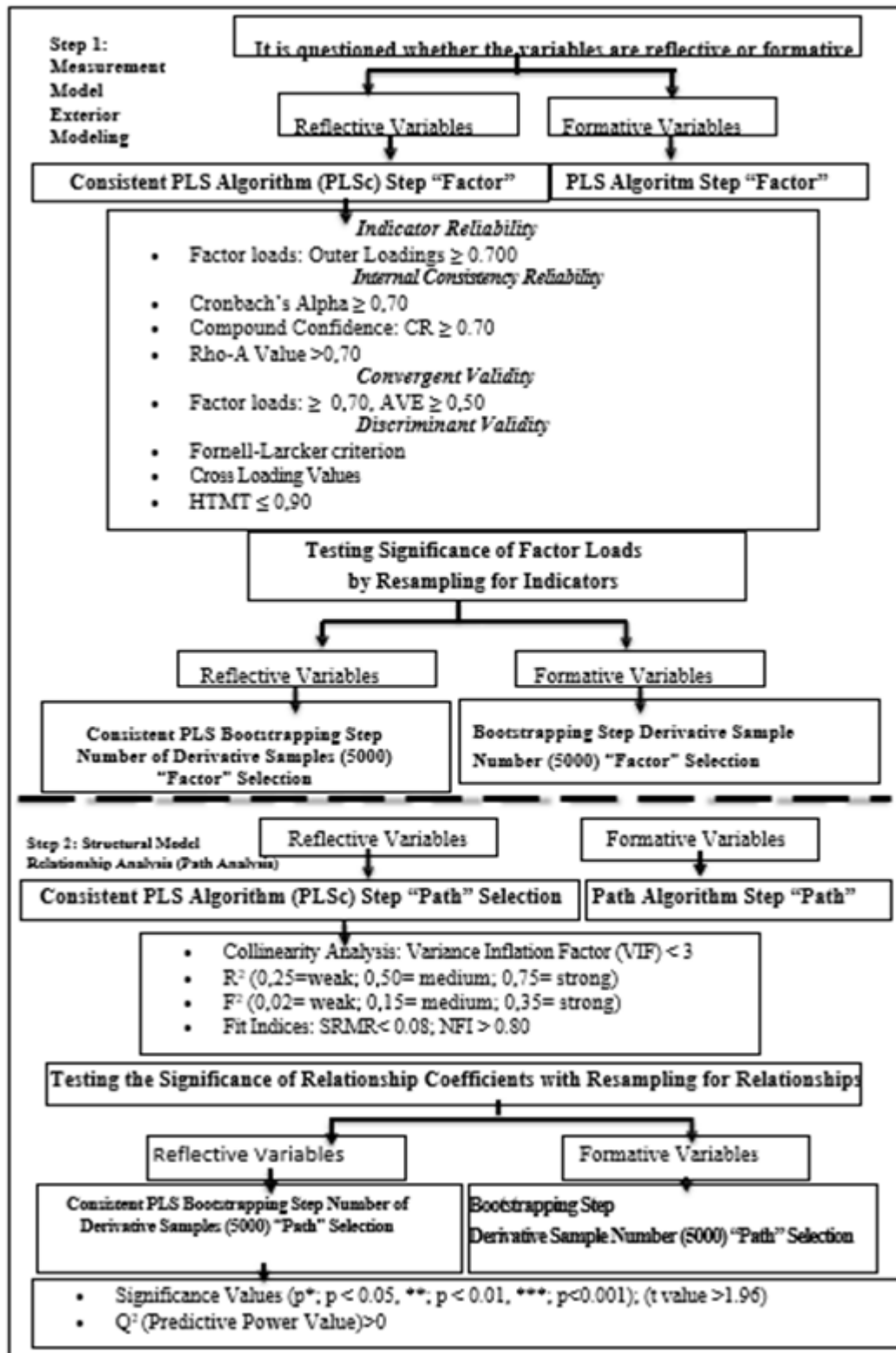


Figure 5 Basic Steps in Data Analysis with Smart PLS (Özgül, 2020)

5.2.4. Measurement Model

First, the measurement model assessment (outer model) that involves the establishment of the quality criteria for the factor loadings followed by the check on construct reliability and construct validity were performed. *“Factor loadings refers to the extent to which each item in the correlation matrix correlates with the given principal components. Factor loadings can vary from -1.0 to + 1.0 with higher absolute values indicating the higher correlation of the item with the underlying factors”* (Hair et al., 2017). As a rule of thumb, outer loadings greater than 0.7 are considered as good (Hair et al., 2017). Examination for the outer loadings of the construct items Cognitive Empathy, Affective Empathy, Salesmanship Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Technical Skills, Perceived Value, Reliance and, Relationship Strength via Smart PLS yielded the results tabulated in Table 13. The results indicate that all the item loadings relevant to the constructs are above the acceptable limit of 0.7, except for the outer loading of the 4th item (RS4) measuring relationship strength which is 0.435. Thus, the item RS4 was taken out of the analysis.

Table 13. Outer Loadings

	AFFEMP				
AFEMP1	0.784				
AFEMP2	0.866				
AFEMP3	0.844				
AFEMP4	0.856				
AFEMP5	0.772				
AFEMP6	0.859	COGEMP			
COGEMP1		0.912			
COGEMP2		0.774			
COGEMP3		0.835			
COGEMP4		0.737			
COGEMP5		0.828			
COGEMP6		0.891	INTPER		
INTPERSKIL1			0.766		
INTPERSKIL2			0.841		
INTPERSKIL3			0.872		
INTPERSKIL4			0.89		
INTPERSKIL5			0.848	PERVAL	
PERVAL1				0.82	
PERVAL2				0.825	
PERVAL3				0.81	REL
REL1				0.928	
REL2				0.837	
REL3				0.864	
REL4				0.904	RS
RS1				0.759	
RS2				0.842	
RS3				0.727	
RS4				0.435	
RS5				0.738	SALE
SALESKILL1				0.728	
SALESKILL2				0.797	
SALESKILL3				0.792	
SALESKILL4				0.889	
SALESKILL5				0.832	TECH
TECHSKILL1				0.872	
TECHSKILL2				0.851	
TECHSKILL3				0.837	
TECHSKILL4				0.854	
TECHSKILL5				0.824	

5.2.5. Reliability and validity

Next, the reliability of the measurement model was evaluated. The commonly accepted criterion for establishing internal consistency reliability is to assess Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability of the factors that are based on the intercorrelations of the observed indicator variables. As a rule, composite reliability values between 0.60 to 0.70 can be considered as acceptable, and values between 0.70 and 0.90 can be regarded as satisfactory. Values higher than 0.95 are not very desirable (Hair, et al. ,2017). The results of the analysis for Cronbach's Alpha were ranging from 0.750 to 0.910 and for composite reliability from 0.833 to 0.934 as reported in the table (Table 14) below. Both indicators of reliability have reliability statistics over the required threshold of 0.70. Hence, construct reliability is established.

Table 14. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
AFFEMP	0.910	0.930	0.690
COGEMP	0.910	0.931	0.692
INTPER	0.899	0.925	0.713
PERVAL	0.757	0.859	0.669
REL	0.906	0.934	0.781
RS	0.750	0.833	0.509
SALE	0.867	0.904	0.655
TECH	0.902	0.927	0.718

Next, SmartPLS was used to test for convergent validity and discriminant validity. For convergent validity, AVE (Average variance extracted) figures that measure the level of variance captured by a construct were checked. AVE value of 0.50 or higher means that, the construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators (Hair et al., 2017). The assessment by SmartPLS revealed that all the constructs' AVE values are well above the threshold, so convergent validity is established. (See Table 14).

To check for the degree to which a measure does not correlate with another measure whose underlying construct is conceptually unrelated, discriminant validity was assessed. For variance-based structural equation modeling, there are basically two dominant approaches to assess the discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2017): (1) Fornell- Larcker criteria and, (2) Examination of cross-loadings. However, recent studies examining the performance of these methods reveal that neither of them might detect the possible discriminant validity issues (Henseler et al., 2015). A remedial alternative approach is to check the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios that act as a basis for statistical discriminant validity test. This approach gives an estimate on what the true correlation between two latent variables would be, if they are measured perfectly. Values close to 1.0 is an indication of lack of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The results of the smart PLS run for HTMT ratios are given in Table 15.

Table 15. HTMT Ratios

	AFFEMP	COGEMP	INTPER	PERVAL	REL	RS	SALE	TECH
AFFEMP	-							
COGEMP	0.765							
INTPER	0.568	0.646						
PERVAL	0.337	0.611	0.363					
REL	0.601	0.826	0.589	0.621				
RS	0.647	0.687	0.581	0.801	0.852			
SALE	0.633	0.763	0.988	0.477	0.736	0.682		
TECH	0.536	0.670	0.841	0.505	0.622	0.601	0.941	-

As PLS-SEM does not make any distributional assumptions, instead of applying standard parametric test on HTMT values with a criterion of given thresholds, statistical discriminant validity test by using “complete bootstrapping” procedure is run. This procedure allows for constructing confidence intervals for the HTMT to test the null hypothesis ($H_0: HTMT \geq 1$) against the alternative hypothesis ($H_1: HTMT < 1$). If a confidence interval contains the value

of 1.0, this is a strong indication of lack of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The results of the bootstrapping test for the model are given in Table 16.

Table 16. Confidence Interval for HTMT Values (Complete Bootstrapping for HTMT Ratio)

	HTMT RATIOS			
	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M) (Bootstrapping)	2.50%	97.50%
COGEMP -> AFFEMP	0.765	0.761	0.647	0.853
INTPER -> AFFEMP	0.568	0.571	0.337	0.748
INTPER -> COGEMP	0.646	0.645	0.392	0.824
PERVAL -> AFFEMP	0.337	0.370	0.222	0.534
PERVAL -> COGEMP	0.611	0.613	0.409	0.798
PERVAL -> INTPER	0.363	0.392	0.201	0.616
REL -> AFFEMP	0.601	0.592	0.421	0.744
REL -> COGEMP	0.826	0.822	0.703	0.906
REL -> INTPER	0.589	0.589	0.325	0.793
REL -> PERVAL	0.621	0.618	0.367	0.812
RS -> AFFEMP	0.647	0.640	0.447	0.800
RS -> COGEMP	0.687	0.685	0.490	0.828
RS -> INTPER	0.581	0.586	0.315	0.811
RS -> PERVAL	0.801	0.801	0.629	0.926
RS -> REL	0.852	0.850	0.675	0.958
SALE -> AFFEMP	0.633	0.634	0.425	0.798
SALE -> COGEMP	0.763	0.761	0.582	0.894
SALE -> INTPER	0.988	0.988	0.916	0.945
SALE -> PERVAL	0.477	0.478	0.258	0.684
SALE -> REL	0.736	0.734	0.522	0.885
SALE -> RS	0.682	0.682	0.450	0.863
TECH -> AFFEMP	0.536	0.537	0.324	0.704
TECH -> COGEMP	0.670	0.670	0.461	0.815
TECH -> INTPER	0.841	0.840	0.687	0.954
TECH -> PERVAL	0.505	0.504	0.285	0.708
TECH -> REL	0.622	0.620	0.379	0.800
TECH -> RS	0.601	0.599	0.343	0.786
TECH -> SALE	0.941	0.940	0.879	0.992

As none of the confidence intervals contains the value 1.0, it is concluded that the constructs in the model are distinct, and the discriminant validity is established.

5.3. Structural Model

5.3.1. Multicollinearity assessment

In multivariate regression analysis, the ideal situation is to have a number of independent variables highly correlated with the dependent variable, but with little correlation among themselves. To detect multicollinearity, the test for variance inflation factor (VIF) in SmartPLS was used. The resulting table lists the VIF values of all combinations of endogenous constructs (Relationship Strength and Reliance) represented by the columns and corresponding exogenous constructs represented by the rows. Large VIF values indicate a high degree of collinearity or multicollinearity among the independent variables. The cutoff threshold is recommended as $VIF < 5.0$ (Hair et al., 2017). However, there are less conservative approaches in the literature that set the limit as $VIF < 10.0$. (Hair et al, 2014) The run for inner VIF values for the model yielded the results given in Table 17.

Table 17. Inner VIF Values

CONSTRUCT	RELATIONSHIP STRENGTH	RELIANCE
AFFECTIVE_EMPATHY	x	2.043
COGNITIVE_EMPATHY	x	2.585
INTPERSONAL_SKILLS	x	4.153
SALESMANSHIP_SKILLS	x	6.221
TECHNICAL_SKILLS	x	3.385
PERCEIVED VALUE	1.381	x
RELIANCE	1.381	x

Based on the results, the inner VIF values for all the constructs for the structural model are less than 5.0, except the one between salesmanship skills and reliance ($VIF=6.221$) which is slightly higher than the conservative threshold of 5.0. In this situation, one option would be to remove one of the corresponding indicators of salesmanship skills. However, this would require that the remaining indicators still capture the construct's content from a theoretical

perspective, which was not desirable. As the literature also mentions VIF <10.0 as a less conservative but acceptable threshold (Hair et al., 2014), it was decided not to remove any of the indicators by considering inflation is only observed between reliance and salesmanship skills and is not even close to 10.0. Hence, it was concluded that there's no multicollinearity issue between the variables.

5.3.2. Significance of path coefficients

To estimate the structural model path coefficients that represent the hypothesized relationships among the construct, PLS-SEM algorithm with bootstrapping procedure (subsamples=1,500, p=0.05) is run. Path coefficient estimates and their significance determine if the conceptual model/theoretical hypotheses are empirically verified. Furthermore, the relative magnitudes of the significant path coefficients give an idea about the comparative importance of the exogenous latent variables in predicting an endogenous latent variable (Hair et al., 2017). The results of the bootstrapping are given in Table 18. The p-values that are less than 0.05 indicating the statistical significance of the path coefficients were printed in bold.

Table 18. Significance of Path Coefficients

	Path Coeff. Original Sample (O)	Path Coeff.(Bothstrapping) Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	P Values
AFFEMP -> REL	0.006	0.004	0.087	0.949 (ns)
COGEMP -> REL	0.568	0.558	0.108	0.000
INTPER -> REL	-0.135	-0.114	0.140	0.332 (ns)
SALE -> REL	0.376	0.367	0.178	0.035
TECH -> REL	0.007	0.010	0.133	0.961 (ns)
PERVAL -> RS	0.347	0.354	0.089	0.000
REL -> RS	0.551	0.546	0.100	0.000

Furthermore, by using the SmartPLS' feature of "highlight paths", it is possible to display the significant paths and related coefficients visually (See Fig 6).

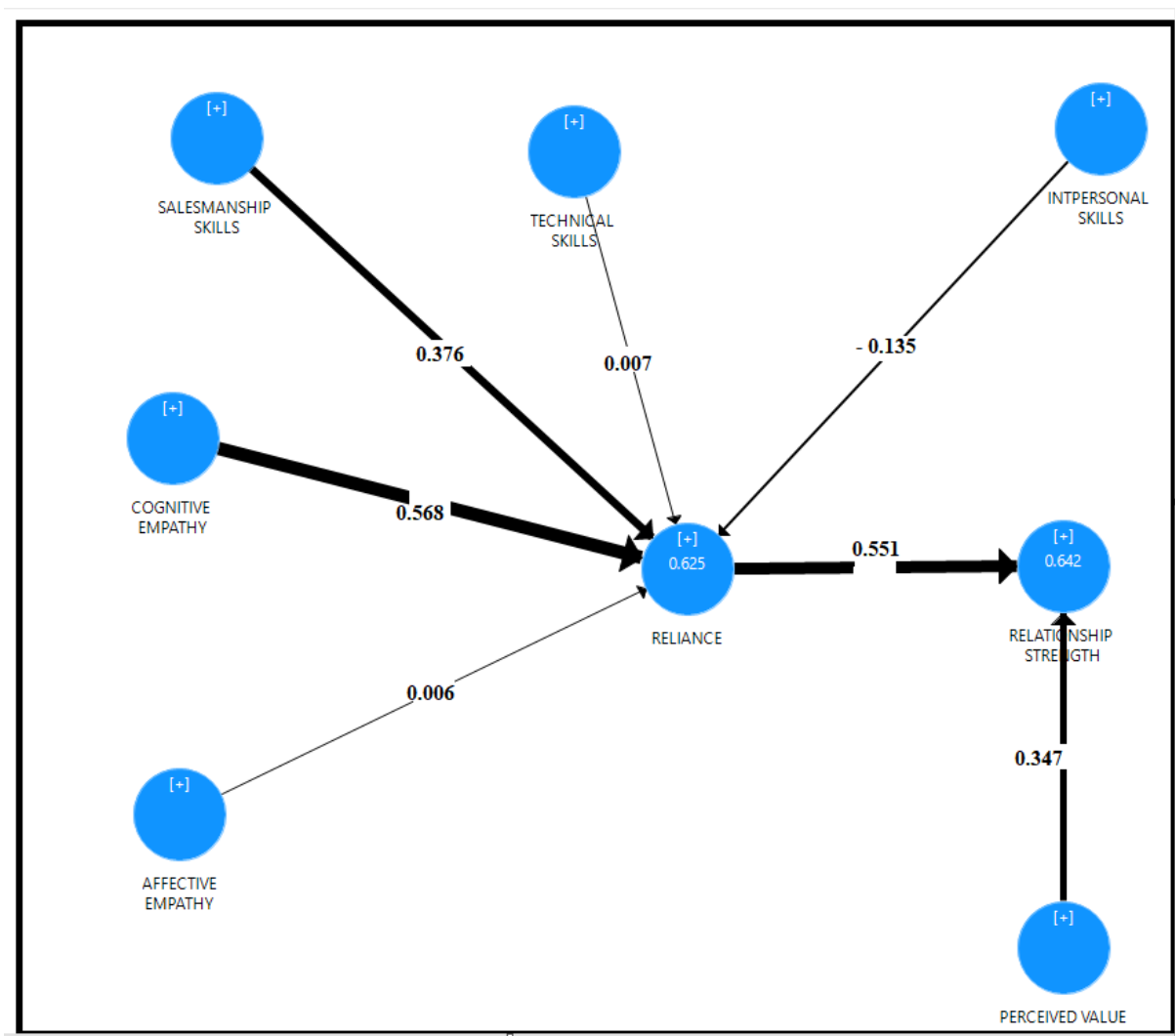


Figure 6. Bootstrapping Results in Smart PLS

5.3.3.R Squared

R square (R^2) is the square of the correlation coefficient also named as the coefficient of determination which indicates the percentage of total of the dependent variables (Relationship Strength and Reliance) explained by the regression model. As a rule of thumb, Henseler (2009) proposed R^2 with 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 as substantial, moderate, and weak respectively. The R^2 values out of the SmartPLS analysis are tabulated in Table 19.

Table 19. R Square and R Square Adjusted

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
REL	0.608	0.589
RS	0.624	0.617

The results reveal that the model estimates the endogenous constructs REL and RS moderately.

5.3.4. Effect Size: f^2

When a specified exogenous latent variable is removed from model, the change in the R^2 of the model can be used to check whether the removed variable has a significant impact on the endogenous latent variables. In another words, f^2 gives an indication of the contribution of an exogenous variable to an endogenous latent variable. This measure is called f^2 effect size. Effect size values that are less than 0.02 point out that there is no effect. Values between 0.02 and 0.15 indicate small effect, 0.15 to 0.35 medium effect and higher values than 0.35 refers to large effect (Hair et al., 2017). According to the results, affective empathy on reliance has no effect, while cognitive empathy has medium effect. Other exogenous variables (salesmanship, interpersonal skills and technical skills) have small effect on reliance. The largest effect is observed on the effect of reliance on relationship strength (see Table 20).

Table 20. Effect Size

		Endogenous Variables		
Exogenous Variables		REL	RS	Effect
	AFFEMP	0		no effect
	COGEMP	0.319		medium
	SALE	0.058		small
	TECH	0		small
	INTPER	0.011		small
	PERVAL		0.231	medium
	REL		0.584	large

5.3.5. Blindfolding and Predictive Relevance Q^2

Blindfolding is an iterative procedure in which every data point is systematically omitted from the data matrix and reduced datasets are used to predict the omitted data points, while keeping the number of observations the same as in the original data set. The process of omission, model estimation and predictions are repeated several rounds so that, in the end, every data point has been omitted and predicted. Comparison of the original values with the predictions, the prediction error of the path model for the target construct is obtained. This prediction error is used for the computation of the Q^2 value (Stone-Geisser's Q^2) for assessing predictive relevance. If the Q^2 value is above zero, the model has predictive relevance for a selected reflective endogenous construct. This means that, if a Smart PLS path model exhibits predictive relevance, the model is capable to predict the data that were not used in the model (Hair et al., 2017).

The results of the blindfolding algorithm for the model show that the Q^2 values for the two endogenous variables (reliance and relationship strength) are larger than zero. Thus, the model's predictive relevance is confirmed (See Table 21).

Table 21. Model's predictive relevance

	SSO	SSE	Q ² (=1-SSE/SSO)
AFFEMP	654	654	
COGEMP	654	654	
INTPER	545	545	
SALE	545	545	
TECH	545	545	
PERVAL	327	327	
REL	436	238	0.454
RS	436	282	0.354

SSO Sum of squared observations
SSE Sum of squared error

5.3.6. Model fit assessment

The stand-alone model proposed estimates the endogenous constructs REL($R^2=0.608$) and RS ($R^2=0.624$) moderately. Furthermore, the model fit assessment done by checking SRMR value yielded a result ($SRMR=0.083 < 0.09$) which is in agreement with the thresholds suggested by Hair et al.(2017) and Hu and Bentler (1999) to conclude that the model fit is acceptable

5.3.7. Multi group analysis

Smart PLS was run separately to see the path coefficients for family companies($N=68$) and for corporate companies ($N=41$) differ in the same model. Path coefficients for these two runs were tabulated in Table 22. The model predicts the endogenous variables moderately for both groups.

Table 22. Path coefficients and R^2 values for family and corporate companies

	Path Coeff. FAMILY	Path Coeff. CORP.
AFFEMP -> REL	-0.065 (n.s.)	0.208 (n.s.)
COGEMP -> REL	0.451	0.555
INTPER -> REL	-0.042 (n.s.)	-0.339 (n.s.)
SALE -> REL	0.499	0.409
TECH -> REL	-0.047 (n.s.)	0.051 (n.s.)
PERVAL -> RS	0.249	0.413
REL -> RS	0.622	0.549
R Squared		R Squared
REL	0.697	0.596
RS	0.640	0.646

To check if there is any difference between the path coefficients between corporate firms and family firms, multi-group analysis feature of SmartPLS was used (complete bootstrapping). The analysis takes the difference of the path coefficients for both groups and examines if the difference is statistically significant. The results presented in Table 23 reveal that there's no significant difference between the path coefficients for the 2 groups (corporate and family companies).

Table 23. Results of multi-group analysis

	Path Coefficients-diff (Firm Type(1.0=CORP) - Firm Type (2.0_FAMILY))	t-Value (Firm Type (1.0=CORP) vs Firm Type(2.0=FAMILY))	New p-Value (Firm Type (1.0=CORP) vs Firm Type(2.0=FAMILY))
AFFEMP -> REL	0.273	1.559	0.122
COGEMP -> REL	0.104	0.480	0.632
INTPER -> REL	-0.297	1.085	0.280
PERVAL -> RS	0.164	0.988	0.325
REL -> RS	-0.073	0.418	0.677
SALE -> REL	-0.089	0.261	0.795
TECH -> REL	0.098	0.351	0.727
Firm Type	1=CORPORATE (N= 41)		
Firm Type	2 =FAMILY (N=68)		

6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

As the study is structured as a mixed model approach with qualitative and quantitative parts, the results are discussed based mainly on the quantitative study, while the findings of the qualitative study were merged and jointly discussed whenever appropriate. Complementary findings with respect to the research questions are examined to check if the findings of the qualitative and quantitative findings converge. On the other hand, the results of the quantitative part are scrutinized in two ways. First, the results of the individual hypotheses amongst the proposed antecedents are interpreted. Second, the overall model proposed to explore the antecedents of relationship strength is assessed.

Qualitative results indicate that the industrial buyers' primary expectation from a supplier is to establish a longer term and sustainable partnership, attributing to the concepts like trust, honesty, mutual understanding, win-win perception that are majorly associated with subjective, "difficult to quantify" considerations. This observation is confirmed with the supported hypothesis H7 ($H7: \beta_7=0.551, t=5.526, p=0.000$) stating that reliance affects relationship strength positively in business markets. This result is expected and of confirmatory of similar works by different authors (e.g., (Levin and Johnston, 1997; Mouzas et al., 2007) as well as the theory of commitment and trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Second, the qualitative part of the study has provided apparent clues that buyers expect to get the best price and quality in return for what they pay to the suppliers. In fact, with this expectation the buyers make referral to the concept of perceived value. In another words, industrial buyers are concerned with the economy of their purchases in return for acceptable quality and usage. This observation is also confirmed with the supported hypothesis H6 ($H6: \beta_6=0.347, t=3.873, P=0.000$). This result is expected and re-confirmatory of the results of the similar works (Ganesan, 1994; Zhizhong et al., 2013; Barry et al., 2008) and in line with the

conceptualization of perceived value based on “benefits and sacrifices (Monroe, 1991; Grewal et al., 1998; Ulaga and Chacour, 2001).

It should be noted that both reliance and perceived value should co-exist to ensure a strong relationship. This process of ensuring might take some time and is more relevant for the establishment of reliance. A certain timespan is needed for the partners to assess their capabilities, to understand the mutual needs and expectations and, more importantly, to observe the sellers' good level of repeated performance continuously. On the opposite end, it is also difficult to terminate a reliant relationship immediately. Once the business partners have developed a long term relationship supported by reliance, the buyers usually avoid changing their suppliers mainly due to the cost of switching and/or due to the burden brought by alternative seeking (Ganesan et al., 2010). On the other hand, assessment of value characterized mainly by the price and quality can be implemented relatively quickly. A buyer can always ask for a price quotation for a certain product to check the relevant cost, or ask for a trial order for testing to the quality and workability of a product. From this perspective, reliance can be termed as the “history dependent” component of relationship and perceived value can be considered as the “instantaneous component”. This postulate is supported by the schema of relationship classification (see Fig 2) in which both belief and action part are needed to attain a strong (bilateral) relationship (Donaldson and O'Toole, 2000).

Examination of the path coefficients linking the perceived value and reliance to relationship strength indicate that reliance is a more important antecedent than perceived value ($\beta_7=0.568$) > $\beta_6=0.376$). This result is supported with the findings of the qualitative study, in which most interviewees prioritized the importance of longer term and sustainable relationship, trust, and mutuality compared to the price and the quality perception. This finding cannot be compared with any other findings in literature as it had not been tested before. Once an industrial buyer approves a product of a raw material supplier, they would

like to continue to keep on buying the same product, not only once, but consistently in every ordering period. Risk avoidance of these buyer to change a supplier might be pushing them to be extremely conservative because they know that if they work with a “reliant” supplier, they will not be disappointed and supported in case a technical, quality or a commercial problem arise. At least, this is the case for the Turkish plastics industry, which is quite expectant for the reliability and the integrity of a supplier.

In the model tested, it was asserted that reliance can be formed by combining empathy and salesperson skills. The findings regarding the effect of empathy on reliance revealed that only cognitive empathy has a significant effect on reliance ($H1:\beta_1=0.568$, $t=5.239$, $p=0.000$). As anticipated, cognitive empathy emerges as a rational antecedent of reliance in a B2B relationship re-confirming the importance of “*perspective taking*” in the sales business. On the other hand, affective empathy does not have any significant impact on reliance ($H2:\beta_2=0.006$, $t=0.064$, $p=0.949$). This finding also supports and confirms the findings of the previous similar works of Limbu et al. (2016) and Duleep et al.(2018) in which affective empathy directly impacts customer orientated behavior and communication ability, but not the relational outcomes. Furthermore, diverging results of cognitive and affective empathy show the importance of studying the construct in the view of multidimensional conceptualization. However, the role of affective empathy in any commercial relationship should not be totally disregarded. Although it does not emerge as a direct antecedent of reliance, it might act as a catalyst for an intimate communication leading to relational exchange orientation as anticipated by De Ruyter and Wetzel (2000). Once a salesperson develops a close relationship via affective empathy with the person in charge of decision making, a personal relationship develops and the customer will be more inclined to have an open and direct communication that eases the communication process (Main et al., 2017).

These findings are also in line with the comment of one of the interviewees (M2) during qualitative interviews attributing to the facilitating effect of being friendly and honest.

The study also tested the effects of the individual dimensions of the multidimensional construct salesperson *skills* on reliance with three hypotheses (H3, H4, H5). The tests of the hypotheses revealed that the interpersonal skills (H3) and technical skills (H5) do not have any significant effect on reliance (H3: $\beta_3 = -0.135$, $t = 0.970$, $p = 0.332$; H5: $\beta_5 = 0.007$, $t = 0.049$, $p = 0.961$), while salesmanship skills has significant and positive impact on reliance (H4: $\beta_4 = 0.376$, $t = 2.113$, $p = 0.035$). These findings indicate that industrial buyers do not develop reliance neither based on positive personality defined under interpersonal skills, nor on technical skills of the salesperson, but rather on salesmanship skills of the salesperson. In another words, what the customers primarily expect from a salesperson is him/her to act professionally and do their job framed within the business customs via contracts, agreements, commitments and promises. This finding is also in agreement with the conceptualization of reliance of Mouzas et al. (2007) reflecting the “positive expectations” and “enforceability” characteristic of reliance.

Although interpersonal and technical skills are important for the salesperson to gain self-confidence and to earn the respect of the customer as anticipated by Ben Amor (2019), this study did not find any supporting evidence that superior technical and interpersonal skills lead to a stronger relationship with the buyers. The findings also do not support the results presented by Lee and Daves (2005) and, Abosag and Naude (2014) in Chinese cultural context to establish Guanxi, in which bond building and socializing with the customers are important. This means that the relationship structures and bond building might change depending on the cultural environment of the business setting.

Similar to the relationship of affective empathy and reliance, interpersonal skills are also likely to facilitate the communication process in the dyad, but not prerequisite for

reliance. However, exaggerated obtrusive attempts in the name of facilitating communication and getting credit should be avoided by the salespeople as it might result in adverse effects and might be found repulsive. One of the qualitative interviewees' comments (M2) of "*I do not like too talkative salespersons*" supports this view. Therefore, the salespeople should know the boundaries and acts cautiously to avoid these situations.

Rejection of the hypothesis regarding the impact of technical skills on reliance (H5) might also be explained in regard to sample population of this study that is chosen amongst the reputable industry players mainly dealing with the purchase of commodity products in the manufacturing activities. They are already self-competent in handling technical matters without inquiring too much about technical support, specifically from the salesperson. They are also aware that if a technical issue arises with the suppliers' product, they know that it is not the salesperson, but the technical unit of the supplier will be there to help. Salesperson acts only as a messenger to report the details of the technical problem to the technical support unit of the supplier company. The respondents' replies might have been different if the sample population had been chosen from an industry segment that deals with sophisticated technical specialties that call for higher technical collaboration. Overall, the findings of the study regarding the technical skills are in line with some studies (e.g., Basir et al, 2010.; Plouffe et al., 2009), but in partial conflict with some other studies (e.g., Verbeke et al., 2011; Ohiomah et al., 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the inconsistencies by carrying out further studies on the effect of technical skills in different business setting and different market segments to make more generalized conclusions.

Another interesting finding is to reveal that there is no significant difference between family owned and corporate companies in the paths to establish reliance and relationship strength. The initial intuition was to find that family companies attach more importance to affective aspects compared to corporate governed companies. The thought behind this

anticipation is that, in family companies, they are usually the owners who make the final purchase decisions and might credit a likeable salesperson by favoring his/her company. This view is not supported. Therefore, it is concluded that whether a company is run by a “boss” or “white collar employees”, the formation of reliance and relationship strength is almost identical.

The path coefficients of the hypotheses in the model were summarized in Table 24 below.

Table 24. Hypotheses Results

HYPOTHESIS	PATH COEFFICIENT	SUPPORTED OR NOT	p VALUES
H1: COGEMP=> REL	0.551	SUPPORTED	0.000
H2: AFFEMP=>REL	ns	NOT SUPPORTED	0.949
H3: INTPER=>REL	ns	NOT SUPPORTED	0.332
H4: SALE=>REL	0.347	SUPPORTED	0.035
H5: TECH=>REL	ns	NOT SUPPORTED	0.961
H6: PERVAL=>RS	0.376	SUPPORTED	0.000
H7: REL=>RS	0.568	SUPPORTED	0.000

7. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1. Conclusions

First, the study provides a holistic framework that embodies both economic and affective drivers for relationship strength. Antecedents of relationship strength are determined as reliance and perceived value in B2B markets.

Second, out of the two antecedents proposed, reliance is a more important construct than perceived value in industrial market and this conclusion is supported by both qualitative and quantitative parts of the study. Reliance as the rational form of trust is confirmed to act as a rather new antecedent to explain relationship strength in business markets.

Third, the other antecedent of relationship strength perceived value that is identified mainly by price, quality, and cost is confirmed to play a key role in achieving relationship strength.

Fourth, when considered as a multidimensional construct, only cognitive dimension of empathy affects the formation of intercompany reliance. Affective dimensions of empathy have no influence in establishing reliance in business markets.

Fifth, only salesmanship skills of the salesperson is important to attain a reliant relationship, while reliance is not influenced by interpersonal and technical skills.

Finally, there is no difference between family owned and corporate companies in the ways that reliance and relationship strength are formed.

These conclusions provide both academic and managerial implications.

The first academic implication of this study is that, it suggests a simple but elegant framework to explain the formation of relationship strength in industrial markets. Extant studies so far have been focusing on complex models made up of too many constructs with mediating and moderating variables. This study contributes to the relationship and B2B

marketing literature by proposing one economic (perceived value) and one non-economic (social) antecedent in a single parsimonious model.

Second, the importance of perceived value in the industrial markets is re-confirmed. The academicians when studying interorganizational relationships should always consider the importance of value

Third, the study ascribes an important role to the new construct of reliance by providing evidence that reliance in B2B markets is attained in the presence of only cognitive components (i.e. cognitive empathy and salesmanship skills) addressing the importance of professional attitudes towards building sustainable relationships.

Fourth, the study is a unique one to introduce the concept of empathy in B2B settings from a multidimensional perspective. Empathy as an important psychological construct did not find too much place in marketing literature. Furthermore, empathy is an inseparable driver of any healthy relationship, and its importance in relationship marketing has been underutilized, so it is believed that there's a gap. This study is believed to fill this gap to a certain extent. It is also expected that this study to be considered as a small but courageous step for further studies embodying empathy in business relations. For future studies the concept of empathy can be extended from interpersonal level to interorganizational ground. It will be interesting to check the notion "inter-company empathy" exists and can be conceptualized. It is believed that any relationship, no matter whether interpersonal or interorganizational, can be considered without mutual understanding, perspective taking and sensing the others' state of mind. Empathy should not be considered as an "overtly feminine" concept as Rene Schuster, former CEO of Telefonica Germany, stated: "Empathy is not a soft nurturing value but a hard commercial tool that every business needs as part of their DNA" (Parmar, 2015).

Finally, the study further reveals that the dynamics of building strong relationships in business market do not differ between family and corporate companies. This finding gives new insights and inspirations for scholars studying marketing as well as organizational behavior.

Managerial implications of the study are outlined as follows:

The first managerial implication of this study is that, it underlines the ultimate desire of B2B customers towards building long-lasting strong relationship with the suppliers.. To achieve this, perceived value of the offerings should be augmented and a rational form of trust (reliance) should be established in CRM activities. These activities should be designed in such a way that the customers will acknowledge “this is my supplier, because I can rely on them”. This is true for existing customers and as well as for the prospects.

Second, in the endeavors of pursuing a strong relationship, marketing and sales managers should assign more priority in establishing a reliant relationship than just focusing on economic benefits. In another words, relatively more investment should be allocated in the establishment of reliance than just selling with price or quality argument. Here, it is not meant to underestimate the importance of perceived value in meeting the customer expectations, but is simply suggested that focusing only on value (price and quality) does not always necessarily lead to a fruitful relationship on the long run.

Third, to nourish reliance, managers and marketing practitioners hire and train their salespeople selectively. The primary selection criterion of hiring a new salesperson should be the possession of salesmanship skills. The training programs for the existing salesforce should be designed to enhance their professional sales skills whenever needed. Recruiting salespeople only with the criteria of superior technical knowledge or superior interpersonal skills might be deceptive and disappointing unless he/she poses salesmanship skills. Of

course, ideally, the best would be to hire salespeople who are possessing all the three mentioned skills together.

Fourth, the budget for investing in socialization with the customers should be spent with care. Here, it is not suggested that the affections and social components do not matter in a relationship. On the contrary, socializing with the customers, developing affective bonds, and investing in salespersons' empathetic and interpersonal skills are certainly important to achieve an open, transparent, gratifying, and easier communication. Furthermore, affective factors augment the company's reputation and brand image. However, if the aim is to develop and maintain a strong relationship with the customers, relationship marketing resources should be allocated more in favor of enhancing salesmanship skills and cognitive empathizing abilities of the salesforce. This consideration should also be included in the criteria (e.g. aptitude test) of the recruitment process of new salespeople of the firms.

Fifth, as there is no difference between corporate and family companies with respect to reliance and relationship strength, managers are not required to design and implement different account plans for these differently structured companies. When managing relationships with a portfolio of both family and corporate firms, there is no need to design different relationship marketing strategies to establish reliant and strong relationships.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

Although all the stages of this dissertation were executed with utmost care, it has several limitations. The first limitation was related to the research context which is representative only for a specific segment (plastics industry) of B2B markets in Turkey. B2B is a very large area that contains too many segments. As future studies suggest, these segments can also be examined from the perspective of buyers too, as the evaluation of a strong relationship is a bilateral measure of the state that concerns both buyers and sellers.

Second, this study was done in a Turkish setting in a specific B2B industry. It is highly likely that the cultural context is an important factor in any business transactions. It is not doubted that empathy is an important factor in any given relationships in any cultures. However, it might have relatively more importance in some cultures, but less importance in some others. Therefore, researchers are invited to examine the topic in different cultural contexts.

Third, the data used in this study were collected from a market that mostly involves buying and selling of commodities with too many numbers of suppliers. The fundamentals might be different in segments of specialties or semi-specialties where the products should come with a technical service. The same limitation can be true in a market where the products are offered by only a very few producers as in the case of monopoly. Therefore, further studies might require enlarging the scope of the study to those segments to revalidate the results.

Fourth, the similarities and interrelatedness of some of the constructs in affective dimensions of the model might be a concern. For example, some of the items measuring interpersonal skills and affective empathy are very similar. Although the measurement model was validated with relevant tests, the data collection was made from the same respondents. This might be a source of a usually encountered problem in behavioral research called of

common method biases that can be arising from having a common measurement items and instruments, common measurement context and, common characteristics (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In this study, this problem was tried to be minimized by asking the respondents to rate the salespeople and selling companies, not themselves. Also, the disparity of the findings supports the thought that concern of common method variance is not a big issue.

Fifth, in this study it was anticipated that development and establishment of reliance in business relationships requires some time. The question “How long will it take to establish reliance” remains unanswered. Therefore, it is recommended for future studies to explore the factors affecting the time for establishing reliance. The antecedents to recommend are the quality of business meetings, efficiency of discussions, number and the quality of the visits by the salespersons, brand perception of the buyers etc.

Lastly, this study investigated the antecedents of the relationship strength from the buyers’ point of view. As buying and selling activity is a bilateral exchange, it would be worthwhile to carry out and see the result of the same study from the suppliers’ point of view, so that a broader understanding of the relationship strength can be captured.

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APPENDIX I

Scale Items

COGNITIVE EMPATHY Duleep et al. (2019)	The salesperson understands my needs from my perspective.
	The salesperson asks questions to understand my needs and concerns.
	The salesperson refers to what is most important to me.
	The salesperson recognizes me and my role in this organization.
	The salesperson fully comprehends my concerns
AFFECTIVE EMPATHY Duleep et al. (2019)	The salesperson can identify how things look from my perspective
	The salesperson has greater affection toward me.
	The salesperson usually senses what I am feeling.
	When I am hurt or upset, the salesperson can recognize my feelings exactly, without becoming upset him/herself.
	The salesperson can predict how I will feel
	The salesperson can tell if I am masking my true emotions
RELIANCE Zhizhong et al. (2013)	The salesperson can recognize my emotions.
	We are confident with this supplier's ability to fulfill our agreements.
	We are confident that this supplier is competent at what they are doing.
	The performance of this supplier can always meet our expectations.
RELATIONSHIP STRENGTH Barry et al.(2008)	We have faith in the supplier's ability to fulfill their promises.
	It is likely that we will be doing business with this supplier over the next few years
	We are continually on the lookout for another supplier to replace this supplier (reverse)
	We find it necessary to be cautious with this supplier (reverse)
	Our relationship with this supplier deserves our maximum effort to maintain
CUSTOMER PRECEIVED VALUE Eggert and Ulaga (2002)	Make me feel important and appreciated
	Compared to the price we pay, we get reasonable quality
	Compared to the quality we get, we pay reasonable price
SELLING SKILLS Rentz et al. (2002)	The purchasing relationship delivers us superior net value
INTERPERSONAL SKILLS	
	Ability to express yourself nonverbally
	Ability in general speaking skills
	Awareness and understanding of the nonverbal communication of others
SALESMANSHIP SKILLS	Ability to control and regulate nonverbal displays of emotion
	Ability to manipulate others to control the situation
	Ability to prospect for customers
	Ability to qualify prospects.
	Ability to close the sale
	Ability to present the sales message
TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE	Ability to service the account
	Knowledge of customers' markets and products
	Knowledge of your own company's procedures
	Knowledge of competitors' products, services, and sales policies
	Knowledge of product line, including product features and benefits
	Knowledge of customers' operations (e.g., store and shelf layout, employee training, etc.)

APPENDIX II

Questionnaire in Turkish

ANKET

Yeditepe Üniversitesi İİBF İşletme Bölümü Doktora Öğrencisi Kemal Kiş tarafından yürütülen bu akademik çalışma bilimsel amaçlı olup araştırmada yer alan soruları eksiksiz olarak cevaplamanızı rica eder, katkılarınızdan dolayı teşekkür ederiz.

Çalışmaya katılmanız tamamen isteğe bağlıdır. Sizden ücret talep etmiyoruz ve size herhangi bir ödeme yapmayacağız. Yapmak istediğimiz araştırmanın size herhangi bir risk getirmesi beklenmemektedir. Bize vereceğiniz cevaplar sadece ilgili bilimsel araştırma dahilinde kullanılacak ve kimliğiniz kesinlikle gizli tutulacaktır. Cevaplarınızın gizli tutulacağına dair bize olan güveninizi sağlamak için sizden isminizi veya kimliğinizi açığa çıkartacak herhangi bir işareti anket formu üzerine yazmamanızı önemle hatırlatırız.

Lütfen her bir ifadeyi dikkatlice okuyunuz ve Ürün/Hizmet Satın aldığınız ya da satın almanız muhtemel herhangi bir TEDARİKÇİYİ düşünerek aşağıdaki ifadelere ne derece katıldığınıza ilişkin görüşünüzü “Kesinlikle katılıyorum” dan “Kesinlikle katılmıyorum” doğru uzanan ölçek üzerinde belirtiniz.

1. Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum
2. Katılmıyorum
3. Ne katılmıyorum, ne katılıyorum
4. Katılıyorum
5. Kesinlikle katılıyorum

		KESİNLİKLE KATILMIYORUM	KATILMIYORUM	NE KATILMIYORUM NE KATILMIYORUM	KATILMIYORUM	KESİNLİKLE KATILMIYORUM
ITEM						
COGEMP1	Bu satış temsilcisi ihtiyaçlarımı beklentilerimi benim bakış açımdan kavrar.					
COGEMP2	Bu satış temsilcisi ihtiyaçlarımı beklentilerimi ve kaygılarımı anlamak için sorular sorar					
COGEMP3	Bu satış temsilcisi benim için en önemli olan noktalara değinir					
COGEMP4	Bu satış temsilcisi benim ve bu organizasyondaki rolümün farkındadır					
COGEMP5	Bu satış temsilcisi kaygılarımı bütün yönleriyle kavrar					
COGEMP6	Bu satış temsilcisi durumun benim bakış tarafımdan nasıl görüldüğünü kavrar					
AFEMP1	Bu satış temsilcisi bana çok yakınlık gösterir					
AFEMP2	Bu satış temsilcisi çoğunlukla nasıl hissettiğimi sezinler					
AFEMP3	Bu satış temsilcisi keyifsiz ya da moralim bozuk olduğunda, kendi moralini bozmadan duygularımı tam olarak anlayabilir					
AFEMP4	Bu satış temsilcisi nasıl hissedeceğimi tahmin edebilir					
AFEMP5	Bu satış temsilcisi gerçek duygularımı gizlemeye çalıştığımı anlayabilir					
AFEMP6	Bu satış temsilcisi hissettiklerimi anlayabilir					
REL1	Bu tedarikçinin anlaşma şartlarını yerine getireceğinden eminiz					
REL2	Bu tedarikçinin kendi alanında uzman olduğundan eminiz					
REL3	Bu tedarikçinin performansı beklentilerimizi her zaman karşılar.					
REL4	Bu tedarikçimizin verdiği sözleri tutacağına güvenimiz tamdır.					
RS1	Önümüzdeki senelerde bu tedarikçi ile çalışmaya devam etme olasılığımız yüksektir					
RS2	Bu tedarikçi yerine başka bir tedarikçi arayışı içindeyiz					
RS3	Bu tedarikçi ile temkinli olmamız gerektiğini düşünüyoruz					
RS4	Tedarikçimizle olan ilişkimizi sürdürürebilmek çaba göstermeye değer.					
RS5	u tedarikçiden diğer alternatiflerine kıyasla daha fazla ürün/hizmet satın almaktayız					
PERVAL1	Ödediğimiz fiyata karşılık kabul edilebilir bir kalite elde etmekteiz					
PERVAL2	Aldığımız kaliteye göre ödediğimiz fiyat makuldür					
PERVAL3	Bu tedarikçimizle olan alışveriş ilişkimiz bize değer katmaktadır					

Lütfen YUKARIDAKİ TEDARİKÇİNİN SATIŞ TEMSİLCİSİNİ düşünerek aşağıdaki nitelikleri "Çok İyi" den "Çok Kötü"ye uzanan ölçek üzerinde belirtiniz

1. Çok Kötü
2. Kötü
3. Orta
4. İyi
5. Çok İyi

		ÇOK KÖTÜ	KÖTÜ	ORTA	İYİ	ÇOK İYİ
INTPERSKILL1	Kendini sözsüz ifade edebilme becerisi					
INTPERSKILL2	Genel konuşma becerisi					
INTPERSKILL3	Diğer kişilerin sözsüz iletişimlerini fark etme ve anlayabilme becerisi					
INTPERSKILL4	Duygularının sözsüz olarak kontrol etme ve düzenleme becerisi					
INTPERSKILL5	Durumu kontrol edebilmek için başkalarını yönlendirme becerisi					
SALESKILL1	Müşteriler bulmak için araştırma yapma becerisi					
SALESKILL2	Müşterileri sınıflama becerisi					
SALESKILL3	Satış sonuçlandırma becerisi					
SALESKILL4	Satış mesajını verebilme becerisi					
SALESKILL5	Müşteriye hizmet edebilme becerisi					
TECHSKILL1	Pazar ve müşteri bilgisi					
TECHSKILL2	Şirketimizin işleyişini bilme					
TECHSKILL3	Rakiplerin ürün, hizmet ve satış politikalarını bilme					
TECHSKILL4	Ürün yelpazesi, özellikleri ve faydalarını bilme					
TECHSKILL5	Müşteri iç operasyonel süreçler hakkında bilgi sahibi olma (üretim, hammadde vs)					

Firmanızın ağırlıklı faaliyet şeklini aşağıdakilerden hangisi en doğru tanımlar?

1. Kurumsal
2. Aile firması

Firmanızın ağırlıklı faaliyet şeklini aşağıdakilerden hangisi en doğru tanımlar?

1. Üretici
2. Bayi - İthalatçı -Alım/Satım
3. Acente - Temsilci

Firmadaki Göreviniz/Pozisyonunuz

1. Firma Sahibi /Ortak
2. Satınalma Yöneticisi/Sorumlusu
3. Üretim Yöneticisi/Sorumlusu
4. Satış/ Pazarlama
5. Finans
6. ARGE
7. Teknik
8. Kalite
9. Diğer

Yaşınız :

Eğitim Durumunuz

1. Lise
2. Yüksekokul / Üniversite
3. Yüksek Lisans
4. Doktora

Cinsiyetiniz

1. Erkek
2. Kadın