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**Leveraging the Service Marketing Mix to Reduce Price Sensitivity
in Product-Centric B2B Firms across Europe**

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Mestrado em Gestão

Dissertação orientada pelo Professor Doutor Jorge Abrantes

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Leveraging the Service Marketing Mix to Reduce Price Sensitivity in Product-Centric
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Dedication

To my beloved children, I dedicate this master's dissertation as a testament to the power of lifelong learning and the pursuit of knowledge. May my journey inspire you to continue expanding your horizons throughout your lives further and better than me.

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This dissertation is dedicated to all of you, who have been the pillars of my life, and without whom, this accomplishment would not have been possible.



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Resumo

Esta dissertação de mestrado explora a utilização da lógica do marketing de serviços para reduzir a sensibilidade ao preço entre as Pequenas e Médias Empresas (PMEs) multiculturais na Europa, da indústria de construção pré-fabricada, tanto em clientes como em fornecedores. A dissertação apresenta um quadro conceptual para integrar o marketing de serviços no marketing *mix* das organizações durante as crises económicas, levando a uma melhor perceção de valor do cliente e a uma redução da sensibilidade ao preço. A pesquisa visa investigar como as organizações centradas no produto podem aproveitar a análise da jornada do cliente para melhorar a criação de valor na sociedade hiper-conectada e horizontalmente estruturada de hoje.

A metodologia utilizada neste estudo envolveu o uso de um questionário para recolher a opinião dos clientes sobre a satisfação e a sensibilidade ao preço na indústria da construção, com um foco específico nos setores de pedra e vidro pré-fabricados dentro da região de comércio de Schengen na Europa. Os resultados fornecem informações sobre como as organizações centradas no produto podem adotar a lógica de serviços e aproveitar as interações dos clientes para analisar melhor a jornada do cliente, gerando mais valor para os clientes e acionistas através de um aumento otimizado dos volumes de negócios e margens de lucro.

Palavras-chave: Marketing B2B; Mix de Marketing de Serviços; Sensibilidade ao Preço; Satisfação do Cliente; PME; Estratégia Intercultural.

Abstract

This master dissertation explores the use of service marketing logic to reduce price sensitivity among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the multicultural European Business-to-Business (B2B) prefabrication construction industry, both as customers and suppliers. This dissertation presents a conceptual framework for integrating service marketing into the marketing mix of organisations during economic downturns, leading to improved customer value perception and reduced-price sensitivity. This research aims to investigate how product-centric organisations can leverage customer journey analysis to enhance value creation in today's hyper-connected and horizontally structured society.

The methodology employed in this study involved the use of a questionnaire to gather customer insights into satisfaction and price sensitivity in the construction industry, with a specific focus on the prefabrication stone and glass sectors within the Schengen trade area in Europe. The results revealed that while enhanced after-sales services significantly improve customer satisfaction, not all assumed relationships (e.g. management background and market orientation) were supported. Notably, higher customer satisfaction was linked with lower price sensitivity, underscoring the value of service-centric strategies for product-oriented B2B firms. These findings suggest that integrating service marketing logic can give product-centric companies a competitive edge in multicultural European markets

Keywords: B2B Marketing; Service Marketing Mix; Price Sensitivity; Customer Satisfaction; SMEs; Cross-Cultural Strategy.

Resumo alargado

A globalização e a crescente integração dos mercados internacionais têm levado as empresas a enfrentar desafios significativos ao entrar e competir em mercados interculturais. Um desses desafios é entender e atender às necessidades e expectativas dos clientes de diferentes culturas, o que pode afetar a *performance* das empresas. Nesse contexto, este estudo pretendeu investigar a relação entre a orientação de marketing, a satisfação do cliente e a sensibilidade ao preço em mercados interculturais e o impacto desses fatores no desempenho das empresas.

Para abordar essas questões, foram formuladas quatro hipóteses de investigação que exploram as relações entre as variáveis supramencionadas. A primeira hipótese investiga se existe uma correlação positiva entre a orientação de mercado de uma empresa, caracterizada pela adoção de uma abordagem orientada para o serviço e o *background* de sua equipa de gestão. A segunda hipótese procura saber se a satisfação do cliente em mercados interculturais está positivamente relacionada com a oferta de suporte local e cultural por parte das empresas. Deve referir-se que, para cultura, foi usado como *proxy* o idioma nas dimensões anteriores e pós-venda. A terceira hipótese propõe avaliar se a satisfação do cliente em mercados interculturais está positivamente relacionada com a adoção de uma abordagem orientada para o serviço. Por último, a quarta hipótese visa perceber se a satisfação do cliente em mercados interculturais está negativamente relacionada com a sensibilidade ao preço dos clientes e potenciais clientes.

A pesquisa foi conduzida utilizando um questionário aplicado às empresas dos setores de pedra e vidro pré-fabricados, tendo-se obtido 126 respostas, sendo apenas consideradas 101 empresas, por as restantes não serem Pequenas e Médias Empresas (PMEs) e não atuarem no espaço económico Schengen (European Commission, 2024), as duas dimensões inerentes ao tipo de empresa que a investigação irá abordar. Os dados recolhidos foram analisados usando métodos estatísticos apropriados, como o teste Qui-quadrado, análise de regressão linear múltipla e análise de correlação de Pearson. Os resultados obtidos foram, então, interpretados e discutidos no contexto da literatura académica existente e das implicações práticas para as empresas que operam em mercados interculturais.

Os resultados da análise mostraram a correlação entre a orientação de mercado de uma empresa e o seu histórico de gestão. Além disso, a oferta de suporte local e cultural, bem como a adoção de uma abordagem orientada para o serviço, estão positivamente relacionadas com a satisfação do cliente em mercados interculturais. Esta relação sugere que as empresas devem concentrar-se em adotar uma abordagem orientada para o serviço, bem como fornecer suporte local e cultural adequado para satisfazer os seus clientes e melhorar o seu desempenho em mercados interculturais. Além disso, também a relação entre a satisfação do cliente e a sensibilidade ao preço foi estatisticamente significativa. As empresas devem continuar a monitorizar a satisfação do cliente e implementar estratégias para melhorá-la, uma vez que isso pode levar à fidelidade e à retenção dos clientes, bem como reduzir a possibilidade de clientes insatisfeitos mudarem para concorrentes com preços inferiores.

A pesquisa também ressalta a importância de adaptar estratégias de marketing e comunicação às preferências e expectativas culturais dos clientes, já que a satisfação do cliente é fundamental para o sucesso das empresas em mercados interculturais. A capacidade de uma empresa entender e se adaptar às diferenças culturais pode ser crucial para criar uma vantagem competitiva e garantir um desempenho financeiro sólido no longo prazo.

Este estudo investigou igualmente a relação entre a orientação de marketing, a satisfação do cliente e a sensibilidade ao preço em mercados interculturais e o impacto desses fatores no desempenho das empresas. Os resultados indicam que a adoção de uma abordagem orientada para o serviço e o fornecimento de suporte linguístico e cultural estão positivamente relacionados à satisfação do cliente em mercados interculturais. Essas descobertas têm implicações práticas para as empresas que buscam melhorar o seu desempenho em mercados interculturais, destacando a importância de adaptar estratégias de marketing e comunicação às preferências e expectativas culturais dos clientes.

A pesquisa contribui igualmente para o campo do marketing industrial intercultural e o desempenho das empresas, fornecendo *insights* valiosos para académicos e profissionais. Os resultados podem ser úteis para os gestores e profissionais de marketing que procuram melhorar a *performance* e satisfação do cliente em mercados interculturais, assim como para os investigadores e académicos que desejam aprofundar o entendimento das relações entre as variáveis estudadas.

Este estudo forneceu uma compreensão abrangente dos fatores que influenciam a satisfação do cliente e a vantagem competitiva em mercados B2B interculturais, baseando-se em fontes acadêmicas chave e expandindo as suas implicações teóricas enquanto encaixa novas tendências do marketing B2C para o B2B. Ao adotar uma abordagem orientada para o serviço, conforme sugerido por Vargo e Lusch (2004), as empresas podem se diferenciar dos concorrentes e fomentar a lealdade do cliente.

Os resultados deste estudo enfatizam a importância de abordar as diferenças culturais e geográficas, como proposto, por exemplo, por Hofstede (2011), para melhorar a satisfação do cliente em mercados B2B multiculturais. Esta pesquisa concorda com a abordagem do marketing mix proposta por Vorhies e Morgan (2005) e a sua ênfase na avaliação comparativa das capacidades de marketing para uma vantagem competitiva sustentável. No entanto, este estudo reconhece que as suas conclusões são baseadas principalmente no modelo de marketing mix dos 4Ps, que é limitado até ao momento em que a venda ocorreu. Ao expandir o modelo de marketing mix para também focar as dimensões que ocorrem após a venda, esta pesquisa aborda as limitações identificadas no trabalho de Vorhies e Morgan (2005) e visa fornecer uma base mais abrangente para empresas que operam no mercado B2B intercultural.

Além disso, esta pesquisa não discorda da abordagem da Resource-Based-View (RBV) de Merrilees et al. (2010), mas simplifica as dimensões abstratas que os autores propõem usando também um modelo alargado de marketing mix de serviços como uma ferramenta mais acessível para gestores de PMEs. As dimensões do mix de marketing propostas neste estudo podem ser comparadas metaforicamente ao aço, aos blocos e ao cimento que constroem os edifícios numa cidade. Assim, como nenhum edifício é feito sem se concentrar nos elementos que o compõem, o mesmo pode ser dito para as dimensões de nível superior estudadas por Merrilees et al. (2010). As dimensões que estes últimos autores estudaram são como os edifícios numa cidade, abstratas e complexas para gestores de PMEs, enquanto as dimensões de marketing mix que este estudo propõe são os elementos que compõem esses edifícios. Esta simplificação é particularmente relevante para os gestores de PMEs, que podem ter dificuldade em compreender completamente dimensões académicas complexas, como *branding* ou inovação, devido a recursos ou tempo limitados.

Além disso, este estudo expande o trabalho de Merrilees et al. (2010) ao incorporar uma análise intercultural na Europa, já que a pesquisa desses investigadores se concentrou apenas em clientes B2B australianos. Esta extensão é crítica para PMEs que operam em mercados B2B interculturais, pois fornece *insights* práticos sobre os fatores que impactam a satisfação do cliente e a vantagem competitiva num contexto multicultural.

Em resposta à evolução do cenário de uma realidade de marketing hiper-conectada, esta pesquisa incorpora o modelo estendido de marketing mix de serviços de 8 Ps proposto por Lovelock e Wirtz (2007) e adapta o modelo AIDA (Strong, 1925b) para o modelo dos Cinco A's (Assimilação, Atração, Atenção, Ação e Apologia) de Kotler et al. (2016), procurando abordar o efeito “caixa negra” (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007) e focar em defesa da marca pelos clientes, *offline* e *online*. Este apoio à marca também amplifica o poder da rede do marketing boca a boca, conforme evidenciado pela lei de Metcalfe (2013).

No entanto, é importante notar que a pesquisa possui algumas limitações. A primeira delas é o tamanho da amostra. Apesar de estatisticamente apresentar robustez científica, pode não representar completamente a diversidade de perspectivas existentes no panorama B2B intercultural.

Outra limitação é a generalização dos resultados devido ao nível elevado de educação formal dos participantes. Estudos futuros poderiam expandir o escopo da pesquisa, explorando abordagens diferentes de questionários, bem como investigar a relação entre a satisfação do cliente e outras variáveis, como rentabilidade e participação de mercado.

Apesar dessas limitações, os resultados deste estudo têm implicações práticas importantes para as empresas que operam em mercados interculturais. Ao reconhecer a importância da adoção de uma abordagem orientada para o serviço e fornecer suporte local e cultural, as empresas podem melhorar a satisfação do cliente e, assim, aumentar a probabilidade de sucesso em mercados interculturais.

Em suma, esta pesquisa traz uma contribuição para a literatura académica sobre marketing B2B intercultural, baseando-se no trabalho de líderes académicos, fornecendo *insights* empíricos práticos sobre os fatores que impactam a satisfação do cliente e a vantagem competitiva, e adaptando-se a novas tendências em marketing. As descobertas podem

orientar as PME's no desenvolvimento de estratégias de marketing B2B mais eficazes, enquanto oferecem potenciais vias para futuras pesquisas nesta área.

Epigraph

*Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The
important thing is not to stop questioning. Albert Einstein.*

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List of abbreviations

AI: Artificial Intelligence

AIDA: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action

APA: American Psychological Association

B2B: Business-to-Business

B2C: Business-to-Consumer

CE: Customer-Employee

CF: Customer-Firm

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease 2019

DCS: Direct Service Contact

DISC: Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness

EF: Employee-Firm

EU: European Union

PME: Pequena e Média Empresa

RBV: Resourced-Based View

RC Cola: Royal Crown Cola

SE: Standard Error

SME: Small and Medium Enterprise

vs: versus

Introduction

Marketing is a critical business function that involves creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging value for customers, commercial partners, and society (Buttle, 1996). McLuhan (1968) argues that technological advancements have created a global village that has increased the speed at which society operates. This advancement in digital communication technology has made consumers more informed, educated, and sophisticated (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012).

Borden (1964) first introduced the concept of marketing mix as a way for executives to blend various ingredients or elements to create a unique and competitive strategy. The marketing mix consists of four main elements – Product, Price, Promotion, and Placement – which provide tools and dimensions for implementing marketing strategies in the market. This concept has been considered a straitjacket that limits the management team in adapting the company's processes to the real market (Grönroos, 1994), and was further developed and refined by scholars such as Keller (1998), Lovelock and Wirtz (2007), and Kotler (2011).

In today's digital era, management background and services have become crucial logics for marketing, as noted by Kotler (2011) and Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019).

This study aims to identify and examine the value of service marketing mix dimensions adapted to product centric B2B suppliers, focusing on prefabrication glass and stone construction B2B customers.

A quantitative approach was employed to ensure comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The methodology included a structured survey that aimed to test the effectiveness of marketing strategies in increasing awareness and customer satisfaction, and decreasing price sensitivity, among prefabrication glass and stone construction B2B customers.

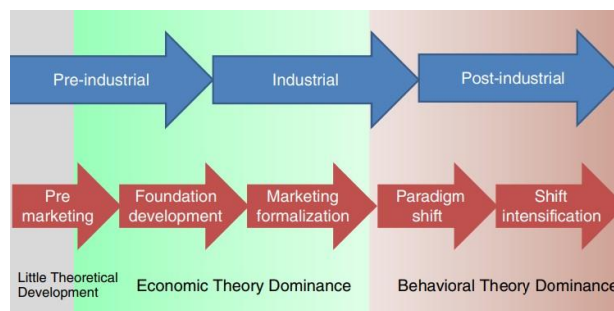
Chapter 1: Research rationale – marketing mix for product-centric suppliers

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, this study explores the evolution of B2B marketing, which has undergone significant transformation since its inception in the realm of industrial marketing during the early 20th century. This historical exploration encompasses the development of B2B marketing from its traditional industrial roots to its contemporary state, marked by digital technologies, relationship marketing, and globalisation. To provide a comprehensive understanding of B2B marketing's evolution, the first historic section is organised as follows: an overview of industrial marketing, the emergence of relationship marketing, the impact of globalisation, the rise of digital technologies, and the present and future needs of B2B marketing.

The historic development of B2B marketing first appeared in the late 1800s and early 1900s, driven by the expansion of the manufacturing sector and the need for businesses to systematically market their products and services to other enterprises. Hadjikhani and LaPlaca (2013) categorize this evolution into distinct developmental phases: Pre-marketing, Foundation Development, Marketing Formalisation, Paradigm Shift, and Shift Intensification. As depicted in Figure 1, these phases transitioned from an initial economic-theory dominance during the industrial era toward behavioural-theory dominance in the post-industrial era, reflecting a strategic shift from transactional interactions towards relationship-focused marketing strategies.

Figure 1 Balance of economic and behavioural foundations of B2B marketing theory across two development paths



Source: Hadjikhani & LaPlaca (2013)

Traditional marketing tactics such as print advertisements, trade shows, and personal selling were used during this era (LaPlaca, 1997). Marketers prioritised selling products and services based on their features and benefits, a trend that characterised this product-centric focus.

With the advent of relationship marketing, the 1980s saw a shift in marketing approaches that emphasised the importance of building long-term relationships with customers to achieve customer satisfaction and loyalty (Grönroos, 1990). This approach recognised the value of trust, commitment, and cooperation between businesses and their customers as well as the need for businesses to understand and adapt to their customers' changing needs and preferences.

Globalisation, characterised by the growing online interconnectedness of markets and businesses around the world, has significantly impacted B2B marketing. Companies expanded their reach by forming strategic alliances, pursuing joint ventures, and adopting international multicultural marketing strategies (Cavusgil et al., 2019). Successful companies such as ABB and Siemens have leveraged their global presence and expertise in their respective industries to navigate the complex environment created by globalisation.

Digital technologies have transformed the B2B marketing landscape, enabling businesses to communicate, collaborate, and conduct online transactions more efficiently than ever before. Recent studies underscore the profound impact of digital transformation on marketing strategies. Nanayakkara and Jabeen (2024) suggest that the marketing mix should include performance due to the novel AI (Artificial Intelligence) technologies and Cioppi et al. (2023) provide a systematic review highlighting how digital transformation reshapes marketing by enhancing customer engagement and optimizing business processes. Social media, marketing automation, and artificial intelligence have become essential tools for B2B marketers to build and maintain global relationships (Nanayakkara & Jabeen, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the adoption of digital technologies as businesses adapted to remote working, and increased reliance on digital channels for sales and marketing activities.

The history of B2B marketing demonstrates continuous evolution in response to changing market conditions and technological advancements. The B2B marketing type has been adapted to meet the needs of businesses operating in an increasingly interconnected and

dynamic environment. As digital technologies continue to shape the future of B2B marketing, it is essential for businesses to remain informed and to prepare for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Notably, the development of marketing strategies and tools has been critical in facilitating this evolution.

The motivation for this research originated during the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, while managing area sales and marketing activities in a multinational, I experienced a sudden halt in sales and a marked ineffectiveness of conventional marketing initiatives. In response, I implemented a strategy of offering complimentary services to existing customers, aiming to leverage mutual idle periods to strengthen business relationships. All interactions were meticulously documented, providing an extensive data repository. As economic activities resumed, this proactive service-oriented approach demonstrated significant value. Interestingly, industrial customers – typically reticent in sharing experiential feedback, or as I thought they were – began actively advocating our brand due to heightened levels of satisfaction, loyalty, and emotional connection.

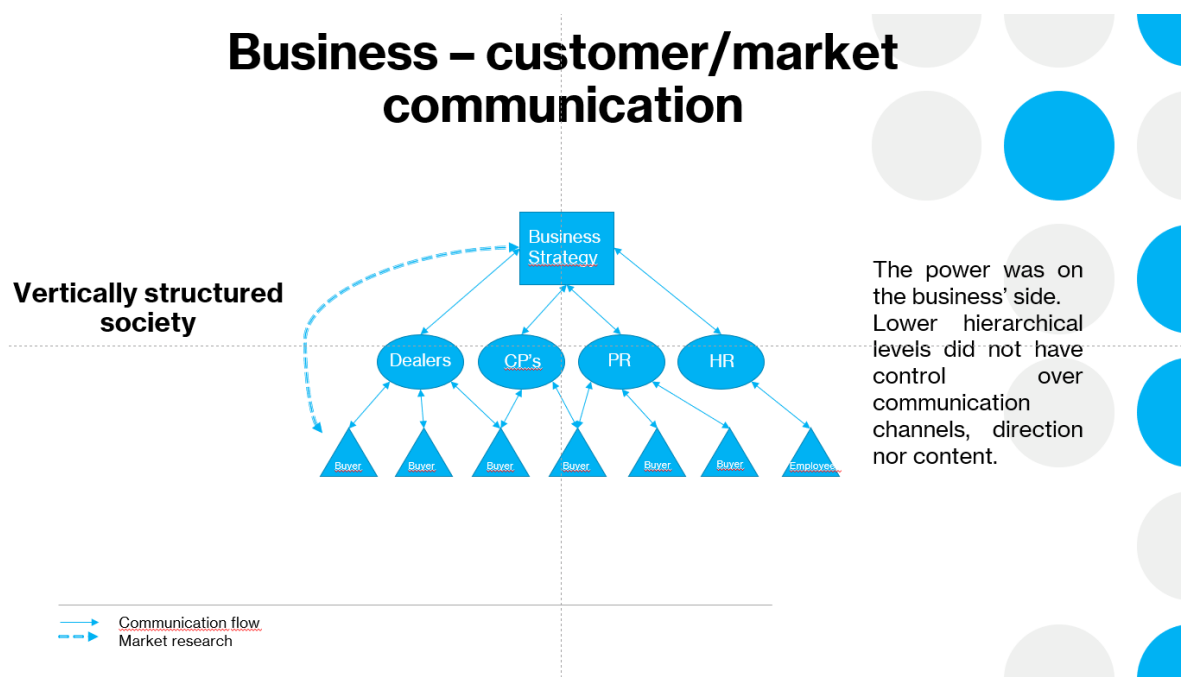
These practical observations prompted deeper academic inquiry, revealing parallels with prior studies conducted by Merrilees et al. and Vorhies & Morgan, who had explored marketing capabilities and customer advocacy phenomena within business-to-business (B2B) contexts. Motivated by their foundational works (Vorhies & Morgan, 2005; Merrilees et al., 2010), I aimed to extend their insights into a multicultural European environment. The research sought to simplify their conceptual frameworks, rendering them accessible and implementable by contemporary B2B managers.

Furthermore, the decision to exclusively analyse prefabricated glass and stone construction sectors arose from statistical considerations. Preliminary evaluations highlighted these sectors' relevance, statistical significance, and prevalence within the European B2B landscape, providing an ideal context for exploring the impacts of enhanced customer interactions and post-sales services. Other industrial sectors were excluded to ensure methodological robustness and statistical clarity, thus sharpening the focus of this investigation.

Marketing as a broad subject, extensively studied by scholars, has evolved significantly over time. Borden's (1964) traditional marketing framework, comprising the four elements known as the 4Ps (Product, Price, Placement, and Promotion), provided managers with strategic

tools to structure their organisational marketing activities up until the moment of purchase. These dimensions were particularly effective in traditional market contexts characterised by unidirectional and hierarchical communication flows, as illustrated in Figure 2. Organisations during this period predominantly relied upon conventional media channels, including newspapers, radio, trade shows, and television, to disseminate their messages. Due to the vertically structured nature of this communication model, strategic control was concentrated at upper management levels, restricting lower hierarchical levels from influencing message content, channel selection, or overall strategic direction. Consequently, communication strategies offered limited opportunities for real-time interaction or immediate feedback from customers. Organisations later conducted market research to retrospectively gather and analyse customers' impressions and perceived value, attempting to fill gaps created by the absence of direct and immediate customer interactions (Borden, 1964).

Figure 2 Traditional communication flow



Source: Own elaboration

The advent of digital communication technology has radically altered traditional marketing landscapes. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) highlight that businesses now have access to various digital channels such as social media, email, and smart mobile devices, enabling real-time communication and feedback collection from customers. Consequently, the marketing mix concept has evolved to adapt to this new reality and has expanded to include

extra dimensions, such as people, processes, and physical evidence (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012), to ensure more effectiveness. However, to adapt to this changing environment, organisations must understand the factors that influence customer behaviour in the digital era.

This master's dissertation endeavours to investigate the dimensions of the extended service marketing mix in B2B strategic implementation through marketing dimensions, with a particular focus on the post-sales aspects, customers' behaviours, and their enhanced capacity to seamlessly externalise their perceptions in today's highly inter-connected world. Additionally, the study will examine the implications of omni-channel marketing strategies in B2B contexts, as highlighted by Hayes and Kelliher (2022). The dimensions of this study, including Elements of the Product, Place and Time, Price and other Costs to the purchaser, Promotion and Education, Processes, People, Physical or Digital Placement, including Productivity and Quality, as suggested by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) and Tapscott (2014), allow firms to enhance awareness and effectiveness in implementing marketing strategies in this hyper-connected world. This study employed a structured survey approach to quantitatively target B2B customers in prefabricated glass and stone construction, aligning the service marketing perspective to the industrial B2B market making activities. The survey examined how management background influences the likelihood of product-centric organizations adopting service-oriented strategies in the digital era. This exploration was particularly focused on understanding the impact on customer satisfaction and the reduction of price sensitivity.

1.2 Evolution of the marketing-mix concept in the digital age

The notion of a marketing mix first emerged in the mid-twentieth century when Borden (1964) likened marketers to chefs blending ingredients to meet specific objectives. McCarthy (1960) distilled Borden's expansive list into the now-famous four Ps—Product, Price, Place and Promotion—offering firms a concise, internally focused checklist for influencing demand. Subsequent work on services marketing acknowledged the distinctive role of people, processes and physical evidence, expanding the framework to seven Ps and broadening its relevance to experiential offerings (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011).

While the 4P/7Ps templates remain useful as planning heuristics, their supply-side orientation renders them increasingly inadequate in a marketplace characterised by real-time

interaction, data abundance and empowered customers. A recent systematic review of digital transformation research highlights the extent to which interactive technologies, ubiquitous connectivity and granular analytics have re-shaped every element of the traditional mix (Cioppi et al., 2023). “Place”, for example, now spans physical, digital and hybrid channels; “Promotion” has evolved from one-way messaging to continuous dialogue and community engagement. Even the extended 7Ps focus primarily on what the firm does rather than how the customer experiences value, leaving gaps in understanding of post-purchase satisfaction and advocacy.

Responding to these gaps, scholars have advocated a shift from producer-centred Ps to customer-centred Es: Experience, Exchange, Everywhere and Engagement. Olaoye et al. (2024) present a hybrid 4E/7P model in which each managerial P is re-aligned around a corresponding experiential E. Under this lens, the product becomes a carefully curated experience; price decisions revolve around value exchange; distribution addresses customer need for access everywhere; and promotion transforms into engagement that fosters dialogue and advocacy. The hybrid model retains the operational discipline of the seven Ps while embedding an explicit outside-in orientation that better captures contemporary customer journeys.

Running parallel to the experiential turn is the recognition that modern marketing must be continually optimised. Nanayakkara and Jabeen (2024) argue for a fifth P – Performance – enabled by artificial intelligence tools that track, analyse and refine every marketing activity in real time. Performance encompasses five inter-locking capabilities: personalisation, optimisation, dynamisation, automation and innovation. When fused with the existing Ps, these capabilities create a self-adjusting system in which each tactical decision is accountable to measurable outcomes and quickly recalibrated as data dictate. Empirical evidence presented by Nanayakkara and Jabeen shows that firms integrating AI-driven performance monitoring achieve materially higher returns on marketing investment than peers relying on static planning.

Together, the experiential 4E perspective and the performance-oriented 5P reposition the marketing mix as a dynamic orchestration of customer value and organisational learning. They shift managerial attention from episodic campaign planning to continuous value co-creation and iterative optimisation. For researchers, these developments invite renewed inquiry into how product-centric B2B suppliers can leverage digital tools to close the post-

purchase “black box” identified in Section 1.3. For practitioners, they underscore that sustainable advantage now rests on the dual ability to design compelling experiences and to refine them relentlessly through data-driven performance management.

1.3 The “black box” challenge

The “black box” symbolises a significant obstacle for organisational decision-makers who cannot access primary information about customers' experiences, perceptions, and satisfaction after purchasing products or services (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007). Consequently, organisations were unable to properly adjust their marketing strategies to suit changing market demands and customers' evolving needs. To overcome this challenge, organisations must adopt new methodologies that provide comprehensive data on customer experiences and perceptions beyond the point of purchase (Verhoef et al., 2009). Implementing artificial intelligence (AI) in marketing practices offers a solution to this challenge. Keegan et al. (2022) explore how AI technologies enhance data analysis capabilities, providing deeper insights into customer experiences and enabling more effective marketing strategies. By utilising these methodologies, organisations can gain insights into customers' present behaviour, preferences, and needs, allowing them to innovate their marketing strategies to suit the changing market needs and build long-term relationships with customers (Kumar, 2008).

Recognising this necessity, some businesses have begun to acknowledge that traditional marketing techniques focusing solely on the point of purchase are no longer sufficient, as they exclude important events that occur simultaneously with purchase and post-purchase perceptions and evaluations (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007). Marketing mix strategies must now account for highly personalised, multidirectional communication channels that allow for increased sophistication and customer requirements (Kotler et al., 2016). In light of these changes, it becomes evident that businesses must adapt their strategies to the evolving market landscape to remain competitive and relevant.

This is the current hyper-connected market, in which communication technologies have shifted the power balance towards customers, who can now easily communicate with competitors and other consumers globally (Tapscott, 2014). This phenomenon has led to greater emphasis on meeting customer needs, expectations, and perceptions, because comparisons with global competitors or substitutes are broadly accessible (Kotler &

Armstrong, 2012). Given this context, it has become increasingly important for marketers to adapt their strategies and better understand the post-sale customer experience to cater loyal advocates in the market making activities.

In response to the challenges presented by global hyper-competition, marketers have sought to extend their knowledge of customers and services delivered after the sale. Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) suggested eight elements, the 8Ps of Service Marketing, that provide a comprehensive framework to counter the “black box” effect and develop strategies to meet customer needs and expectations in a hyper-competitive and hyper-connected market.

1.4 Dissertation’s structure

This first chapter sets the starting point for an in-depth academic exploration of the hyper-connected world and its implications for businesses. As this research examines further into a dissertation, it adheres to a coherent structure to thoroughly investigate various aspects of this complex topic.

This master's dissertation is designed to provide a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the various factors influencing customer satisfaction, B2B value perception, price sensitivity, and the development and implementation of successful service-marketing mix strategies in product-centric markets.

To achieve this objective, Chapters 2 through 4 form the Literature Review section, which studies into the customer journey, marketing models, and the impact of hyper-connectivity on customer experiences. Additionally, the Literature Review addressed the B2B intrinsic context, national culture, and competitive advantage. By systematically exploring these topics, the literature review builds a robust theoretical foundation that elucidates the factors influencing customer satisfaction, B2B value and price perception, and successful service marketing mix strategies. This solid grounding in theory paves the way for a coherent analysis, discussion, and synthesis of the findings presented in subsequent chapters of this dissertation. Ultimately, this methodical structure facilitates seamless progression from the exploratory phase to hypothesis formulation, ensuring a clear and comprehensible presentation of the research for the reader.

Chapter 5 presents the research questions, objectives, and rationale of the methodological approach employed in this study. It details the research design, methods, sample selection,

hypotheses, and data collection procedures, ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings.

Chapter 6 defines data recoding procedures and analyses the questionnaire results by employing descriptive and inferential statistics to test the study's hypotheses. This chapter reveals insights into customer satisfaction, cultural and geographical gaps, and other key aspects influenced by a hyper-connected society, such as customer satisfaction and price sensitivity.

Chapter 7 presents the research findings and their implications, discusses the limitations of this study, and suggests avenues for future research. This comprehensive and structured approach is designed to provide a thorough understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the hyper-connected business world, making this dissertation a valuable resource for both academics and practitioners.

Finally, chapter 8 serves as the culmination of this dissertation, providing a critical synthesis of the findings and their broader implications within the hyper-connected B2B marketplace. It integrates the research's key insights on customer satisfaction, price sensitivity, and service-marketing mix strategies, drawing from the extensive literature review and empirical data analysis presented in previous chapters. This final chapter not only reflects on the study's contributions to academic knowledge and managerial practice but also outlines the limitations encountered during the research process. Importantly, it sets forth a roadmap for future research, suggesting new directions to further investigate the evolving dynamics of customer relationships and marketing strategies in an increasingly digital and interconnected business environment. This conclusion underscores the dissertation's aim to enrich the understanding of service marketing's role in enhancing competitive advantage and customer value perception in B2B settings, marking a significant step forward in the discourse on marketing strategies in the digital era.

Chapter 1 Conclusion

In summary, this study explores deeper into the interaction of B2B product-centric suppliers and customers, who, as corroborated by the study's findings, have historically placed greater emphasis on product suitability and features rather than services. Nonetheless, within the framework of McLuhan's (1968) global village, suppliers are now forced to broaden their focus to include services alongside product features given the pervasive nature of global

competition. This master's dissertation explores the complexities and intricacies of customer satisfaction and value perception in the context of the product-centric Business-to-Business (B2B) market making activities. The rationale behind undertaking this research lies in the ever-increasing importance of comprehending how businesses create and maintain competitive advantage, particularly in an environment characterised by rapidly evolving customer behaviours, preferences, expectations, and new trends brought to market by existing or new competitors. This dissertation aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence customer satisfaction and value perception in B2B relationships, especially in the dimensions that occur after sales, ultimately contributing to the development of effective strategies for businesses to thrive in the B2B competitive landscape. The role of digital technologies and AI in enhancing these factors will also be explored, building on the work of Keegan et al. (2022).

To achieve this goal, this dissertation digs deeper into the existing body of literature, dissecting various theoretical frameworks, models, and empirical findings to identify the critical elements that shape customer satisfaction and value perception in characteristically product centric B2B markets. This study focuses on the interplay between customer expectations, product and service offerings, and after-sales services and examines their collective impact on business performance, customer loyalty, and price sensitivity reduction. By synthesising the insights gleaned from the literature review, the research tries to uncover potential gaps in the current understanding of B2B customer satisfaction and value perception, thus highlighting areas in which further research could add value. Additionally, this dissertation seeks to identify the best practices and strategies businesses can adopt to enhance their ability to meet and exceed customer expectations, ultimately fostering long-term relationships and securing a competitive edge in the market.

In conclusion, the purpose of this master's dissertation is to deepen the understanding of customer satisfaction and value perception in the B2B context by analysing the relevant literature, pinpointing areas for further research, and offering practical recommendations for businesses to improve their competitive standing.

Chapter 2: Introduction to the customer journey

2.1 Introduction

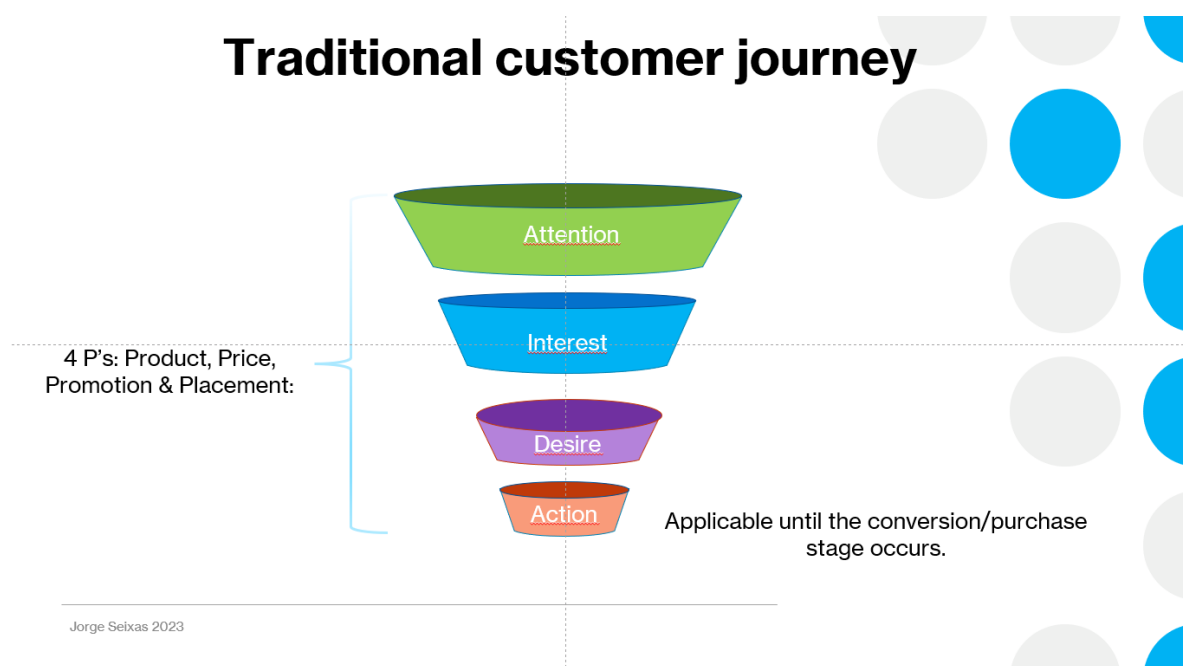
The customer journey represents a comprehensive overview of the experiences customers encounter when engaging with suppliers. Each customer's unique background, culture, and origin inform their decision-making process. In today's hyper-connected society, consumers interact with brands through innovative channels that often extend beyond the control of producers, known as horizontal networks (Edelman, 2010). This shift has been further accelerated by the rise of digital marketing platforms, enabling real-time engagement and co-creation with consumers (Cham et al., 2022). These networks empower customers to exchange perceptions and evaluations of a brand and its competitors, thereby increasing customers' influence on the market. Adopting an integrated perspective that ensures consistency in addressing customer needs is crucial, especially with the increasing implementation of artificial intelligence in B2B marketing practices, which necessitates a harmonious blend of technology and human interaction (Keegan et al., 2022). Organisations that fail to prioritize customer interest risk lose control of market influence due to global competition. Consequently, firms must diligently manage customer journeys and experiences to maintain control over brand reputation and customer satisfaction (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007). Recent scholarship synthesises these shifts. Mele et al. (2025) argue that a customer-journey lens must now integrate lifecycle feedback loops, platform ecosystems and data governance if it is to remain fit for purpose.

Grasping the complexities of the customer journey is vital in the current competitive and interconnected market landscape, as recent studies highlight the significance of digital echovse strategies in emerging B2B markets (Vieira et al., 2019). Transitioning from exploring customer experiences to traditional marketing theories reveals that these conventional methods have largely focused on managing customer interactions until the purchase stage, using frameworks like Borden's 4Ps (1964) and Elias St. Elmo Lewis' AIDA model (Barry & Howard, 1990) – a limitation confirmed by time-varying journey metrics that show meaningful post-purchase effects on firm revenue (Koch et al., 2023)

2.1.1 The AIDA model in marketing

The AIDA model – Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action – is a fundamental framework in marketing literature that delineates the stages consumers navigate when engaging with promotional communications (Barry & Howard, 1990). The traditional application of this model aligns effectively with Borden's (1964) 4Ps, as shown in Figure 3, with each 'P' dimension strategically corresponding to distinct phases of consumer engagement. However, this alignment only effectively captures consumer interactions up to the purchase or conversion phase.

Figure 3 Relation between the 4Ps and the AIDA framework



Source: Own elaboration

This model was first introduced by Elias St. Elmo Lewis in 1898 and has since become a fundamental concept in marketing and advertising (Strong, 1925b). The AIDA model aims to provide marketers with a systematic approach to designing persuasive marketing communications that capture the target audience's attention and drive them to take the desired action. The characterization of the different framework steps is as follows:

Attention: The first stage of the AIDA model focuses on capturing the attention of potential customers. This is crucial in the marketing process, as it

is challenging to convey a message or promote a product if the audience does not pay attention to communication (Smith et al., 1999). Marketers employ various strategies to grab the audience's attention, such as eye-catching visuals, bold headlines, or provocative statements (Hassan et al., 2015).

Interest: Once the audience's attention has been captured, the next step in the AIDA model is to generate interest in the product or service being offered. Marketers must provide relevant and engaging information to pique the curiosity of their target audience and make them want to learn more about a product or service (Belch & Belch, 2012). This can be achieved by highlighting the unique selling points, benefits, and features that differentiate a product or service from competitors (Hassan et al., 2015).

Desire: The third stage of the AIDA model involves transforming the audience's interest into a desire for a product or service. At this stage, marketers must evoke an emotional response in the audience, persuading them that a product or service will satisfy their needs or wants (Smith et al., 1999). This can be accomplished using persuasive language, appealing imagery, and testimonials or endorsements from satisfied customers (Hassan et al., 2015).

Action: The final stage of the AIDA model focuses on encouraging the audience to take the desired action, such as making a purchase, signing up for a newsletter, or requesting more information (Belch & Belch, 2012). Marketers must provide a clear and straightforward call to action to guide the audience toward the next step in the process (Hassan et al., 2015). This may involve offering incentives, creating a sense of urgency, or providing easy-to-follow instructions on how to proceed (Smith et al., 1999).

Summarising the discussion on the AIDA model, it is crucial to acknowledge that the model adeptly traces the customer journey up to the acquisition and payment completion stages. However, as the modern market landscape has evolved, the significance of the consumption and post-consumption stages cannot be understated. For companies striving to establish sustainable competitive advantages in today's dynamic business environment, a more

comprehensive and holistic approach to understanding the customer journey is necessary (Biemans, 2010).

2.2 The importance of hyper-connectivity

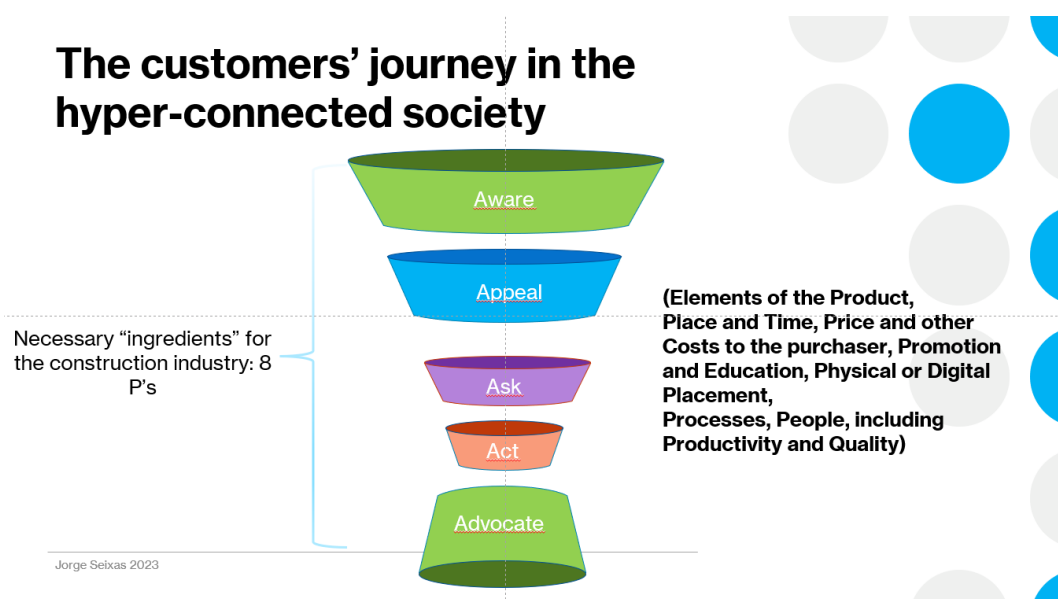
Recognising the impact of hyper-connectivity in today's society, knowing that customers now have the ability to share their brand perceptions through horizontal communication channels, which are beyond the control of producers, unlike traditional channels such as radio or television (Edelman, 2010), is essential to thrive in the turbulent market conditions, an effect that Swaminathan et al. (2020) demonstrate empirically by linking connectivity intensity to brand-equity gains. This new condition also shifts the power dynamics between organisations and customers, highlighting the necessity for adopting a comprehensive and integrated perspective, ensuring a consistent approach toward consumers (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007). Understanding how customers choose among available market alternatives is crucial for decision-makers within firms aiming to establish a sustainable competitive advantage. Firms that prioritize customer satisfaction and align their values with those of their customers stand a better chance of achieving long-term success and competitive advantage (Biemans, 2010). As a result, this study suggests that industries, even product-centric interactive market makers suppliers-customers, must embrace a new approach that encompasses the entire customer journey, considering the hyper-connected society that now is humankind's reality. Evidence points that by integrating theories of the customer journey with the ability to communicate globally through channels beyond a firm's control can lead to long-term success (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007; Kotler et al., 2016).

Considering these changes, Kotler et al. (2016) introduced the Five A's model, which adapts the traditional AIDA model by incorporating the initial contact with purchased products and post-evaluation stages of the customer journey, reflecting the evolving technological environment, the customer behaviour, and the need for businesses to adapt to this new reality. Such pervasive connectivity means that each contact point now contributes dynamically to equity formation across the journey (Koch et al., 2023).

2.2.1 The Five A's model in customer journey analysis

The Five A's model proposed by Kotler et al. (2016) extends beyond the traditional AIDA framework by introducing additional post-purchase dimensions (Figure 4), capturing the complexity and interconnected nature of the contemporary customer journey. This model integrates seamlessly with Lovelock and Wirtz's (2007) expanded 8Ps marketing mix, effectively addressing not only initial consumer awareness and engagement but also emphasising the essential post-consumption stages – Attachment and Advocacy – that characterise customer interactions in today's hyper-connected market environment.

Figure 4 The customer journey today



Source: Own elaboration

The five stages are Awareness, Attraction, Attention, Act/Attachment, and Advocacy. In this five-stage customer journey model proposed by Kotler et al. (2016) each stage plays a critical role in guiding the customer from their initial exposure to a brand or product to eventually becoming a brand ambassador. The model emphasizes that the customer journey does not end with the purchase; rather, it extends beyond the transaction and includes the customer's post-purchase experience through the Attachment and Advocacy dimensions. By focusing on these additional stages, marketers can develop strategies to build customer loyalty and advocacy, which can lead to repeated business and positive word-of-mouth that today can be exponential due to the hyper-connectivity explained by the network's value by Metcalfe's

law (2013). The delineation of the five stages within the Kotler et al. (2016) framework can be described as follows:

Awareness Stage: This stage represents the customer's first encounter with a brand or product. At this point, the customer may be unaware of the brand or its offerings. The primary goal of marketers during the Awareness stage is to create brand recognition and capture the customer's attention. This can be achieved through advertising, public relations efforts, and various other promotional activities designed to enhance brand visibility and generate curiosity among potential customers.

Attraction Stage: After capturing the customer's attention, the next step is to create a compelling value proposition that entices the customer and generates interest in the brand or product. This stage focuses on communicating the unique benefits, features, and advantages of the product or service to the target audience. Marketers may use persuasive messaging, appealing visuals, and targeted promotions to demonstrate the value of their offering and create a desire for it among potential customers.

Attention Stage: This stage is akin to the 'Interest' phase in the traditional AIDA model, where marketers must maintain the customer's engagement and interest in the product or service. The Attention stage involves presenting relevant and informative content that highlights the brand's unique selling points, providing answers to potential customer concerns, and offering solutions to their problems. By offering valuable information and addressing customer needs, marketers can establish trust and credibility, which are crucial for moving the customer further along the journey.

Act/Attachment Stage: At this stage, the customer has made the purchase and begins developing an emotional connection to the brand or product. Marketers must strive to deliver an exceptional customer experience during and after the purchase to foster a sense of attachment. This can include providing excellent customer service, offering post-purchase support, and ensuring that the product or service lives up to the customer's expectations. A strong emotional bond with the brand can lead to customer loyalty and repeat purchases.

Advocacy Stage: In the final stage of the customer journey, satisfied customers become brand ambassadors and actively promote the brand or product to others. This stage capitalises on the customer's positive experiences and perceptions of value, turning them into a powerful marketing resource. Advocacy can take various forms, such as word-of-mouth recommendations, online reviews, and social media endorsements. Marketers can encourage and support customer advocacy by offering incentives, such as referral programs, loyalty schemes, and exclusive offers for existing customers.

Building upon this comprehensive understanding of the customer journey, the next Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between Kotler et al. (2016) 5As framework and Lovelock and Wirtz's (2007) 8Ps extended marketing mix, further elucidating the interplay between these concepts in crafting a well-rounded marketing strategy.

In line with this “new reality”, Tapscott (2014) underscores the importance of the hyper-connected society we live in today. Customers now demand more knowledge about products and services, which can be achieved through after-sales services. By providing after-sales services, organisations can create more knowledge, adaptations, and decisions about altered or new strategic choices. This service logic places the customer at the centre of the strategy definition, making it easier to meet their needs and expectations.

The provision of after-sales services creates a competitive advantage for product-centric suppliers, aligning with the principles of service-dominant logic that emphasize value co-creation through service integration (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This ensures that customers receive value beyond the product they purchase, creating customer loyalty and increasing the likelihood of repeat purchases. Additionally, by providing after-sales services, organisations can expand their target market to include customers who lack the necessary skills to operate their products (Grönroos, 2006). The incorporation of service logic into the marketing strategy of product-centric organisations is crucial in expanding their target market through the provision of after-sales services, as it develops loyalty and increases the likelihood of repeat purchases. In today's hyper-connected society, this service logic places the customer at the centre of the strategy definition, making it easier to fulfil customers' needs and expectations (Grönroos, 2006). By adopting a service logic and offering after-sales services, product-centric suppliers can expand their target market and maintain a

competitive edge in an increasingly demanding marketplace, as the future of B2B marketing theory suggests a shift towards innovation and customer journey enhancement (Cortez & Johnston, 2017)

Furthermore, in the context of the contemporary digital era, online reviews and social media significantly influence customer satisfaction (Chen & Xie, 2008). These authors suggest that online reviews have a greater impact on customers' purchasing decisions than traditional marketing methods do, emphasizing the importance of customer feedback in achieving high levels of satisfaction.

2.3 Lauterborn's 4Cs model, the moment of truth, and interconnections with research topics

Lauterborn's (1990) 4Cs model, focusing on customer value, cost, communication, and convenience, plays a crucial role in understanding customer experience and engagement in the context of this research. Each component of the 4Cs model is explained in further detail below:

Customer Value: This aspect of the 4Cs model emphasises the importance of delivering value to customers through products or services, ensuring that the offerings address customers' needs, wants, and preferences. By understanding and focusing into the customers' perceived value, organisations can enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Cost: Instead of focusing solely on price, the cost component considers the total cost of ownership, encompassing not only the purchase price but also any additional expenses or investments required to use, maintain, or dispose of the product or service. This perspective acknowledges that customers weigh various costs, both tangible and intangible, when making purchasing decisions.

Communication: This element replaces the traditional promotion component of the marketing mix, highlighting the importance of establishing a two-way dialogue with customers. In the context of modern marketing practices, communication encompasses various channels, techniques, and media that facilitate interaction and engagement between organisations and their customers.

Convenience: Convenience underscores the significance of providing ease of access, use, and availability to customers in the purchasing process. This aspect of the 4Cs model encompasses factors such as distribution channels, payment options, and customer support, which contribute to a seamless and frictionless customer experience.

The 4Cs model aligns with the consumer-centric approaches found in Lovelock and Wirtz's (2007) 8Ps marketing mix and other contemporary marketing practices, stressing the importance of adapting marketing strategies to accommodate the needs and preferences of consumers. The concept of "the moment of truth," as defined by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) as one of the stages of customers' journeys, highlights the significance of customer experiences during critical interactions with a product or service. These moments of truth can be pivotal in shaping a consumer's overall perception of a brand and in determining their satisfaction and loyalty, undermining anything that happened before and afterwards.

In this research, the 4Cs model and the moment of truth concept can be interconnected with various topics to provide a comprehensive understanding of the customer experience in cross-cultural markets. One such connection is the significance of language and cultural sensitivity in providing a positive customer experience.

Furthermore, the 4Cs model can be connected to the concept of customer satisfaction in cross-cultural markets and its relationship with price sensitivity.

Moreover, the 4Cs framework can be linked to the role of market orientation in shaping a company's approach to sales and marketing. By adopting a service-oriented approach that emphasizes consumer needs and preferences, businesses can effectively focus into their target markets and optimize their marketing strategies for better performance.

Overall, the Lauterborn's 4Cs model and the moment of truth concept offer valuable insights into understanding the complexities of the customer experience in cross-cultural markets. By interconnecting these frameworks with other research topics, such as language and cultural sensitivity, customer satisfaction, and market orientation, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing customer experiences and satisfaction and their implications for businesses operating in cross-cultural markets. Lauterborn's 4Cs (Consumer, Cost, Communication, and Convenience) are relevant to this

research, as they emphasize the importance of customer-centric marketing in today's hyper-connected market.

2.4 The logic of service in marketing performance

Service provision has become increasingly important in modern marketplaces. Servitization, the process of adding services to products, has been recognised as a way for manufacturers to develop competitive strategies (Vandermerwe et al., 1989; Wise & Baumgartner, 1999; Oliva & Kallenberg, 2003; Chesbrough & Spohrer, 2006). As noted by Grönroos (2006) and Meunier-FitzHugh and Piercy (2011), the complete value-creation process involves customers' perception, assessment, and externalization of the hyper-connected market (Kotler et al., 2016), which includes both products and services. Fundamentally, the inclusion of services in the marketing mix can also help organisations develop competitive strategies and achieve long-term success. By extending the marketing mix to include services, companies can create a more comprehensive value creation process that increases customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy. Hoyer et al. (2020) show how communication technologies intensify these service interactions, extending value creation well beyond the point of sale.

Nonetheless, merely incorporating services into a product does not guarantee success, as dynamic journey research highlights the need for real-time performance monitoring (Koch et al., 2023). As Tapscott (2014) notes, customers now have more control over the organisational market strategy, and this effect pushes companies to extend their marketing mix to constantly adapt delivered dimensions along with the main value propositions. The value perceived by customers is influenced by the unique value proposition of the organisation and the comparison that customers make with alternatives available in the market (Kotler et al., 2016). For instance, inadequate Direct Service Contact (DCS) employees or manuals can decrease a customer's perception of value and negatively impact the organisation's success in the long term. This highlights the importance of not only delivering quality products but also providing exceptional services that enhance the overall customer experience (Vandermerwe & Rada, 1988) to gain a competitive advantage over existing competitors or new entrants to the marketplace. The role of the extended perspective in marketing has evolved to become a critical driver of value creation and customer satisfaction, particularly in the digital age (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Adopting a service-

oriented marketing mix approach, and the supplier-customer communication channels between that are born therein, creates market's knowledge that enables the adaptation of the multiple dimensions that are delivered to the customer during the value creation chain within an organisation. Therefore, organisations must not only focus on delivering quality products, but also provide exceptional services that enhance the overall customer experience to create long-term customer loyalty and advocacy. This requires a comprehensive analysis of the entire value-creation process and the customer's perceived value through the customer journey. As services have become a critical driver of value creation and customer satisfaction, organisations should prioritize them in their marketing strategies.

Theoretical marketing models suggest that strong market orientation and customer-centric strategies achieve customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy, which can lead to reduced price sensitivity and increased value perception (Zeithaml et al., 1990; Homburg et al., 2012). Overall, the literature underscores the importance of services and the knowledge created by using these services in an organisation's strategic choices, focusing on all the dimensions that affect the customer journey. Therefore, it is necessary to break down the model from a sequential perspective to a more comprehensive analysis of everything that occurs between the organisational market orientation and the customer's perceived value.

In the context of marketing performance, it is important to recognize the characteristics of services that are intangible, inseparable, perishable, heterogeneous (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007), and often challenging to manage. These service characteristics apply to a range of industries, including product-centric sectors such as the prefabrication construction industry, which is the focus of this research. Despite the challenges presented by these characteristics, integrating after-sales dimensions into product-centric sectors also leads to increased customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy (Vandermerwe et al., 1989; Wise & Baumgartner, 1999; Oliva & Kallenberg, 2003; Chesbrough & Spohrer, 2006). Therefore, understanding the role of these services in product-centric sectors is crucial for enhancing the overall organisational performance.

In conclusion, by extending the marketing mix to dimensions that occur after sales conversions, companies can adapt to a more comprehensive value-creation chain that increases market efficiency, particularly in the context of digitalization's impact on contemporary marketing strategies (Cham et al., 2022). Supplier organisations should

recognize the significance of delivering quality services to customers as well as in product-centric industries; hence, it allows for more innovation and influences customer loyalty, advocacy, and overall customer value perception.

2.5 The influence of market orientation on customer satisfaction

The existing literature indicates that market orientation has a significant impact on various aspects of business performance, including customer satisfaction, loyalty, innovation, and service quality in the Business-to-Business (B2B) sector. This subsection discusses the importance of market orientation and its influence on customer satisfaction:

O’Cass and Ngo (2007) found that marketing and product innovation capacities partially mediate the relationship between a company's market orientation and its ability to create value. Additionally, marketing skills mediate the relationship between market orientation and customer relationship value. This highlights the importance of market knowledge in driving innovation (Bessant et al., 2005; Lindstrom, 2016). Companies that prioritize market orientation can enhance their marketing capacity, processes, and product innovation, ultimately leading to increased value creation and stronger customer relationships.

Bell et al. (2005) emphasised the importance of customer participation in service production and delivery, indicating that involving customers in the value creation chain can lead to better service quality and higher satisfaction. Rust and Oliver (1994) provided valuable insights into the relationship between service quality and its managerial implications, highlighting the importance of focusing on service quality as a crucial component of customer satisfaction. Voon (2006) posited that a market-oriented approach positively affects customer satisfaction and loyalty. This, in turn, can lead to reduced price sensitivity and improved organisational performance. Lee and Ng (2001) also demonstrated that market and learning orientation have a positive impact on innovation and performance in firms, emphasizing the importance of adopting a market-oriented approach to enhance firms’ performance.

Several studies have highlighted that customer satisfaction is crucial to the success of companies in the B2B sector. For instance, Homburg and Pflesser (2000) suggest that customer satisfaction is an essential driver of customer loyalty and word-of-mouth

recommendations. Similarly, Liao and Chuang (2004) showed that customer satisfaction has a positive impact on customer loyalty, which in turn leads to higher profitability.

In conclusion, by focusing on understanding customers' needs and wants – expectations and desires – and aligning their offerings, companies can increase customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy.

2.6 The Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

The European Commission (2015) defines Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) by three thresholds: staff headcount, annual turnover, and annual balance sheet. Businesses that have fewer than 250 employees, an annual turnover of less than 50 million euros, or a total annual balance sheet of less than 43 million euros are considered to be a SME by the European Union. SMEs represent a significant portion of the global economy and contribute to innovation, job creation, and economic growth (Ayyagari et al., 2007). In Europe, SMEs are extremely important as they represent 99% of all enterprises (European Commission, 2015). Despite being ten years old, the definition is still the same nowadays. This research specifically focuses on B2B companies operating in France, Portugal, and Spain.

In 2023, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) across the European Union demonstrated notable variations in economic resilience and growth, with significant positive outcomes observed particularly in Portugal, Spain, and France. SMEs in Spain and Portugal were among the strongest performers, showcasing substantial growth in real value added, with Spain achieving a notable increase of 4.9% and Portugal also reflecting consistent improvement (European Commission, 2024). France followed this positive trend, albeit at a more moderate rate, reflecting the general stability and adaptability of SMEs within its robust and diversified economic structure (Katsinis et al., 2024).

Employment figures for SMEs in these three countries further underline their economic resilience and agility. Spain recorded an employment growth of 2.4%, illustrating SME capacity to create jobs even amidst broader economic uncertainty (European Commission, 2024). Portugal exhibited similar resilience, with SME employment growing steadily, indicating effective adaptability to post-pandemic market demands and inflationary pressures. In France, micro-enterprises showed particular dynamism, significantly contributing to employment stability within the SME sector (Katsinis et al., 2024).

While SMEs in Portugal, Spain, and France displayed favourable growth and employment outcomes, broader regional contrasts emerged across the EU. Eastern European economies faced significant challenges, primarily driven by high inflation and geopolitical instability, notably the impacts of the war in Ukraine. Estonia, Bulgaria, and Lithuania experienced sharp declines in SME productivity and economic output, highlighting uneven economic recovery paths within the EU-27 (Katsinis et al., 2024).

In conclusion, SMEs play a pivotal role in economic growth and innovation, both within Portugal and the broader European landscape. For policymakers and business leaders aiming to enhance SMEs' competitiveness and resilience, keeping abreast of current performance metrics, challenges, and available support systems remains crucial.

The purpose of this study is to investigate commercial activities within the B2B context and the service marketing mix focus. This sub-section further develops the importance of a market-oriented approach, service quality, and customer relationships as the key factors for success in the B2B context. Janita and Miranda (2013) identified four key dimensions of B2B service quality: reliability and privacy, the usefulness of information, value-added services, and efficiency. These dimensions emphasize the importance of delivering reliable and private services, providing useful information to customers, offering value-added services that go beyond basic offerings, and ensuring an efficient service delivery. Therefore, by focusing on these dimensions, companies can enhance their service quality and strengthen their position in the B2B context.

Advancements in technology have enabled SMEs with fewer resources to manage customer relationships more effectively, resulting in a focus on customer durability and the ability to invest in marketing to increase turnover and profit margins (Rust & Huang, 2014). Consequently, marketing departments have become financially responsible services that focus more on customer relationships to provide added value and reduce price sensitivity. This customer-focused approach allows suppliers to constantly improve their offerings and maintain marginal value creation in economies of scale through technological improvements, such as promoting on social media and achieving organic search results on internet search engines.

SMEs possess distinct characteristics that distinguish them from larger organisations. One of the most notable traits is that they are typically run by individuals with less managerial

capacity (Leitner & Guldenberg, 2010). This limitation can be attributed to various factors such as insufficient resources, lack of managerial experience, and limited access to training or professional development opportunities (Chan et al., 2002). As a result, SME owners and managers often require a clear and accessible framework to enhance their marketing capabilities and effectively leverage high-level marketing dimensions. One way to address this challenge is to provide SME managers with a step-by-step approach to more complex high-level marketing dimensions, such as customer orientation, market orientation, and innovation, through the application of mid-level dimensions such as the marketing mix (Grönroos, 1994). As analysed in the current research, the marketing mix, often referred to as the 4Ps (Product, Price, Promotion, and Placement), is a widely recognised framework that offers practical guidance to strategic marketing managers (Constantinides, 2006). By adjusting and extending the 4Ps to as many Ps as needed to suit their specific contexts, SMEs' managers can develop a more comprehensive strategy that adapts to their customers' needs and desires. Therefore, in addition to the traditional marketing mix, this study also suggests that SMEs can benefit from adopting an extended marketing mix that incorporates a minimum of four additional elements: People, Process, Physical evidence, and Productivity and Quality (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007). This extended mix can further enhance SMEs' complex marketing capabilities by addressing the unique challenges that arise in the current service-oriented global culture (Rust et al., 2004).

SMEs form a significant segment of the business community and contribute substantially to the global economy. Understanding their challenges, capabilities, and marketing strategies is crucial for organisations seeking to serve this segment effectively. By simply focusing on the broadened marketing mix dimensions, which can be easier for managers to understand and implement, SMEs can develop their strategies more effectively, leading to improved overall performance and competitiveness. Due to their unique characteristics and managerial constraints, SMEs generally require a clear and accessible framework to enhance their marketing capabilities. By focusing on mid-level dimensions such as the marketing mix and its possible extensions, SME managers can better understand and implement high-level marketing dimensions, ultimately improving their organisations' performance and competitiveness in the marketplace.

Chapter 2 Conclusion

The traditional 4Ps marketing mix dimensions are typically pushed to SMEs by its context, the market demand and competition, but that solely does not mean that the organisation will maintain itself in economies of scale or in a position of competitive advantage. The research focus of this master dissertation pertains to the dimensions that customers experience during and after "the moment of truth" as defined by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007), that is, after customers decide to buy certain products and get that new element to their personal or professional environments. These dimensions are integral to the value creation chain and play a crucial role in promoting and educating the market for advocacy of determined brands. They serve as a direct conduit between an organisation's strategy and its intended audience (Lee & Ng, 2001) and can provide customer data directly (Menon & Varadarajan, 1992) or feed data, information, and knowledge into a system framework to be transformed into knowledge used for the development of new dimensional strategic adaptations.

Thus, this study seeks to integrate the concepts of Lovelock and Wirtz's 8 Ps dimensions and Lauterborn's 4Cs to develop an effective and comprehensive service marketing strategy that meets the needs and expectations of customers in a hyper-connected market. Happy customers not only tend to repeat purchases, but also act as advocates, promoting the firm's market offerings in their offline and online circles (Desiraju & Shugan, 1999). The exponential reach of customer networks can be explained by Metcalfe's law, which relates the value of a network to the square existing elements within that network (Metcalfe, 2013) in the hyper-connected reality. Firms can leverage this phenomenon by adopting the correct market orientation and building strong and loyal consumer communities, leading to consistent business growth and greater marketing effectiveness and efficiency.

In conclusion, firms need to orient themselves towards the customer journey and ensure that their strategic decisions prioritize customer experiences. The combination of Five A's model from Kotler et al. (2016), Lovelock and Wirtz's (2007) extended marketing mix, and Lauterborn's (1990) 4Cs explain how firms use a hyper-connected society to exponentiate their marketing and other organisational dimensions' innovation (Bessant et al., 2005). By doing so, firms can achieve long-term competitive advantage in today's hyper-connected society.

Chapter 3: How to develop and implement a successful service marketing mix strategy towards the B2B organisations

3.1 B2B cross-cultural customer value perception and its impact on customer satisfaction

Customer value perception involves a customer's assessment of a product or service's benefits and costs, considering their needs and expectations (Gupta & Lehmann, 2003). In the B2B context, customer value often arises from the value a product or service provides to a customer's business, such as improved efficiency or cost savings (Anderson & Narus, 1998). However, non-economic factors such as the supplier's reputation, reliability, and trustworthiness also influence customer value perception (Homburg et al., 2012).

Understanding customer value perception is crucial for companies to create effective marketing strategies and customer relationship management programs (Woodruff, 1997). By comprehending customer value perception, companies can segment their customer base and develop customized offerings that provide to each segment's unique needs (Woodruff, 1997). Moreover, understanding customer value perception enables companies to set prices that reflect the value customers assign to their products and services, thus fostering customer loyalty and satisfaction (Zeithaml, 1988).

However, it is crucial to understand that customer desires and expectations are important dimensions that must be considered in business decisions. Although desires and expectations are often overlooked, they are born with customers' needs and created by the organisation or competitive market, respectively (Gardial et al., 1994; Spreng et al., 1996). Customers' desires and expectations have a significant influence on their perceived value, as desires are intrinsically connected to expectations, even though they are different dimensions (Woodruff et al., 1983).

Additionally, firms must acknowledge the unique background, culture, origin, and context that influence customer preferences and decisions (Edelman, 2010). For instance, after-sales services play a critical role in B2B customer value perceptions and satisfaction. These services encompass the activities a company performs after selling a product, including installation, maintenance, repair, and customer support (Matthyssens & Vandenbempt,

2010). Effective after-sales services can help companies differentiate themselves from competitors and increase customer satisfaction and loyalty (Matthyssens & Vandenbempt, 2010).

The role of customers in business is crucial because they contribute to the achievement of organisational objectives by providing value to the organisation. Customers consider the price they pay relative to their satisfaction with a product or service, which includes both monetary and non-monetary trade-offs (Narver & Slater, 1990; Woodruff, 1997; Ulaga, 2003).

Moreover, perceived value is often aligned with the customer's evaluation of what was delivered by the supplier after the purchase has been made (Anderson & Narus, 1998), which is confirmed by the theoretical framework of Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) in the post-purchase stage of the customer journey.

The service dimension of the marketing mix is particularly important in the B2B context, as firms cannot afford to lose some of their key customers because of a mistake made by a Direct Contact Service (DCS) employee or any other touchpoint that occurs after the first purchase has been made (Kumar & Grisaffe, 2004). The moment of consumption, or the first contact of the customer with the acquired goods or services, as named by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) as the "moment of truth," is where expectations meet reality. The role of the DCS staff is to ensure that this moment goes as smoothly and pleasingly as possible to the customer.

Lastly, national cultures can have a significant impact on consumers' value perceptions, as people from different countries or cultures may attach contradictory meanings and relevance to different aspects of a firm's marketing mix (Overby et al., 2004). Therefore, it is essential to assess how different cultures perceive value, especially in the context of global competition, where customer requirements and expectations are constantly increasing. Organisations need to be proactive and sensitive to these needs and want to deliver cross-cultural customers' desires and expectations (Hofstede, 2011).

In conclusion, customer perceived value is an important concept in the business literature, it refers to the dimensions that customers perceive and assess when purchasing products or services from an organisation. This study argues that customers' national cultures have an

impact on their perceived value, which makes it essential for organisations to account for cultural differences in their business decisions.

3.2 Addressable market expansion of B2B product-centric relationships through services

B2B customer handling refers to how a supplier interacts with its customers. Research indicates that B2B customers expect their suppliers to handle them in the same way that they would like to be treated (Anderson & Narus, 1998). It encompasses aspects such as responsiveness, reliability, flexibility, and trustworthiness. B2B customer handling is crucial for building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with customers, and significantly impacts customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Nonetheless, customer satisfaction is a complex, multi-dimensional construct that reflects a customer's overall evaluation of a product or service (Oliver, 1999). After-sales services play a crucial role in enhancing customer satisfaction by addressing any issues or concerns that customers may have after purchase (Heskett et al., 1994). Research suggests that after-sales services can significantly impact customer satisfaction and loyalty in B2B relationships (Parasuraman, 1998). Recent work confirms that artificial-intelligence applications now underpin many of those service extensions, mapping specific AI tasks to the B2B service-mix and demonstrating measurable efficiency gains (Moradi & Dass, 2022).

Customer satisfaction is a vital aspect of a company's success and has been extensively discussed in the academic literature. Achieving customer satisfaction involves meeting customer expectations and fulfilling their needs. Anderson and Narus (1984) defined customer satisfaction as a positive perception resulting from consumers' appraisal of the "ingredients" that the supplier delivers. Customers' satisfaction is achieved when their expectations are met and their needs are fulfilled (Richtnér et al., 2018), but it is a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors beyond product quality alone. These factors include price, customer service, brand image, and other dimensions that depend on culture (Oliver, 1999).

Satisfaction ratings have been found to be a crucial factor in explaining repurchase behaviour (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). Moreover, loyal customers tend to be less price-sensitive, particularly in innovative fields (Boamah & Agbozo, 2017).

The Stakeholder theory posits that firms should consider the interests of all stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, employees, and the community, in their decision-making processes (Freeman, 2010). In B2B relationships, customers are among the most critical stakeholders, and their satisfaction is vital for business success. Firms adopting a stakeholder approach to their B2B relationships are more likely to achieve sustained competitive advantage by building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with their customers (Gundlach et al., 1995).

The addressable market for any business is the audience that the organisation aims to sell products or services. Product-centric suppliers who focus solely on selling their products realize the need to expand their target markets through the provision of services (Sheth & Sharma, 2008). This section discusses the importance of including service logic in the marketing strategy of product-centric organisations and how it can enhance their market coverage, ultimately resulting in increased customer satisfaction, loyalty, and repeat purchases.

Grönroos (2006) highlighted the need for product-centric suppliers to provide extra services with their products to supply to the needs and expectations of their customers. For instance, customers who purchase a drill expect a manual explaining how to use it efficiently. Failure to provide such a service will limit the target market to only professional industrial segments, thereby missing potential customers who lack the necessary skills to operate the tool. Grönroos' research emphasizes that product-centric organisations, such as drill manufacturers, must incorporate service logic into their strategic market implementation to offer the complete transformation process that customers seek.

3.3 Enhancing customer perception through employee differences: A Service Marketing Triangle perspective

The Service Marketing Triangle, conceptualized as a strategic model, delineates the interactions among companies, employees, and customers in the service sector (Zeithaml et al., 1990). The service provider refers to the organisation or individual that delivers the service. The customer is the recipient of the service. The service environment includes all physical and social aspects that influence the delivery and consumption of the service.

The three elements of the Service Marketing Triangle are interconnected, and any change in one element affects the others. For instance, changes in the service provider, such as employee turnover or training programs, can affect the customer experience. Changes in customers, such as expectations or preferences, can affect service providers' delivery of services. Changes in the service environment, such as the layout of a physical space or the cultural norms of society, can affect both the service provider and the customer. This framework underpins the importance of aligning company promises with employee actions and customer expectations, highlighting the interdependencies within service delivery.

3.3.1 Theoretical foundations

The empirical study by Anderson and Smith (2017) in the *Journal of Services Marketing* extends the application of the Service Marketing Triangle by exploring the dynamic relationships among customers, employees, and the firm (employee-firm EF, customer-firm CF, and customer-employee CE dyads), revealing that the employee-firm fit significantly influences customer evaluations of the service experience. This empirical evidence underscores the foundational role of service employees in shaping customer perceptions and experiences, aligning closely with the objectives of this research, underscoring the foundational role of service employees in shaping digital as well as physical encounters (Larivière et al., 2017).

3.3.2 Employee attributes and customer perceptions

Building on the insights from Lemmink and Mattsson (2002), who examined the impact of employee behaviour and conveyed feelings of warmth on customer perceptions in service encounters, this research explores specific employee differences, such as language proficiency and availability for in-person interactions. The study highlights that attributes like warmth and empathic behaviours are critical for fostering customer loyalty and satisfaction, suggesting that employee differences can profoundly impact customer perceptions of service quality and loyalty.

3.3.3 Practical implications for service marketing

Drawing from the components and types of marketing involved in the Service Marketing Triangle, this research identifies key areas for enhancing service delivery through employee training and development. Internal marketing efforts focused on empowering employees with the skills and behaviours that align with customer expectations are vital. This involves

not only language and communication skills but also training in emotional intelligence and empathy, enabling employees to effectively deliver on the company's service promises.

The Service Marketing Triangle offers a useful lens through which to examine the complexities and interdependencies of service marketing. By understanding these relationships, researchers and practitioners can develop strategies and tactics to enhance service experiences, customer satisfaction, and overall success in the service industry.

3.4 Price sensitivity

The concept of price sensitivity refers to the extent to which consumers are affected by changes in the prices of goods or services. The level of price sensitivity varies depending on economic strength, cultural factors, and the presence of alternative options. Monroe (1971) argued that customers' perceptions of pricing strategies can vary depending on their economic strength and cultural factors. Subsequent research has focused on price changes (Bucklin et al., 1995), price presentation (Dhar & Hoch, 1996), and price comparison with competition or substitutes (Lichtenstein & Bearden, 1989). More recent elasticity estimates in B2B markets indicate comparable patterns (Awaad et al., 2024). These authors also show that lifetime-value models outperform single-period margins when gauging the revenue impact of price moves.

Perceived value has been suggested as a critical factor in price sensitivity. Dodds et al. (1991) defined perceived value as the conclusion that customers draw from the combination of goods and services they receive, taking into account the price they pay, and the costs associated with the purchase. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) expanded on this concept by stating that perceived value can be evaluated from functional, emotional, social, and conditional perspectives.

Innovation capabilities can also affect customers' level of price sensitivity. Goldsmith and Newell (1997) found that customers are less likely to be sensitive to price changes when brands are perceived as innovative. Privacy risk, however, can offset that tolerance: evidence from product-service-system selling reveals that heightened privacy concerns sharply raise price sensitivity (Nijssen et al., 2022). Grönroos (2006) also developed these ideas with his process approach to value delivery, suggesting that all actions taken after the customer has made a purchase are part of the extended service marketing mix.

Stock (2005) demonstrated a clear inverse relationship between customer satisfaction and price sensitivity. Satisfied and loyal customers, as described by Webster (1965), place less importance on cost. This implies that companies should focus on delivering high-value products and services while keeping the pricing strategy in line with customers' perception of value.

In conclusion, price sensitivity is a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors, including economic strength, cultural factors, competition, perceived value, innovation capabilities, customer satisfaction, and communication. Companies should take these factors into account in order to effectively manage their pricing strategies and maintain customer loyalty. By understanding the intricacies of price sensitivity and addressing the needs and preferences of their customers, businesses can optimize their pricing strategies and foster long-term customer relationships.

3.5 Connecting the management background to service mix implementation

This sub-section aims to explore the impact of variables influenced by the strategic marketing department on adopting service as logic for business, customer satisfaction and price sensitivity, particularly in the current period of inflation (European Central Bank, 2022). It also examines the relationship between the management background and the implementation of the service mix in the B2B context, combining it with the forementioned Stakeholder theory.

The adaptation of companies to changing market conditions is considered a form of innovation that requires integration into various organisational departments and dimensions. Porter (1979) emphasizes the importance of companies adapting to market changes, while Bessant et al. (2005) argue that innovation and adapting to market conditions is a key driver of success that can only be achieved through the correct management orientation towards change. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) discuss the role of marketing in adapting to changing market conditions, while Kotler et al. (2016) reiterate the importance of customer-centric marketing strategies.

Effective marketing strategies can help companies navigate changing market conditions, maintain customer satisfaction, and manage price sensitivity, especially during periods of economic uncertainty. The maturity of a firm's AI capability also matters; Reghioi and

Soukeur (2024) link advanced AI adoption to greater pricing agility and faster margin recovery when costs fluctuate.

Geletkanycz and Hambrick (1997) found that top management support, shared values, and customer focus have a significant positive effect on market orientation. They concluded that management plays a crucial role in creating a customer-focused culture that enables the organisation to identify and respond to changing customer needs and preferences. Managers shape the organisational processes, methodologies, and staff training, which directly impacts employees' engagement with the company's objectives and ultimately the customer experience (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). The authors argue that managers play a key role in shaping the organisational culture, which in turn impacts employees' perception of their work and their level of commitment to the organisation.

The examination of the relationship between the management background and the implementation of the service mix can be crucial for understanding the factors that impact customer satisfaction and price sensitivity in the B2B context. The management background is a crucial factor that comprehensively influences the company and its ability to adopt a service logic mindset but cannot be directly influenced by the company itself. Further research might be needed to fully understand the impact of the management background on the service mix and how it affects customer satisfaction and price sensitivity in the B2B context.

Nonetheless, limited research has been conducted on the relationship between the personality types of managers and the quality of service provided by their teams (Dougherty et al., 2008; Sawyerr et al., 2009). Sawyerr et al. (2009) identified five key personality dimensions to consider when hiring employees who will manage interaction with customers: conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to new experiences, emotional stability, and locus of control. However, these characteristics may not always be easy to identify during a job application procedure as candidates can present themselves differently during an interview (Amar & Mullaney, 2017). These authors suggested using standardized personality tests such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Hogan Personality Inventory, and DISC (Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness) Personality Assessment to mitigate uncertainty in the hiring process. These tests aim to identify individuals with personalities more prone to innovation. However, the authors acknowledge that this is a

complex and controversial topic that may not be appropriate to address in all research studies.

In summary, the success of a company's implementation of its service marketing mix can be greatly influenced by the management background and personality types of its managers. Research has shown that certain personality traits can positively impact the customer experience performance of Direct Contact Service employees. While standardized personality tests have been suggested as a means of reducing uncertainty in the hiring process, this is a complex and controversial topic that requires further exploration. Consequently, in this investigation, the management background is considered as an independent variable that can influence business practices but not be influenced by the business within the scope of this study due to the variable's high ambiguity level.

Chapter 3 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a comprehensive understanding of the key aspects of developing and implementing a successful service marketing mix strategy for B2B organisations. By focusing on B2B customer value perception, national culture, perceived value, stakeholder theory, target market expansion, management background, the service marketing triangle, and price sensitivity, the chapter has explored into the essential factors that contribute to a thriving B2B service marketing strategy.

The practical implications of this chapter are significant for managers who aim to foster strong business relationships with other B2B companies. By recognising the importance of customer satisfaction and its connection to perceived value, managers can tailor their marketing strategies to address the unique needs of their B2B clients. Furthermore, acknowledging the influence of national culture and perceived value enables managers to adapt their marketing efforts to diverse markets, thereby maximizing the effectiveness of their strategies.

Incorporating stakeholder theory and building robust B2B relationships are critical for long-term success. Managers who understand the interdependencies between their organisations and stakeholders will be better equipped to create mutually beneficial partnerships. Emphasizing after-sales services as a means of expanding target markets for product-centric suppliers offers additional avenues for growth and revenue generation.

The practical application of the service marketing triangle, along with understanding the role of price sensitivity, will enable managers to make more informed decisions about their service offerings and pricing strategies. By connecting the management background to service mix implementation, this chapter offers insights into leveraging organisational resources and capabilities to create competitive advantages in the B2B marketplace. The insights provided here can be used to inform decision-making processes and create effective, sustainable business relationships that drive growth and success in today's increasingly competitive global market.

Chapter 4: Competitive advantage and the market's future

4.1 Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving and increasingly competitive global market, competitive advantage has become a vital aspect for organisations, particularly for SMEs. This chapter aims to expand on the concepts of competitive advantage and its significance for SMEs by incorporating the latest development in the field, Marketing 5.0.

In addition, the chapter seeks to build upon the research conducted by Vorhies and Morgan (2005) and Merrilees et al. (2010), providing a contemporary perspective on the challenges and opportunities cross-cultural SMEs suppliers face in achieving and sustaining a competitive edge.

Subsequently, it will explore the various sources of competitive advantage, highlighting the importance of leveraging unique resources and capabilities to differentiate SMEs suppliers from their competitors.

Finally, the chapter will conclude by identifying the challenges and opportunities SMEs suppliers encounter in achieving and sustaining competitive advantage in today's dynamic and complex business environment.

To accomplish this, the chapter is structured as follows: initially, it will discuss the definition and types of competitive advantage, emphasizing its relevance for SMEs in the current market landscape. Next, the concept of Marketing 5.0 was introduced, elaborating on its key principles and practical implications for businesses looking to gain a competitive advantage. It will then analyse into how this dissertation builds on the foundational research of Vorhies and Morgan (2005) and Merrilees et al. (2010) by offering new insights and contemporary and multicultural perspectives on competitive advantage for SMEs.

By offering a comprehensive understanding of competitive advantage and integrating the latest advancements in marketing, this chapter aspires to provide valuable insights for SMEs striving to succeed in the modern marketplace. Through the analysis of the latest research and the examination of practical implications, the chapter aims to offer a solid foundation for understanding and leveraging competitive advantage in the context of SMEs.

4.2 Defining competitive advantage

Competitive advantage refers to a firm's ability to outperform its competitors in terms of profitability or market share (Barney, 1991). Porter (2008) argues that competitive advantage can be achieved through cost leadership, differentiation, or focus. Cost leadership involves achieving lower costs than competitors, allowing firms to offer products at lower prices or achieve higher profit margins. Conversely, differentiation focuses on creating unique products or services valued by customers, which enables firms to charge higher prices or achieve higher profit margins. Ultimately, focus relates to focusing even further into cost leadership or differentiation.

Competitive advantage is particularly significant for SMEs, as they often operate in highly competitive environments (Collins & Moore, 1970). To succeed, SMEs must differentiate themselves from competitors and address resource constraints, allowing them to compete with larger firms (Davidsson & Wiklund, 2006). In order to do so, SMEs can leverage several sources of competitive advantage, with innovation being one of the most important (Porter, 2008). Innovation also encompasses 4Ps: Paradigm Innovation, Process Innovation, Position Innovation, and Product Innovation (Bessant et al., 2005).

Furthermore, recent work leverages large-scale EU panel data to derive marketing-specific sensing and seizing metrics, demonstrating how dynamic capabilities directly feed competitive positioning in SMEs (Khurana et al., 2022). Firms capable of innovating can create new markets or disrupt existing ones, providing significant competitive advantage.

Achieving and sustaining competitive advantage can be challenging for all firms, but SMEs face unique challenges, such as resource constraints (Davidsson & Wiklund, 2006). Limited financial and human resources can hinder SMEs' ability to invest in innovation, marketing, or other sources of competitive advantage. Another challenge is the dynamic nature of markets (Day & Wensley, 1988). Markets constantly change, and SMEs must adapt to these changes to maintain their competitive advantage. This can be particularly challenging for SMEs lacking the resources to invest in market research or other forms of analysis.

Effective marketing helps SMEs understand customers' needs and preferences, allowing them to develop products and services that meet these needs. As this research demotes, Marketing is the original source of competitive advantage (Day & Wensley, 1988), as also seen in the case of brands such as Coca-Cola and RC Cola, being RC Cola the first, still lost

the market to Coca-Cola due to the inability to innovate marketing strategies to the cross-cultural market despite of being the first to create the type of that soft drink. Another clear example is between the mp3 and the Apple's iPod. In practice, firms can repeat these achievements through enabling all 4Ps of innovation to be reached by the active and constant communication channels that are generated by the focus of the Marketing department onto the complete customer journey, enabling identification of further needs, network developments, improvements, and all "must haves" and "good to haves" in the desired market segments.

4.3 Marketing 5.0

Marketing 5.0¹ is a customer-centric marketing approach that combines the principles of traditional and digital marketing with a focus on creating value for customers, society, and the planet. It emphasizes on engaging customers emotionally and creating a sense of purpose through marketing activities (Kotler et al., 2021). Marketing 5.0 is based on three principles: co-creation, customer experience, and purpose-driven marketing:

Co-creation is a process where firms and customers work together to create value. Customers are no longer passive recipients of products and services but active participants in the value creation process (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Co-creation involves engaging customers in product design, development, and delivery, and allowing them to provide feedback and suggestions to improve the product or service.

Customer experience is the sum of all interactions a customer has with a brand. It encompasses every touchpoint a customer has with the brand, from the initial awareness to post-purchase interactions (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Customer experience is critical in Marketing 5.0 as it focuses on creating a positive emotional connection with the brand and delivering a seamless and personalised experience to customers.

Purpose-driven marketing is about creating a sense of purpose and meaning through marketing activities. It involves aligning the brand's values with the customers'

¹ Philip Kotler has already introduced "Marketing 6.0: The Future is Immersive," further expanding on the evolution of marketing strategies (Kotler, 2023).

values and creating a shared sense of purpose (Kotler et al., 2016). Purpose-driven marketing is becoming increasingly important, as customers are looking for brands that align with their values and beliefs.

Moreover, price-sensitivity insights from recent lifetime-value modelling enhance competitive-advantage frameworks by quantifying long-term revenue impacts (Awaad et al., 2024).

4.3.1 Marketing 5.0 in practice

Marketing 5.0 is a modern concept that is not yet widely adopted. However, some companies have begun integrating its principles into their marketing strategies. For instance, Unilever has embraced a purpose-driven marketing approach, aligning its brand values with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (We are Unilever, 2023). Similarly, Patagonia, an outdoor apparel company, focuses on generating positive environmental and social impacts through its products and marketing activities (Patagonia 50, 2023).

4.3.2 Challenges and opportunities

Implementing Marketing 5.0 principles comes with several challenges for companies. These include understanding customer values, incorporating co-creation and purpose-driven marketing into existing strategies, and evaluating the impact of marketing efforts on customer experience and societal outcomes.

Despite these challenges, Marketing 5.0 offers numerous opportunities for firms to stand out in the marketplace and establish strong, enduring relationships with their customers. By adopting Marketing 5.0 principles, companies create value for both customers and society, enhance their brand image, build customer loyalty, and drive long-term growth.

4.4 Resource-Based View and marketing capabilities of SMEs

Barney et al. (2001) introduced the Resourced-Based View (RBV) perspective, which views an organisation as a collection of resources that transform and deliver outputs to society, adding unique value that results in competitive advantages in the market. Going deeper into the resources that a company has, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) emphasised the importance of individuals and the knowledge they accumulate and disseminate within the organisation in creating value and competitive advantage.

The RBV perspective highlights the importance of resources in an organisation's success, while the service marketing mix provides a framework for developing and implementing successful marketing strategies that increase customer value and loyalty. The extended service marketing mix strategy can help organisations achieve their marketing objectives by addressing various aspects of marketing, including product development, pricing, placement, promotion, processes, market information management, marketing planning, and marketing implementation.

Merrilees et al. (2010) applied the RBV approach to examine the marketing strategies of SMEs in the Australian B2B context. The authors identified higher-level marketing capabilities such as Market Orientation, Management Capability, Branding, and Innovation as critical for achieving better marketing and financial performance, arguing that the marketing mix is a mid-level marketing strategy. A systematic review of dynamic-capability research further reveals gaps in marketing-capability measurement, suggesting areas for future SME capability development (Supriyanto et al., 2024).

Merrilees et al. (2010) findings challenge the perspective of Vorhies and Morgan (2005), who surveyed 63 managers, including nine senior marketing managers from Fortune-500 companies, to form their views on the marketing mix's mid-level dimensions relevance.

Further research could explore the interplay between higher-level marketing capabilities and the marketing mix, as well as their impact on marketing and financial performance, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of SME marketing strategies and enable better marketing and financial outcomes.

While Merrilees et al. (2010) study offers valuable insights into the marketing strategies of SMEs in the Australian B2B context, it is essential to examine the topic in different geographical and cultural regions to validate the generalizability of their findings. International SMEs also benefit when dynamic capabilities moderate entrepreneurial orientation, leading to stronger cross-border performance (Fernandes et al., 2025). Simonson and Tversky (1992) found that market orientation levels vary across different countries and cultures, emphasizing the need for further research to understand the impact of cultural and geographical differences on SME marketing strategies.

A meta-analysis conducted by Bello et al. (2016) revealed a strong positive relationship between market orientation and financial performance in SMEs. This finding suggests that a market orientation, characterised by a focus on customer needs and responsiveness to market trends, can lead to improved financial outcomes for SMEs.

Other higher-level marketing capabilities, such as management capability, branding, and innovation, are also essential for SMEs to achieve better marketing and financial outcomes. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) found that firms with strong management capability were better able to implement marketing strategies and achieve superior performance outcomes. Aaker (2003) noted that a strong brand could help SMEs differentiate themselves from competitors and increase customer loyalty. Merrilees et al. (2010) found that firms with a strong brand image were better able to generate higher levels of customer loyalty and repeat business. Moreover, Merrilees et al. (2010) discovered that firms with strong innovation capability were better able to bring new and improved products to market, leading to increased sales and market share. However, considering the unique challenges and obstacles SMEs face in the market due to their management structure, limited resources, and expertise, this study aims to provide clear, easy-to-follow directions for cross-cultural SMEs in their pursuit of marketing excellence. This is achieved by utilizing the marketing mix as the foundation that nurtures higher-level dimensions identified by Merrilees et al. (2010), such as Market Orientation, Management Capability, Branding, and Innovation.

The traditional 4Ps marketing mix (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) has been expanded to include People, Physical Evidence, Process, and Performance, forming the extended 8 Ps marketing mix. Each of these dimensions plays a crucial role in shaping the customer experience and defining the company's value proposition. However, further research could explore the relationship between these capabilities and performance outcomes in different geographical and cultural regions.

This research focuses on the key post-purchase factors in the marketing mix framework: People, Physical Evidence, Process, and Performance. By concentrating on these areas, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can improve customer experience and satisfaction, which are crucial for long-term success. These four components are particularly significant for SMEs in multicultural environments and should be central to their marketing plans. The Resource-Based View (RBV) and the extended marketing mix framework

provide valuable perspectives for businesses aiming to effectively serve the B2B market. Finally, case evidence from the mobility sector underscores that sensing, seizing and reconfiguration tasks remain central to SME digital transformation, offering transferable lessons for broader marketing-capability alignment (Saeedikiya et al., 2024).

Chapter 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the extensive literature review presented in Chapters 2 through 4 has been designed to provide a solid foundation for understanding the complexities of customer satisfaction, B2B value perception, and the development and implementation of successful service marketing mix strategies. To adapt to the hyper-connectivity, by thoroughly examining the Lovelock and Wirtz's (2007) customer journey, stages of consumption, and extended marketing mix, relating these theories with Lauterborn's 4Cs Model, and Five A's models, market orientation, and the B2B context, this chapter has established the key concepts and theories that underpin this research.

Furthermore, the exploration of the literature review has explored the importance of customer's national culture, perceived value, after-sales services in shaping customer expectations and their impact on businesses. Additionally, the chapter analysed competitive advantage, Marketing 5.0, and its elements such as co-creation, customer experience, and purpose-driven marketing, as well as the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for businesses in this ever-evolving landscape.

By detailing these topics, this study aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing customer satisfaction and B2B value perception in the context of service marketing mix strategies. This understanding will serve as the basis for this investigation into the development and implementation of successful service marketing mix strategies in the B2B organisation.

The literature review has not only highlighted the gaps in the existing body of knowledge but also emphasised the need for further empirical research to address these gaps and contribute to the advancement of the field. The subsequent chapters of this dissertation will build upon the theoretical foundation established by the literature review, employing a rigorous methodology to analyse data and test hypotheses, ultimately providing empirical

and practical recommendations for businesses seeking to enhance their service marketing mix strategies and achieve a competitive advantage in the market.

By connecting the various concepts, theories, and frameworks explored in the literature review, it has paved the way for a holistic investigation that will not only contribute to the academic discourse but also provide valuable guidance for practitioners in the field of B2B marketing. This, in turn, will help organisations to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the hyper-connected society and create meaningful, lasting relationships with their customers.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

The scientific methodology for academic research is a systematic and comprehensive process that helps researchers design and conduct high-quality research studies. This chapter outlines the quantitative approach employed in this master dissertation, which involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to test hypotheses and measure relationships between variables. The methodology involves several key steps essential for conducting rigorous and valid research.

The research design of this study is quantitative in nature and will involve surveying a large number of customers from the construction industry across the EU. The survey questionnaire was designed to gather data on the customers' value perception, and their propensity for diminishing price sensitivity towards firms' market offerings. Additionally, the survey also aimed to gather data on the role of after-sales services in achieving and maintaining competitive advantage for B2B SMEs in the construction industry. The data collected from the survey was analysed using statistical methods, such as regression analysis and factor analysis, to test the research hypotheses and provide insights into the cross-cultural B2B customer value perception.

This research contributes to the field of marketing by providing insights into cross-cultural customer value perception in the prefabrication construction industry and the impact of services on customer value perception. The findings from this study have the potential to inform the marketing strategies of supplier organisations to the prefabrication construction industry B2B SMEs, helping them to increase the value of their market offerings and achieve a competitive advantage. The study also has implications for future research, as it provides a foundation for exploring the relationship between stakeholder theory and the buyer-seller profile, which will contribute to the advancement of the field of marketing.

This study suggests that to achieve a competitive advantage in the B2B market of the construction industry, suppliers must expand the dimensions of their marketing strategy beyond the traditional 4Ps (Product, Price, Promotion, and Placement) to an 8 Ps approach. The extended 8 Ps approach adapts the former 4 Ps to elements of the Product, Place and

Time, Price and other Costs to the purchaser, Promotion and Education, and furthermore considers extra 4 Ps, that are elements that happen after the sale has occurred, such as Processes, People, Physical or Digital Placement, including Productivity and Quality – which organisations can alter to continuously adapt their strategies to remain competitive in today's hyper-connected society. The research aims to discover the marketing mix which of these dimensions that happen after the sale stage has occurred can enhance the B2B customer's value perception.

The main theoretical framework for this study is the company's need to adapt to the hyper-connected reality and the customer's evaluation of received value from the supplier after the sale has occurred. The concept of Marketing 4.0, as defined by Kotler et al. (2016), incorporates both traditional and digital marketing techniques to better serve the connected customer who shares experiences and wields increased power in the global market. Marketing 4.0 aims to combine style with substance in the construction of brands, with the ultimate goal of defending the customer's best interests.

Building on this framework, the recently introduced concept of Marketing 5.0 (Kotler et al., 2021) advances the dialogue by explicitly integrating value creation for customers, society, and the environment. Marketing 5.0 emphasises emotional engagement and purposeful interactions, grounded in three core principles: co-creation, customer experience, and purpose-driven marketing. Co-creation involves customers actively participating alongside firms in product design, development, and service delivery, thereby becoming essential collaborators in value generation rather than passive consumers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The notion of customer experience extends beyond mere satisfaction, encompassing the entirety of interactions across all brand touchpoints, seeking a seamless, personalised, and emotionally meaningful journey (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Lastly, purpose-driven marketing strives for alignment between the brand's core values and those of its customers, creating shared narratives of ethical, social, or environmental significance (Kotler et al., 2021).

Additionally, this study builds on the work of Merrilees et al. (2010) and Vorhies and Morgan (2005), who both used the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm to understand the firm's marketing strategy. However, this study adds a more focused approach to how

organisations can use the dimensions of the marketing mix to target markets and increase success certainty levels.

Furthermore, this study aligns with the service as a logic for marketing concept proposed by Grönroos (2006) and the focus on the customer's journey, as proposed by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007). This research takes these ideas further by placing the customer at the centre of the strategy definition, recognising that it is the customer who ultimately perceives the value delivered by the firm to society.

This research has a representation of a diverse cultural landscape, covering three countries with different cultures and languages. It aims to fill the gap left by Merrilees et al. (2010) limitation of conducting research in Australia and Vorhies and Morgan's (2005) traditional marketing mix-focused conclusions.

In this study, an experimental methodology was employed to explore the drivers of customer satisfaction in the construction industry, with the goal of eventually extending these findings to the broader B2B market. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), experimental research designs are valuable for establishing cause-and-effect relationships by manipulating independent variables to observe the effects on dependent variables.

Experimental designs are ideal for exploring causality, as they allow researchers to manipulate independent variables, control for extraneous factors, and observe the effects on dependent variables. This method is particularly useful here, as it offers a realistic depiction of the phenomena under study and helps establish causality (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

In this study, an experimental design is used to investigate how management backgrounds, the concept of service as a business logic, and customer satisfaction affect price sensitivity. This approach helps to identify the factors that enhance B2B customer satisfaction and supplier success in this context.

The research examines the influence of managers' backgrounds on business strategies and customer service within product-centric B2B environments. Prior research has shown that managerial experience impacts company performance. For example, Bertrand and Schoar (2003) discuss this connection in their article "Managing with Style: The Effect of Managers on Firm Policies," published in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

Additionally, the study explores how adopting a service-oriented business logic can drive customer satisfaction. This relationship is detailed in Javalgi et al. (2006) article in the Journal of Services Marketing.

In conclusion, by employing an experimental design, this study aims to provide a clearer understanding of the factors driving customer satisfaction, including management backgrounds and service-oriented business logic, and their effect on price sensitivity. This rigorous method allows for robust conclusions about the drivers of customer satisfaction and their relevance to other B2B markets.

5.2 Research questions and objective

The first step is to select a research problem and determine the research question. The research problem should be clearly defined and focused. This process requires a thorough review of the relevant literature to identify the gap in knowledge that the research aims to fill. Quivy and Van Campenhoudt (1988) suggest that the research question should be clear, concise, and focused.

A thorough examination of the existing literature illuminated unexplored areas, particularly in understanding the marketing strategies and the influence of after-sales services in expanding the target market for B2B product-centric suppliers. This gap stimulated the inception of the central research problem for this dissertation:

How can SMEs, primarily operating within the B2B sector with a product-centric focus, effectively leverage service-orientation and an expanded marketing mix to reduce price sensitivity among multicultural customers?

Subsequently, derived from this central research problem, the research questions guiding the empirical section of this master dissertation are:

- 1. How can product-centric suppliers effectively incorporate a service logic into their marketing strategies to expand their addressable market?**
- 2. What is the impact of after-sales services on customer loyalty, satisfaction, and competitive advantage in the hyper-connected society?**
- 3. Can the extended marketing mix framework be applied in B2B product-centric contexts, and what are the implications for SMEs?**

The research's main objective is to understand the B2B customer value perception during the first contact with purchased products and after the sale stage has occurred, with a focus on how the organisation applies strategies to the market. Despite these dimensions happening during “the moment of truth” and after-sales, they can provide valuable organisational knowledge that can guide firms in increasing value from existing market offerings or creating new value to meet new customer needs (Bonnafous-Boucher & Rendtorff, 2016).

The relationship between the buyer-seller profile will also be assessed to determine if stakeholder theory applies, with the intention of extrapolating the results to understand what these customer personas expect from suppliers (Gibson, 2000).

This research aims to expand the traditional marketing mix model proposed by Borden (1964), which includes the 4Ps of product, price, place, and promotion. The research problem is centred on understanding cross-cultural construction industry customers' value perception through dimensions experienced during consumption and after-sales. These dimensions are believed to have a greater impact on creating market knowledge and influencing the traditional 4Ps. The study seeks to provide a more nuanced and engaged approach to marketing for the construction industry, taking into consideration the service-dominant logic for marketing proposed by Grönroos (2006) and the customer journey-focused approach proposed by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007).

This study further aims to add to the existing literature by broadening the focused customers' culture to including multiple countries in the EU that provides a diverse geographical landscape with different cultures and languages. This broadens the scope of previous research, which had limitations in terms of geographical representation, such as the research by Merrilees et al. (2010) which was limited to Australia, and Vorhies and Morgan's (2005) research which was limited to traditional marketing mix conclusions. The study's aim is to fill the gap left by these limitations and provide insights into cross-cultural value perception in the B2B as a customer.

5.3 Rationale for the methodological approach

To address the research questions and objectives, a suitable methodological approach is required. The chosen methodology should allow for an in-depth investigation of the marketing strategies, customer journey, and after-sales services in the context of product-

centric suppliers such as prefabricated stone and glass producers. Moreover, the methodology should enable the researcher to gather rich data that can be used to generate insights and contribute to the advancement of marketing theory and practice.

Considering the complexity of the research questions and the need to explore the phenomena from multiple perspectives, a quantitative research approach was employed. This approach involves the collection and analysis of numerical data, enabling researchers to capture the statistical relationships between variables and test hypotheses (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The methodology included a structured survey, which aimed to test the effectiveness of marketing strategies in increasing awareness and customer satisfaction among prefabrication glass and stone construction B2B customers.

5.4 Hypotheses

Following a comprehensive review of the literature on the subject, this master dissertation proposes four hypotheses to be tested in the multicultural B2B construction industry market. These hypotheses aim to provide valuable insights into the relationship between various factors affecting the performance and customer satisfaction in the industry. This chapter presents each conceptual framework along with the supporting literature and conclusions drawn from the existing research.

Hypothesis 1

There is a positive correlation between a company's market orientation, characterised by the adoption of a service-oriented approach, and its management background.

This dissertation is grounded in the literature by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007), who argue that effective service marketing necessitates the integration of people, technology, and strategy. The construction industry, traditionally product-focused, has seen a shift towards a service-oriented approach, as customers increasingly demand not only quality products but also quality service experiences (Grönroos, 1984). Consequently, this dissertation aligns with the service-dominant logic that underpins the service-dominant perspective (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

Previous research has indicated that the background of top management, including education and industry experience, can significantly impact the performance of construction projects

(Kagioglou et al., 2001). Therefore, the incorporation of a service-oriented logic into business operations may positively influence the performance of the prefabrication construction industry, with management background serving as an independent factor.

Hypothesis 2

There is a positive correlation between shorter cultural and geographical gaps and customer satisfaction.

The marketing of services can be understood through a triangular framework involving the company, its employees, and customers (Zeithaml et al., 1990). Thus, it is vital to assess whether employees working for the supplier are relevant in the sub-sector analysed, or if the importance of the product persists. This dissertation aims to assess if shorter cultural and geographical gaps between service employees and customers can lead to improved customer satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3

Adaptive and continued after-sales service created by an extended marketing mix approach positively correlates with cross-cultural customers' satisfaction levels.

This dissertation is informed by the research of Majchrzak et al. (2004) and Kotler et al. (2016), who emphasize the importance of the extended service marketing mix and its influence on customer satisfaction. The service marketing dimensions can add value by generating insights from customers' environments, which can, in turn, inform the firm's offerings. This dissertation posits that an adaptive and continued after-sales service can enhance cross-cultural customers' satisfaction levels.

Hypothesis 4

Customer satisfaction of cross-cultural clients negatively correlates with clients' and prospects' price sensitivity.

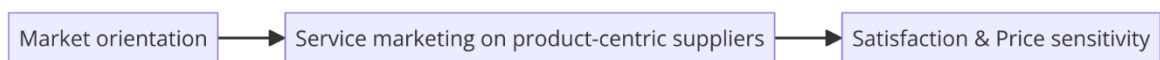
This dissertation seeks to examine the extent to which customer satisfaction among cross-cultural clients influences their perception of price sensitivity. It tests if satisfied customers are less likely to be price-sensitive, as they perceive the value they receive from a product or service to be worth the price paid (Anderson et al., 1994).

In conclusion, these four hypotheses aim to study a framework for understanding the complex relationships between market orientation, management background, cultural and geographical gaps, customer satisfaction, and price sensitivity in the multicultural B2B construction industry. By testing these hypotheses, this master dissertation aims to contribute to the development of effective strategies and best practices for businesses operating in this dynamic and evolving industry.

5.5 Research design and methods

Once the research problem and questions have been identified, the next step is to determine the research design. This involves deciding on the type of study to be conducted (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods), the research methods to be used (e.g., surveys, experiments, case studies), and the sample size and population to be studied. According to (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), the research design should be appropriate for the research question, and the methods chosen should be consistent with the research design.

Figure 5 Main research model



Source: Own elaboration

The research design proposed in this study takes a slightly different approach compared to the one studied by Merrilees et al. (2010). The latter authors also utilized a Resource-Based View of the firm to examine which marketing dimensions impact the financial performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the B2B sector. Through a quantitative structured survey of 367 Australian SMEs, the authors tested the marketing strategies of SMEs in the B2B context. The results showed that branding and innovation capabilities were the dimensions that explained the financial performance of SMEs in the B2B sector.

Vorhies and Morgan (2005) also focused on the marketing mix dimensions, as they are the foundation of the higher-level dimensions studied by Merrilees et al. (2010). This study does not intend to disagree with the RBV perspective used by Merrilees et al. (2010), but rather to simplify to fit the SMEs managerial capabilities and adapt the studied variables to the current hyper-connected reality, to better align overall with the global context of SMEs.

In today's world, it is increasingly important to consider the customer's perspective when creating and implementing strategies (Hassan, 2010), which is reflected in the financial performance of SMEs. Strategists must understand the importance of putting the customer at the centre of their strategy definition, as consumers are the driving financial force behind firms in one way or another. This requires an extended marketing mix strategy that not only allows for a better understanding of customers but also streamlines the direct contact between service personnel and systems and the customers' current and future needs.

The focus of this research is thus on the customer experience during the "moment of truth" - the first contact with the delivered products or services and everything that happens thereafter. By doing so, product-centric suppliers can improve customer satisfaction and increase brand value in the market, reducing price sensitivity.

5.6 Research model breakdown

5.6.1 Connection between main research model and research model breakdown

The main research model in this study encompasses three key components: market orientation, service marketing on product-centric suppliers, and satisfaction and price sensitivity. The research model breakdown further dissects these components into smaller, more specific elements that provide a clearer understanding of the relationship between the main components and their underlying factors. By breaking down the main research model, this study aims to highlight the importance of individual aspects in shaping the overall outcomes.

5.6.2 Linking market orientation to service as logic

Market orientation serves as the foundation of the research model and directly influences service marketing (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990). By adopting a market-oriented approach, businesses can better understand and respond to customer needs, leading to the development of a service logic mindset (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Grönroos, 2008). Service as logic, in turn, focuses on creating value for customers through a combination of products and services, aligning with the main research model's emphasis on service marketing.

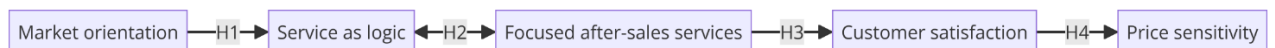
5.6.3 Service marketing and focused after-sales services

Service marketing on product-centric suppliers plays a crucial role in shaping customer satisfaction and price sensitivity. One of the key elements within this component is focused after-sales services. Effective after-sales services can help foster long-term relationships with customers, increase loyalty, and reduce price sensitivity (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Anderson et al., 1994). By prioritizing after-sales services, businesses can directly influence customer satisfaction and price sensitivity, as outlined in the main research model.

5.6.4 Satisfaction and price sensitivity

The final component in both the main research model and research model breakdown is satisfaction and price sensitivity. As discussed earlier, customer satisfaction is influenced by market orientation, service marketing, and focused after-sales services. Satisfied customers are more likely to exhibit reduced price sensitivity, contributing to increased loyalty and profitability for businesses (Fornell, 1992; Oliver, 1999). Understanding and addressing these factors allows product-centric suppliers to enhance customer satisfaction and reduce price sensitivity, ultimately achieving the desired outcomes of the main research model.

Figure 6 Focused research model



Source: Own elaboration

5.7 Sample selection and data collection

The data collection focused on multicultural European B2B customers' perceptions, specifically targeting managers (Malhotra et al., 2017), and their preferences regarding the brand they aim to establish in their customer's minds (Villani & Fana, 2021) and brands that they purchase from as multicultural B2B customers. The sample will be drawn from the researcher's market prospection. To ensure an even representation of multiple European cultures, a stratified random sample was first employed via an official company's newsletter. The questionnaire was sent to approximately 3,000 customers via that newsletter but only received seven responses. As a result, the researcher decided to expand the distribution of the survey through social media, which led to a higher response rate. Participants were

informed about the purpose of the questionnaire and its anonymity. Most of the participants displayed an interest in receiving the results of the current study by checking the box signalling that intention, and by typing in their email addresses.

The sampling method employed in this study can be classified as a form of convenience sampling, specifically, a type of non-probability sampling referred to as "snowball sampling" (Goodman, 1961). In snowball sampling, the researcher begins by identifying a small group of individuals who meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. These initial participants then recruit additional participants from their networks, creating a 'snowball' effect.

In the context of this study, the initial group comprised individuals within my professional network. The questionnaire was disseminated to these individuals via social media, who were then encouraged to share the questionnaire within their own networks. This method was particularly useful given the difficulty in identifying or reaching a comprehensive list of individuals, willing to participate, within the multicultural European Business-to-Business (B2B) prefabricated glass and stone within the construction industry.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this sampling method. As Goodman (1961) notes, snowball sampling is not a random sample, which means it may not be representative of the larger population. This can limit the generalisability of the findings. In this study, the sample was limited to my professional network and their subsequent networks, which may not fully represent the broader industry.

Despite these limitations, snowball sampling provided a practical means of gathering data for this study. It allowed for the collection of insights from a diverse range of individuals within the industry, contributing to a richer understanding of the factors influencing customer satisfaction and competitive advantage in cross-cultural B2B markets.

5.8 Data validity and reliability

This descriptive research design adopts a mono-method quantitative approach, utilizing a structured survey strategy to collect primary data through a questionnaire. A computer system was employed by the researcher to store and analyse the collected data (Malhotra et al., 2017). To prevent skewed responses due to the presence of larger corporations in the sample and maintain focus on the B2B market, exclusion criteria was applied to customer "deciders" (Saunders et al., 2019). Respondents answered closed questions using a Likert

scale (1 to 5), multiple-choice, yes or no, or other formats such as lists, categories, rankings, ratings, quantities, or matrices. Closed questions are predominantly used in marketing research as they are quick to answer, easier to compare, and more objective (Malhotra et al., 2017).

To accommodate maximum multiculturalism, the questionnaire was developed in seven languages, including English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese. All questions, except for demographic ones, are closed questions with yes or no, multiple-choice, or Likert scale from 1 to 5.

The data collection software Typeform was employed for its capacity to branch responses, enabling the researcher to create a single questionnaire for all seven languages. The questionnaire was first made available on 18th of February 2023, and the results were retrieved on 15th of April 2023.

The research was conducted among a representative sample of customers from the prefabrication stone and glass industry segments. As the researcher works in a business that supplies the industries, personal social media channels were used to obtain relevant answers for the study. Due to the diversity of countries that responded to the questionnaire, and in order to reduce errors, the study focused on the three countries with higher participation levels, namely Portugal, Spain, and France, yielding a total of 101 valid answers (from a total of 122 answers) from managers with decision power in a SME based in these three countries.

After all customers' identification from these two industry segments in the Schengen area, the sample was divided into strata based on characteristics such as geography, demographics, or behavioural attributes. The purpose of stratifying the sample was to ensure its representativeness of the population and reduce sampling error.

For instance, if customers from the glass or decorative stone industry come from different countries within the Schengen area, the sample can be divided into strata based on the customers' country of origin. This approach ensures that the sample is representative of customers from each country, providing a more accurate representation of the population. The use of stratified random sampling helps to ensure that the sample is representative and reduces sampling error, ensuring that the results of the research are accurate and reliable.

The aim of the stratified random sampling method in this research is to ensure a clear representation of the cross-cultural B2B customer segment in the prefabrication stone and glass industry.

5.9 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire is in Annex 1 and was designed to gather information on B2B customers, specifically in the prefabrication stone and glass industries, to test the research problem and related hypotheses. As forementioned, the questionnaire was administered via Typeform, a software that offers customization and the ability to consolidate results in multiple languages. Respondents were asked about their demographics, organisation's demographics, and views on sales and purchasing activities. The questions were mostly answered on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “Not at all confident” or “Strongly disagree” and 5 is “Extremely confident” or “Strongly agree”. The questionnaire aimed to determine the correlation between a company's market orientation, characterised by the adoption of a service-oriented approach, and its management background. It also focuses on identifying customer types in sales and the level of importance placed on product features versus after-sales services in multicultural environments.

The demographic questions include age, country of origin, current residency, and role within the organisation. The organisation's demographics include industry, headquarters location, and engagement in international trade. The questionnaire also inquired about the respondent's academic background, professional experience, and confidence in handling customers, explaining products or services, and meeting customer expectations. Additionally, the questionnaire asked about the level of importance placed on after-sales services. All the relations between the questions, objectives, and hypotheses are here summarised:

Hypotheses, questions, and relation to research problem

Hypotheses	Questions	Objectives	Supporting Literature (Authors and Year)
H1. There is a positive correlation between a company's market orientation, characterised by the adoption of a service-oriented approach, and its management background.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you believe has more influence on your sales approach in the market? • What is your highest level of education achieved? • Which do you believe has a greater influence on your sales approach in the market? 	<p>To assess the impact of management background on the adoption of service logic in business strategies.</p> <p>The aim of this assessment is to determine if the seller profile matches the buyer profile with regards to management background as an independent variable. The questions assess the respondent's academic background and later gauge their perception of the importance of after-sales services when both selling and buying.</p>	Kohli & Jaworski (1990); Narver & Slater (1990); Barney (1991); Vargo & Lusch (2004); Vorhies & Morgan (2005); Merrilees et al. (2010); Grönroos (2008); Bello et al. (2016).
H2: There is a positive correlation between shorter cultural and geographical gaps and customer satisfaction.	<p>Rate the following on a scale of 1-5 when buying, where 1 is "Irrelevant" and 5 is "Extremely Important".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual in customer's language. • Salesperson speaks customer's language. • Training/support in customer's language. • How important is an in-person visit to your business before making a purchase? 	<p>Centralization of production processes can lead to improved productivity and quality of products but may negatively impact the level of provided after-sales services. As an example, this concept can be seen in the production of Tesla cars.</p> <p>Centralized suppliers do not produce and are not present in</p>	Simonson & Tversky (1992); Hofstede (2001, 2011); Vargo & Lusch (2004); Grönroos (2008); Biemans (2010); Cortez & Johnston (2017); Mele et al. (2025).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product Suitability and Features. • After-sales services, such as helpdesk and 24-hour contact number. • What is your preferred method for providing feedback on the machines or tools you have purchased? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Email b) Phone call c) In-person visit 	<p>each region and therefore have bigger geographical and cultural gaps.</p> <p>Objective: Assess relevance of cultural and geographical gaps to different nationalities and cultures as a B2B customer.</p>	
<p>H3. Adaptive and continued after-sales service created by an extended marketing mix approach positively correlates with cross-cultural customers' satisfaction levels.</p>	<p>On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "Not at all likely" and 5 is "Extremely likely", please rate the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a regional competitor has good product feedback, would you buy the product? • Would you buy a product seen to be used happily by regional competitors only online, despite not knowing them in-person? • How likely are you to recommend a product from a supplier that met your expectations to others? • How likely would you be to buy a product that has a higher price but is recommended by someone you know in your professional network? 	<p>Centralized suppliers may face challenges in providing adequate after-sales services due to their geographical, cultural, and psychographic distance. This raises questions about what is most important to the B2B customer: high-quality products, exceptional customer service, or a balance between the two. It is crucial for centralized suppliers to understand their customers' preferences to ensure customer satisfaction and retain their business.</p>	<p>Parasuraman et al. (1988); Heskett et al. (1994); Anderson & Narus (1998); Vorhies & Morgan (2005); Lovelock & Wirtz (2007); Grönroos (2008); Merrilees et al. (2010); Kotler et al. (2021).</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How likely would you be to buy a product that has a higher price but is recommended by someone you know only online in your online professional network? 	
H4.	Customer satisfaction of cross-cultural clients negatively correlates with clients' and prospects' price sensitivity.	<p>Rate the following on a scale of 1-5 when buying, where 1 is "Irrelevant" and 5 is "Extremely Important".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important is price when making a purchase decision for you? • How likely are you to decrease price sensitivity when repeating business with a trusted supplier? 	<p>The knowledge about the price sensitivity helps the development of pricing strategies and ultimately impacts the business performance.</p> <p>Monroe (1971); Zeithaml (1988); Dodds et al. (1991); Desiraju & Shugan (1999); Hinterhuber (2004); Stock (2005); Vorhies & Morgan (2005); Merrilees et al. (2010); Kotler et al. (2021); Awaad et al. (2024).</p>

Source: Own elaboration

Hypothesis 1 (H1):

The foundational framework on market orientation is established by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990), who explore organisational behaviours and processes that foster market-driven strategies. Complementing this, Barney (1991) resource-based view theory emphasises the crucial role of management backgrounds as strategic resources influencing market orientation. Extending these insights, Vargo and Lusch (2004) paradigm of service-dominant logic and Grönroos (2008) work on service co-creation articulate the theoretical grounding necessary to investigate service-oriented approaches adopted by management teams. Vorhies and Morgan (2005) and Merrilees et al. (2010) explicitly focus on the relevance of marketing capabilities within SMEs, confirming the impact of managerial backgrounds and capabilities in shaping market orientation and strategic choice, thus providing robust justification for H1.

Hypothesis 2 (H2):

Hofstede (2001, 2011) comprehensive analysis of cultural dimensions provides authoritative insight into cultural proximity and its critical role in cross-cultural customer relationships. Complementing this cultural framework, Simonson and Tversky (1992) offer significant insights into decision-making biases influenced by cultural and psychological proximity. Biemans (2010) specifically addresses the unique challenges in B2B marketing contexts, particularly emphasising the importance of managing geographical and cultural distances to enhance customer satisfaction. Vargo and Lusch (2004) and Grönroos (2008) further strengthen this hypothesis through the lens of service logic, detailing how cultural proximity facilitates service co-creation and relationship-building. Finally, Mele et al. (2025) conceptual framework on customer journeys provides recent scholarly support emphasising how geographical and cultural alignment significantly affects customer satisfaction and purchase decisions, fortifying the validity of H2.

Hypothesis 3 (H3):

The extended service marketing mix and customer-centric service strategies presented by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) form the foundational theoretical underpinning for adaptive and continuous after-sales services in B2B contexts. Complementing these insights, Heskett et al. (1994) seminal work on the Service-Profit Chain explicitly links robust after-sales services to sustained customer satisfaction and loyalty, reinforcing their significance in strategic marketing initiatives. Furthermore, the widely recognised SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman et al. (1988) provides critical insights into measuring service quality dimensions, crucial to understanding adaptive service performance. Merrilees et al. (2010) and Vorhies and Morgan (2005) explicitly contextualise these service capabilities within B2B SMEs, and Kotler et al. (2021) expands on these arguments by emphasising technological enablement and digital adaptation of service strategies, confirming the modern relevance and theoretical solidity of H3.

Hypothesis 4 (H4):

The theoretical foundation of price sensitivity and perception is articulated by Monroe (1971), whose seminal work on psychophysics and price thresholds remains foundational. Building on this, Zeithaml (1988) introduces a significant perspective on perceived value, quality, and price relationships, further validated by Hinterhuber (2004), who details the strategic implications of value-based pricing. Stock (2005) specifically investigates the

direct relationship between customer satisfaction and reduced price sensitivity within B2B environments, aligning perfectly with the current research objectives. Additionally, Vorhies and Morgan (2005) provide a broader strategic framework by benchmarking marketing capabilities directly related to price-setting capabilities in SMEs. Merrilees et al. (2010) further validate these relationships within B2B SME contexts. Finally, contemporary insights from Kotler et al. (2021) underscore how technological advancements influence pricing strategies, while recent empirical evidence from Awaad et al. (2024) directly links pricing sensitivity to customer lifetime value, offering rigorous contemporary support for H4.

Collectively, these scholarly works provide a comprehensive, multidimensional theoretical foundation supporting the hypotheses of this dissertation, effectively addressing the core aspects of management backgrounds, cultural and geographical proximity, adaptive after-sales services, and price sensitivity within product-centric B2B marketing contexts.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the research journey, following the well-established framework by Quivy and Van Campenhoudt (1988), which outlines a seven-step scientific process.

Summary of Investigation According to Quivy and Van Campenhoudt's (1988) seven steps

1. Starting Question:

How can SMEs, primarily operating within the B2B sector with a product-centric focus, effectively leverage service-orientation and an expanded marketing mix to reduce price sensitivity among multicultural customers?



2. Literature Review and Conceptual Definition:

Literature Review:

- Universidade Aberta's Repository;
- Google Scholar;
- B-On;

Conceptual Definition:

- Marketing (Industrial and B2B)
- Global village and hyper-connectivity
- Customers' journey and satisfaction

- RCAAP

- Marketing performance

- JSTOR

- SMEs

- Competitive Advantage



3. Research Theme:

Exploring the integration of service logic in marketing strategies of product-centric B2B SMEs and its impact on price sensitivity.



4. Formulation of Hypotheses:

1. There is a positive correlation between a company's market orientation, characterised by the adoption of a service-oriented approach, and its management background.
2. There is a positive correlation between shorter cultural and geographical gaps and customer satisfaction.
3. Adaptive and continued after-sales service created by an extended marketing mix approach positively correlates with cross-cultural customers' satisfaction levels.
4. Customer satisfaction of cross-cultural clients negatively correlates with clients' and prospects' price sensitivity.



5. Observation Instruments

Online questionnaire targeting SMEs in the multicultural European construction sector.



6. Information Analysis

Utilizing descriptive and inferential statistics to test the hypotheses and validate the research.



7. Conclusions

Drawing conclusions on the relationship between service-oriented marketing strategies and price sensitivity in B2B contexts and acknowledging potential limitations and areas for future research.

This structured approach has been essential in shaping the study's methodology, ensuring it meets the highest academic standards and supporting the validity of the findings. The detailed map chart, depicting these seven steps, visually demonstrates this systematic exploration and highlights the thoroughness of the research design.

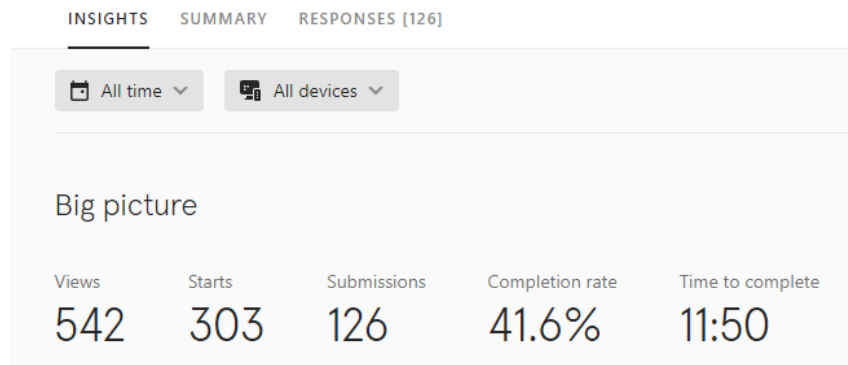
Chapter 6: Questionnaire Results and Data Analysis

6.1 Introduction

The primary purpose of this chapter is to present the raw findings obtained from the Typeform software questionnaire distributed to European B2B customers' deciders. This exploration is critical for understanding the relationships between market orientation, service marketing on product-centric suppliers, satisfaction, and price sensitivity in the context of B2B interactions (Sheth & Parvatlyar, 1995; Ulaga, 2003; Liao & Chuang, 2004). The data analysis will employ both descriptive and inferential statistics, with the appropriate inferential statistical tests being employed to test the relationships among the variables. To analyse the data, Orange software was used. Orange is a data mining software able to analyse multiple variables at once in an easy and seamless manner. All the tables analysing data are generated by Orange software and lead to the next Findings and Implications chapter.

When the original questionnaire was first sent out as part of a promotional organisational newsletter, it received a low response rate, with only 43 link clicks and 7 answers. The researcher suspects that the questionnaire might have been mistaken for a promotional item. Given the low response rate of 16.3% relative to the link clicks, the researcher decided to change the approach for reaching respondents. Even though a pre-test was conducted, the questionnaire was condensed into fewer questions that aimed to convey the same meaning as the previous extended version, and it was subsequently shared through the researcher's social media channels. This approach proved to be more effective in obtaining responses with a questionnaire participation of 303, from which 126 completed and submitted, completion rate of 41.6%. Consequently, after applying the filters related to the research's scope (SME deciders/managers, operating in the Schengen economic space, and organisation's headquarters in France, Portugal, or Spain to remove outliers) 101 were considered valid as belonging to SME managers whose organisation headquarters are in the Schengen economic space, focusing on France, Portugal, and Spain.

Figure 7 Questionnaire answers



Source: Typeform software (2023)

It is essential to acknowledge that the chosen method, a structured survey, has certain limitations. Such limitations include the inability to explain questions to participants that cannot grasp the intended meaning of a certain query, as well as the difficulty in capturing tacit knowledge, which can be a valuable source of information in understanding complex phenomena. Nevertheless, the structured survey approach is justified as it allows for a more objective comparison of responses and can minimize potential biases arising from cultural diversity, different sub-sectors industries' origin, and the education levels of participants. To enhance the likelihood of participation, the questionnaire was made available in seven languages. This approach was adopted to mitigate potential language barriers that could hinder respondents' engagement with the research.

This chapter is structured as follows: Section 6.2 details the data preparation process, including the steps taken to clean and organize the data. Section 6.3 presents the descriptive statistics of the collected data, providing an overview of the sample's characteristics. Section 6.4 discusses the inferential statistics analysis, showcasing the relationships among the variables. Lastly, Section 6.5 offers a summary of the chapter's findings and their implications for the research questions. This chapter analysing the data created by the answers using the Orange data mining software is the perfect lead to the next chapter where all the findings and their implications are detailed.

6.2 Data preparation process

This subchapter details the data preparation process employed to facilitate the analysis of the questionnaire responses. As mentioned, the questionnaire was made available in seven languages: Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. The data collection process involved obtaining a total of 126 responses from global participants in the prefabrication stone and glass industries. The questionnaire employed various Likert scale formats tailored to different constructs: agreement scales (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree), importance scales (1 = Irrelevant to 5 = Extremely important), confidence scales (1 = Not at all confident to 5 = Extremely confident), and likelihood scales (1 = Not at all likely to 5 = Extremely likely). These scales enable nuanced measurement of attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural intentions across multiple dimensions relevant to B2B customer satisfaction, service orientation, and price sensitivity. Responses were organized in Excel and translated into English to streamline the analysis process. In order to maintain the validity of the research and avoid potential biases, only responses from Portugal, Spain, and France were considered, as they constituted a significant portion of the participants compared to other countries. The low participation rate from other countries could skew the research results and lead to inaccurate conclusions (Saunders et al., 2019) about these countries' realities. After applying filters to select only Schengen-based businesses, SMEs (European Commission, 2024), and respondents with decision-making power, 101 usable answers were obtained from Spanish, French, and Portuguese respondents.

To ensure a systematic approach to data analysis, the questions were categorized into three different types based on their characteristics (Hair et al., 2013). Type 1 questions were category-type questions, which included questions related to language, industry, country of origin, role within the organisation, and other demographic and business-related questions. Categorical data analysis techniques were employed to examine the responses to these questions (Malhotra et al., 2017).

Type 2 questions were ordinal questions, including age and education level. Age groups were coded from 1 to 6, with each number representing a ten-year age range (e.g., 1 for 10-19 years old, 2 for 20-29 years old, and so on). Education level will match the service level

Type 3 questions were continuous questions that utilized a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (Hair et al., 2013). These questions aimed to assess respondents' attitudes and preferences regarding

customer handling, supplier services, product features, and other factors influencing sales and purchase decisions.

A Service Requirement Score was devised in this study to assess the service expectations of B2B customers from their suppliers. This score encompasses the following aspects: the relevance of after-sales services, the presence of a helpdesk department or availability of a 24-hour contact number, and whether customers believe a supplier should provide free manuals, training, and ongoing support for the products they purchase.

In order to perform the inferential statistical tests to the four main hypotheses of the study, some questions were recoded, and composite variables were created as follows:

a. For H1, the responses for the question about the influence of academic and professional backgrounds on sales approach were recoded into two groups:

Group 1: A combination of both academic and professional experience (C)

Group 2: Academic background (A) or professional experience (B)

b. For H1, the responses for the question about the importance of product versus service were recoded:

1: The product you sell is more important (A)

0: The service you add to the product is more important than the product itself (B)

c. For H1, as ordinal respondents' ages varied from 2 to 6, these ages were rescaled into a scale from 1 to 5, where 2 became 1, 3 became 2, and so on. This was done to fit these answers to the same proportion as the dependent variable (market orientation) obtained through answers in a Likert scale from 1 to 5.

d. For H2, a composite "cultural compatibility score" was calculated as the average rating of the following questions:

- Importance of a manual in the customer's language
- Importance of a salesperson that speaks the customer's language
- Importance of a training/support in the customer's language

e. For the customer satisfaction relevance score was calculated as the average rating of the following questions:

- How likely are you to recommend a product from a supplier that met your expectations to others?
- How likely would you be to buy a product that has a higher price but is recommended by your professional network due to high satisfaction?
- You choose a product with high satisfaction among your online network, even if it's more expensive than similar products?

f. For the geographical gap, results to the question How important is a supplier's representative in-person visit to your business before making a purchase? were considered.

g. For H3, a composite "Extended Marketing mix score" was calculated as the average rating of the following questions:

- Do you think a supplier should provide free manuals, trainings, and free ongoing support for the product you buy?
- Importance of manual in customer's language
- Importance of a salesperson that speaks customer's language.
- Importance of a training/support in customer's language
- How important is a supplier's representative in-person visit to your business before making a purchase?
- Importance of after-sales services, Helpdesk department or availability of a 24-hour contact number.

The same customer satisfaction relevance score as used in H2 was utilised.

h. For H4, a composite "price sensitivity score" was calculated as the average rating of the following questions:

Given that one of the questions pertaining to price sensitivity employed an inverted scale compared to the others, it was necessary to calculate the inverse result on the Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. Specifically, the question - "How important is price when making a purchase decision for you?" - was inverted as follows: 5 became 1, 4 turned into 2, 3 remained unchanged, 2 transformed into 4, and 1 converted to 5. This adjustment ensured consistency across the responses and facilitated accurate analysis.

- How likely are you to decrease price sensitivity when repeating business with a trusted supplier?
- How likely would you be to buy a product that has a higher price but is recommended by your professional network due to high satisfaction?
- You choose a product with high satisfaction among your online network, even if it's more expensive than similar products?

The same customer satisfaction relevance score as used in H2 and H3 was utilised.

The data cleaning process involved addressing missing values by using the median values, to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings (Hair et al., 2013). After cleaning the data in Excel, it was saved in a file and imported into Orange, an open-source data mining and machine learning software, for further data mining and results analysis.

Organising the data in this manner enabled efficient analysis of responses and extraction of meaningful insights related to preferences and attitudes of B2B decision-makers in the prefabrication stone and glass industries in the studied countries.

The recoding and creation of composite variables were conducted based on established guidelines for scale development and data preparation (Hair et al., 2013; Malhotra et al., 2017). By applying these best practices, the aim was to ensure the validity and reliability of the data and the subsequent analysis results. Moreover, the use of composite variables allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying constructs, enhancing the interpretability of the findings (Hair et al., 2013).

In conclusion, the data preparation process was carried out meticulously, adhering to guidelines provided by established scholars in the field of marketing research (Hair et al., 2013; Malhotra et al., 2017; Pallant, 2020). The recoded data and composite variables provide a solid foundation for dissertation testing and inferential statistical analysis in the subsequent subchapters.

6.3 Data analysis using descriptive statistics

The data analysis presented in this chapter was conducted using Orange Data Mining software, a powerful tool for visual programming and data analysis. Orange provides an intuitive, easy-to-use interface for data mining, which allowed for the efficient handling and visualization of complex datasets. All the figures throughout the descriptive and inferential

analysis were created using this software, offering clear, detailed visual representations of the statistical findings. By leveraging Orange, this study ensured precise and comprehensive analysis, enhancing the reliability and clarity of the results. For more information about Orange Data Mining software, please visit <https://orangedatamining.com/>.

6.3.1 Business headquarters' country representation and industry sub-sectors in the sample

The study achieved responses from several countries, nonetheless countries with low participation were considered as outliers and removed from the analysis. Because of that, the research focused on France, Portugal, and Spain due to their higher participation rates. Out of the total responses, France accounted for 25 responses (24.8%), Portugal contributed 36 responses (35.6%), and Spain provided 40 responses (39.6%).

In terms of industry sector distribution, the Glass industry represented 28 responses (27.7%) and the Stone industry accounted for 73 responses (72.3%). The country-specific distribution within each industry sector was as follows: France's Glass industry represented 3.6% and Stone industry 33.8%; Portugal's Glass industry made up 25.9% and Stone industry 18.3%; Spain's Glass industry constituted 14.3% and Stone industry 50.7%.

Figure 8 Country representation of business headquarters vs industry sub-sector

Where is the headquarters of your organization located?	Count	In which industry do you work?		Total
		Glass Industry	Stone Industry	
France		1.0	24.0	25.0
Portugal		23.0	13.0	36.0
Spain		4.0	36.0	40.0
Total		28.0	73.0	101.0

The Stone Industry was more prevalent in all countries except for Portugal, where a higher number of respondents from the Glass industry was observed.

It should be acknowledged that the results demonstrate certain limitations concerning their disaggregation. Particularly in Portugal, there is a notable inversion in results from the Glass industry as compared to the Stone industry. This limitation warrants attention. However, it is critical to underline that both sectors are intricately connected to the prefabrication industry, thereby validating the global sample of 101 responses as statistically robust in terms of the industry sector under study.

6.3.2 Age distribution

In this study, the age distribution of respondents was categorised into ordinal ages, where ordinal age 2 corresponds to respondents aged 20-29 years, ordinal age 3 represents 30-39 years, ordinal age 4 is 40-49 years, ordinal age 5 denotes 50-59 years, and ordinal age 6 signifies 60-69 years. The average age of the respondents was 40 years, with the oldest respondent being 63 and the youngest 20, indicating a diverse array of experiences and perspectives from different age groups.

The pivot table below effectively captures the age distribution within the sample, illustrating the representation of each age group per country. This comprehensive representation allows for a detailed understanding of the age demographics within the sample and highlights the diverse age groups contributing to the research from each participating country.

Figure 9 Age distribution of respondents per country

		Where is the headquarters of your organization located?			
	Count defined	France	Portugal	Spain	Total
Ordinal Age	2	1.0	4.0	3.0	8.0
	3	9.0	8.0	7.0	24.0
	4	6.0	16.0	17.0	39.0
	5	8.0	5.0	11.0	24.0
	6	1.0	3.0	2.0	6.0
	Total	25.0	36.0	40.0	101.0

6.3.3 International trade

As the Schengen area facilitates borderless international trade within its region, a question was asked to analyse whether the ease of doing international trade within the Schengen space would increase the percentage of SMEs participating in international trade. The results show that, overall, 64.4% of the respondents engage in international business. According to the European Court of Auditors (2022), the proportion of SMEs participating in international trade is approximately 30%. Thus, the analysed sample displays a higher propensity for SMEs in the Schengen area to participate in international trade compared to the observed average, indicating a propensity to increase probably due the lack of frictions to trade with other countries.

In France, 12 respondents (48% of French respondents) reported not participating in international trade, while 13 (52%) indicated they do engage in international trade. In Portugal, 4 respondents (11.1% of Portuguese respondents) indicated they do not participate in international trade, while 32 (88.9%) reported they do. In Spain, 20 respondents (50% of Spanish respondents) reported not participating in international trade, and 20 (50%) indicated they do engage in international trade.

These results highlight the varying propensities for international trade among the surveyed SMEs in the Schengen area. The data indicates that Portuguese respondents are more likely to engage in international trade compared to their French and Spanish counterparts. This finding may be attributed to the particularities of each country's economy, industry dynamics, or differing levels of integration within the Schengen area's trade environment.

Figure 10 International trade per country

Do you buy or sell products outside your home country?	Count	Where is the headquarters of your organization located?			
		France	Portugal	Spain	Total
No		12.0	4.0	20.0	36.0
Yes		13.0	32.0	20.0	65.0
Total		25.0	36.0	40.0	101.0

It is important to note, however, that the identical results from France and Spain and the strikingly different outcome in Portugal might be influenced by the fact that the Glass industry is more prevalent in Portugal. This could represent a sector-specific effect, economic incentives from the Portuguese government, or a socio-cultural aspect unique to Portugal, and it is worth considering as a limitation of the current study. Moreover, this distinctive characteristic could provide an interesting avenue for future research, focusing on dissecting the influence of industry type or socio-cultural factors on international trade propensities in prefabrication construction SMEs.

6.3.4 Sales and purchase approach

The Sales Approach dimension relates to how these businesses face the competitive market and what respondents feel is more important when handling their customers. To the question “What do you believe has more influence on your sales approach in the market?”, respondents answered as shown in the table below:

Figure 11 Sales approach influence

Which do you believe has a greater influence on your sales approach in the market?	Count	Where is the headquarters of your organization located?			
		France	Portugal	Spain	Total
Combination of academic and professional experience		8.0	19.0	17.0	44.0
Professional experience		17.0	17.0	23.0	57.0
Total		25.0	36.0	40.0	101.0

In this study, the respondents were classified into two groups based on their perception of the importance of academic background and professional experience in their sales approach. France had a total of 25 respondents, with 8 in Group 1 and 17 in Group 2. Portugal had 36 respondents, with 19 in Group 1 and 17 in Group 2. Spain had 40 respondents, with 17 in Group 1 and 23 in Group 2.

Results demonstrate that none of the respondents considers the academic background as determinant to their approach to the market. Therefore, Group 2 only comprises respondents who believe that their professional experience is more relevant to the way they act in the market. The overall percentage of respondents with this belief is 56.4% $[(17+17+23) / 101]$.

On the other hand, 43.6% $[(8+19+17) / 101]$ of respondents perceive that their sales approach is based on the combination of academic and professional experience. These respondents indicate the importance of a well-rounded background in shaping their market strategy.

To summarise, the sales approach influence per country can be broken down as follows:

- France: 32% (8/25) of respondents in Group 1 and 68% (17/25) in Group 2
- Portugal: 52.8% (19/36) of respondents in Group 1 and 47.2% (17/36) in Group 2
- Spain: 42.5% (17/40) of respondents in Group 1 and 57.5% (23/40) in Group 2

Overall, the results highlight the significance of professional experience in shaping the sales approach of the respondents across the three countries. While a considerable percentage of respondents recognise the value of integrating academic and professional experience, the majority of them rely predominantly on their professional background to navigate the market. These findings emphasise the need for a comprehensive understanding of both

academic and practical aspects to develop effective sales strategies in a competitive landscape.

As for the question: “Which do you believe has a greater influence on your sales approach in the market?”, participants answered mostly that the service is more important than the product itself.

Figure 12 Sales approach per country

What do you believe has more influence on your sales approach in the market?	Count	Where is the headquarters of your organization located?			Total
		France	Portugal	Spain	
The product you sell is more important		6.0	8.0	8.0	22.0
The service you add to the product is more important		19.0	28.0	32.0	79.0
Total		25.0	36.0	40.0	101.0

In the study, respondents from France, Portugal, and Spain provided their perspectives on the importance of the product being sold and the significance of the service accompanying the product.

The results indicate that, in France, 24% of respondents (6 counts) prioritized the importance of the product, while 76% (19 counts) believed that the service accompanying the product was more significant. In Portugal, 22% of respondents (8 counts) considered the importance of the product, while 78% (28 counts) emphasized the significance of the service. In Spain, 20% of respondents (8 counts) focused on the importance of the product, and 80% (32 counts) considered the service accompanying the product more crucial.

Proportionally, calculating $\frac{79}{101} \times 5 = 3,91$ in a scale from 1 to 5, is the relevance that respondents give to the service when developing a business in the market.

Overall, across all three countries, 21.8% of respondents prioritized the importance of the product being sold, while 78.2% believed that the service accompanying the product was more important. B2B businesses often operate in highly competitive marketplaces characterized by low barriers to entry (Porter, 2011). These findings could suggest that respondents recognize developing businesses with goods or materials that are easily accessible, leading to low barriers to trade and a heightened risk of new entrants. In response,

they may focus on enhancing the service they deliver to their customers to remain competitive.

This conclusion is also partially confirmed by the average answer to the question “How well do you handle customers with limited knowledge in your field?” of 3,78 (scale from 1 to 5).

Figure 13 Capacity to handle less knowledgeable customers

	Count	Where is the headquarters of your organization located?			Total
		France	Portugal	Spain	
How well do you handle customers with limited knowledge in your field?	2	1.0	2.0	3.0	6.0
	3	9.0	10.0	17.0	36.0
	4	6.0	13.0	14.0	33.0
	5	9.0	11.0	6.0	26.0
	Total	25.0	36.0	40.0	101.0

In this question, respondents were asked about their ability to handle customers with limited knowledge in their respective fields. The responses were collected using a Likert scale, where 1 represented "very poorly" and 5 represented "very well." The count results are displayed in the above Figure 13.

To better understand the data, the percentage of respondents within each rating category for each country were calculated.

In France:

- 4% of respondents rated themselves as 2
- 36% of respondents rated themselves as 3
- 24% of respondents rated themselves as 4
- 36% of respondents rated themselves as 5

In Portugal:

- 5.6% of respondents rated themselves as 2
- 27.8% of respondents rated themselves as 3
- 36% of respondents rated themselves as 4
- 30.6% of respondents rated themselves as 5

In Spain:

- 7.5% of respondents rated themselves as 2
- 42.5% of respondents rated themselves as 3
- 35% of respondents rated themselves as 4
- 15% of respondents rated themselves as 5

These findings indicate that respondents across all three countries are confident in their ability to handle customers with limited knowledge in their fields. In France, 60% of respondents rated their capability as 4 or 5, while in Portugal, 67% did so, and in Spain, 50%. Overall, this suggests that businesses in these countries place importance on effectively communicating and assisting customers who may not have extensive knowledge in the respective fields.

Considering that the sample displays having a propensity to the service, it is interesting to check if the education level will match the service level. Through the question “What is your highest level of education achieved?”, results ranged from 1 for elementary school, 2 for high school, 3 for bachelor's, 4 for master's, and 5 for doctorate degrees, average was close to the bachelor's level (2,91).

Figure 14 Education level in the sample

What is your highest level of education achieved?	Count	Where is the headquarters of your organization located?			
		France	Portugal	Spain	Total
1	1	1.0	2.0	4.0	7.0
2	3	3.0	19.0	8.0	30.0
3	13	13.0	8.0	13.0	34.0
4	8	8.0	7.0	10.0	25.0
5	0	0.0	0.0	5.0	5.0
Total		25.0	36.0	40.0	101.0

The results suggest that while respondents’ self-assessments highlight the relevance of their professional experience in market interactions, the sample predominantly comprises individuals with a high level of formal education, which may affect their decision-making processes and perceptions in the B2B market. To examine the relationship between the propensity to prioritize service, the ability to handle less knowledgeable customers, and

education level, is viable the comparison between the education data with previous findings and analyse them through inferential tests.

In France, 76% of respondents emphasized the importance of service over the product, with 60% rating their capacity to handle less knowledgeable customers as 4 or 5. Most of these respondents held a bachelor's or master's degree.

In Portugal, 78% of respondents prioritized service, and 67% rated their capacity to handle less knowledgeable customers as 4 or 5. The largest group had completed secondary school, followed by those with bachelor's or master's degrees.

In Spain, 80% of respondents considered the service accompanying the product more important, with 50% rating their capacity to handle less knowledgeable customers as 4 or 5. Similar to France, most respondents held a bachelor's or master's degree.

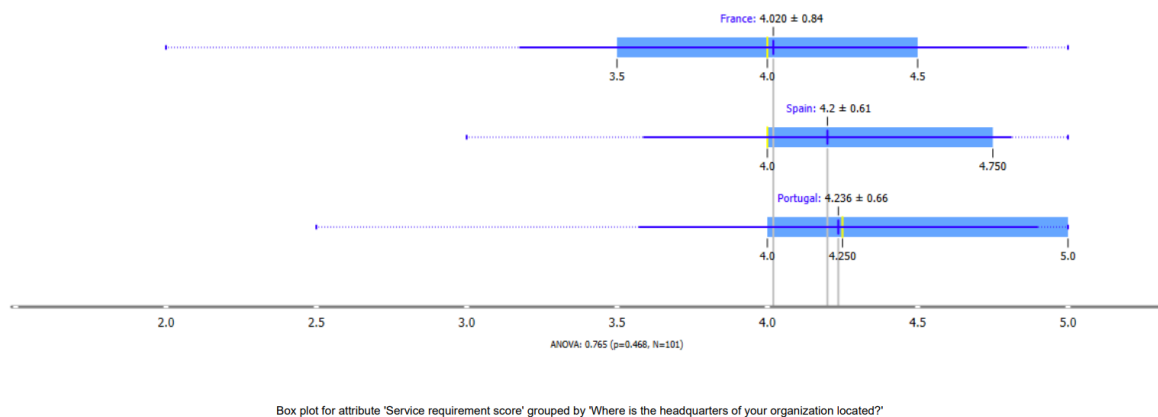
Although this analysis does not establish a direct causal link between education level and the propensity to prioritize service or handle less knowledgeable customers, there seems to be a trend suggesting that higher education levels, especially bachelor's and master's degrees, may correlate with a greater emphasis on service and a higher capacity to manage less knowledgeable customers. This could be due to the extensive knowledge and skills gained through higher education, which enable individuals to better understand customer needs and develop effective communication strategies in B2B settings.

The study also explores whether the buyer-seller profile of B2B customers aligns with their service requirements. By examining these factors, the research provides insights into the diverse service expectations among B2B customers in different countries.

A Service Requirement Score was created to assess the service expectations of B2B customers from their suppliers. This score includes aspects such as the relevance of after-sales services, the presence of a helpdesk department or a 24-hour contact number, and

whether customers believe suppliers should provide free manuals, training, and ongoing support for the products they purchase.

Figure 15 Relevance of services included with purchased products per country



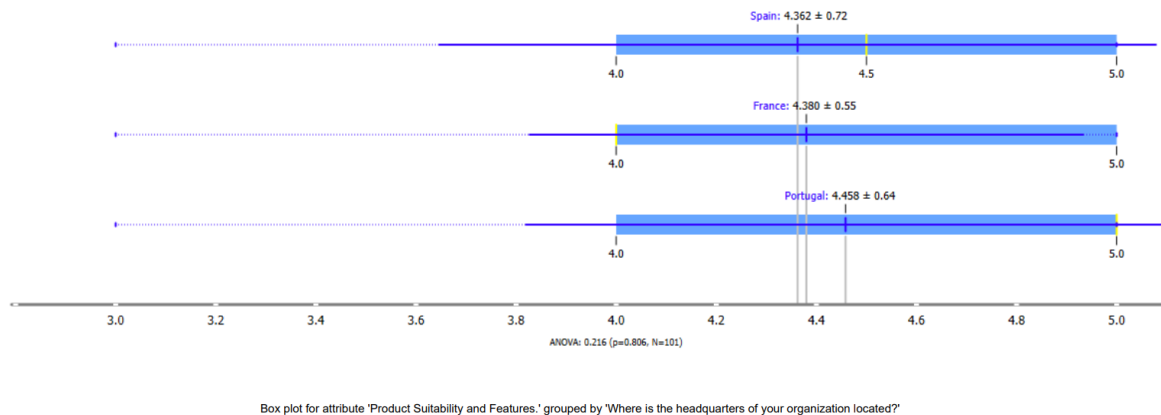
The average Service Requirement Score across the three countries was 4,17 on a scale of 1 to 5, indicating a strong inclination for customers to expect service support from their suppliers. A country-wise analysis offers a more nuanced understanding of these expectations in relation to the respondents' organizational cultural backgrounds.

Among the three countries, Portuguese respondents exhibited the highest demand for services from their suppliers, followed by those from Spain, and lastly, France. This highlights the variation in service requirements based on cultural and organizational contexts and underscores the importance for suppliers to tailor their service offerings to better serve to the specific needs of their B2B customers.

The relationship between the perceived importance of service and product quality was also assessed in the questionnaire. A question focusing on product suitability and features scored an average of 4.4, indicating that while multicultural B2B customers value the services provided by their suppliers, the product's quality remains a critical consideration in their

purchasing decisions. If a product is deemed unsatisfactory, the accompanying services may not be sufficient to persuade these customers to make a purchase.

Figure 16 Product suitability and features relevance per country



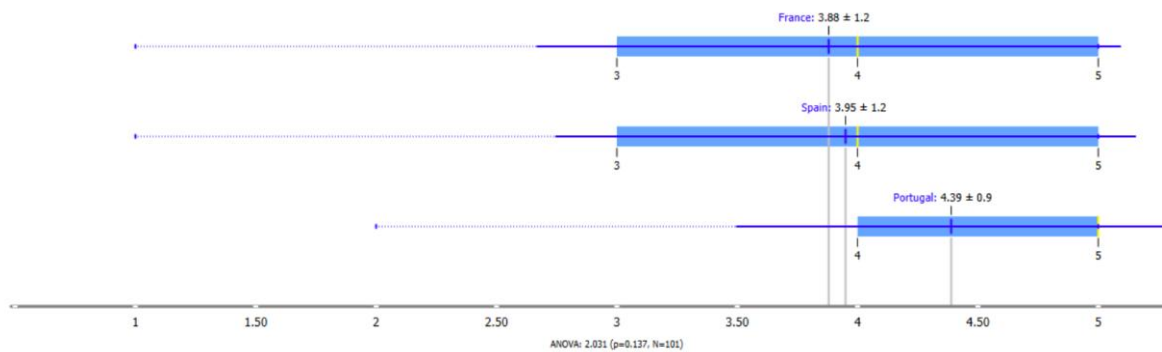
A comparative analysis of the average scores for this question reveals that respondents from Spain placed relatively less emphasis on product suitability and features compared to their counterparts in France and Portugal. This insight underscores the need for suppliers to strike a balance between offering high-quality products and providing exceptional services to provide to the diverse expectations of their multicultural B2B customers.

6.3.5 The cultural and geographical gaps

In marketing theory, customers have distances towards suppliers that can be psychographic, cultural, or geographical (Hofstede, 2001). To assess the importance of geographical and cultural distances, the researcher placed several questions to avoid getting skewed results. About this topic, a division was done to comprehend the three stages of the sale: before the purchase, during the first contact with purchased products, and after the purchase has occurred and the first contact was done.

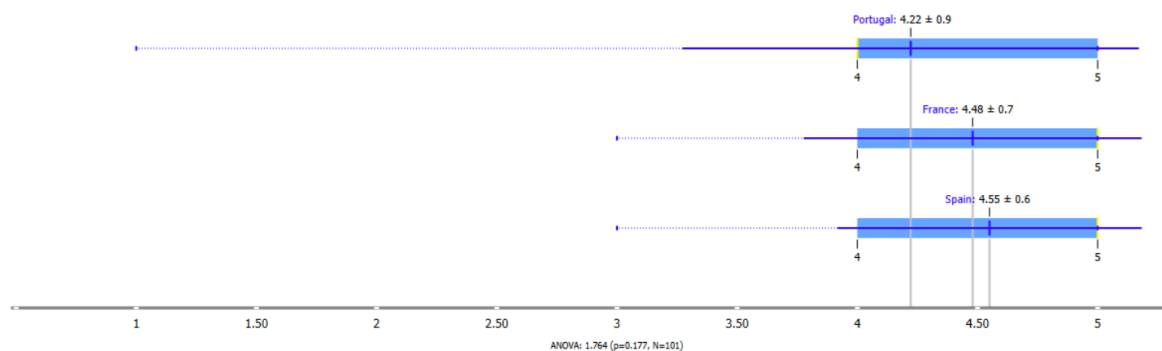
Regarding the first moment of the sales stage that happens before the purchase, the researcher decided to place two questions. The first asked the multicultural B2B if they require a personal visit before finishing a deal with a supplier. The result for that question was 4,09, demonstrating that the topic is of relevance for that customer type.

Figure 17 'How important is a supplier's representative in-person visit to your business before making a purchase?' grouped by 'Where is the headquarters of your organization located?'



The chart shows that Portuguese respondents place more importance on in-person visits before finalizing a deal with a supplier compared to their counterparts in Spain and France. However, even more crucial than visiting the multicultural B2B customer in person is the salesperson's ability to speak the customer's language. The second question about the sales stage before closing the deal yielded a high average score of 4,42.

Figure 18 'Salesperson speaks customer's language' grouped by 'Where is the headquarters of your organization located?'

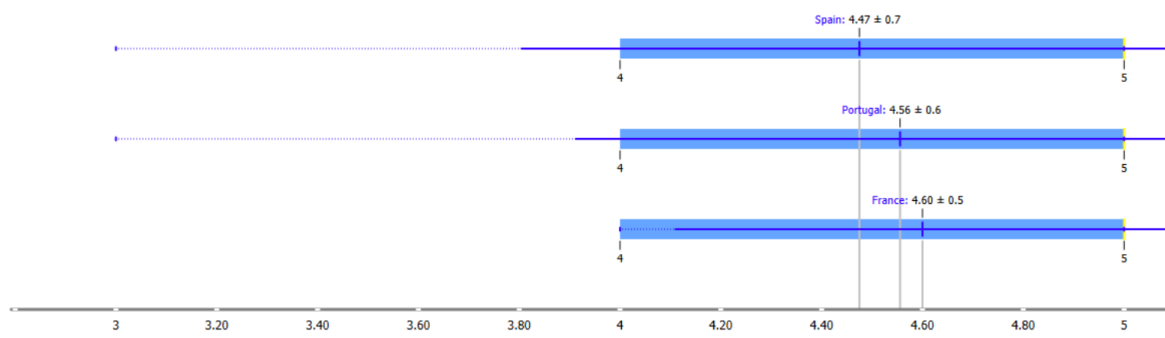


In this case, Spanish customers give more relevance to the supplier organisation's representatives speaking Spanish, followed by their French and lastly by their Portuguese peers.

The findings suggest that although geographical distance is a relevant factor, using language as proxy for culture, cultural distance appears to hold greater significance for multicultural B2B customers. It is plausible that the psychographic distance between customers may be reduced due to the shorter cultural distance in the hyper-connected world, further highlighting the importance of addressing cultural factors when factoring to a diverse clientele. In summary, suppliers aiming to succeed in the multicultural B2B market should prioritize bridging cultural gaps and fostering a deeper understanding of their customers' cultural backgrounds, as these aspects may have a more substantial impact on customer relationships than geographical proximity alone.

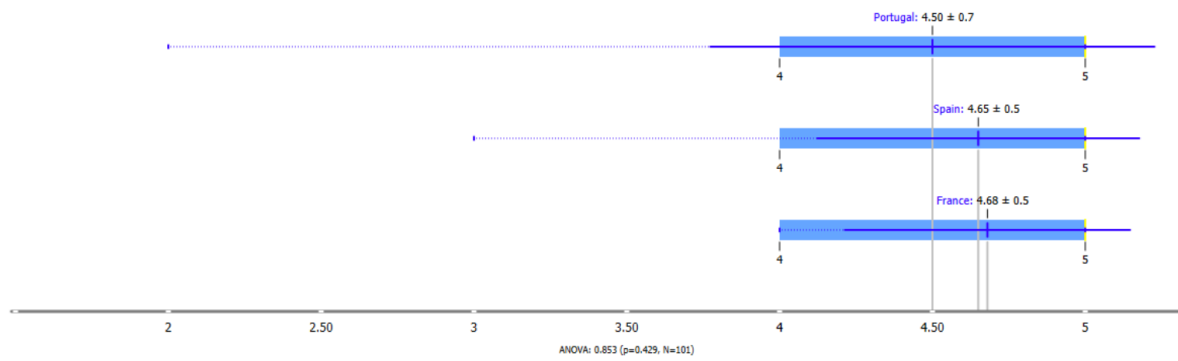
Focusing on the second stage of the sales process, as defined by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007), "the moment of truth", when expectations meet reality, and the customer gets in contact with the purchased product. At this moment of the sales stage, the multicultural B2B customer replied that the presence of a manual in their own language is highly relevant, with a score of 4,53.

Figure 19 'Manual in customer's language' grouped by 'Where is the headquarters of your organization located?'



The above Figure 19 display that the manual in their own language is more important to French than to Portuguese or Spanish, respectively. Training or support delivered in their own language is also important, with a result of 4,60.

Figure 20 'Training/support in customer's language' grouped by 'Where is the headquarters of your organization located?'



Lastly, the research focuses on the dimension that happens after the purchase was done, and the first contact has happened, where the evaluation, attachment, and advocacy occur. Regarding the question about the after-sales services, such as a helpdesk or 24h contact number, the multicultural B2B customer assigned these services with a relevance of 4,39 but expect these services for free with a relevance of 3,95.

Figure 21 'After-sales services, Helpdesk department or availability of a 24-hour contact number.' grouped by 'Where is the headquarters of your organization located?'

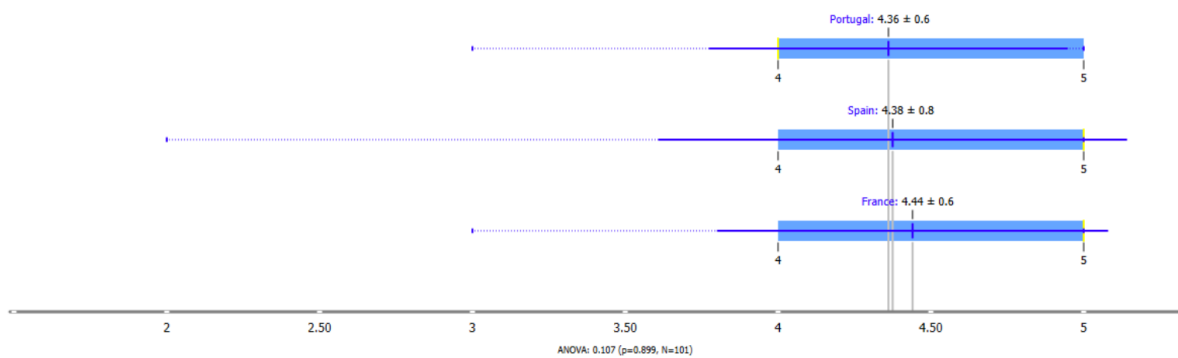
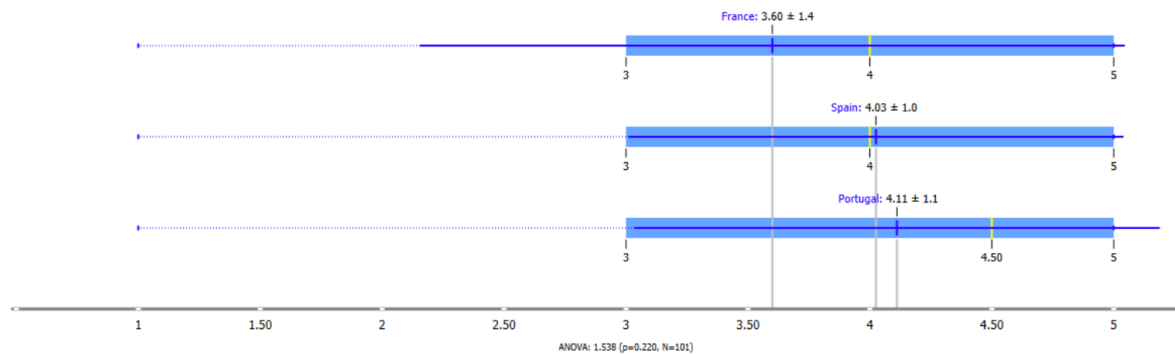


Figure 22 'Do you think a supplier should provide free manuals, trainings, and free ongoing support for the product you buy?' grouped by 'Where is the headquarters of your organization located?'



The Figures 21 and 22 reveal a contrasting relationship between the cultural preferences of French, Spanish, and Portuguese respondents. While the French place the highest importance on the availability of after-sales services, the Portuguese and Spanish counterparts value them less. Conversely, the Portuguese respondents exhibit a stronger expectation for these after-sales services to be provided free of charge, compared to their Spanish and French peers in the industry.

Regarding the preferred method for providing feedback on the machines or tools purchased is in-person visits (42.6%), followed by email (30.7%) and phone calls (26.7%).

Figure 23 'What is your preferred method for providing feedback on the machines or tools you have purchased?' grouped by country

		What is your preferred method for providing feedback on the machines or tools you have purchased?			
		Email	In-person visit	Phone call	Total
Where is the headquarters of your organization located?	Count				
	France	10.0	7.0	8.0	25.0
	Portugal	9.0	18.0	9.0	36.0
	Spain	12.0	18.0	10.0	40.0
	Total	31.0	43.0	27.0	101.0

In evaluating the significance of geographic proximity, this study combined the responses from two questions: "How important is a supplier's representative in-person visit to your business before making a purchase?" and "What is your preferred method for providing feedback on the machines or tools you have purchased?"

The first question assesses the importance of an in-person visit from a supplier before a purchase takes place, while the second question examines the preference for an in-person visit by a supplier's representative after the sale has been completed. To amalgamate these responses, which were given on different scales, a proportional value was calculated.

For the first question, respondents provided their answers on a scale of 1 to 5, with an average score of 4,09. Proportionally, this translates to 81.8% importance for in-person visits before a purchase ($4.09/5 * 100$). For the second question, 43 out of 101 respondents indicated the importance of an in-person visit to assess their satisfaction after the purchase, yielding a proportional value of 42.6% ($43/101 * 100$).

By averaging these proportional values, the combined results reveal that geographic distance holds a 62.2% relevance for the multicultural B2B customers surveyed. Notably, the presence of a supplier's representative before a purchase appears to be more crucial than an in-person visit after the sale has been finalized.

6.3.6 The customer satisfaction network's value in the hyper-connected society

6.3.6.1 *The offline circle*

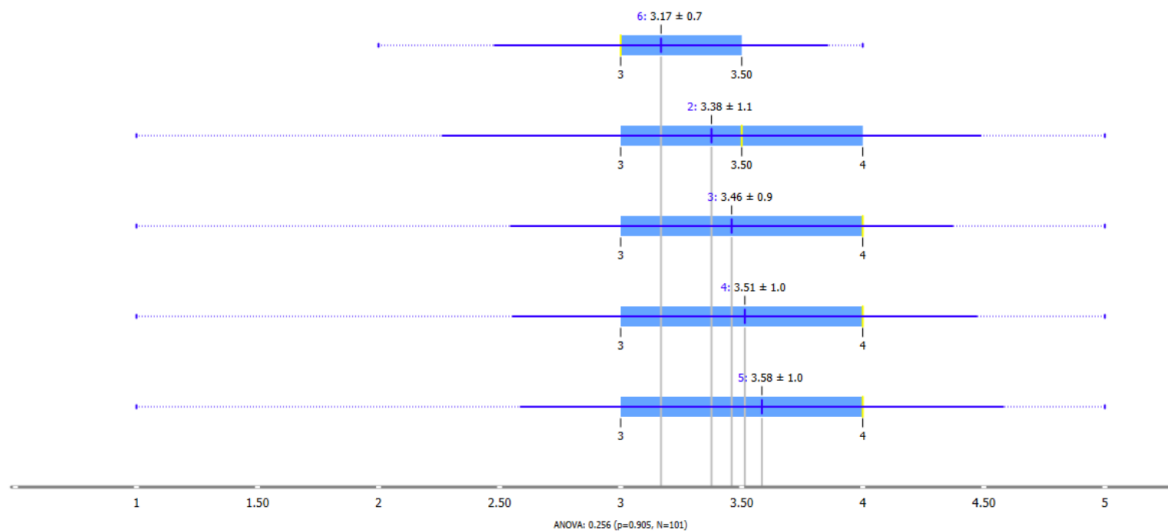
This section examines the impact of the service marketing mix strategy on customer satisfaction and purchasing intentions in the multicultural B2B market. The role of word-of-mouth marketing, particularly within offline professional circles, is assessed in relation to the advocacy stage (Kotler et al., 2016).

Results from the question, "How likely are you to recommend a product from a supplier that met your expectations to others?" indicate a score of 4,28. This suggests that multicultural B2B customers are willing to share information about the machines or tools they use in manufacturing, provided the product meets their needs and the accompanying services are satisfactory.

To differentiate between offline and online word-of-mouth promotion, the research employed a question examining whether multicultural B2B customers accept product recommendations from their offline professional circles.

The results for the question, "If a regional competitor has good feedback, would you buy that machine/product?" showed an average score of 3,49.

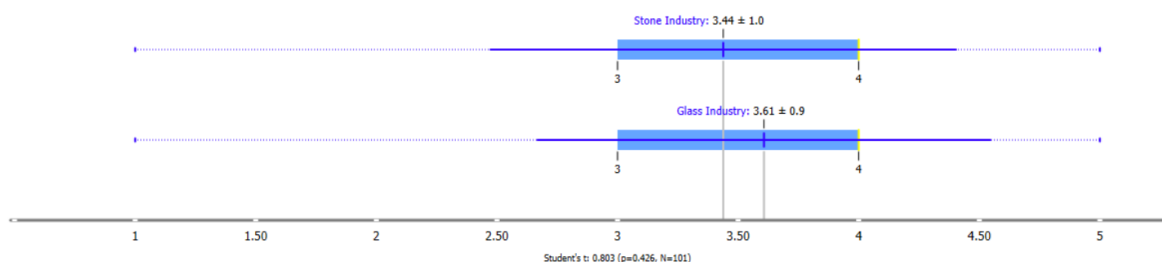
Figure 24 'If a regional competitor has good feedback, would you buy that machine/product?' grouped by 'Ordinal Age'



Further analysis by age range surprisingly revealed that either the younger or older respondents were more reluctant to accept advice about which products or machines to buy, namely the 60s and 20s, with results of 3,17 and 3,38, respectively. These findings indicate that these age ranges exhibit less propensity to trust advice from others regarding product purchases for their businesses.

As the below Figure 25 shows, the Glass industry had higher levels of advice acceptance compared to the Stone industry.

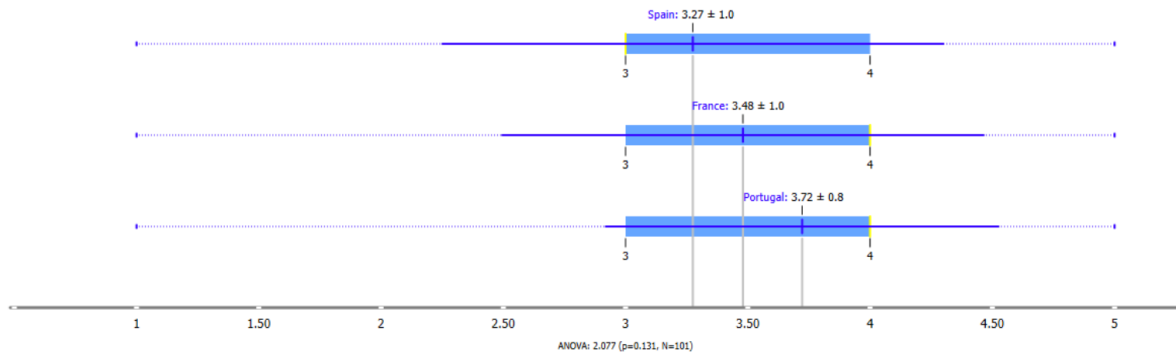
Figure 25 'If a regional competitor has good feedback, would you buy that machine/product?' grouped by 'In which industry do you work?'



National organisational culture also appears to influence openness to word-of-mouth marketing. Results demonstrated that managers that work in Spanish organisations were less

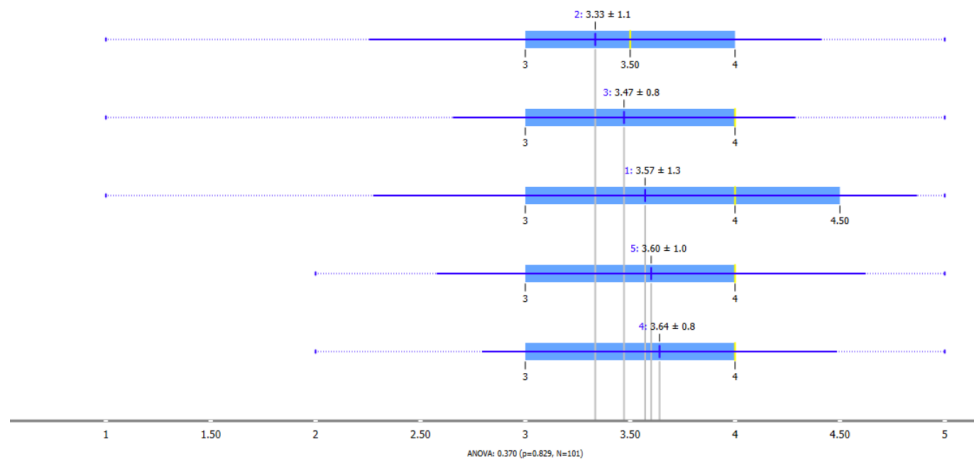
likely to accept advice on purchasing for their business production processes, while Portuguese managers were more receptive.

Figure 26 'If a regional competitor has good feedback, would you buy that machine/product?' grouped by 'Where is the headquarters of your organization located?'



The interrelation between the level of education and the propensity to accept recommendations from industry peers is not characterized by a clear-cut linear association within the sample. Figure 27 depicted below elucidates the connection between these two variables:

Figure 27 'If a regional competitor has good feedback, would you buy that machine/product?' grouped by 'What is your highest level of education achieved?'

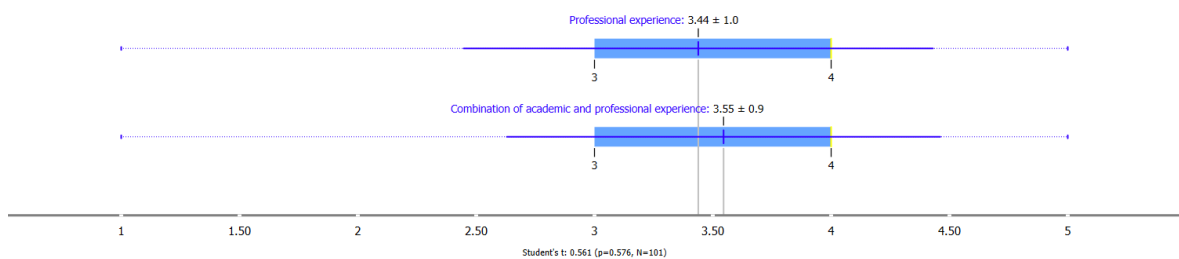


The examination of the data in Figure 27 reveals that a simple linear relationship is not present. However, the results indicate that respondents with higher levels of education (Level 4: Master's degree and Level 5: Doctorate) demonstrate a stronger tendency to accept advice from their industry peers. This observation implies that individuals possessing advanced educational qualifications may exhibit a higher openness to the insights and experiences

shared by fellow professionals within their field. As a result, these individuals likely appreciate the importance of incorporating collective wisdom and expertise into their decision-making processes.

With regard to the respondents' professional or academic backgrounds, a direct link to their market interactions might not be immediately apparent within the data. However, Figure 28, which maps responses to the question 'If a regional competitor has good feedback, would you buy that machine/product?' against 'Which do you believe has a greater influence on your sales approach in the market?' provides deeper insights:

Figure 28 'If a regional competitor has good feedback, would you buy that machine/product?' grouped by 'Which do you believe has a greater influence on your sales approach in the market?'



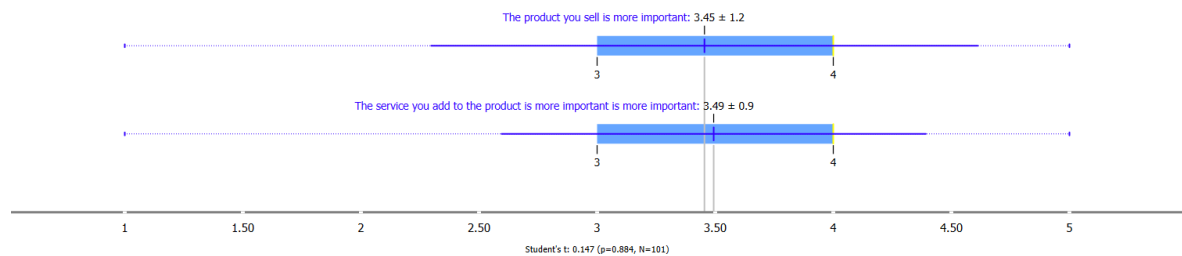
Individuals that rely solely on their professional experience displayed a result of 3,44 in the propensity to accept advice from peers, and individuals that believe that a combination of academic and professional experience is more important to the way they behave in the market results were 3,55.

Notwithstanding, it is crucial to highlight that this relationship, whilst interesting, requires a more nuanced interpretation. It is clear from Figure 28 that professional or academic backgrounds can have a significant influence on market interactions, but the specific nuances of these effects may vary substantially based on factors not considered in this research. This indicates a potential limitation of this study and an avenue for future exploration.

Further research could explore more profoundly into these varying influences and how they shape market behaviours. For instance, additional research might examine whether

professionals with certain backgrounds are more likely to follow market trends or the success of their competitors, and how these tendencies influence their decision-making processes. These extended investigations would enrich the existing body of literature and provide more targeted insights for SME managers operating in cross-cultural B2B markets. The analysis exploring the relationship between in-person advocacy acceptance and respondents' product/service orientation offers valuable insights. Figure 29, as depicted below, reveals the respondents' preferences when considering a regional competitor's well-reviewed product or machine.

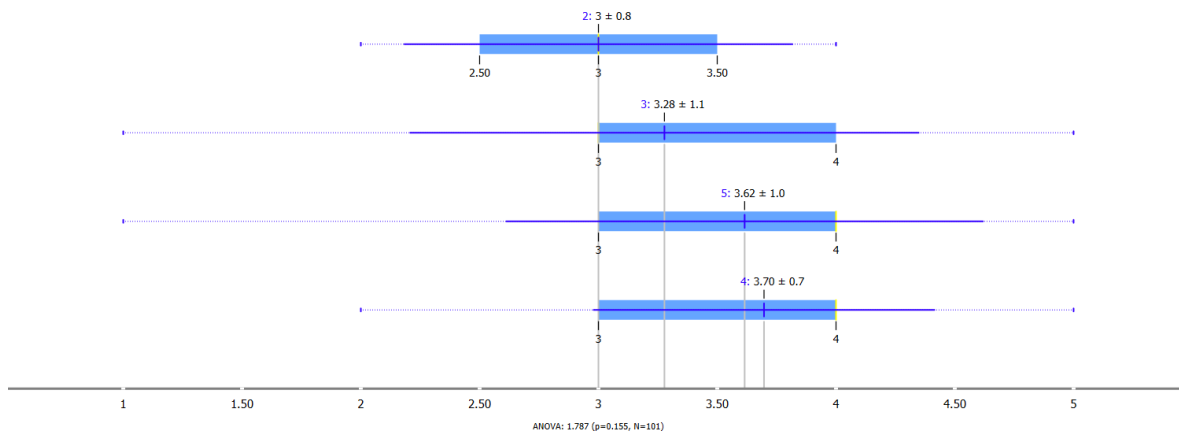
Figure 29 'If a regional competitor has good feedback, would you buy that machine/product?' grouped by 'What do you believe has more influence on your sales approach in the market?'



Respondents prioritizing the service they provide over the product itself display a higher inclination to accept in-person advocacy, with an average rating of 3,49. Conversely, respondents who regard the product as more significant have a marginally lower average rating of 3,45.

These findings are further corroborated by the respondents' self-assessment of their ability to manage customers with limited knowledge in their respective fields:

Figure 30 'If a regional competitor has good feedback, would you buy that machine/product?' grouped by 'How well do you handle customers with limited knowledge in your field?'



As displayed in Figure 30, a noteworthy connection emerges between service orientation and in-person advocacy acceptance. It is apparent that respondents confident in their ability to manage customers with limited knowledge in their sector are more inclined to accept in-person advocacy from peers and direct stakeholders. This pattern underlines the intricate interplay between service orientation and in-person advocacy acceptance, factors instrumental in shaping potential customers' decision-making processes.

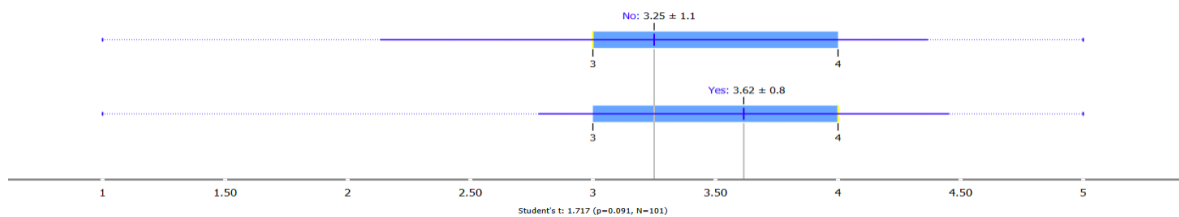
However, while the data representation in Figure 30 provides a clear visualisation of this trend, it also points towards a potential limitation of this research. It assumes a direct relationship between service orientation and advocacy acceptance, potentially overlooking nuanced factors such as the influence of individual personality traits, the nature of the relationship between the advocates and the potential customers, or the specific industry context.

This highlights an avenue for future research. Subsequent studies could dig deeper into these nuances, exploring how specific factors moderate the relationship between service orientation and advocacy acceptance. Additionally, future research could also consider diverse contexts, investigating if this relationship holds true across different industries, geographical locations, or cultures. These further enquiries would enrich our understanding of B2B dynamics and provide actionable insights for managers in diverse settings.

Further focusing on advocacy acceptance from in-person professional circles, results of Figure 31 show that B2B customers not engaged in international trade were less willing to

receiving advice (3,25) on what to buy compared to customers involved in international trade (3,62).

Figure 31 'If a regional competitor has good feedback, would you buy that machine/product?' grouped by 'Do you buy or sell products outside your home country?'



The analysis of Figure 31 reveals a notable distinction in the propensity to accept advice from in-person professional networks based on international trade involvement. B2B customers engaged in international trade exhibit a higher likelihood of being receptive to recommendations on product purchases.

In summary this section has dissected the intricate dynamics and influential factors within the customer satisfaction network of cross-cultural B2B markets in our hyper-connected society. The findings have underlined the influential role of word-of-mouth marketing within offline professional networks, and its connection to various aspects such as age, industry sub-sector, national organizational culture, managers' level of education, and the level of engagement in international trade.

It was observed that the Stone and Glass industries demonstrated variations in receptiveness to advice from industry peers, influenced potentially by the unique dynamics within each industry. Moreover, the data unveiled that the acceptance of peer advice varied across countries, suggesting that national organisational culture plays a crucial role in shaping businesses' receptiveness to industry peer feedback.

In assessing the interrelation between respondents' educational levels and their propensity to accept advice, became apparent that individuals with advanced degrees demonstrated a stronger inclination to value insights from their professional network. This underscores the potential influence of education in shaping market behaviours and decision-making processes.

However, the relationship between educational background and market behaviour wasn't a straightforward one, pointing to the existence of other influential variables and inviting future research to explore these nuances in greater depth.

Intriguingly, this study also revealed a meaningful link between service orientation and in person advocacy acceptance, emphasising the importance of service provision in shaping customers decision making processes. However, this relationship should be interpreted in light of potential limitations. It underscores the need for future research to further explore into this interplay, taking into account individual personality traits, the nature of the relationship between advocates and potential customers, and the specific industry context.

Lastly it was noted that B2B customers engaged in international trade demonstrated a higher propensity to be receptive to product purchase recommendations, highlighting the potential influence of international trade involvement on decision-making processes.

In conclusion, the understanding of these diverse dynamics and influential factors within the specific customer segment is integral to the effective deployment of marketing strategies in the B2B marketplace. Each of these elements presents an opportunity for future research to contribute to the academic body of literature, ultimately providing richer insights and practical implications for SMEs managers navigating the cross-cultural B2B markets in our increasingly connected world.

6.3.6.2 The online circle

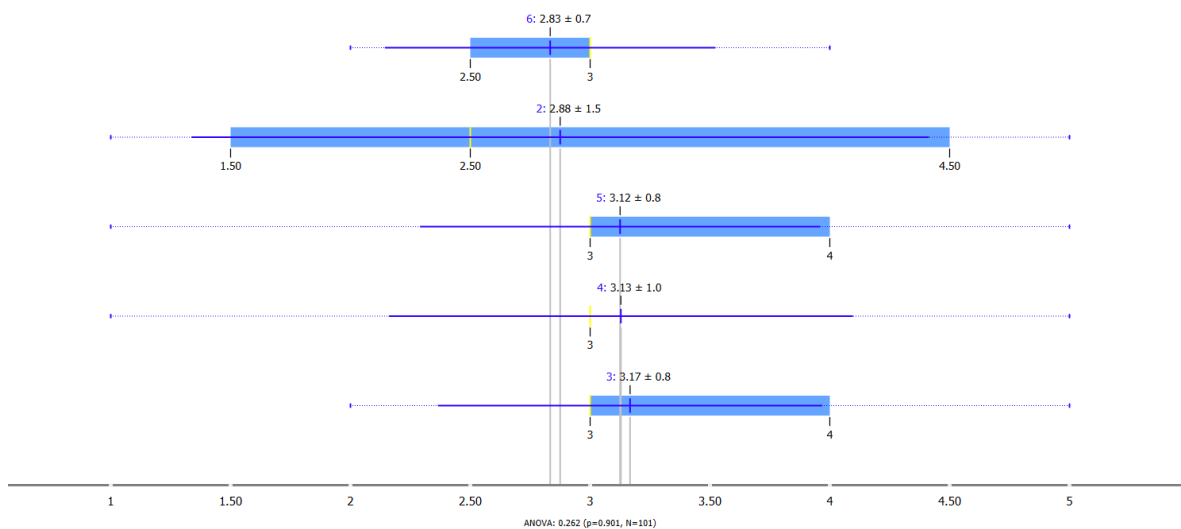
In today's hyper-connected society, the vast majority of individuals possess a device that enables instant global communication. In addressing the query, "Would you buy a product that you have seen to be used happily by regional competitors only online, despite not knowing them in-person?" the findings suggest that multicultural B2B customers display a stronger inclination towards trusting advice obtained from their offline professional networks, that as previously observed yields an average rating of 3,49, as opposed to advocacy stemming exclusively from solely online communication channels, which received a comparatively lower rating of 3,1.

To establish a comprehensive comparison between the influences of offline and online advocacy, an analysis was conducted using the same sample characteristics as those

employed for offline advocacy acceptance. The empirical assumption, based on the current study, suggests that satisfied customers tend to share their positive experiences.

Within the context of online advocacy acceptance, the results expressed in Figure 32 revealed the following average ratings for each age group: 2.83 for respondents in their 60s, 2.88 for those in their 20s, 3.12 for individuals in their 50s, 3.13 for respondents in their 40s, and 3.17 for those in their 30s. In contrast, the offline advocacy acceptance results showed: 3.17 for respondents in their 60s, 3.38 for those in their 20s, 3.46 for individuals in their 30s, 3.51 for respondents in their 40s, and 3.58 for those in their 50s.

Figure 32 'Would you buy a product that you have seen to be used happily by regional competitors only online, despite not knowing them in person?' grouped by 'Ordinal Age'



Across all age groups, offline professional networks are more trusted than online channels. The age group in their 40s, which was the most represented in the sample, displayed a higher acceptance of offline advocacy (3,51) than online advocacy (3,13).

Online advocacy acceptance refers to the willingness of respondents to trust and adopt recommendations from individuals whom they have only encountered digitally, whereas offline advocacy acceptance denotes their inclination to rely on advice and recommendations provided by individuals with whom they have established face-to-face relationships.

In terms of percentage differences, using offline advocacy as represented in the Figure 24, answering the question “If a regional competitor has good feedback, would you buy that

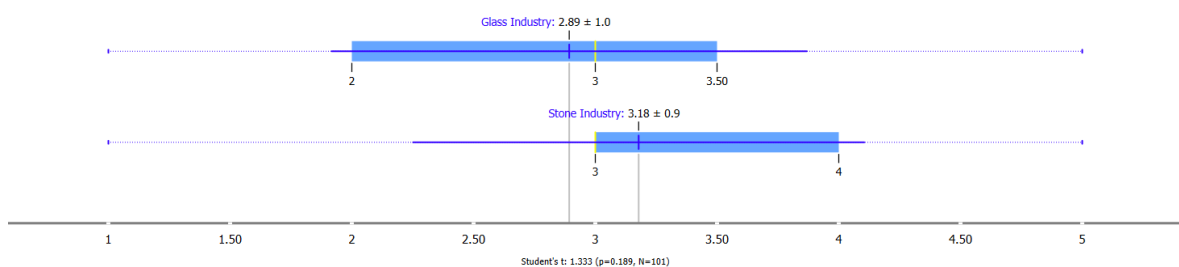
machine/product?' grouped by 'Ordinal Age'" as 100%, the deltas between offline and online advocacy acceptance for each age group are as follows:

- 20s: 14.8% lower acceptance for online advocacy
- 30s: 8.4% lower acceptance for online advocacy
- 40s: 10.8% lower acceptance for online advocacy
- 50s: 12.8% lower acceptance for online advocacy
- 60s: 10.7% lower acceptance for online advocacy

These findings suggest that businesses should tailor their marketing strategies to accommodate the preferences of different age demographics, giving special attention to the age group in their 40s, as they were the most prevalent in the sample. While offline advocacy remains dominant in terms of influence, the analysis reveals that the gap between offline and online advocacy acceptance is narrower among the younger age groups (20s and 30s), highlighting the importance of leveraging online channels for these demographics.

Examining the prefabrication sub-sectors in Figure 33, a noticeable discrepancy emerged between the Glass and Stone industries regarding online advocacy acceptance. The Glass industry scored an average rating of 2,89, while the Stone industry scored a higher average of 3,18.

Figure 33 'Would you buy a product that you have seen to be used happily by regional competitors only online, despite not knowing them in person?' grouped by 'In which industry do you work?'



When comparing the online and offline word-of-mouth marketing effects, the most significant discrepancy was observed in the Glass industry, with a 0,55-point difference between the online (2,89) and offline advocacy effects. The Stone industry displayed a

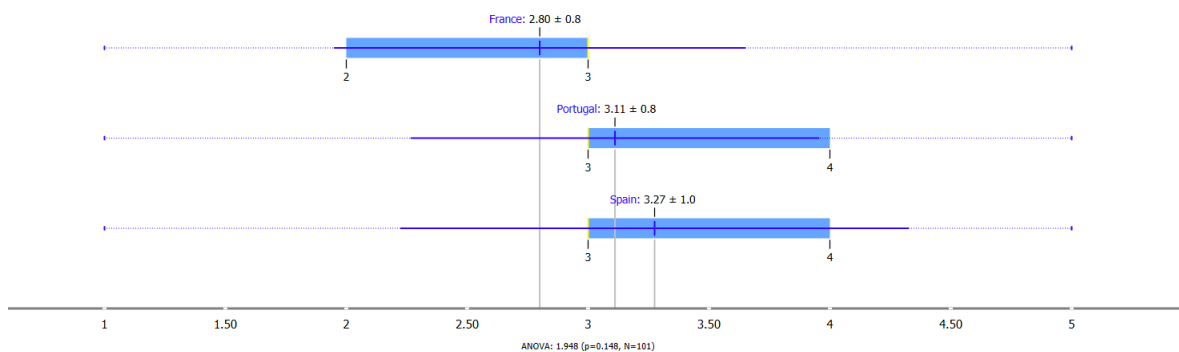
smaller difference of 0,26 points between online (3,18) and offline advocacy effects. To further illustrate these differences, the reader can consider the offline advocacy acceptance as a 100% reference point and calculate the percentage deltas:

- Glass industry: 18.98% lower acceptance for online advocacy
- Stone industry: 7.41% lower acceptance for online advocacy

These results demonstrate that multicultural B2B customers in the Stone industry are more trusting of online advocacy than their counterparts in the Glass industry.

Culture plays a significant role in shaping advocacy effects on multicultural B2B customers. A comparison between offline and online advocacy acceptance among French, Portuguese, and Spanish respondents reveal varying preferences (Figure 34).

Figure 34 'Would you buy a product that you have seen to be used happily by regional competitors only online, despite not knowing them in person?' grouped by 'Where is the headquarters of your organization located?'



The average ratings for offline and online advocacy acceptance for each nationality are as follows:

- French: 3,48 offline versus 2,80 online
- Portuguese: 3,72 offline versus 3,11 online
- Spanish: 3,27 offline versus 3,27 online (identical ratings)

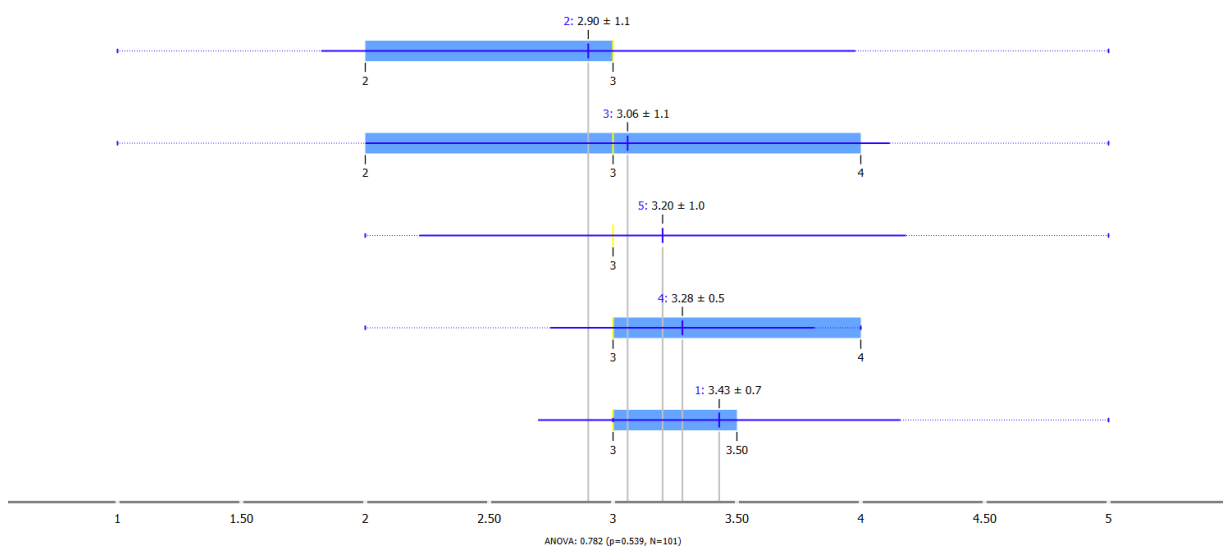
Considering the offline advocacy acceptance as a 100% reference point, the percentage deltas are:

- French: 19.54% lower acceptance for online advocacy
- Portuguese: 16.40% lower acceptance for online advocacy
- Spanish: no difference in acceptance between offline and online advocacy

These results indicate that both French and Portuguese respondents have a higher preference for offline advocacy, while Spanish respondents exhibit equal trust in both offline and online advocacy channels.

The influence of managers' education levels on offline and online advocacy acceptance is another notable aspect within the context of advocacy effects on B2B customers, as presented below in Figure 35.

Figure 35 'Would you buy a product that you have seen to be used happily by regional competitors only online, despite not knowing them in person?' grouped by 'What is your highest level of education achieved?'



The average ratings for offline and online advocacy acceptance for each education level are as follows:

- Education Level 1 (Elementary school): 3,57 offline vs. 3,43 online
- Education Level 2(High school): 3,33 offline vs. 2,90 online
- Education Level 3 (Bachelor's degree): 3,47 offline vs. 3,06 online

- Education Level 4 (Master's degree): 3,64 offline vs. 3,28 online
- Education Level 5 (Doctorate): 3,60 offline vs. 3,20 online

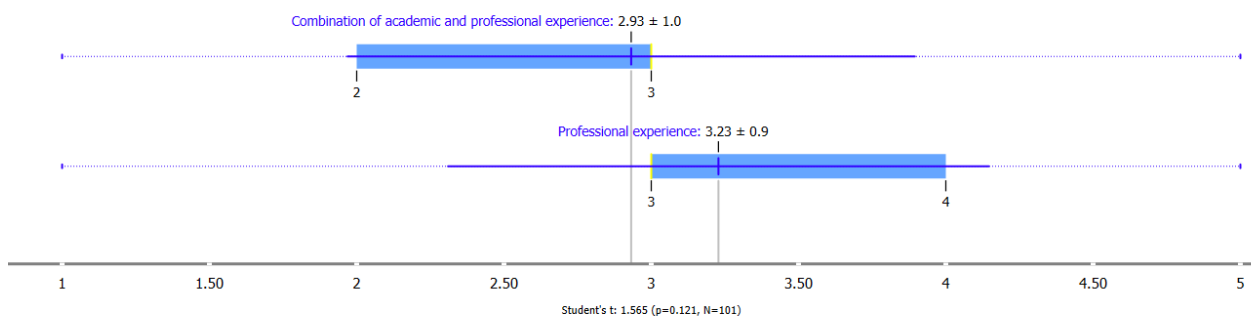
Considering the offline advocacy acceptance as a 100% reference point, the percentage deltas are:

- Education Level 2: 12.91% lower acceptance for online advocacy
- Education Level 3: 11.81% lower acceptance for online advocacy
- Education Level 5: 11.11% lower acceptance for online advocacy
- Education Level 4: 9.89% lower acceptance for online advocacy
- Education Level 1: 3.92% lower acceptance for online advocacy

The results demonstrate that offline advocacy is generally more influential among all education levels. However, the preference for offline advocacy is most pronounced among respondents with Education Level 2, while the smallest difference in acceptance is observed among those with Education Level 1. Therefore, the data does not display a clear relation between these two variables.

In this section, this research also explores the relationship between participants' background factors and their online advocacy acceptance by analysing their perceived influence on their sales approach in the market. The results are presented in Figure 36.

Figure 36 'Would you buy a product that you have seen to be used happily by regional competitors only online, despite not knowing them in person?' grouped by 'Which do you believe has a greater influence on your sales approach in the market?'



The average ratings for offline and online advocacy acceptance based on the perceived influence are:

- Academic and Professional Experience: 3,55 offline vs. 2,93 online
- Professional Experience: 3,44 offline vs. 3,23 online

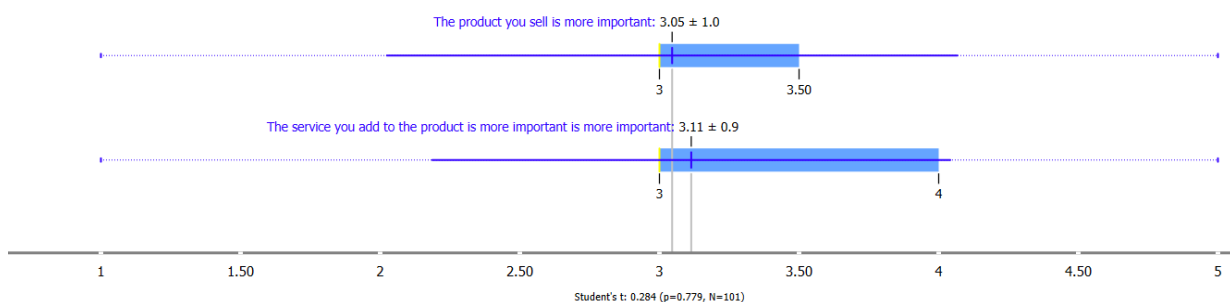
Calculating the deltas in a scale from 1 to 5 and the percentage deltas considering the offline as 100%, results are:

- Academic and Professional Experience: 0,62 delta (17.5% lower acceptance for online advocacy)
- Professional Experience: 0,21 delta (6.1% lower acceptance for online advocacy)

The results also indicate that offline advocacy acceptance is higher than online advocacy acceptance, regardless of the participants' perceived influence on their sales approach. However, the difference in acceptance is more substantial for individuals who believe that both academic and professional experiences contribute to their sales approach, as compared to those who rely solely on their professional experience.

In this next section, this study examined the relationship between product or service sales focus and online advocacy acceptance among the sample. The results, as illustrated in Figure 37, are presented below.

Figure 37 'Would you buy a product that you have seen to be used happily by regional competitors only online, despite not knowing them in person?' grouped by 'What do you believe has more influence on your sales approach in the market?'



The average ratings for offline and online advocacy acceptance based on the sales focus are:

- Product Focus: 3,45 offline vs. 3,05 online
- Service Focus: 3,49 offline vs. 3,11 online

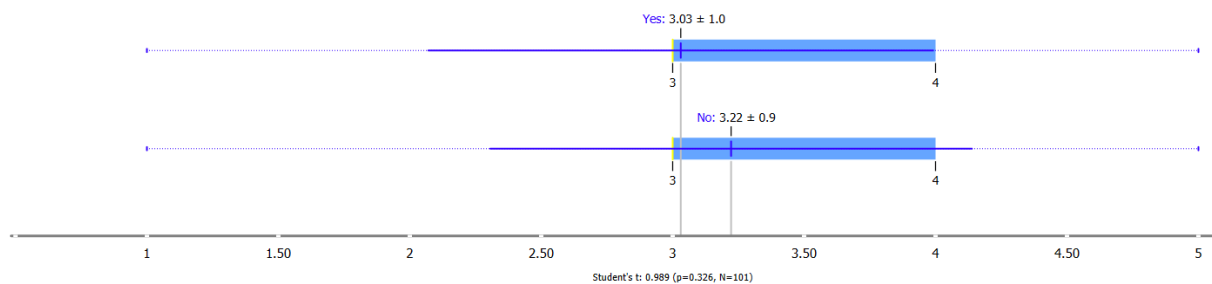
Calculating the deltas in a scale from 1 to 5 and the percentage deltas considering the offline as 100%, findings are:

- Product Focus: 0,38 delta (11.0% lower acceptance for online advocacy)
- Service Focus: 0,38 delta (10.9% lower acceptance for online advocacy)

The results indicate that, regardless of whether the participants prioritize product or service in their sales approach, offline advocacy acceptance is consistently higher than online advocacy acceptance. The deltas between offline and online advocacy acceptance are almost identical, with both product and service-focused participants demonstrating a similar preference for offline advocacy.

In the final analysis comparing offline and online advocacy acceptance, this study examines the impact of international trade activities on the advocacy acceptance among multicultural B2B customers. The results are presented in Figure 38.

Figure 38 Would you buy a product that you have seen to be used happily by regional competitors only online, despite not knowing them in person?' grouped by 'Do you buy or sell products outside your home country?'



The average ratings for offline and online advocacy acceptance based on international trade activities are:

- Not Engaging in International Trade: 3,25 offline vs. 3,22 online
- Engaging in International Trade: 3,62 offline vs. 3,03 online

Calculating the deltas in a scale from 1 to 5 and the percentage deltas considering the offline as 100%, observation is:

- Not Engaging in International Trade: 0,03 delta (0.9% lower acceptance for online advocacy)
- Engaging in International Trade: 0,59 delta (16.3% lower acceptance for online advocacy)

The results indicate that online advocacy acceptance decreases compared to the offline version for multicultural B2B customers engaging in international trade activities. The decrease is more significant for those engaging in international trade, revealing a trust gap in online circles' advocacy. This could be attributed to the fact that these customers may have larger in-person networks due to their active involvement in the international market.

6.3.6.3 Conclusion

In concluding, the examination of both online and offline advocacy acceptance across a myriad of factors such as age, industry sub-sector, national cultures, educational attainment, sales approach influences, and international trade involvement, unveils an overarching preference for offline advocacy within the B2B landscape. Yet, it is essential to recognise that the strength of this preference oscillates across varying demographic and operational contexts.

The current research underlines the necessity for businesses to finely calibrate their marketing strategies to the distinct preferences of their target demographic. Striking a robust balance between online and offline advocacy channels will be key to successfully captivating the attention of multicultural B2B customers, irrespective of the unique factors shaping their receptivity.

The seemingly larger influence of offline advocacy does not downplay the significance of its online counterpart. It rather underscores the need for businesses to amplify their online presence and credibility to match the perceived trustworthiness of offline networks. In an increasingly hyper-connected society, the integration of online advocacy initiatives within marketing strategies is no longer optional, but essential.

This study suggests an intriguing dynamic: While younger demographics appear more receptive to online advocacy than their older counterparts, there still exists a marked

preference for offline advocacy across all age groups. Therefore, businesses seeking to target younger demographics should not discount the importance of offline advocacy while ramping up their online efforts.

In terms of industry sub-sectors, there exists a conspicuous gap in online advocacy acceptance between the Stone and Glass industries, being the Stone industry less likely to accept the online advocates as advisors. The discrepancy further underscores the need for tailored marketing strategies that reflect sector-specific nuances.

Moreover, the influence of educational attainment, perceived influences on sales approach, and international trade engagement on advocacy acceptance suggests complex interrelations between these factors and the weight placed on online versus offline advice. This complexity necessitates further research to unlock deeper insights into these dynamics.

Ultimately, these findings underline the vitality of a balanced marketing approach that respects the traditional while embracing the digital, targeting diverse customer characteristics, and flexibly adapting to future behavioural trends. By acknowledging and adapting to these dynamics, businesses can effectively capitalise on both offline and online word-of-mouth marketing, enhancing customer satisfaction and forging resilient relationships in an ever-connected society.

6.4 Inferential statistics and hypothesis testing

This section employs inferential statistics to test the formulated hypotheses, providing evidence of relationships between key research variables. Inferential statistics enable the analysis of sample data to draw conclusions about the broader population (Hair et al., 2013). Four hypotheses (H1-H4) are assessed through appropriate statistical methods, clearly presented and explained in the following subsections.

6.4.1 Theoretical foundations of inferential statistical techniques

Chi-Square Test (χ^2)

The Chi-square test assesses whether there is a statistically significant relationship between two categorical variables. It compares the observed frequencies (O) in each category to the frequencies expected (E) if the variables were independent. The formula is:

$$\chi^2 = \sum (O_{ij} - E_{ij})^2 / E_{ij}$$

(1)

A p-value less than 0.05 indicates a statistically significant relationship between the variables (Casella & Berger, 2021).

Pearson Correlation (r)

Pearson correlation measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two continuous variables. Values range from -1 (perfect negative correlation) to +1 (perfect positive correlation). A value close to 0 indicates no relationship (Hair et al., 2013).

Pearson correlation coefficient formula:

$$r = \frac{\sum[(x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})]}{\sqrt{[\sum(x_i - \bar{x})^2 * \sum(y_i - \bar{y})^2]}}$$

(2)

Coefficient of Determination (R² and Adjusted R²)

R² indicates the percentage of variation in the dependent variable explained by the independent variable(s). Adjusted R² modifies R² to account for the number of predictors, providing a more precise explanatory measure, especially for smaller samples or multiple predictors (Hair et al., 2013).

Coefficient of determination (R Square) formula:

$$R^2 = r^2$$

(3)

The coefficient of determination, or R², is derived by squaring the Pearson correlation coefficient, r (Casella & Berger, 2021). R² illustrates how much of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variable.

Adjusted R Square formula:

$$\text{Adjusted } R^2 = 1 - [(1 - R^2) * (n - 1) / (n - k - 1)]$$

(4)

Adjusted R^2 is a refined version of R^2 that takes into account the number of independent variables (k) in the model and the sample size (n). This adjustment ensures a more precise measurement of the variance explained by the model, especially when multiple independent variables are present (Casella & Berger, 2021).

Standard Error (SE)

The standard error indicates how much observed data points deviate from predicted values in regression analysis.

Standard Error formula:

$$SE = \sqrt{[\sum(y_i - \hat{y})^2 / (n - 2)]} \quad (5)$$

Here, y_i is the actual observed value of the dependent variable, and \hat{y} is the value predicted by the regression model. The sample size is represented by n . A lower SE suggests that the regression model's predictions are more accurate (Casella & Berger, 2021).

F-statistic and Significance F

The F-statistic evaluates how well the regression model fits compared to a baseline model without predictors. Higher F-values indicate better explanatory power. Significance F (p-value of the F-test) indicates if the regression results are statistically significant (typically, $p < 0.05$ is significant).

F statistic formula:

$$F = (R^2 / k) / [(1 - R^2) / (n - k - 1)] \quad (5)$$

The F statistic helps assess the overall significance of the regression model. It is calculated using R^2 (the coefficient of determination), k (the number of independent variables), and n (the sample size). A higher F statistic points to a stronger relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Significance F and P-value:

Values for significance are drawn from the F-distribution table, considering the F statistic and degrees of freedom.

$$df = n - k - 1$$

(6)

Significance F indicates the likelihood of obtaining an F statistic as extreme as the one observed if there is no actual relationship between the variables. The P-value, derived from Significance F, shows the probability of observing the F statistic purely by chance. A small p-value (< 0.05) means that results are statistically significant, and thus the null hypothesis can be rejected (Casella & Berger, 2021).

6.4.2 Analysis of Hypothesis 1

Market orientation is a crucial determinant of business performance, as it emphasizes the importance of understanding and responding to customer needs (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). A company's management background can play a significant role in shaping its market orientation, particularly when it comes to adopting a service-oriented approach (Day & Wensley, 1988).

In this Hypothesis 1, the study examined the relationship between a company's market orientation and management background to understand how these factors impact financial marketing performance.

First, a Chi-Square test assessed the association between two categorical variables:

- Market orientation: preference for product or service.
- Management background: academic, professional, or both.

The resulting Chi-Square test produced a p-value of 0.49 (>0.05).

The null hypothesis (H0) posits that there is no association between the two categorical variables, while the alternative dissertation (H1) suggests that an association exists.

The resulting Chi-Square test produced a p-value of 0.49 (>0.05). Thus, no significant categorical relationship was found between the independent variable 'market orientation' and the mediator variable 'management background'.

Figure 39 Data analysis in Excel: Sales approach grouped by background

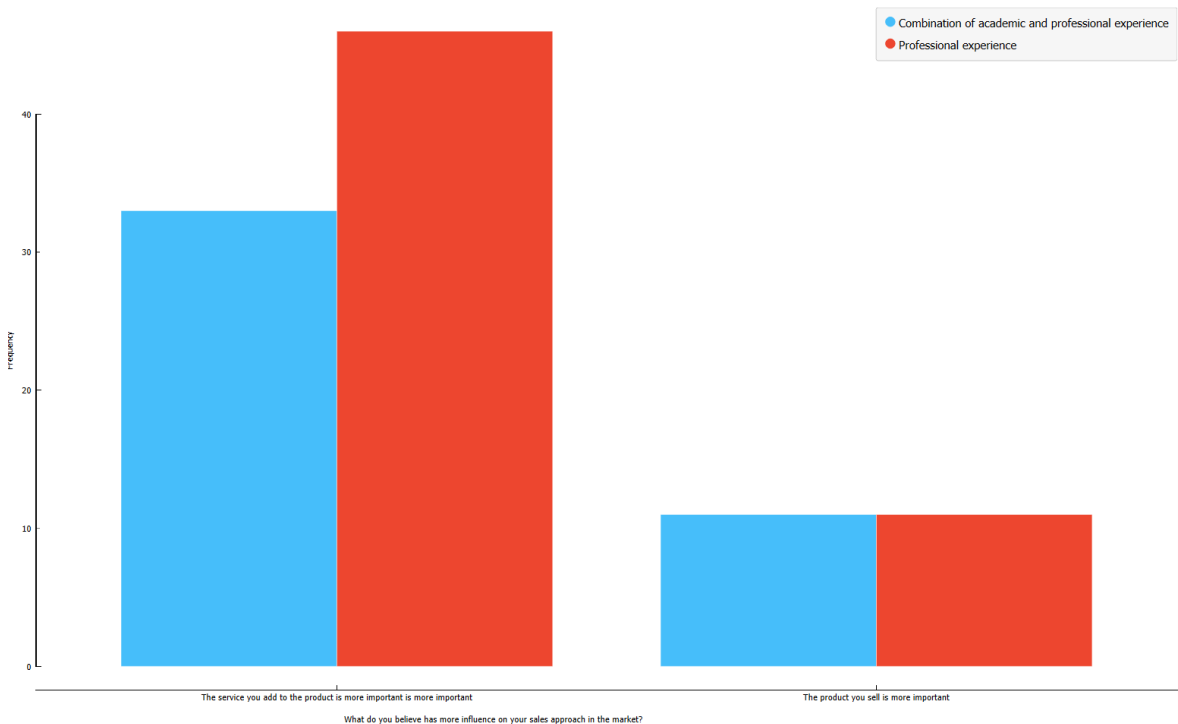
Count of What do you believe has more influence on your sales approach in the market?	Column Labels		
Row Labels	Combination of academic and professional experience	Professional experience	Grand Total
The product you sell is more important	11	11	22
The service you add to the product is more important is more important	33	46	79
Grand Total	44	57	101

	Combination of academic and professional experience	Professional experience	Grand Total
The product you sell is more important	9,584158416	12,41584158	22
The service you add to the product is more important is more important	34,41584158	44,58415842	79
Grand Total	44	57	101

P value 0,491233644

This result is also visible by analysing the below Figure 40:

Figure 40 Distribution of 'What do you believe has more influence on your sales approach in the market?' with columns split by 'Which do you believe has a greater influence on your sales approach in the market?'



The information illustrated in Figure 40 support the inability to reject the null hypothesis, as the distribution does not show a clear pattern or association between the ‘market orientation’ and ‘management background’. Consequently, the analysis of the categorical variables does

not provide sufficient evidence to support H1, indicating that a company's market orientation, characterised by the adoption of a service-oriented approach, does not have a statistically significant correlation with its management background.

Nonetheless, to eliminate potential bias in respondents' self-assessment and gain further insight into the relationship between market orientation and management background, a regression analysis was conducted using numeric variables instead of categorical.

The independent variable, management background, was numerically described by ordinal education, with numeric codes assigned to each education level: 1 for elementary school, 2 for high school, 3 for bachelor's, 4 for master's, and 5 for doctorate degrees.

The mediator variable, the adoption of a service-oriented approach, is derived from answers to the question: How well do you handle customers with limited knowledge in your field?

Since both variables are numeric, this approach enhances robustness by reducing subjective biases inherent in respondents' self-assessments, thus enabling a regression analysis to effectively examine the relationship between academic background and the adoption of a service-oriented business approach.

The regression analysis results offer valuable insights into how a company's market orientation, specifically through adopting a service-oriented approach, relates to its management background. Each value obtained from the analysis aids in understanding Hypothesis 1 (H1)

Multiple R (0.905): This value represents the correlation coefficient, which measures the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables. A value of 0.905 indicates a strong positive correlation, suggesting that as the management academic background improves, there is a tendency for companies to adopt a more service-oriented approach.

R Square (0.819): This value, also known as the coefficient of determination, explains the proportion of the variance in the mediator variable (market orientation) that can be predicted from the independent variable (management background). An R Square value of 0.819 suggests that approximately 81.9% of the variance in market orientation can be explained by management background.

Adjusted R Square (0.809): This value is a modified version of R Square that takes into account the number of variables in the model. In this case, the Adjusted R Square is very close to the R Square value, indicating that the model is not penalised significantly for including additional variables.

Standard Error (1.663): This value represents the standard deviation of the residuals, which are the differences between the observed and predicted values. A lower standard error indicates a better fit of the model to the data. In this case, the standard error suggests a reasonably good fit.

F statistic (451.51): The F statistic is a measure of how well the regression model fits the data compared to a model with no predictors. A larger F value indicates a better fit. In this case, the F statistic of 451.51 suggests that the model is a significant improvement over a model with no predictors.

Significance F ($p < 0.001$): This value represents the probability that the observed F statistic could have occurred by chance if there were no relationship between the variables. A low Significance F value such as the one calculated indicates that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant.

P-value ($p < 0.001$): The p-value is the probability of obtaining a test statistic as extreme or more extreme than the one observed, assuming the null hypothesis is true. In this case, the p-value so close to zero, well below the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the relationship between the two variables is statistically significant, and the null hypothesis in favour of H1 can be rejected.

To further examine the relationship between a company's market orientation and management background, the ordinal age of respondents was incorporated into the analysis. The observed ages were transformed into ordinal ages to match the same scale as answers to the question "How well do you handle customers with limited knowledge in your field?" The transformation of ordinal age helped to eliminate potential biases and provided more accurate insights into the relationship between management background and propensity to adopt a service-oriented approach.

The inferential test results to test the relation between respondents' ages and market orientation are as follows:

Multiple R (0.921): This value indicates a strong positive correlation between the independent variable (ordinal age) and the mediator variable (adopting a service-oriented approach). The strong correlation suggests that as management ages are higher, there is a higher propensity for managers to adopt a service-oriented approach.

R Square (0.849): This value signifies that approximately 84.91% of the variance in the mediator variable (adopting a service-oriented approach) can be explained by the independent variables (ordinal age).

Adjusted R Square (0.839): This value is very close to the R Square value, indicating that the model is not significantly penalised for including additional variables.

Standard Error (1.518): This value suggests a reasonably good fit of the model to the data, with a lower standard error indicating more accurate predictions of the regression model.

F (562.54): The F statistic suggests that the model is a significant improvement over a model with no predictors, as a larger F value indicates a better fit.

Significance F ($p < 0.001$): This value indicates that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant, with a low Significance F value suggesting that the observed F statistic could not have occurred by chance if there were no relationship between the variables.

P-value ($p < 0.001$): The p-value is well below the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is statistically significant, and the null hypothesis can be rejected in favour of H1.

The incorporation of ordinal age into the analysis provides additional insight into the relationship between a company's market orientation and its management background. The strong positive correlation between management academic background, ordinal age, and the adoption of a service-oriented approach supports H1. This relationship highlights the importance of considering both academic background and managers' age when assessing a manager's propensity to adopt a service-oriented approach.

In conclusion, the two types of inferential tests offer contrasting results. The Chi-Square Test did not provide sufficient evidence to support H1, indicating no significant correlation between a company's market orientation and its management background based on

categorical variables. However, the regression analysis using numeric variables such as education level and age revealed a strong positive correlation between the two variables and market orientation, supporting H1. The discrepancy between these results may be attributed to the self-assessment bias inherent in categorical variables, as respondents may have been influenced by their subjective interpretations of abstract dimensions.

Considering the limitations of categorical analysis, the regression analysis, which relies on respondents' actual numeric academic achievements or demographics, can here be regarded as a more reliable indicator of the relationship between a company's market orientation and its management background. Therefore, the research concludes that there is a positive correlation between a company's market orientation, characterised by the adoption of a service-oriented approach, and its management background, as evidenced by the the two regression analyses results regarding the managers' background.

6.4.3 Analysis of hypothesis 2

Cultural compatibility is a critical factor in effective communication between businesses, particularly in international trade (Rust & Huang, 2014). Cultural differences can negatively impact trust and collaboration between businesses, which may affect the likelihood of establishing long-term relationships (Simonson & Tversky, 1992). Therefore, it is essential to explore the role of cultural compatibility in fostering successful business relationships in the multicultural B2B marketplace due to the high degree of globalisation of contemporary society.

- H2: There is a positive correlation between shorter cultural and geographical gaps and customer satisfaction.

To test H2, a composite variable for cultural compatibility was computed using language as a proxy for culture, as other cultural dimensions are more difficult to assess in a quantitative study. As previously described in the data preparation process, the "language compatibility score" was calculated as the average rating of the following questions:

- Importance of a manual in the customer's language
- Importance of a salesperson that speaks the customer's language
- Importance of training/support in the customer's language

Moreover, the customer satisfaction score was calculated by averaging the scores of the following questions:

- How likely are you to recommend a product from a supplier that met your expectations to others?
- How likely would you be to buy a product that has a higher price but is recommended by your professional network due to high satisfaction?
- You choose a product with high satisfaction among your online network, even if it's more expensive than similar products?

The results from the regression analysis were as follows:

Multiple R = 0.983 (Pearson correlation coefficient)

R Square = 0.966

Adjusted R Square = 0.956

Standard Error = 0.744

ANOVA: F = 2801.325

Significance F = $p < 0.001$

P-value = $p < 0.001$

In this case, the Pearson correlation coefficient (Multiple R) is strong, suggesting a strong positive relationship between cultural compatibility and customer satisfaction. The p-value of $p < 0.001$ is much smaller than the conventional significance level of 0.05, indicating that the observed correlation is statistically significant. Consequently, the regression analysis partly supports Hypothesis 2, as there is evidence to conclude that shorter cultural gaps, as represented by language compatibility, are positively correlated with customer satisfaction.

These results reinforce the importance of cultural compatibility in fostering successful business relationships in the multicultural B2B marketplace. As globalisation continues to increase, businesses should be mindful of cultural differences and strive to bridge cultural gaps to enhance customer satisfaction and build long-term partnerships.

Hypothesis 2 also aimed to test the relationship between the geographical proximity dimension and customer satisfaction. The geographical relationship was tested using the

customer satisfaction score and the responses to the question, "How important is a supplier's representative in-person visit to your business before making a purchase?"

Testing the relationship between geographical proximity and customer satisfaction, the regression analysis achieved the following results:

Multiple R = 0.955

R Square = 0.913

Adjusted R Square = 0.903

Standard Error = 1.184

ANOVA: F = 1044.304

Significance F = $p < 0.001$

P-value = $p < 0.001$

In this context, the Multiple R represents the strength and direction of the linear relationship between geographical proximity (independent variable) and customer satisfaction (dependent variable). The higher the value of Multiple R, the stronger the relationship between the two variables (Hair et al., 2013).

The R Square value indicates the proportion of the variation in customer satisfaction that is attributable to the variation in geographical proximity (Hair et al., 2013). In this case, approximately 91.3% of the variation in customer satisfaction is explained by geographical proximity.

The Adjusted R Square accounts for the number of independent variables in the model and provides a more accurate measure of the explanatory power of the model (Hair et al., 2013). In this case, the Adjusted R Square value of 0.903 indicates that approximately 90.3% of the variation in customer satisfaction is explained by geographical proximity after accounting for the number of independent variables.

The Standard Error measures the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line (Hair et al., 2013). The smaller the Standard Error, the more accurate the predictions are. In this case, the Standard Error value of 1.184 suggests that the average distance between the observed values and the regression line is relatively small, indicating

that the model is reasonably accurate in predicting customer satisfaction based on geographical proximity.

The F statistic tests the overall significance of the regression model. A higher F statistic value indicates a more significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Hair et al., 2013). In this case, the F statistic value of 1044.304 suggests a highly significant relationship between geographical proximity and customer satisfaction.

The Significance F and P-value are derived from the F statistic and degrees of freedom. A smaller P-value indicates a more significant relationship between the variables (Hair et al., 2013). In this case, the resulting P-value of $p < 0.001$ is substantially smaller than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that the observed correlation between geographical proximity and customer satisfaction is statistically significant.

The sample indicated that cultural compatibility, assessed through language compatibility scores, has a more significant effect on customer satisfaction than geographical proximity, which was evaluated based on the importance of in-person visits by a supplier's representative. Both cultural compatibility and geographical proximity showed statistically significant correlations with customer satisfaction.

In summary, the findings support the hypothesis that both cultural compatibility and geographical proximity influence customer satisfaction. However, cultural compatibility, indicated by language compatibility scores, appears to have a stronger impact on customer satisfaction compared to geographical proximity, measured by the significance of in-person visits by suppliers. Despite the strong correlations, it is important to recognize that other factors might also affect customer satisfaction. Correlation does not imply causation, so additional research is needed to identify other elements that may influence customer satisfaction within the B2B sector.

6.4.4 Analysis of hypothesis 3

Customer satisfaction is a critical factor for businesses aiming to maintain competitiveness and drive long-term growth, particularly in cross-cultural environments. Companies operating across different cultures face unique challenges in providing satisfactory after-sales services that focus into diverse needs, languages, and preferences. A comprehensive marketing mix strategy can enable organisations to adapt and provide ongoing after-sales

service, consequently enhancing cross-cultural customer satisfaction (Rust & Huang, 2014). This study aimed to investigate the impact of adaptive and ongoing after-sales service on cross-cultural customer satisfaction.

- H3: Adaptive and continued after-sales service created by an extended marketing mix approach positively correlates with cross-cultural customers' satisfaction levels.

The composite extended marketing mix variable was created by averaging all mediator variables from H3, representing a holistic view of the marketing mix strategy. A linear regression analysis was performed to test the relationship between the composite variable and cross-cultural customer satisfaction. The regression analysis results for the mediator, in the sub-model independent, variable will be discussed in terms of their Multiple R, R Square, Adjusted R Square, Standard Error, ANOVA F, Significance F, and p-value, along with their implications for H3.

"Extended marketing mix composite variable":

The Multiple R value of 0.985 indicates a very strong positive relationship between the composite variable and customer satisfaction. The R Square value of 0.969 suggests that 96.9% of the variance in customer satisfaction can be explained by the composite variable. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.959 takes into account the degrees of freedom. The F-statistic (3150.496) has a Significance F value of 7.22E-77 – close to 0 – and a p-value of 2.04E-77 – close to 0 – which are both well below the 0.05 threshold, indicating a statistically significant relationship.

Given that the correlation between the composite extended marketing mix variable does not mean causation with cross-cultural customer satisfaction, further analysis was conducted to dissect the composite variable and examine the individual contributions of each dimension. The following independent variables were analysed: free manuals, trainings, and ongoing support; manuals in the customer's language; salespersons who speak the customer's language; training and support in the customer's language; the importance of a supplier's representative's in-person visit; and after-sales services, including helpdesk support and a 24-hour contact number.

- "Do you think a supplier should provide free manuals, trainings, and free ongoing support for the product you buy?":

The Multiple R value of 0.955 suggests a strong positive relationship between the variable and customer satisfaction. The R Square value of 0.912 indicates that 91.2% of the variance in customer satisfaction can be explained by this variable. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.902 accounts for the degrees of freedom. The F-statistic (1031.14) with a Significance F value of $p < 0.001$ – and a p-value of $p < 0.001$ – both close to 0 – demonstrate a statistically significant relationship.

- "Importance of manual in customer's language":

The Multiple R value of 0.98 indicates a strong positive relationship between the variable and customer satisfaction. The R Square value of 0.961 suggests that 96.1% of the variance in customer satisfaction can be explained by this variable. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.951 takes into account the degrees of freedom. The F-statistic (2474.627) with a Significance F value of $p < 0.001$ and a p-value of $p < 0.001$ reveal a statistically significant relationship.

- "Importance of a salesperson that speaks customer's language":

The Multiple R value of 0.975 suggests a strong positive relationship between the variable and customer satisfaction. The R Square value of 0.951 indicates that 95.1% of the variance in customer satisfaction can be explained by this variable. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.941 accounts for the degrees of freedom. The F-statistic (1923.198) with a Significance F value of $p < 0.001$ and a p-value of $p < 0.001$ demonstrate a statistically significant relationship.

- "Importance of a training/support in customer's language":

The Multiple R value of 0.982 indicates a strong positive relationship between the variable and customer satisfaction. The R Square value of 0.965 suggests that 96.5% of the variance in customer satisfaction can be explained by this variable. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.955 takes into account the degrees of freedom. The F-statistic (2679.841) with a Significance F value of $p < 0.001$ and a p-value of $p < 0.001$ reveal a statistically significant relationship.

The statistical analysis results for each variable suggest a positive relationship with cross-cultural customer satisfaction. The high Multiple R values, R Square values, Adjusted R

Square values, and the ANOVA F-statistics, along with the low Significance F values and p-values, indicate a statistically significant impact on customer satisfaction.

These results support Hypothesis H3, which posits that adaptive and ongoing after-sales service, facilitated by a comprehensive service marketing mix strategy, positively affects cross-cultural customer satisfaction.

6.4.5 Analysis of hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis (H4) postulates that increased customer satisfaction negatively correlates with price sensitivity in cross-cultural markets. Understanding this relationship is crucial for marketers, as it can inform the development of pricing strategies in international markets, ultimately impacting businesses' performance (Monroe, 1971).

- H4: Customer satisfaction of cross-cultural clients negatively correlates with clients' and prospects' price sensitivity.

To test H4, a linear regression analysis was employed to measure the relationship between customer satisfaction, operationalized as the composite mediator variable of the customer satisfaction score, and a composite dependent variable for price sensitivity obtained by the average result to the questions:

- How important is price when making a purchase decision for you? – inverted scale
- How likely are you to decrease price sensitivity when repeating business with a trusted supplier?
- How likely would you be to buy a product that has a higher price but is recommended by your professional network due to high satisfaction?
- You choose a product with high satisfaction among your online network, even if it's more expensive than similar products?

Obtained results indicate a strong relationship between customer satisfaction and price sensitivity. The regression analysis yielded the following results:

Multiple R: 0.994

R Square: 0.988

Adjusted R Square: 0.978

Standard Error: 0.383

ANOVA F: 8094.359

Significance F: $p < 0.001$

P-value: $p < 0.001$

The Multiple R value (0.994) represents the correlation between the mediator variable (customer satisfaction) and the dependent variable (price sensitivity). This value indicates a very strong negative relationship between customer satisfaction and price sensitivity, as it is close to -1. The R Square (0.988) and Adjusted R Square (0.978) signify that approximately 98.8% and 97.8% of the variance in price sensitivity can be explained by customer satisfaction, respectively. These values suggest a high degree of reliability in the model.

The Standard Error (0.383) indicates the average deviation of the observed values from the regression line. A smaller standard error signifies a more accurate model. In this case, the standard error is relatively small, providing further support for the reliability of the model.

The ANOVA F value (8094.359) and Significance F ($p < 0.001$) represent the overall significance of the regression model. With a very low Significance F value, the model is statistically significant. The P-value ($p < 0.001$) is substantially below the 0.05 threshold, further corroborating the statistical significance of the relationship between customer satisfaction and price sensitivity.

In conclusion, the linear regression analysis results support H4, indicating a strong negative correlation between customer satisfaction and price sensitivity in cross-cultural markets. This result shows that as customer satisfaction increases, price sensitivity decreases.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This chapter has comprehensively presented the results derived from the structured questionnaire administered to B2B decision-makers within the prefabrication stone and glass industries in France, Portugal, and Spain. By employing rigorous descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, the study provided valuable empirical evidence concerning key

theoretical constructs: market orientation, service marketing strategies, customer satisfaction, cultural compatibility, geographic proximity, and price sensitivity.

Initially, the methodological approach was carefully outlined, highlighting how data was meticulously collected, cleaned, and organised to ensure accuracy and reliability. The survey was strategically offered in multiple languages to mitigate potential language barriers, resulting in a final dataset of 101 valid responses. Despite achieving statistical robustness, limitations such as uneven representation between countries and industry sectors were acknowledged, emphasising cautious interpretation of findings.

Descriptive statistics demonstrated notable demographic insights, revealing variations across age, education, international trade engagement, and industry sector representation. A significant majority of respondents emphasised the importance of service over product attributes, showcasing the industry's inclination towards service orientation as a strategic differentiator within highly competitive markets. The findings further indicated that respondents' educational backgrounds correlated positively with service orientation, potentially influencing their effectiveness in customer interactions.

Crucially, this chapter presented robust inferential statistical analyses to address four key hypotheses. The examination of market orientation (H1) revealed that while categorical analyses showed no associations, regression models incorporating numerical variables (education and age) provided compelling evidence that management background significantly influences companies' adoption of a service-oriented market approach. These nuanced findings underline the importance of considering both academic background and managerial age in strategic decision-making processes.

The exploration of cultural compatibility and geographical proximity (H2) underscored their positive relationships with customer satisfaction. Cultural compatibility – operationalised via language preferences – emerged as a particularly significant predictor of satisfaction, surpassing even geographic proximity. This result highlights the critical importance of bridging cultural gaps through tailored marketing and service strategies, reaffirming that cultural sensitivity is paramount for sustained customer engagement and satisfaction in multicultural B2B contexts.

Analysis of the extended marketing mix approach (H3) demonstrated a consistently strong positive relationship between adaptive, ongoing after-sales services and cross-cultural customer satisfaction. Specific dimensions, including the provision of multilingual manuals, training, and customer support, significantly contributed to overall satisfaction. This underscores the necessity for businesses to comprehensively tailor after-sales services, ensuring alignment with the linguistic and cultural preferences of their customer bases.

Finally, addressing price sensitivity (H4), the analysis provided robust evidence of a strong negative correlation between customer satisfaction and price sensitivity. Enhanced customer satisfaction significantly mitigated price-driven purchasing decisions, underscoring the critical strategic benefit of fostering customer loyalty and perceived value through high-quality services, even in price-sensitive markets.

Overall, this chapter has systematically validated the theoretical relationships among service marketing orientation, cultural factors, customer satisfaction, and pricing behaviours. The empirical evidence presented here establishes a solid foundation for the subsequent chapter, which will further synthesise these insights into actionable implications for marketing practitioners and contribute to theoretical advancements in cross-cultural B2B marketing literature.

Chapter 7: Findings and implications

In the rapidly evolving landscape of marketing performance, cross-cultural business-to-business (B2B) relationships have become a critical field of enquiry. This chapter explores into the empirical results and their managerial and theoretical implications, offering guidance on how marketing performance can be enhanced in diverse B2B contexts. The focal research question was:

How can SMEs – primarily product-centric and operating in B2B markets – leverage service orientation and an expanded marketing-mix to reduce price sensitivity among multicultural customers?

That derives into three key research sub-questions:

- 1. How can product-centric suppliers effectively incorporate a service logic into their marketing strategies to expand their addressable market?*
- 2. What is the impact of after-sales services on customer loyalty, satisfaction, and competitive advantage in the hyper-connected society?*
- 3. Can the extended marketing mix framework be applied in B2B contexts and, if so, what are the implications for SMEs?*

By observing the results from the statistical calculations testing the four hypotheses in chapter 6, the findings and implications below review how market orientation, cultural and geographical distance, after-sales service and price sensitivity interact to shape satisfaction and performance in international markets.

7.1 The role of market orientation in adopting a service-oriented approach (H1)

The adoption of a service-oriented approach and its influence on market orientation has become increasingly important in today's dynamic and competitive business environment. This section discusses the findings and implications of the study on the role of market orientation in adopting a service-oriented approach. The relationship between management background and market orientation is examined, along with additional factors that may impact market orientation.

7.1.1 Results for H1: management background and market orientation

Descriptive statistics showed that the majority of multicultural B2B customers prioritize service delivery over the product itself. This finding aligns with stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010) and service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), emphasizing the importance of addressing the diverse needs and interests of stakeholders and co-creating value through interactions between firms and their customers. Suppliers who wish to serve this segment must be aware of this demand for service and adapt their strategies accordingly.

The inferential statistics results of the analysis on Hypothesis 1 (H1) revealed contrasting findings. While the categorical analysis through the Chi-Square Test did not provide sufficient evidence to support H1, the regression analysis using numeric variables, namely education level and age, indicated a strong positive correlation between management academic background and demographics, and market orientation. This discrepancy may be attributed to the self-assessment bias inherent in categorical variables, as respondents may have been influenced by their subjective interpretations of abstract dimensions.

Considering the limitations of categorical analysis, the regression analysis can be regarded as a more reliable indicator of the relationship between a company's market orientation and its management background. The strong positive correlation between management academic background, age, and the adoption of a service-oriented approach supports H1. This finding reinforces the importance of both academic background and managers' age when assessing a manager's propensity to adopt a service-oriented approach as a mediator variable to the researched model.

7.1.2 Additional determinants of market orientation

Besides management background, other factors such as culture may influence market orientation. For example, macro and micro factors can impact the market orientation of a business, including the legal environment and competitive forces (Porter, 2008). Future research may explore these factors across various industry subsectors, geographic locations, and contexts, over market orientation. The findings suggest that companies should prioritize internal marketing strategies that equip employees with the necessary skills and attitudes to meet diverse customer needs. Additionally, companies must engage in external marketing that accurately communicates the quality and nature of not only their products – but as well as their services – setting realistic customer expectations. Finally, interactive marketing –

direct interactions between employees and customers – should be leveraged to deliver personalized and satisfying service experiences, thereby enhancing customer perceptions and loyalty.

7.2 The importance of cultural and geographical proximity in customer satisfaction (H2)

Customer value perception is essential for companies to create effective marketing strategies and customer relationship management programs, as it involves assessing a product or service's benefits and costs, considering customer needs and expectations (Woodruff, 1997; Gupta & Lehmann, 2003). As customers' desires and expectations significantly influence their perceived value (Woodruff et al., 1983), it is crucial to understand the impact of cultural and geographical proximity on customer satisfaction, especially in the context of global competition and increasing customer demands (Edelman, 2010; Hofstede, 2011).

The present study examined the hypothesis that shorter cultural and geographical distances between the company and customers positively impact customer satisfaction (H2). The findings acquired through descriptive statistics revealed a preference for personal visits and salespersons who speak the customer's language, emphasizing the importance of cultural and geographical proximity in B2B relationships. Inferential statistics were also conducted to test H2, focusing on the role of cultural compatibility and geographical proximity in fostering successful business relationships in the multicultural B2B marketplace.

Regression analysis confirmed a strong positive impact of language compatibility on satisfaction (Multiple R = 0.983, $p < .001$) and a significant, though less powerful, effect for geographical proximity (Multiple R = 0.955, $p < .001$). Hence H2 is fully supported, with culture exerting the greater influence.

7.2.1 Strategies for bridging distance

These findings accord with the position advanced by Simonson and Tversky (1992), who likewise argued that culturally tailored strategies – and deliberate efforts to bridge cultural and geographic gaps – are essential for elevating customer satisfaction and sustaining long-term international relationships. Following strategies are suggested:

1. Employing bilingual or multilingual staff, providing language training for employees, and offering customer support in the customer's language.
2. Utilising technology, such as video conferencing and virtual reality, to bridge geographical gaps and facilitate communication between businesses and customers while taking maximum advantage of existing business' cultural capacity.
3. Collaborating with local partners to gain insights into local market conditions and better understand customer preferences and expectations – while having someone visiting in person establishing the customers' relationship rapport towards the company.
4. Adapting marketing materials, product offerings, and services to suit the specific needs and preferences of customers from different cultural backgrounds.
5. Providing cultural sensitivity training for employees to improve their ability to understand and respect cultural differences.
6. Create quarterly local events per geographic and cultural area to help customer to reduce the geographic and cultural distances, and consequently also the psychographic distance.

These measures reduce both perceived and objective distance, translating into higher satisfaction and stronger long-term ties.

7.3 The impact of adaptive and ongoing after-sales service, facilitated by a comprehensive marketing mix strategy, on cross-cultural customer satisfaction (H3)

The eight-element service-marketing-mix (Lovelock & Wirtz 2007) is rarely applied to product-centric B2B SMEs. Our findings demonstrate its relevance: multilingual support, contextual training and 24-hour helplines emerged as the most potent satisfaction drivers. However, its applicability in product-centric B2B contexts is a topic of debate through this study. The research tested the relevance of the extended marketing mix framework in the cross-cultural B2B marketplace, focusing on its implications for SME suppliers, particularly those that are also themselves SMEs and possess limited resources. The findings of the study are that the service extended marketing mix framework can indeed be applied in B2B contexts, as it helps companies identify crucial factors that contribute to customer satisfaction, price sensitivity reduction, loyalty, and gain competitive advantage.

For SMEs, the framework translates into eight practical imperatives, summarised below:

1. **Product and associated elements:** SMEs should consider not only the tangible aspects of their products but also the intangible benefits and services that can enhance customer satisfaction and foster long-term relationships. SME that are this research's customers, prefer to use company's resources selling more and less in resolving supplier problems, so a deep analysis of the product's usage and customer journey is mandatory for success.
2. **Price and other Costs to the purchaser:** In B2B markets, price sensitivity can vary depending on factors such as product complexity, and customer requirements. SMEs' suppliers should adopt predictable pricing strategies that take that company size into account.
3. **Place and Time:** SMEs should ensure that their distribution channels are convenient, efficient, and reliable, as timely delivery and availability are critical factors in B2B customer satisfaction.
4. **Promotion and Education:** B2B promotional strategies should focus on building trust, credibility, and long-term relationships, emphasizing the company's expertise, experience, and commitment to customer success.
5. **People:** In B2B markets, personnel play a crucial role in the customer experience. SMEs should invest in hiring, training, and retaining talented employees who can effectively communicate with relevant multicultural colleagues and customers to provide personalized support, increasing service productivity and contributing to improved product quality.
6. **Process:** Efficient processes are essential in B2B contexts, as they can enhance customer satisfaction and reduce costs. SMEs should continuously review and optimize their processes to ensure smooth operations and a seamless customer experience.
7. **Physical and Digital Evidence:** While physical evidence may be less prominent in B2B markets compared to B2C, it still plays a role in shaping customer perceptions. SMEs should strive to create a professional image through branding, packaging, and other more visible tangible elements that reflect their commitment to quality and customer satisfaction. The digital image is every day more relevant, even though that

less than as it happens in the B2C contexts, B2B customers also end up promoting products in their digital social and professional circles.

8. **Productivity and Quality:** Companies can harness the dimension by optimizing resources, refining processes, and monitoring customer satisfaction. This approach improves efficiency, reduces costs, and elevates service quality, leading to increased customer value and a competitive advantage.

The findings observed through statistics revealed that customers value free manuals, trainings, and ongoing support in their language, as well as in-person visits and after-sales services such as helpdesk departments or 24-hour contact numbers. Recommended actions, in order of relevance, include:

1. Responsive and accessible customer support channels, such as Helpdesk departments or 24-hour contact numbers.
2. Language adaptation: Provide training and support in the customer's native language.
3. Culturally sensitive materials: Offer product manuals in customers' languages.
4. To have multilingual sales representatives.
5. Maintain some level of in-person visits.
6. To offer value-added services such as manuals, training, and ongoing support.

These findings suggest that although customers value after-sales services, they do not necessarily expect them to be free of charge, indicating a willingness to pay a premium for superior support.

7.3.1 Priorities for enhancing after-sales service

One of the objectives of this study was to explore the impact of adaptive and ongoing after-sales service on cross-cultural customer satisfaction in the context of the extended service marketing mix. The composite variable of the extended marketing mix was analysed through six key aspects. Here, the relevance of each aspect is displayed, ranked by the observed strength of the correlation to customer satisfaction:

1. Importance of after-sales services, Helpdesk department or availability of a 24-hour contact number.
2. Importance of training/support in customer's language.
3. Importance of manual in customer's language.

4. Importance of a salesperson that speaks customer's language.
5. Importance of an in-person visit before making a purchase.
6. Availability of free manuals, trainings, and free ongoing support.

Regression ranking of these six service elements indicated that round-the-clock multilingual support delivered the greatest incremental satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.966$), followed closely by language-specific training and manuals. Interestingly, respondents did not demand these services free of charge, signalling scope for premium, value-added packages.

While the findings of this study are robust, further research on a larger scale exploring other variables that might influence cross-cultural customer satisfaction would provide even more comprehensive insights and actionable recommendations for businesses looking to thrive in today's global market landscape.

To leverage the potential of after-sales services on customer satisfaction, businesses can implement the following strategies:

1. Establish dedicated after-sales service teams to provide personalized and timely support to customers.
2. Develop comprehensive service packages, including preventive maintenance, repairs, and spare parts management, to focus into customers' needs and preferences.
3. Implement advanced technologies, such as remote monitoring and diagnostics, to proactively identify potential issues and address them before they escalate.
4. Offer training programs and workshops for customers to enhance their understanding of the products and services, improving their ability to troubleshoot and improve product skills. Document findings for future product improvement adaptations.
5. Monitor and evaluate after-sales service performance regularly, using customer feedback and key performance indicators to identify areas for improvement and ensure continuous enhancement of service quality.

7.4 Customer satisfaction and price sensitivity in cross-cultural B2B markets (H4)

Price sensitivity refers to the extent to which a consumer's purchasing behaviour is influenced by the price of a product or service (Monroe, 1971). It is particularly relevant in

SMEs that wish to operate in B2B contexts. Understanding the relationship between customer satisfaction and price sensitivity is crucial for all business performance.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) tested if increased customer satisfaction negatively correlates with price sensitivity. To test H4, a linear regression analysis was employed to measure the relationship between customer satisfaction, operationalised as the composite mediator variable of the customer satisfaction score, and a composite dependent variable for price sensitivity. The results obtained indicated a strong negative relationship between customer satisfaction and price sensitivity.

This finding suggests that as customer satisfaction increases, price sensitivity decreases, and businesses operating in international markets should prioritise enhancing customer satisfaction to reduce price sensitivity among customers.

The strong negative correlation between customer satisfaction and price sensitivity found in this analysis has critical implications for businesses operating in cross-cultural markets. To optimise pricing strategies and enhance performance, marketers should consider the following recommendations based on the results obtained:

1. **Prioritise customer satisfaction:** As increased customer satisfaction is negatively correlated with price sensitivity; businesses should focus on improving customer satisfaction through various measures. These may include improving product quality, offering exceptional customer service, addressing customer needs effectively, and providing a seamless purchasing experience.
2. **Leverage customer satisfaction for premium pricing:** With higher levels of customer satisfaction, businesses may find it possible to charge a premium for their products or services. Customers with higher satisfaction levels may be less sensitive to price increases and more likely to accept higher prices for a more satisfying experience.
3. **Segment markets by customer satisfaction levels:** Companies can consider segmenting their target markets based on customer satisfaction levels. By identifying segments with higher satisfaction, businesses can tailor their pricing strategies and promotional activities to focus to these groups more effectively.
4. **Monitor and adapt to cultural differences and local conditions:** While the results indicate a strong negative correlation between customer satisfaction and price sensitivity, it is crucial to consider other factors such as cultural differences, local

economic conditions, and industry-specific variables when devising pricing strategies.

5. Conduct regular assessments of customer satisfaction: It is essential to continually measure and monitor customer satisfaction levels, as this can provide valuable insights for adjusting pricing strategies and marketing efforts accordingly.

By implementing the recommendations above, businesses can develop effective pricing strategies and promotional activities tailored to the unique characteristics of their target markets, ultimately leading to improved performance and profitability.

7.4.1 Pricing strategies for less price-sensitive markets

Value-based pricing: As suggested by (Hinterhuber, 2004), value-based pricing focuses on setting prices according to the perceived value of the product and related services in the eyes of the customer. By aligning prices with the benefits customers derive, businesses can justify higher prices and reduce price sensitivity. This approach requires a deep understanding of customers' journey, each touchpoint, as well as continuous monitoring and adaptation to changing market conditions.

Differentiated pricing: Differentiated pricing involves offering varying prices for different customer sub-segments (Varian, 1980). By tailoring prices to the specific needs and price sensitivity levels of each segment, businesses can maximise revenues and reduce overall price sensitivity. This approach requires a thorough understanding of market segmentation and the unique characteristics of each sub-group.

Bundling: Bundling is a pricing strategy where multiple products or services are offered together as a package, often at a discounted price (Stremersch & Tellis, 2002). This approach can create added value for customers, resulting in increased satisfaction and reduced-price sensitivity. Moreover, bundling can encourage customers to purchase complementary products or services, increasing overall revenue.

Psychological pricing: As suggested by Wedel and Leeflang (1998), psychological pricing involves setting prices that appeal to customers' cognitive biases and perceptions. Examples include odd-even pricing (e.g., pricing a product at 9.99 instead of 10) or price anchoring (e.g., presenting a higher-priced option alongside a lower-priced one). These tactics can make prices appear more attractive and reduce price sensitivity.

7.4.2 Leveraging customer satisfaction for competitive advantage in cross-cultural B2B markets

Mirroring Metcalfe's (2013) network-value effect, Kotler et al.'s (2016) customer-path logic and Heskett et al.'s (1994) service-profit chain, the data show that satisfied customers repurchase and advocate—shrinking both their own and prospects' price sensitivity. Six initiatives operationalise this insight:

1. Cultivate enduring relational capital

The data show that firms capturing a price-insensitive customer base do so by strengthening trust-based ties. Systematic voice-of-customer programmes, proactive issue-resolution routines, and transparent two-way communication create the relational equity that translates directly into repeat purchasing and positive network advocacy. In practice, this requires formal key-account plans, service-level agreements that exceed contractual minima, and periodic value-review meetings that keep evolving needs in view.

2. Institutionalise continuous quality enhancement

Superior value is sustained when product and service quality are treated as dynamic capabilities rather than static attributes. Investment in R&D pipelines, ISO-aligned quality-management systems, and front-line staff upskilling should be embedded in annual strategic cycles. By routinely surpassing performance specifications, suppliers fortify reputation and attenuate buyers' propensity to seek lower-priced alternatives.

3. Operationalise data-driven personalisation

The findings underline the competitive pay-off of configuring modular solutions around segment-specific pain points. Leveraging CRM analytics, predictive modelling, and flexible production technologies, firms can standardise back-end processes while tailoring front-end bundles—thereby delivering bespoke value at scale. Such mass-customisation enhances customer satisfaction and raises switching costs without incurring prohibitive complexity.

4. Embed customer-centric governance

Price tolerance rises when every organisational layer is calibrated to customer benefit metrics. This entails re-aligning KPIs from purely financial outputs to customer lifetime

value, on boarding cross-functional service teams, and empowering employees to resolve issues autonomously. A clearly articulated service vision—reinforced through recruitment, training, and reward systems—ensures that decision-making consistently privileges customer impact.

5. Maintain an innovation-feedback loop

Cross-cultural B2B buyers reward suppliers that anticipate and adapt to emergent requirements. Instituting formal mechanisms—such as innovation councils with client representation, co-creation workshops, and rapid-prototyping sprints—allows companies to translate latent needs into new offerings ahead of rivals. Continuous scanning of technological and regulatory trends further safeguards relevance in heterogeneous markets.

6. Design a frictionless omni-channel journey

Finally, a seamless experience across search, purchase, implementation, and support stages magnifies satisfaction and diminishes price salience. Mapping the end-to-end journey, eliminating hand-off gaps, and integrating digital self-service with high-touch assistance create a coherent brand impression. Consistency in service standards—irrespective of geography or channel—strengthens the credibility on which premium positioning ultimately relies.

Collectively, these six initiatives operationalise the study's core insight: that sustained competitive advantage in multicultural B2B settings is secured less by transactional price concessions and more by orchestrating superior, relationship-centred value across the customer lifecycle.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

This chapter synthesised the empirical evidence, the fundamental findings and implications generated by the survey of 101 Schengen-area SMEs in the prefabricated stone and glass sectors. Four hypotheses were evaluated, each mapped to one of the research sub-questions.

- H1 demonstrated that managers with higher formal education and greater tenure are significantly more likely to champion a service-oriented marketing logic, confirming the pivotal role of human capital in shaping market orientation.

- H2 showed that cultural compatibility—proxied by shared language—exerts a stronger positive effect on satisfaction than sheer geographical proximity, although both dimensions matter.
- H3 established that the eight-element service marketing mix is transferable to product-centric B2B contexts: responsive multilingual support, customised training and 24-hour helpdesks emerged as the most powerful satisfaction levers.
- H4 confirmed a robust inverse association between satisfaction and price sensitivity, validating the service-profit chain in a multicultural European setting.

Collectively, these findings answer the overarching research question: **SMEs can attenuate multicultural buyers' price sensitivity by embedding service logic across the extended marketing mix and by actively managing distance.**

Theoretical contribution: The study extends service-dominant logic into mid-tech manufacturing SMEs and demonstrates the moderating effect of culture on the satisfaction–price nexus.

Managerial implications. Executives should:

1. Invest in management development to foster a service mindset;
2. Prioritise language-adapted touchpoints ahead of costly local warehousing;
3. Formalise after-sales platforms (helpdesk, training, on-site visits);
4. Segment customers by satisfaction tier to unlock value-based pricing.

Limitations and future work. The single-industry sample constrains generalisability; longitudinal data would clarify causality. Future studies could test the model in high-tech or emerging-market contexts and examine digital self-service tools as moderators.

By integrating these insights, this findings and implications chapter provides a coherent bridge from statistical evidence to actionable strategy, setting the stage for the overall dissertation conclusions in Chapter 8.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and strategic implications for cross-cultural B2B marketing excellence

8.1 Synthesis and Implications

Building upon the insights and methodologies outlined in the previous chapters, this concluding chapter distils the critical insights derived from the exploration of customer satisfaction and competitive advantage in the realm of cross-cultural B2B markets. It elucidates the practical application of the service-oriented approach, underpinned by the seminal theories of Vargo and Lusch (2004), and tailored to the nuanced needs of B2B marketing in the digital age. Through a meticulous examination of cultural and geographical diversities, following Hofstede's (2011) guidelines, this segment reinforces the study's commitment to enhancing B2B relationships across borders. It further elaborates on the expanded marketing mix, addressing after-sales dynamics to furnish SMEs with a rounded perspective for competitive positioning towards enhancing multinational B2B relationships.

The decision to structure the synthesis of the hypotheses in reverse order, progressing from Hypothesis 4 through to Hypothesis 1, was intentionally adopted. This choice was guided by the overarching research objective of this dissertation, which centres explicitly on enhancing B2B supplier performance. By starting the discussion with customer satisfaction and price sensitivity (H4), the research explicitly foregrounds customer-centric outcomes, reflecting their direct relevance and tangible impact on business performance. Subsequently, the analysis systematically transitions to the antecedent factors – adaptive after-sales services (H3), cultural and geographical proximity (H2), and finally market orientation (H1) – thus providing a coherent narrative flow from outcomes to drivers, closely aligning with the dissertation's ultimate focus: the sustainable competitive advantage and operational effectiveness of B2B suppliers in cross-cultural contexts.

Acknowledging the foundational work of Vorhies and Morgan (2005) and extending the marketing mix to encapsulate after-sales dynamics, this study not only traverses beyond the conventional 4Ps framework but also examines the essence of the Resource-Based View (RBV) for pragmatic application in SMEs' strategic manoeuvring, as discussed by Merrilees et al. (2010). This approach aligns with the imperative to demystify the marketing mix as

foundational building blocks for robust B2B strategies, akin to constructing edifices in urban landscapes, thereby empowering SME managers with actionable insights amidst resource constraints.

This research has provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing customer satisfaction and competitive advantage in cross-cultural B2B markets, drawing on key academic sources and expanding on their theoretical implications while adapting new trends in B2C to B2B marketing. By adopting a service-oriented approach, as suggested by Vargo and Lusch (2004), businesses can differentiate themselves from competitors and foster customer loyalty.

To fully grasp the relevance of the service in product-centric markets, the conclusion reorients the analysis, placing the customer's experience and satisfaction at the forefront. By reversing the research model, the conclusion emphasizes the importance of service in reducing price sensitivity, improving business performance and achieving competitive advantage. This inverted approach underscores the primacy of customer satisfaction as the foundation upon which effective B2B strategies are built, thus reflecting the true dynamics of modern business relationships.

8.1.1 The relationship between customer satisfaction and price sensitivity in cross-cultural B2B markets (H4)

The analysis of Hypothesis 4 (H4) demonstrated a strong negative correlation between customer satisfaction and price sensitivity in cross-cultural markets. This finding suggests that as customer satisfaction increases, price sensitivity decreases. Therefore, businesses operating in international markets should prioritize enhancing customer satisfaction to reduce price sensitivity among customers.

Key strategies to leverage customer satisfaction for competitive advantage include:

1. **Prioritize customer satisfaction:** Improve product quality, offer exceptional customer service, and address customer needs effectively.
2. **Leverage customer satisfaction for premium pricing:** Satisfied customers are less sensitive to price increases and more likely to accept higher prices for a better experience.

3. **Segment markets by customer satisfaction levels:** Tailor pricing strategies and promotional activities to cater to segments with higher satisfaction.
4. **Monitor and adapt to cultural differences and local conditions:** Consider cultural differences, local economic conditions, and industry-specific variables when devising pricing strategies.
5. **Conduct regular assessments of customer satisfaction:** Continuously measure and monitor customer satisfaction levels to adjust pricing strategies and marketing efforts accordingly.

8.1.2 The impact of adaptive and ongoing after-sales service on cross-cultural customer satisfaction (H3)

The findings support hypothesis 3 (H3), which posits that adaptive and ongoing after-sales service, facilitated by a comprehensive marketing mix strategy, positively affects cross-cultural customer satisfaction. Key aspects influencing customer satisfaction include responsive customer support, language adaptation, culturally sensitive materials, multilingual sales representatives, in-person visits, and value-added services.

Strategies to enhance after-sales services include:

1. **Establish dedicated after-sales service teams:** Provide personalized and timely support.
2. **Develop comprehensive service packages:** Include preventive maintenance, repairs, and spare parts management.
3. **Implement advanced technologies:** Use remote monitoring and diagnostics to proactively address potential issues.
4. **Offer training programs and workshops:** Enhance customers' understanding of products and services.
5. **Monitor and evaluate after-sales service performance:** Use customer feedback and key performance indicators to identify areas for improvement.

8.1.3 The importance of cultural and geographical proximity in customer satisfaction (H2)

Hypothesis 2 (H2) was supported, indicating that shorter cultural and geographical distances between the company and customers positively impact customer satisfaction. Cultural compatibility, measured by language compatibility scores, and geographical proximity, measured by the importance of in-person visits, were both found to be significant factors.

Strategies for bridging cultural and geographical distances include:

1. **Employ bilingual or multilingual staff:** Provide language training and offer customer support in the customer's language.
2. **Utilize technology:** Use video conferencing and virtual reality to bridge geographical gaps.
3. **Collaborate with local partners:** Gain insights into local market conditions and better understand customer preferences.
4. **Adapt marketing materials and services:** Tailor offerings to suit the specific needs and preferences of different cultural backgrounds.
5. **Provide cultural sensitivity training:** Improve employees' ability to understand and respect cultural differences.
6. **Create quarterly local events:** Reduce geographic and cultural distances by fostering direct interactions.

8.1.4 The Role of Market Orientation in Adopting a Service-Oriented Approach (H1)

The study found a strong positive correlation between a company's market orientation and its management background, particularly in adopting a service-oriented approach. While the Chi-Square Test did not provide sufficient evidence, the regression analysis using numeric variables, such as education level and age, supported Hypothesis 1 (H1).

Additional factors that may impact market orientation include:

1. **Macro and micro factors:** Legal environment and competitive forces can influence market orientation.
2. **Internal marketing strategies:** Equip employees with the necessary skills and attitudes to meet diverse customer needs.
3. **External marketing:** Accurately communicate the quality and nature of services and products.
4. **Interactive marketing:** Leverage direct interactions between employees and customers to deliver personalized service experiences.

This research agrees with the marketing mix approach proposed by Vorhies and Morgan (2005) and their emphasis on benchmarking marketing capabilities for sustainable competitive advantage. However, this study acknowledges that their conclusions are

primarily based on the 4Ps marketing mix framework, which is limited up to the point that the sales stage has occurred. By extending the marketing mix framework to also focus on dimensions that happen after-sales, this research addresses the limitations identified in Vorhies and Morgan's work and aims to provide a more comprehensive foundation for SMEs operating in the cross-cultural B2B marketplace.

Additionally, this research does not disagree with the Resource-Based View (RBV) approach of Merrilees et al. (2010), but it simplifies the abstract dimensions the authors propose by using the extended service marketing mix framework as a more accessible tool for SME managers. The marketing mix dimensions proposed in this study can be metaphorically compared to the steel, blocks, and concrete that build the buildings in a city. Just like no buildings are made without focusing on the elements that make them up, the same can be said for the higher-level dimensions studied by Merrilees et al. (2010). The dimensions that the latter authors studied are like the buildings in a city, while the marketing mix dimensions this study proposes are the elements that make up those buildings. This simplification is particularly relevant for SME managers, who may struggle to fully grasp complex academic dimensions, such as branding or innovation, due to limited resources or time constraints.

Furthermore, this study expands on the work of Merrilees et al. (2010) by incorporating a cross-cultural analysis, as their research focused solely on Australian B2B customers. This extension is critical for SMEs operating in cross-cultural B2B markets, as it provides practical insights into the factors that impact customer satisfaction and competitive advantage in a multicultural context.

In response to the evolving hyper-connected marketing landscape, this research incorporates the extended 8 Ps service marketing mix framework proposed by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) and adapts the AIDA framework (Strong, 1925b) to the Five A's model (Awareness, Attraction, Attention, Act/Attachment, and Advocacy), searching to address the black box effect (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007) and focus on offline and online advocacies. This also amplifies the word-of-mouth marketing power, as evidenced by Metcalfe's law (2013).

8.1.5 Summary of conclusions: The 8 Ps for product-centric supplier success

To help SME managers understand and apply the extended marketing mix effectively, here is a straightforward summary of the 8 Ps, clearly defining simple strategies about the 4Ps

that happen before the sales stage has happened, Elements of the Product, Place and Time, Price and other Costs, and Promotion and Education. But also focus on those that come into play after the sale: Processes, People, Physical or Digital Placement, and Productivity and Quality.

1. Elements of the Product

Ensure your product not only meets market needs but also offers added value through services that enhance its utility. Regularly update and improve your offerings based on customer feedback and technological advancements.

2. Place and Time

Make your product easily accessible through efficient distribution channels. Ensure timely delivery and availability, which are crucial for customer satisfaction in B2B markets.

3. Price and other Costs

Set your prices based on the value your customers perceive in your product and services. Use customer satisfaction as a lever to justify premium pricing. Adapt your pricing strategy to different market segments to maximize revenue.

4. Promotion and Education

Communicate the benefits of your product and associated services clearly and effectively. Use various channels to reach your internal and external audience, highlighting your expertise, experience, and commitment to customer success.

5. Processes

Streamline your processes to ensure smooth operations and a seamless customer experience. Regularly review and optimize your workflows to reduce costs and improve service delivery. Efficient processes enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

6. People

Invest in hiring, training, and retaining talented employees who can effectively communicate and provide personalized support. Bilingual or multilingual staff can bridge cultural gaps, enhancing customer relationships. Building strong, culturally sensitive teams is essential for meeting diverse customer needs.

7. Physical or Digital Placement

Create a professional image through branding, packaging, and other tangible elements. In B2B, digital presence is equally important. A strong online presence and professional branding can significantly influence customer perceptions and trust.

8. Productivity and Quality

Focus on optimizing resources and refining processes to improve efficiency and reduce costs. High productivity and quality not only enhance customer satisfaction but also provide a competitive edge. Continuously monitor and adapt to meet customer expectations. Ensure that your products and services consistently deliver on their promises, thereby building a reputation for reliability and excellence.

By understanding and implementing these 8 Ps, SME managers can develop effective B2B marketing strategies that improve customer satisfaction, reduce price sensitivity, and enhance competitive advantage. For academics intrigued by this approach, exploring deeper into the nuances of post-sale dynamics and their impact on long-term business success might be an option.

8.2 Limitations and future research

This investigation has provided valuable insights into the dynamics of post sales customer-supplier interactions and price sensitivity reduction in cross-cultural B2B markets. However, it is crucial to recognise its limitations, which in turn offer avenues for future research.

The primary constraints of this study stem from its methodological approach, particularly the reliance on survey data for analysis. This reliance inherently limits the ability to make broad inferences about causality and effects and may introduce a risk of bias common to methods that depend on a single source for data collection. This observation aligns with concerns highlighted in academic discourse regarding the challenges of drawing definitive conclusions from survey-based research (Krosnick, 1999; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Such limitations necessitate a cautious interpretation of the findings, acknowledging the potential for bias and the constraints on the applicability of the results to wider contexts.

Another constraint of this study was the limited sample size. Despite the statistical validity of the 101 respondents, this number may not fully encapsulate the diverse perspectives prevalent in the cross-cultural B2B landscape. The sampling did not proportionally align with the population sizes of the studied countries (Hair et al., 2013), which could have led to skewed data representation due to lack of proportion. Specifically, disparities between countries were pronounced; for example, Portugal exhibited a higher response rate in the Glass industry compared to Stone, and France did not achieve the 30 responses considered a minimum for robust statistical analysis, as suggested by Hair et al. (2013). These discrepancies were navigated through procedural adaptations and the constraints of time, underscoring the pragmatic decisions necessitated by the research's scope and limitations.

Another significant limitation was the sampling method employed. The study utilised a form of convenience sampling known as snowball sampling, where the questionnaire was disseminated to individuals within my professional network who were then encouraged to share it within their own networks (Goodman, 1961). While this method was practical given the difficulty in identifying or reaching a comprehensive list of individuals within the multicultural European Business-to-Business (B2B) prefabrication construction industry, it may have introduced bias as the sample was not randomly selected and may not be representative of the larger population.

Moreover, the study was conducted within the constraints of time and cost, which limited the reach to B2B decision-makers in the chosen segments. Despite the extensive professional network leveraged for this research, reaching a larger and more diverse sample would have been challenging and costly. Future research, with more time and resources, could aim to overcome these limitations, thereby achieving a more representative sample size and enhancing the multicultural dimension of the study.

The geographical focus on Southern Europe may limit the broader applicability of the insights garnered. Expanding future studies to include diverse business environments globally could enrich our understanding of cross-cultural B2B marketing nuances, particularly examining behaviours in Northern European countries, where cultural differences might be starker.

The study also had a narrow industry focus, centring solely on the prefabricated stone and glass businesses. This focus may limit its representation of the broader B2B market. Future

research could encompass a more diverse range of industry sectors, thereby contributing more robustly to the academic B2B marketing literature.

The extrapolation between sales and purchase perspectives, supported by Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 2010), could introduce bias. Future research could delineate these perspectives to gain a more nuanced understanding.

The use of language as a cultural proxy, while pragmatic, may not encapsulate the intricacies of cultural dynamics. Future research could explore deeper into other cultural dimensions such as values, norms, and beliefs (Hofstede, 2011), for a more comprehensive cultural analysis.

The budget available for the research was also exhausted and an advancement by the researcher had to be made. Further research could imply the need of a sponsor programme.

Furthermore, future research could expand the application of the Service Marketing Triangle to other industries. Additionally, research could investigate the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality in shaping the service environment and influencing the relationships among service providers, customers, and the service environment.

Lastly, the study was marked by an underrepresentation of managers in their 20s and 60s, a factor that could have influenced the findings, especially in areas such as acceptance of advocacy. Future research could strive for a sample distribution more proportionally reflective of population age demographics or seek to understand the motivations and preferences of these age groups.

In acknowledging these limitations, this study illuminates several avenues for future research, encouraging the exploration of varying sectors, geographies, cultural dimensions, and age groups. Through these efforts, suppliers can further broaden and deepen the understanding of B2B marketing dynamics in a cross-cultural context.

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Annex 1

Questionnaire in English

<p><i>Overview of the Questionnaire</i></p> <p><i>The questionnaire will be administered via Typeform, a software that offers full customization including background images, videos, and branching responses. This will facilitate the consolidation of results in various languages and allow for referencing previously provided information through the "@" symbol.</i></p> <p><i>Table:</i></p> <p><i>Only bolded text will be visible to respondents.</i></p> <p><i>Questions are indicated by the "•" symbol.</i></p> <p><i>The non-bolded text in the right column provides context and explanation for the questions.</i></p> <p><i>The left column explains the context or hypotheses the questions aim to address.</i></p>	
Language selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a language: <p><i>(Languages displayed in alphabetical order)</i></p> <p>Deutsch (DE)</p> <p>English (EN)</p> <p>Español (ES)</p> <p>Français (FR)</p> <p>Italiano (IT)</p> <p>Nederlands (NL)</p> <p>Português (PT)</p> <p><i>Logical reaction: The following text is displayed in the language selected by the respondent.</i></p>

	<p><i>Intro</i></p> <p>Dear Customer,</p> <p>I'm conducting an academic research study on customer satisfaction and price sensitivity in the construction industry, namely stone and glass industries. Your feedback is important and will help me gather insights into the industries we work in. Your answers will be anonymous and confidential. Only summarized data will be used in the final report.</p> <p>Would you be willing to spend 5 to 8 minutes to complete a questionnaire about your sales and purchasing activities? Participation is completely voluntary, and you can choose not to answer any question.</p> <p>Thank you for your support and valuable insights. The results will be available in English and can be shared upon request by checking the box at the end of the questionnaire. I appreciate the opportunity to gather insights about our industry.</p> <p>Best regards, Jorge Seixas</p> <p><i>Note: Your response will assist me in completing research for my academic research. I apologize if your preferred language is not listed, as I may not be able to understand it.</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In which industry do you work? <i>Stone Industry/Glass Industry</i> • Could you tell me your current age?

<p>Demographic questions (personal)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your country of origin? • In which country do you currently reside? • What is your role within your organisation?
<p>Organisation's demographics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where is the headquarters of your organisation located? • Do you buy or sell products outside your home country? <i>Yes</i> <i>No</i> <p><i>The research examines cross-cultural Business to Business relationships, both as buyers and sellers, and aims to investigate the preferences of companies that are familiar with operating in a global and culturally diverse internal and external marketplace. This is particularly relevant in today's Europe, where cultural diversity is prevalent. The objective of the research is to determine if companies with experience in multicultural environments place a higher emphasis on product features compared to after-sales services.</i></p>
<p>H1. There is a positive correlation between a company's market</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you believe has more influence on your sales approach in the market? <p><i>A. Your academic background</i> <i>B. Your professional experience</i></p>

<p>orientation, characterised by the adoption of a service-oriented approach, and its management background.</p>	<p><i>C. A combination of both academic and professional experience</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your highest level of education achieved? <i>Elementary/High school/Bachelor's/Master's/Doctorate</i> <p><i>The study focuses on the purchase of machines/tools and the sale of finished products or projects.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which do you believe has a greater influence on your sales approach in the market? <p><i>A. The product you sell is more important.</i> <i>B. The service you add to the product is more important than the product itself.</i></p> <p><i>"Identifying Customer Types in Sales" - understand the types of customers in your sales.</i></p> <p>On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “Not at all confident” and 5 is “Extremely confident”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well do you handle customers with limited knowledge in your field? <p><i>1 2 3 4 5</i> <i>Product-centric or service minded seller.</i></p> <p>On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “Strongly disagree” and 5 is “Strongly agree”.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think a supplier should provide free manuals, trainings, and free ongoing support for the product you buy? 1 2 3 4 5 <p><i>The aim of this assessment is to determine if the seller profile matches the buyer profile with regards to management background as an independent variable. The questions assess the respondent's academic background and later gauge their perception of the importance of after-sales services when both selling and buying.</i></p>
<p>H2: Shorter cultural and geographical distances between the company and customers have a positive impact on customer satisfaction.</p>	<p>Reminder: The study focuses on the purchase of machines/tools and the sale of finished products or projects.</p> <p>Rate the following on a scale of 1-5 when buying, where 1 is "Irrelevant" and 5 is "Extremely Important".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual in customer's language: 1 2 3 4 5 • Salesperson speaks customer's language: 1 2 3 4 5 • Training/support in customer's language: 1 2 3 4 5 <p><i>Centralization of production processes can lead to improved productivity and quality of products but may negatively impact the level of provided after-sales services. As an example, this concept can be seen in the production of Tesla cars.</i></p> <p>Rate these on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is "Irrelevant" and 5 is "Extremely Important":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important is an in-person visit to your business before making a purchase? 1 2 3 4 5

	<p><i>Centralized suppliers do not produce and are not present in each region and therefore have bigger geographical gaps.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your preferred method for providing feedback on the machines or tools you have purchased? <p><i>a) Email</i></p> <p><i>b) Phone call</i></p> <p><i>c) In-person visit</i></p> <p>Rate the following on a scale of 1-5 when buying, where 1 is "Irrelevant" and 5 is "Extremely Important".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product Suitability and Features. <p><i>1 2 3 4 5</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After-sales services, such as helpdesk and 24-hour contact number. <p><i>1 2 3 4 5</i></p> <p><i>Centralized suppliers do not produce and are not present in each region and therefore have bigger cultural gaps.</i></p> <p><i>Objective: Assess relevance of cultural and geographical gaps to different nationalities and cultures as a B2B customer.</i></p>
<p>H3. Adaptive and ongoing after-sales service, facilitated by a comprehensive marketing mix strategy,</p>	<p>A regional competitor is another business that develops a similar product and sells in the same market as you do in the same region or country.</p> <p>On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "Not at all likely" and 5 is "Extremely likely", please rate the following:</p>

<p>positively affects cross-cultural customer satisfaction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a regional competitor has good product feedback, would you buy the product? <i>1 2 3 4 5</i> • Would you buy a product seen to be used happily by regional competitors only online, despite not knowing them in-person? <i>1 2 3 4 5</i> • How likely are you to recommend a product from a supplier that met your expectations to others? <i>1 2 3 4 5</i> <p>Your offline professional network includes of individuals and businesses you meet in-person, including personnel, customers, direct competitors, and suppliers of complementary products serving the same customer type as you.</p> <p>Rate the following on a scale of 1-5 when buying, where 1 is " Not at all likely " and 5 is " Extremely likely ".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How likely would you be to buy a product that has a higher price but is recommended by someone you know in your professional network? <i>1 2 3 4 5</i> <p>Your online professional network includes people and businesses in your industry that you connect with online, such as colleagues, similar customers, direct or indirect competitors, and suppliers serving the same customer types as you.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How likely would you be to buy a product that has a higher price but is recommended by someone you know only online in your online professional network? 1 2 3 4 5 <p><i>"Centralized suppliers may face challenges in providing adequate after-sales services due to their geographical, cultural and psychographic distance. This raises questions about what is most important to the B2B customer: high-quality products, exceptional customer service, or a balance between the two. It is crucial for centralized suppliers to understand their customers' preferences in order to ensure customer satisfaction and retain their business."</i></p>
<p>H4. Customer satisfaction in cross-cultural markets negatively relates to customers' and potential customers' price sensitivity.</p>	<p>Rate the following on a scale of 1-5 when buying, where 1 is "Irrelevant" and 5 is "Extremely Important".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important is price when making a purchase decision for you? 1 2 3 4 5 • How likely are you to decrease price sensitivity when repeating business with a trusted supplier? 1 2 3 4 5
<p>Excluding questions – SMEs and decision power</p>	<p>To be considered a Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) in Europe, a company must have fewer than 250 employees, an annual turnover under 50 million, or a total annual balance sheet under 43 million (European Commission, 2015).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your company qualify as an SME according to the European Commission? Yes

	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>No</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your role in the organisation allow you to participate in decisions regarding purchasing and sales activities? <p><i>Yes</i></p> <p><i>No</i></p> <p><i>No SME/decision power, not a valid answer.</i></p> <p><i>The objective of this study is to understand the extent of after-sales services required by European Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) from their suppliers. According to the European Commission, there are criteria that must be met for a company to be classified as a SME in Europe. These criteria form part of the study's literature review.</i></p>
	<p>Thank you for taking the time to participate in this questionnaire. Your feedback is incredibly valuable to me, and it will help me to generate a better overview of what is relevant for the industry we work in. Your input will be kept anonymous, confidential, and I appreciate your honesty and cooperation. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach me.</p> <p>To receive a copy of the research results, please provide your email address. This will enable you to gain further insight into our industry on a European level. Thank you again for your support!</p>

Source: Own elaboration