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Applicability of Keller's brand equity model in the B2B chemical market

Dubravka Sinčić Ćorić^{a*}  and Domagoj Jelić^b

^a*Faculty of Economics & Business, University of Zagreb, Kennedyev trg 6, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia;* ^b*Dow Europe GmbH, Representation Office Zagreb, P. Hektorovića 2, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia*

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A B2B (business-to-business) brand is a distinctive identity that differentiates a relevant, enduring and credible promise of value associated with a product, service or organisation, as well as indicating the source of that promise. The concept of B2B brand equity is one of the most intriguing concepts connected to B2B brands. Although there have been some attempts to conceptualise and measure B2B brand equity in the literature, in practice no consensus about the concept has been reached so far. Unlike previous studies, this study examines the applicability of Keller's brand equity model in a specific industry and market – the B2B chemical market. For that purpose, a series of semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with buyers of specific industrial chemical products in the South and Eastern European B2B chemical market. The results show that the Keller's brand equity model can be applicable in the B2B chemical market, however, the six brand building blocks – salience, performance, imagery, judgements, feelings and resonance – as well as subdimensions that assemble the blocks, need arrangements in different ways in order to meet the logic of the B2B marketing philosophy. As a result, the respondents perceive corporate brands to be more important than product brands. They also point to the significance of the relationship with sales representatives in building brand equity. At the top block of the pyramid respondents set partnership relations, and cooperation in developing solutions oriented towards improvement of customers' production processes.

Keywords: B2B marketing; B2B brands; Keller's brand equity model; chemical industry; chemical market; South and Eastern European market

JEL classification: D40, L21, L65, M31

1. Introduction

The B2B brand is a distinctive identity that differentiates a relevant, enduring and credible promise of value associated with a product, service or organisation, and indicates the source of that promise (Ward, Light, & Goldstine, 1999 as cited in Blombäck & Axelsson, 2007). A B2B brand's importance is growing, and it is constantly enhanced due to the following drivers: globalisation, hypercompetition, proliferation of similar products and services, increasing complexity, high price pressures (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006), greater awareness of a strategic brand issues provoked by significant mergers and acquisitions, increased societal impact of many B2B operations, and increased interest

*Corresponding author. Email: dsincic@efzg.hr

in brands and corporate reputation among business buyers (Lindgreen, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2010).

Researchers agree that B2B branding generates more confidence in purchase decisions, enhances the corporate reputation, offers more scope for competitive advantage, can raise barriers to entry, can differentiate a company by product quality, increases customers' perception, leads to a better financial performance of the company and serves as a foundation for the development of long-lasting relationships between companies, which all lead to a sustained competitive advantage through building a likeable, strong and positive brand image among the many actors involved in the buying process, as well as among all stakeholders – investors, employees, partners, suppliers, competitors, regulators, or members of the local community (Blackett, 1998 as cited in Bendixen, Bukasa, & Abratt, 2004; Beverland, Napoli, & Yakimova, 2007; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007; Michell, King, & Reast, 2001; McQuiston, 2004; Morrison, 2001; Ohnemus, 2009).

The presented facts motivated us to explore one of the concepts in B2B branding – the concept of brand equity. There were some attempts to conceptualise and measure B2B brand equity in the literature (Jensen & Klastrup, 2008; van Riel, de Mortanges & Streukens, 2005) and in practice, but no agreement about the concept of B2B brand equity among academics and practitioners has been reached so far (Jensen & Klastrup, 2008). In addition, there is no model available to assist B2B marketers in identifying and measuring brand equity (Kuhn, Alpert, & Pope, 2008).

Previous research summarises that B2B brand management differs from that in B2C (business-to-consumer) markets (Bendixen et al., 2004; Brown, Bellenger, & Johnston, 2007; Gordon, Calantone, & di Benedetto, 1993), but also indicate that brand concepts developed for the industrial market in general should be applicable irrespective of industry (e.g., Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). Moreover, the discussion about B2B branding concepts usually takes place on a broader level (i.e. across industries). Unlike previous research, the idea of our paper is to validate one of the most popular and comprehensive models for brand equity assessment – Keller's Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model – focusing on one particular industry and market: the B2B chemical market. This paper fills in a gap in the B2B brand equity by exploring whether one of the well-known brand equity models, originally developed for B2C markets can be applied, modified or not, to B2B markets. In that way we validate (or not) previous findings from Kuhn, Alpert and Pope (2008), who point out that Keller's customer-based brand equity concept can be applied, but needs to be modified for B2B markets. Finally, most of the research starts from the premise that the brand in the B2B context usually refers to the corporate industrial brand, instead of the product or service level brand. Our respondents were asked about the specific industrial product brands.

The paper focuses on two main research questions: (1) is Keller's brand equity model applicable in a B2B chemical market? And (2) what are the implications of the research results for selling companies operating in this market?

The results of the research may help B2B brand and marketing managers to understand better the nature of B2B brands, as well as to better manage assets that form brand equity in the minds of their customers.

In the following sections we first present the theoretical background of the concept of B2B brand equity. After that we present the results of the analysis, and discuss the applicability of Keller's CBBE model in the B2B chemical market in South and Eastern Europe.

2. B2B brand equity

One of the most intriguing concepts connected to B2B brands is certainly the concept of B2B brand equity. Aaker (1991) points out that brand equity is a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand. This concept is found to be applicable across different contexts including B2B markets (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2003), however interrelationships between the initial dimensions of the brand equity concept are still under research.

Sinčić Ćorić and Horvat (2009) point out that the traditional view of the brand equity concept was first broadened by Gordon et al. (1993), who showed that brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty form the B2B brand equity dimensions. Several studies have shown that the main dimensions of brand equity in the context of B2B products are perceived quality and brand loyalty (Bendixen et al., 2004; Hutton, 1997; Michell et al., 2001; van Riel et al., 2005). Michell et al. (2001) and van Riel et al. (2005) emphasise that brand awareness and brand associations are relevant in some specific industrial markets, whereas brand associations proved to be insignificant for B2B brand equity (van Riel et al., 2005).

Some of the most popular practical models for measuring brand equity are the Brand Asset Valuator (BAV), the Wunderman Brand Experience Scorecard, Millward Brown Brand Dynamics, the BRANDZ model and the Resonance model. However, the most comprehensive one available in the literature is Keller's Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model (Keller, 1993, 2001, 2003).

What hasn't been verified so far is whether Keller's model can be applied in different contexts, including different industries and different markets? Empirical studies presented by Davis, Golicic, and Marquardt (2008) and Kuhn et al. (2008) support Keller's (1993) conceptualisation of brand equity in the context of B2B services. In their study of financial services Taylor, Hunter and Lindberg (2007) reconcile elements of both Keller's and Aaker's conceptual models.

The CBBE model presumes that brand equity is built through four steps, and that every step is dependent on the successful realisation of the previous one. The steps should ensure that the brand is first identified (identity), and then understood (meaning), that it provokes a customer's reaction (response) and finally builds the relationship with the customer (relationships). In order to achieve the final goal – a harmonious relationship between customer and the brand, Keller's model consists of six brand building blocks – salience, performance, imagery, judgements, feelings and resonance. Moreover, each building block is made of several subdimensions: Category identification, and Need satisfied (Salience), Primary characteristics and secondary features, Product reliability, durability and serviceability, Service effectiveness, efficiency & Empathy, Style & Design, and Price (Performance), User profiles, Purchase & usage situations, Personality & values, and History, heritage & Experiences (Imagery), Quality, Credibility, Consideration, and Superiority (Judgments), Warmth, Fun, Excitement, Security, Social approval, and Self-respect (Feelings), and Loyalty, Attachment, Community, and Engagement (Resonance) (Keller, 2003).

3. Methodology

Keller's model was originally developed for consumer markets. It has been tested for the B2B context; more precisely on the government market (Kuhn et al., 2008), but there is no previous research about its applicability on specific industrial markets. That gap in research was a trigger for us. We wanted to find out if Keller's model was applicable in the B2B chemical market. We therefore set two research objectives: (1) to test

its applicability in the B2B chemical market, and (2) to verify (or not) the results generated in the previous research of electronic tracking for waste management with those representing the chemical market. We presume that the original Keller's model needs adjustments for the B2B chemical market, especially when it comes to its first and fourth building blocks. We therefore assume that the corporate brand will have a greater importance than specific product brands (first block: salience of the manufacturer's brand) as well as assuming the important role the sales force relationships plays in forming the brand equity. (fourth block: feelings about the manufacturer brand).

The chemical market in the examined region (South and Eastern European region) consists of a large number of end customers – factories that are using chemicals in the manufacturing process. These customers can be divided into small, medium and large accounts. Large accounts in the B2B market are considered to be those who can order full truckloads of chemicals in monthly orders, and have large tanks in the factory premises to store the material. They are the most interesting for examination, and there are only a few of them. Medium and small customers are considered to be those customers who are purchasing the material from distributor warehouses, and are basically in contact with distributors, as producers of chemicals usually do not have warehouses on local markets, but rather just a representation officer for the respective market. An additional and very important category of customers is the distributors, who are managing the market segment of small and medium customers.

In order to explore the application of Keller's model in the industrial chemical market, we conducted a series of semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 15 respondents who were chosen to participate in this study. They count for around 30% of the total population of interest. Our respondents come from large customers (key accounts), distributors, and medium customers that are purchasing material from distributors' warehouses. They all represent the middle or higher management of their companies – buyers of specific industrial chemical products (two brands of glycol ethers, which cover the greatest market share). The respondents are 'information rich' (Patton, 2002, p. 40) and illuminative, meaning that they could provide useful information about buying processes and brand evaluations in their organisations.

Interviews consisted of 37 questions, split into in six groups: (1) Industry; (2) Raw materials; (3) Respondents' attitudes toward Keller's model; (4) General information; (5) Demographics; and (6) Notes. Questions were adapted for the chemical market from questionnaires that originated from the Keller's original interview for brand equity valuation and had been applied in a similar research paper by Kuhn et al. (2008). Interviews lasted for 45 to 60 minutes and were recorded by the researchers. They were conducted in spring 2012.

Data were transcribed and analysed according to the principles of qualitative methodology (Patton, 2002; Tkalac Verčić, Sinčić Čorić & Pološki Vokić, 2010). We ensured the quality and credibility of analysis, by following the traditional scientific research criteria (Patton, 2002, p. 544). Objectivity of the inquirers and validity of the data were reached by rigorous and systematic data collection and fieldwork procedures. We triangulated analysts, meaning that each of the researchers conducted separate content analysis of the transcribed interviews. We then grouped the respondents' opinions in a joint discussion. Finally, in order to reach external validity, we asked one external judge to validate our results.

4. Results

The respondents were asked about specific brands, related to chemical goods called either *1-Methoxy - 2 - Propanol* or *Propylene glycol - 1 - methyl ether*, depending on a certain chemical classification, and represented by the following chemical formula: $C_4H_{10}O_2$.

The results of the respondents' opinions, perceptions and attitudes are presented in the following section.

As far as *Salience* is concerned, the results proved category identification and need satisfaction in the case of both brands (A and B). The level of awareness of brand A is greater than the one connected to brand B. Evidence of the awareness of brand A is additionally supported with the respondents' recognition and recollection of brand A. Almost all of the respondents (14 out of a total of 15) remembered brand A. It is probably due to the fact that the name of the brand is similar to the name of the producer (actually the name of the brand consists of the name of the producer) and therefore is easy to remember. In addition, all of the respondents (15/15) knew about producer A. The results connected to brand B showed that only six of the 15 respondents could recall it, although all of them were familiar with producer B (15/15). Almost the same happened when the respondents were asked to think about the producer and the brand simultaneously. All of the respondents recognised both of the producers as manufacturers of glycol ethers designed for industrial purposes. However, they associated brand A to the producer, while they attached brand B to functional characteristics of the product – it is a solvent.

Furthermore, respondents had numerous and strong associations related to brands A and B and their producers. Association related to product brands and corporate brands were not different. Moreover, some associations originally linked to corporate brands were also linked to product brands, although respondents reported a difference between product and corporate brands. Associations were, in general, allied to different features of chemicals designed for industrial purposes. They were clearer for brand A. Some of the respondents even used brand A as a generic product name. Some of the first associations that come to their mind when asked about producer A were: 'The best with the highest quality products on the market. Impossible claims concerning the quality of the products'; 'First class supplier, worldwide presence. Good response and flexibility'; 'Large, strong and high quality company with a wide spectrum of products'.

During interviews, the respondents were constantly referring to the producers' corporate brands when giving their opinions about the product brands, proving a greater awareness of corporate than product brands.

Regarding *Imagery* as the next building block of the model, the respondents predominantly described it through the product's features, such as reliability, safety, traceability, price and functional quality, while product style and design did not appear in their remarks. Respondents particularly stated that consistency in product quality, product safety, accessibility and availability, correct technical documentation and delivery of the product are the most important factors in buying decision-making processes. When asked about the most favourable attributes of Manufacturer A and brand A they noted 'Quality of the product for manufacturer A, and for brand A, the fact that it is produced by manufacturer A'; 'Complete service, commercial and logistic, that the company provides, and technical support'; 'End customers know that the product will have a high quality'; 'Reliability and safety for brand A and manufacturer A' and 'efficiency of the personnel'.

The most favourable attributes of Manufacturer B and brand B were 'Reliability'; 'High quality of the end products'; 'Quality of the products, on time deliveries, and complete service that manufacturer B provides', while 'Lack of availability in certain cases – allocation'; 'High price' and 'Bad sellers' were described as the least favourable ones. These elements actually build the *Performance* building block.

The respondents also reported that technical support, and producer's (supplier's) reputation and tradition play a great role in their buying decision-making processes. They perceived producers A and B as good suppliers, but they only thought of them as reliable and strong companies, while any other associations related to brand personality or brand values, or legacy and history were not mentioned.

All of the above prove that tangible attributes, which are related to functional dimensions of the product brands, combined with some intangible attributes, such as safety, which is a consequence of the producer's reputation, are the most important associations to performance and imagery, as two building blocks of the second step of the model.

Concerning *Judgements*, it can be observed that the first reactions of the respondents were testimonies of the brands' high quality (12 of 15 of them reported that both brands are of a high quality). Brand A was perceived as more available than brand B. This did not imply that it is, because of this response, superior to brand B. However, it seems that brand A has provided an overall superior experience to the respondents than brand B.

Credibility of a producer was reported as a crucial organisational attribute. It was valuable to detect that credibility was often connected to the experience the respondents have had with sales representatives of the particular producer. When asked about specific elements that they perceive to be important in considering the purchase of Glycol Ethers, they stated characteristics, such as 'strength of producer, assurance that it will not become bankrupt, close tanks with material and good logistic'; 'reliability of the producer and assurances that there will be no issues with the availability of the product' and 'reliable deliveries and flexibility'.

Thus, producer A was described as the most credible one on the chemical market (13 of 15 respondents). It was perceived as a company that is trustworthy, caring for its customers and environmentally friendly. Producer B was also perceived as credible (12/15), but respondents were reserved about additional attributes.

Feelings toward the brands were described as less important for respondents. Responses that could have been allied to the respondents' feelings were those explaining the role of the sales representatives. It was evident that sales representatives were significant for the respondents' perception of a brand. When asked about their relationship to a brand, the respondents were actually reporting about their relationship with the sales representatives. The representatives' readiness to serve the needs of their customers, sincerity in their relationship, availability in case of emergency, as well as a partnership in technological improvements were recognised by the respondents as critical aspects of their relationship with the sales representatives.

All of the above prove that, in business markets, customers communicate with the sales representatives, and not with the brands, which is the case in the consumers' markets. It also indicates that the sales representatives can influence their customers' feelings about brands – both product and corporate brands.

As far as the relationship with a brand is concerned (*Resonance*), it can be observed that the respondents perceived their relationship with a brand (again) through their relationships with the sales representatives. If they perceived their relationship with the sales

representatives as friendly and positive, the same notion appeared in describing their relationship with a brand. They were mostly satisfied with their relationships, and therefore were describing brands A and B as pleasing, friendly and positive. They reported some negative examples with brand B and producer B (3/15), proving that their experience with the sales representative has influenced their relationship with a brand. Some of the exact supporting quotes from the respondents are as follows; (How would you describe your relationship with brand A?): 'Nice, friendly, and a good partner'; 'Positive due to positive seller'; 'Good relationship, monthly relationships'; 'Reliable, brand A is opening new partnerships and end customer offer cooperation'. (How would you describe your relationship with brand B?): 'Good relationship, everything okay'; 'Not a good relationship due to a lack of relationships with the company representatives – sellers'.

It is important to emphasise that, while commenting on their relationship to brands, the respondents referred to the terms of the contract, and the necessity to revise them when the contract comes to an end. That means that their behavioural loyalty actually appeared because of the terms of the contract they had with the producer. It implies that better relationships with buyers can lead to better negotiating positions in the future, as well as to a possible continuation of the contract. It was clear that the respondents put an emphasis on the creation of partnerships with producers.

The majority of the respondents (11/15) reported their active attitude in buying processes. That means that they have put time, effort, and other resources in decision-making processes, in order to make a good decision. It was clear that they preferred to lean on their own experience and not on somebody else's. They stated that their primary motive was to keep objectivity in decision-making processes, but they also showed some enthusiasm when they talked about the possibilities of new technological innovations with products from producers A and B. It is also valuable to note that in these particular cases the decision was made by the head of procurement, and not by the buying centre, so possible influences from other members of the buying centre were not reported, or when mentioned, appeared as an insignificant factor. When asked about specific elements that they perceive to be important in considering the purchase of Glycol Ethers, they stated 'good quality of product, good service'; 'quality of product, price and availability of materials'; 'quality, price and fast delivery'; 'long term relationship and partnership'.

All of the above confirm that the respondents describe this building block by the technological solutions that the producer can offer to them, and by a partnership with the sales representatives.

5. Discussion

Our research showed that the B2B chemical market and chemical industry are to some extent specific. Similar (the same) chemicals as products are rarely differentiated in terms of their functional characteristics, because they all consist of the same chemical formula. Companies should, therefore, seek points of differentiation in additional services, the relationship between the sales representatives and the buyers, partnerships in product development and good contract terms – including pricing and availability of products in times of shortage. All these points can be observed as subdimensions of brand equity. This is similar to what was pointed out by van Riel et al. (2005, p. 846), who said that 'Besides a favourable perception of the product, a favourable impression of the employees will aid the company in creating a strong corporate brand. Apparently,

buyers associate the service they receive with the company’ and Mudambi (2002), who emphasised that quality of the ordering and delivery service and the quality of the working relationship influence buyers’ brand perceptions.

Our results indicate that the original Keller’s CBBE model could be applied in the B2B market, but building blocks should consist of different subdimensions. Some subdimensions already exist in Keller’s model, but are perceived with a different importance and on different positions. We, therefore, agree with Kuhn et al. (2008) that Keller’s original CBBE model should be revised in order to suit the specific characteristics of the B2B market, and we accept and start from their proposition (Figure 1).

A more detailed look at the subdimensions of the pyramid reveals that brand equity assessment is related to the producer’s (corporate) brand more than to product brand. This brand-equity ‘halo effect’, in which brand evaluations are transferred from the corporate brand to the product brand is not new, but our findings shows that this happened only in one case (brand A). That leads to the conclusion that brand managers should either capitalise or neutralise the brand-equity halo effect.

It can therefore be concluded that Keller’s blocks *Salience*, *Performance*, *Judgments* and *Imagery* can be applied in B2B markets although there are some differences between the original subdimensions and the ones resulting from our research. Some elements, such as slogans, proved to be irrelevant for business customers, while user profiling, buying terms and credibility proved to be very significant. *Feelings*, when described with the original Keller’s attributes, did not count for an important building block. The respondents rather described *Feelings* through the buyer-seller relationship assessment. Actually, those relationships turned out to be important for overall brand equity assessment. At the top of the pyramid (*Resonance*) our respondents put some new subdimensions, which cannot be found in the original Keller’s model. The top of the pyramid in B2B markets is obviously connected to a long-term and satisfactory relationship between the buyer and producer (via the sales person), and collaboration and partnership in the development of new technological solutions, which could improve the customers’ production processes (Figure 2).

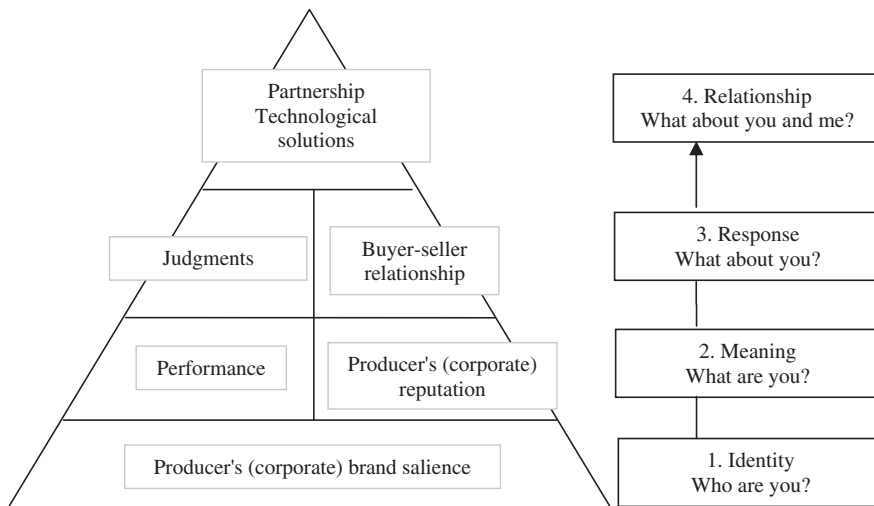


Figure 1. Revised model appropriate for B2B market. Source: Keller (2003), Kuhn et al. (2008) and the current study.

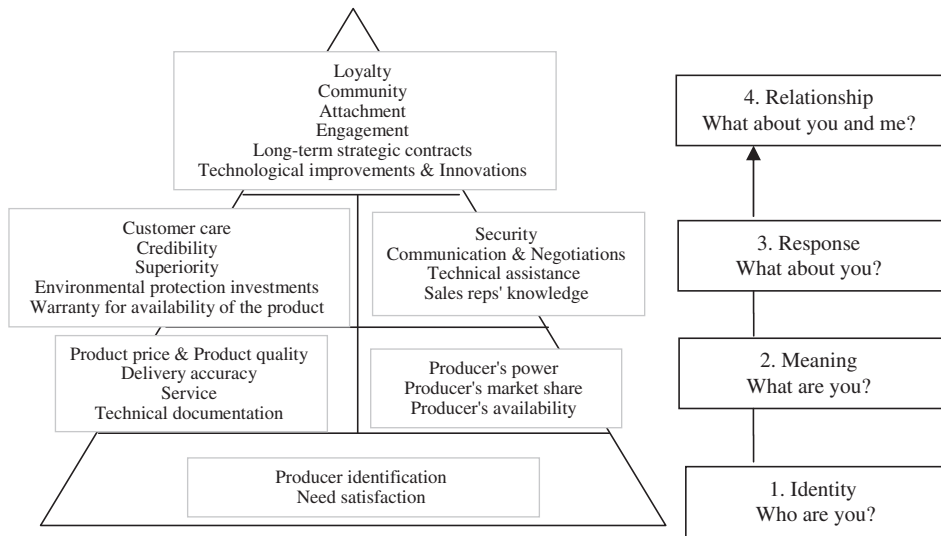


Figure 2. Subdimensions of revised model appropriate for B2B market.
Source: Keller (2003) and the current study.

One of the most emphasised elements in forming the perception of B2B brands that is evident in all of the subdimensions of the revised model are the personal interactions between the buyers and the sales representatives. Baumgarth and Binckebanck (2010) similarly state that many practitioners point out that the personal interaction between buying and selling centres is the difference that matters in markets characterised by products that are increasingly commoditised. Nevertheless, and in spite of the sales-dominant nature of the industrial marketing environment, the brand-driving capabilities of the sales people are poorly examined empirically. In their empirical paper, Baumgarth and Binckebanck (2010) develop and empirically test a conceptual framework explaining the influence of the sales force and two elements of the marketing mix (product and promotion) on B2B brand equity. They conclude that the sales force is relevant in the building and maintenance of a strong B2B brand. They claim that the most important driver of brand equity is the salesperson's behaviour, followed by the salesperson's personality, while product quality and non-personal marketing communications also proved to be significant, but less so than that of the salespersons.

Considering all of the above, when interpreting the results, one should not exclude some limitations of this research. This research tries to assess Keller's CBBE model and adapt it for B2B markets, taking into account current findings, combined with the ones from the research made by Kuhn et al. (2008). Although there are similarities with the previous research, there is still a risk that the results may represent industry-specific, as well as context-specific factors that are not representative for all B2B markets. The fact that this study is a single industry case study can pose a question on generalisability of the findings, but the findings are consistent with those of Kuhn, Alpert and Pope (2008) as well as with Mudambi's finding about brand relevance in organisational buying decision-making processes (2002). She identified three clusters of B2B customers, according to the importance of branding in their purchase decisions. The first group of companies

can be characterised as ‘highly tangible’ firms for bearings purchases. To these firms, the more tangible aspects, such as price and physical product properties, were most highly rated. The second group of companies can be considered ‘branding receptive’, because they perceived all three branding elements (how well known is the manufacturer, a measure of brand name awareness; general reputation of the manufacturer, a measure of brand image or reputation; and number of prior purchases from the manufacturer, an indication of brand purchase loyalty) to be of significantly higher importance. Branding-receptive firms also perceived a significantly higher importance of the service aspects of the quality of the ordering and delivery service and the quality of the working relationship. The third group of companies can be described as one of ‘low-interest’ firms for bearings purchases, meaning that, to these firms, none of the attributes were perceived to be more important than in other clusters (Mudambi, 2002).

Respondents in our study can be described as ‘branding receptive’ firms as they highlighted reliability, credibility, producer’s reputation, and the relationship with sales representatives to be the most important factors in forming their brand perceptions. They acknowledged the importance of a high-quality product and services, but also described them through ‘consistency’, ‘partnership’ and not through tangible elements. Our findings, in that sense, are not in alignment with Kuhn’s, Alpert’s and Pope’s, since they claim that their respondents fit better to ‘highly tangible’ clusters. So it can be concluded that the generalisability of our findings may be stronger for industries fitting into Mudambi’s branding receptive cluster.

Therefore, additional research is needed to validate the findings in other B2B marketing contexts. However, this study can provide some practical insights for both researchers and marketing managers, helping them to better understand, conceptualise, develop and/or use their brands in B2B markets.

6. Conclusions

Although relatively new in terms of theoretical consideration and practical application, B2B branding is gaining more and more attention. Both researchers and practitioners agree that B2B branding generates many positive outcomes, which can improve sales results. Apart from influencing sales results, B2B branding enhances corporate reputation, can differentiate a company by product quality, increases customers’ perceptions, and serve as a foundation for the development of long-lasting relationships between the company and its customers, which all lead to a sustained competitive advantage. However, the practical implication of B2B brand management is still not clear for many practitioners involved in marketing activities in the B2B market.

With all of that in mind, the idea of this paper was to validate one of the most popular and comprehensive models for brand equity assessment – Keller’s original CBBE model – in the B2B market.

Our research has shown that, although the B2B chemical market and chemical industry are specific, the original Keller’s CBBE model could be applied, but with some adjustments. The results indicate that B2B brand managers should focus their efforts on enhancing buyer’s perceptions on (1) products and (2) sales representatives. As van Riel et al. (2005, p. 846), state: ‘Buyers should perceive the product as high quality, dependable, consistent and innovative’ which is consistent with our findings. Apart from that, industrial producer should make the most of the sales representatives, since they represent the company, and their behaviour influences the perception of both product

and corporate brands in the minds of their customers. As emphasised by Baumgarth and Binckebanck (2010), personal interaction between buying and selling centres is the difference that matters in markets characterised by products that are increasingly commoditised, which is the case with industrial chemicals.

Some future research should, therefore, focus on specific elements of the sales representatives' behaviour, especially in interactions with the customers, in order to define the dimensions that enhance (or weaken) brand reputation amongst demanding B2B customers.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Dubravka Sinčić Ćorić  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1834-5491>

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