

INTERPERSONAL TRUST
IN BTB BUYER/SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP :
An Empirical Study of French Industrial Sector

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ABSTRACT

This communication attempts to clarify the state of trust in buyer/supplier relationships in an industrial context among three components: the perception of trustworthiness, trust and trusting behaviour. Otherwise, it proposes a definition of trust based on the affective aspect and has built a measurement scale that has been tested on 252 French company buying directors.

Keywords: Trust, affective trust, perception of trustworthiness, trusting behaviour, BTB, scale of measurement.

1. Introduction

The state of trust between clients and buyers has taken on much more importance in the industrial sector. In fact, it is often emphasized that in B2B the turnover of the year “t” is made up of 90% of the year “t-1” and from this perspective trust in the partner plays a pivotal role in maintaining the relationship and consequently in profits. Although recognized as such, trust has been conceptualized and measured in different ways by researchers.

Following the framework of the recent research trends proving the separateness of the different types of trust: cognitive, affective and conative (Mayer et al., 1995; Smith and Barklay, 1997; Guibert and Feneteau, 1998), we will attempt first to revise this concept by putting forward the affective aspect of trust, innate to man, considering that inter-company relations are made and unmade above all by individuals. As a matter of fact, having recourse to the new technologies of information and communication (NTIC) has only amplified the number of contacts putting the personnel who are interfacing into the heart of the relational system. Secondly, we will try to propose a measurement scale of trust and to test the model by using a structural equation method. It should be specified that most of the research has been based more on a conception of cognitive dominance found in the phase preceding trust itself and that little research has been done on the central part of trust in its affective aspects.

Henceforth, we will consider the perceptions of trustworthiness (cognitive aspects) as the antecedents of trust (affective aspects) encompassing, in turn, trusting behaviour (conative aspects).

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Inced by an intensified search for efficiency and performance in all the links of the chain of values, trust in the industrial sector has imposed itself as an undeniable key factor of success in client/buyer relations. Under the impetus of the researchers at IMP, in the 80s, investigative work was done on the role of trust in client/buyer interactions. As soon as the catalytic role played by trust was recognised and confirmed, other paths of research were taken following the logic of explanation and prediction exploration. One trend (Anderson and Weitz, 1989; Dyer and Chu, 2000) was remarkable in its explanation of the causes and particularly concentrated on identifying and classifying the antecedents. A second category (Schurr and

Ozanne, 1985; Lagace and Marshall, 1994; Ruyter et al, 2001) tried to improve the comprehension of its role and to identify the consequences in partner relations. Other research, such as that of Morgan and Hunt, 1994, Ganesan, 1994 and Doney and Cannon, 1997, tried to associate the two preceding approaches in an integrative attempt. Despite the diversity of this research, two points are agreed upon: first, trust appears as a primordial element in the stability and development of long term relations; then it constitutes a source of undeniable comparative advantages for the company. It is in this sense that Ganesen (1998), in his research about retail company purchasing supervisors, concluded that trust positively affects the relationship's orientation in the long term as it reduces the perception of risk associated with opportunistic behaviour, consolidates the relationship and reduces the costs of the transaction. The work of Geyskens et al., (1998) goes so far as to affirm that trust acts positively on the longevity of the relationship as well as on the satisfaction felt by the two partners.

Although trust is acknowledged to be the principal ingredient in the stability and development of exchange relations, the statutes to which it refers are not confused. In fact, in marketing, trust is at first approached as a group of beliefs vis-à-vis the other party's characteristics (Anderson and Narus, 1990; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Ganesan, 1994; Kumar et al, 1995) and/or as a behavioural intention (Moorman, Zaltman and Despondé, 1992, 1993; Smith and Barclay, 1997).

Recent contributions, however, have made real progress in isolating the perceptions of trustworthiness, trust and trusting behaviour and by taking into account the process aspect involved in trust.

2.1 Differences between the perceptions of trustworthiness, trust and trusting behaviour

The association of the different parts in the definition of trust was not without provoking confusions between the concept of trust itself, its dimensions and its causes (Mayer and al, 1995; Guibert and Fenneteau, 1998). Some researchers including Mayer and al, 1995, tried to clarify this state by considering the perceptions of trustworthiness and trusting behaviour not as parts of trust, but rather as two distinct givens. From this perspective, they move away from the traditional definitions of trust as an "attitude" or a "belief" and they argue in favour of a separation among the factors which contribute to trust and trusting behaviour. To this effect, they have proposed a new framework of analysis in which we can distinctly identify the three elements.

Extending this reflection, a new more precise approach to this concept has allowed both to better identify the antecedents and the consequences of this concept and to take into account its dynamic aspect. Thus, Cowles (1997) maintains that it is necessary to distinguish trust from trusting behaviour which includes three elements: (a) counting on others, (b) the risking of resources and (c) trying to reach a specific goal.

Empirically Smith and Barclay (1997) tested the distinction between the two parts (the perceptions of trustworthiness and trusting behaviour) in the framework of partner relationships and confirmed the existence of two different entities: the perceptions of trustworthiness as antecedents to trusting behaviours.

In the area of consumer behaviour Sirdeshmukh and al, 2002, approach trust as a dynamic concept by separating the dimensions of the perception of trustworthiness (competence, benevolence and orientation in problem solving) from the two forms of trust (FLE “frontline relational exchanges and MPP “management policies and practices).

More recently, Johnson and Grayson’s study (2005), in the service area, confirms the separation of the two dimensions (cognitive and affective) of trust. The results of their research indicate that the antecedents and the consequences of cognitive trust are different from those of affective trust.

2.2 Taking into account the process aspect of trust

The majority of researchers agree unanimously about considering trust as a dynamic process. Mayer and al (1995), for example, think that a better understanding of trust comes from taking into consideration its evolution in time with the development of the relationship.

The integration of the dynamic aspect in the study of trust was introduced by three research categories. The first category approached the question of time through the use of variables such as “the length of the relation” or “the experience with the partner” in the model of the antecedents of trust (Anderson and Weitz, 1989; Ganesan, 1994; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Aulakh et al, 1996; Dyer and Chu, 2000; Benamour, 2000).

The second category was interested in identifying the stages of development in trust. The majority of researchers agree in acknowledging that this notion is developing gradually with time (Gabarro, 1978; Rempal and *al.*, 1985; Curran and *alli.*, 1998). It starts at a weak level, then grows gradually as the relationship is consolidated and reinforced. Nevertheless and paradoxically, some studies have shown that the level of trust can be high even in the initial phase of the relationship (McKnight and *al.*, 1998).

Moreover, the study by Rampal and al. (1985), based on the attribution theory, indicates the existence of three levels of trust: predictability, trustworthiness and faith. Predictability is influenced by the partner’s observed behaviour and by the stability of the social environment, trustworthiness is built on the attributions of the partner’s moral qualities and, finally, faith, representing the last form of trust, corresponds to emotional security.

Finally, the last category paid particular attention to the interactive process of trust (Zand, 1972), a process which integrates all the parts of trust (antecedents and consequences).

Mayer and al. (1995) present the dynamic process of trust through feedback linking the consequences of the risks taken in the relationship with the perceptions of trustworthiness.

3. Hypotheses

3.1 The perceptions of trustworthiness

Based on a process of handling information and of the rational evaluation of risk, trust is based on proof of trustworthiness which is established notably on the basis of the signs of reputation and is reinforced by experience and the interaction between the parties.

Several elements have been put forward to describe a trustworthy person. The first studies only stressed the moral aspects (benevolence, honesty, integrity and seriousness) but neglected the partner's technical and functional characteristics. However, integrating competence into the study of trust, notably in an inter-company context, is demanded more and more (Ganesan, 1994; Smith and Barclay, 1997; Ahmed and al., 1998).

A review of the literature as well as the interviews of the buying and supplier supervisors of industrial companies lead us to consider benevolence, honesty and competence as the principal characteristics inciting the client to view his partner as trustworthy.

Benevolence: it can be defined as the feeling when the partner has good intentions as to completing his work and when he manifests an attachment to the other party. This perception can be translated by the search for the well-being of the other person especially in difficult and unforeseeable moments.

Honesty: it can be considered as the feeling that the partner's promises and words will be honoured in the relationship.

Competence: it is the feeling that the other party has as well as the necessary technical abilities which allow him to do his work well, and the ability for satisfactory interaction in order to maintain and develop the relationship. This dimension, although it is essential in understanding trust, has been poorly exploited by researchers and is often considered as antecedents of this construction and not as an integral part (Crosby and al., 1990; Guibert and Fenneteau, 1997; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Benamour, 2000).

We propose the following hypotheses:

H1a: *There are three dimensions to the perceptions of reliability: benevolence, honesty and competence.*

H1b: *These three dimensions converge towards a factor of secondary order: the perceptions of trustworthiness.*

3.2 Interpersonal trust

Relying on a meta-analysis concerning the empirical studies about interpersonal trust and based on nine articles, Swan and al. (1999), suggest reserving the term "trust" to designate the degree to which the consumer has a feeling of confidence or a lack of confidence concerning his dependence vis-à-vis the seller.

Along the same lines, Guibert's definition (1999) consolidates the refinement in progress and brings adequate replies to the problems in the conceptualization of trust: problems linked to its specification in Marketing and to taking into account its dynamic aspect (Guibert, 1999).

As a matter of fact, for Dinn (1988), the emotional part corresponds to a feeling or to a vague impression based on human emotions. Johnson and Grayon (2005) consider that the affective part of trust is characterized by a feeling of security and the perception of the relationship's solidity.

Consequently, we propose that trust be considered as “*a psychological state which is similar to a feeling of security felt about a partner in an exchange and in the context of a risky situation.*”

Thus, trust is analysed uniquely from an affective point of view which depends on emotional security. This is created based on the information gathered allowing the person who grants his trust to feel a certain serenity. However, this feeling puts the person in a situation of vulnerability because the uncertainty about the other person’s future behaviour doesn’t disappear.

This definition allows us, on the one hand, to emphasize the difference, as is, moreover, the case in English, between confidence (avoir foi en) and trust (faire confiance à). So, trust can be distinguished “from beliefs (benevolence, competence, a good sense of business, reciprocal trust...) which condition it and the consequences which it creates, one upon the other due to their dependence on the research contexts (Guibert, 1999) and, on the other hand, to take into account the procedural aspect.

Moreover, we can note that trust depends on past elements, on former perceptions, but once it is established, it continues over time. In fact, it can only emerge following a process of interaction and learning between the partners. It can only be expected that people would have this type of trust if in the past they had experienced this type of trust and if they consider each other as being trustworthy. We propose this hypothesis:

H2: *The stronger the perceptions of trustworthiness, the greater the trust between buyer/supplier*

3.3 Trustworthy behaviour

These are the actions taken by B which display his acceptance of the risk and thus represent the demonstration of his behaviour. We are reusing two of the five dimensions identified by Smith and Barclay (1997) which are the commitment to the relationship and the communication’s confidentiality. The other dimensions showed themselves to be less important during the exploratory study. We consider that:

H3: *The stronger the trust between buyer/supplier, the more trustworthy behaviour will occur.*

Investment in the relationship:

This is the specific investment that a party makes during a relationship and cannot be reutilized in another one. This investment can take several forms, it can be a question of material support (financial, physical or human) (Williamson, 1985) or even non-material such as devoting time and attention to this relationship (Smith and Barclay, 1997). In all cases, the transfer cost is high and discourages the other party from ending the relationship.

H3a: *The more trust there is between buyer/supplier, the more investment there will be in the relationship.*

Confidential communication:

The use of the notion of communication as a demonstration of trusting behaviour exclusively concerns the informal and confidential aspect. Cural and Judge (1995) as well as Smith and Barclay (1997) used this concept as a demonstration of trusting behaviour. The results of their studies indicate that this concept has a positive effect on the relationship's consequences.

H3b: The more there is trusting behaviour between client/buyer, the more confidential communication there will be.

4. Method

The nineteen items in the measurement scales of the different variables were included in a broader questionnaire. A filter question was included at the beginning in order to ensure that the supplier chosen by the respondent corresponded to a partnership relation (a close and long-term relationship).

The items were measured by the Likert scales based on 5 points including 1 neutral point (ranging from "agree completely" to "disagree completely").

This questionnaire was sent to 1300 companies selected from the French company directory (KOMPASS) and according to the same selection criteria (number of employees, industrial sector, companies with production units and with formal buying departments). After a two-step relaunch procedure (first we did a telephone relaunch in order to be sure that the respondents had received the questionnaire and to encourage them to reply; then three weeks after the initial mailing, we sent a reminder letter and a new copy of the questionnaire to those who had not yet replied), we received 252 useable replies (a 19.38 return rate).

The final sample was made up of production companies belonging to such sectors as automobile, chemical, information technology products, mechanical, plastic materials and rubber transformation, etc. Fifty-seven point five percent of the companies have more than 1000 employees, 30.5% have between 100 and 999 employees and 12% have less than 99. The client/buyer relationships studied were all long-term ones: 18% had existed for more than 20 years, 49% from 10 to 20 years, 22% from 5 to 10 years and only 11% for less than 5 years. Concerning the respondents, 52% of them are the chief buyer and 28% of them are the purchasing director. They have had this job for several years (11% for more than 20 years, 26% between 13 and 20 years, 23% between 7 and 12 years, 18% between 3 and 6 years and 22% for less than 2 years) and their educational level is rather high (31% have a Bachelor's or Master's degree and more than 63% have followed specialised training courses in purchasing).

5. Measurement

We will deal successively with trust, the perceptions of trustworthiness, investment in the relationship and confidential communication.

Trust as a sentiment has never been the subject of empirical investigation. Consequently, it seemed useful to us to build a scale which would make our approach to trust operational. To do this, we relied on the "Churchill paradigm" methodology.

First, we developed a list of items based on a literature review and on the exploratory phase conducted in the industrial sector. Following this, seven items were generated for the pre-test. Secondly, these items were evaluated by 3 marketing experts. The items which had two negative evaluations were withdrawn. Qualitative pre-tests were carried out on teachers from

several disciplines and on four purchasing supervisors in the industrial sector. Two members of the CDAF (French Company of Buyers) also validated the scale. In the end, four items were retained. During the exploratory factorial analyses, only one factor was extracted, this factor explains the 75% variation.

The scale for the perception of trustworthiness contained three dimensions: honesty, benevolence and competence. We borrowed the Kumar and al.. Scale (1995), which integrates the two dimensions of honesty and benevolence and which presents satisfactory psychometric qualities. Concerning competence, we used the Smith and Barclay Scale (1997), after having translated and adapted it to the French industrial sector. The modified scale thus contains three dimensions, each having three items and its reliability is satisfactory (Cronbach Alpha = 0.861).

Concerning the relationship investment scale, we translated and adapted three of the four items from the Ganesan Scale (1994); the last item, which measures the transfer cost, was replaced by an item from Smith and Barclay (1997) which measures the non-economic investment in the relationship. The factorial analysis on the scale made apparent only one factor, which explains 78% of the variation.

Concerning the confidential communication scale, we adapted those of Crosby and al.,. (1990) and Smith and Barclay (1997).

The statistical analysis contained two stages (from Anderson and Gerbing, 1998, 1992). The first consisted of confirming factorial analyses of the measurement models in order to improve the measurement instruments' validity. The second was devoted to structural relationship tests between the latent variables within the framework of the measurement model used for the CFA.

After having carried out the Exploratory Factorial Analyses (EFA) of the principal components analyses (PCA), we made sure of the results obtained by using the Confirming Factorial Analyses (CFA). The CFA are different from the EFA in the sense that they are used to define a factorial structure not *a posteriori* (like EFA) but *a priori* (Gerbing and Hamilton, 1996) and that they allow the explicit testing of the one-dimensionality of the measurement scales (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988).

The confirming factorial analyses were conducted under AMOS (4.0) following the Maximum *Resemblance estimation procedure* and the results were controlled with the aid of a Bootsrasp, which freed us from the data normality hypothesis.

To evaluate the model's quality, Bagazzi and Yi (1988) and Joreskog's (1993) recommendations were taken into account. First, we verified the absence of abnormal results (correlations superior to 1. insignificant parameters). Secondly, an examination of the model's internal parameters was done by verifying three indexes: the standardised gamma (λ), the structural coefficients (C.R) and the SMC which must respect certain levels as well as the indicators of reliability and the validity of the scales. Thirdly, the adjustment indexes, such as the absolute measurement indexes, (Chi-2, Chi-2 taken to infinity, RMR, GFI, AGFI and RMSEA) and the incremental measurement indexes (TLI and CFI), were controlled.

6. 1 Evaluation of the measurement scale parameters

For practical purposes, we will first present the results of the examinations of the internal parameters and the adjustment indexes and, secondly, the reliability and validity of the measurement scales.

Table 1: Internal measurement scale indicators

VARIABLES	ITEMS	Standardized coefficient (λ)	CR	SMC
Benevolence	BENE1	0,849		0,721
	BENE2	0,802	14,256	0,643
	BENE3	0,849	15,144	0,722
Honesty	HON1	0,856		0,733
	HON2	0,833	14,568	0,693
	HON3	0,785	13,724	0,617
Competence	COMP1	0,822		0,676
	COMP2	0,764	11,503	0,583
	COMP3	0,765	11,521	0,586
Trust	TRUST1	0,854		0,730
	TRUST2	0,769	13,903	0,592
	TRUST3	0,846	15,811	0,716
	TRUST4	0,800	14,683	0,640
Investment in the relationship	INV1	0,716		0,513
	INV2	0,877	12,226	0,745
	INV4	0,863	12,218	0,768
Confidential communication	COMC 1	0,907		0,822
	COMC2	0,909	17,776	0,827
	COMC3	0,733	13,860	0,537

Table 2: The measurement model adjustment indexes

indicators	The perceptions of trustworthiness (3 dimensions)	Trust
χ^2	34,144	6,001
ddl	24	2
χ^2/ddl	1,423	3,000
GFI	0,971	0,988
AGFI	0,945	0,941
RMR	0,019	0,008
RMSEA	0,041	0,089

TLI	0,987	0,979
CFI	0,991	0,993

The results of the analysis of the internal indicators of the different concepts are all satisfactory. Let's emphasize, notably, that the three dimensions of trustworthiness adjust perfectly to the empirical data. All of the indexes respect the recommended levels: the Chi-2 taken to degrees of freedom is under the accepted standards, the GFI, AGFI, TLI and CFI present satisfactory indexes and the RMR and RMSEA are excellent. Concerning reliability, the indexes are not as good but remain acceptable.

AFC of secondary order

The AFC of secondary order is a statistical technique which allows "being sure the dimensions, estimated by the first order factors define well a larger and more abstract construction, estimated by the secondary order factor", Roussel et al., 2002. Moreover, it has the advantage of integrating different dimensions in a construction and the relative parameters of these dimensions in the test of the causal relations of a model.

Before using this technique, it was necessary to verify the correlations between the first order factors which must be sufficiently high in order to justify recourse to this technique. Excepting the correlation between honesty and competence which appears a bit weak (under 0.5), the other correlations are acceptable, which justifies using an aggregated secondary factor order.

Table 3: General indexes of secondary order trustworthiness

χ^2	Ddl	χ^2/ddl	GFI	AGFI	RMR	RMSEA	TLI	CFI
34,144	24	1,423	0,966	0,941	0,036	0,047	0,983	0,988

The secondary order AFC on the perceptions of trustworthiness give convincing results, the general indexes are excellent and the factorial contributions of each factor exceed 0.5. Therefore, we can defend the hypothesis of the convergence of the three contributing parts of trustworthiness.

7. Results

7.1. Evaluation of the quality of the measurement scales

Here it is a question of verifying trustworthiness and the validity of the measurement scales. The reliability of the scales was verified with the aid of Joreskog's Rhô which measures a scale's internal coherence based on the items' factorial contributions (Roussel et al., 2002).

The results indicate that the internal coherence of the model's independent variables are all satisfactory (trust = 0.890, trustworthiness = 0.830, investment in the relationship = 0.861, the

confidential communication = 0.889). We then proceeded to a verification of the validity of the construction of these scales.

The validity of the construction which indicates the degree to which a measurement instrument succeeds in measuring the concept to which it refers (Evrard et al., 1993), was verified by an examination of the converging validity and the discriminating validity of the measurement scales.

The converging validity allows verifying if “the various indicators which are supposed to measure the same phenomena are correlated” (Evrard et al., 1993). In other words, it is a question of verifying that one is really measuring the construction’s or the model’s variables independently of the instruments used. Two criteria were used: the C.R. test for each factorial contribution, that is to say, the link between a latent variable and its indicators (this indicator must not be less than 1.96). The variance of the construction, which must be explained more by the items which they measure than by the error. This condition is fulfilled by a calculation of the pVC (rho of converging validity) or by an AVE (Average Variance Extracted), which must be superior to 0.5.

The discriminating validity is admitted when each construction measures what it is supposed to measure and is not confused with the other concepts. According to Giannelonni (1990), a model satisfies the criterion of discriminating validity if the largest variance which is shared ¹ among the constructions is inferior to the smallest pVC found in the preceding stage. In other words, the square root of the pVC of each construction must be superior to the correlations that it shares with the other constructions (Hulland, 1999).

Table 4: The discriminating and converging validity of the measurement scales

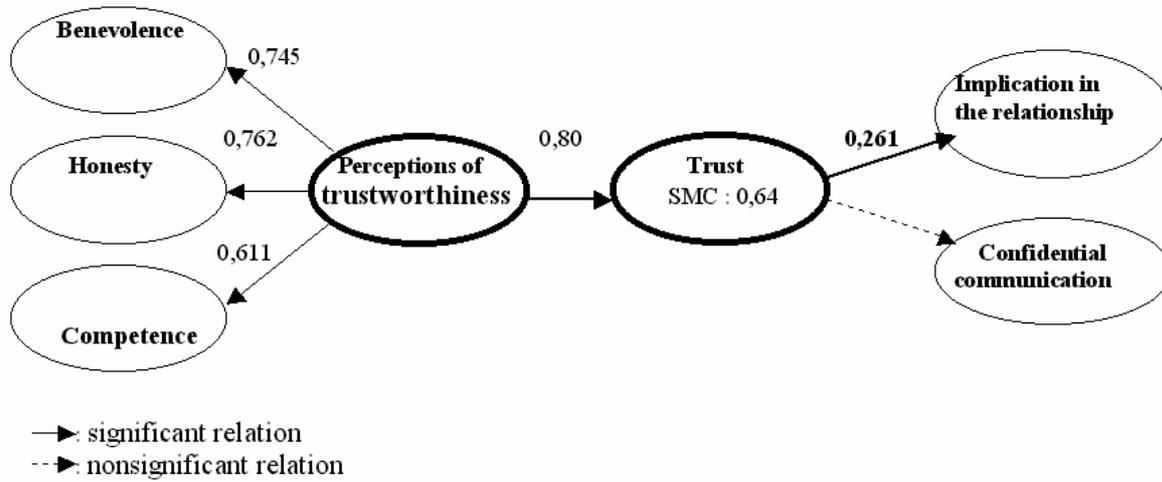
DIMENSIONS	Perceptions of trustworthiness	Trust	Investment in the relationship	Confidential communication
Perceptions of trustworthiness	0,620			
Trust	0,612	0,669		
Investment in the relationship	0,302	0,246	0,676	
Confidential communication	0,107	- 0,033	0,351	0,729

As the chart indicates , the discriminating and converging validities of the model’s variables are completely acceptable. We thus consider these constructions as valid.

7.2 Test of the structural model

After having confirmed the model’s factorial structure, we proceeded to testing the hypotheses with the help of structural equation models.

Figure 1: The structural model



The validity of the structural relations of the perceptions of trustworthiness as a factor of secondary order and the other concepts cannot be definitive without a comparison to other models. Thus, we have tested our research model of X in relationship to two rival models.

Table 5: Confirming factorial analysis of the different models

	Analyses confirmatoires	Nombres d'items	χ^2 ddl	χ^2 /ddl	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA	ECVI
Model x	Perceptions of trustworthiness Trust Investissement Comm conf	9 4 3 3	268 (140)	1,834	0,905	0,877	0,956	0,058	1,447
Model 1	Perceptions of trustworthiness Competence Trust Investment in the relation Confidential communication	3 3 4 3 3	311 (146)	2,129	0,892	0,859	0,803	0,067	1,589
Model 2	Benevolence Honesty Competence Trust Investment in the relation Confidential communication	3 3 3 4 3 3	391 (147)	2,657	0,863	0,823	0,784	0,081	1,899

An examination of the indicators lead to the conclusion that the model Mx is the best (Chi-2/ Degrees of Freedom, RMSEA and ECVI, the weakest and GFI, AGFI and CFI, the highest).

8. Discussion

8.1. Managerial and theoretical contributions

If agreement is unanimous, in B to B marketing, on the importance of trustworthiness in the longevity of a client/buyer relationship, the understanding of this complex concept has to be deepened. This communication has tried to contribute to that objective. The analytical angle chosen – trustworthiness as a feeling – offers new and promising research perspectives. In fact, by considering trustworthiness as “a psychological state resembling a feeling of security vis-à-vis an exchange partner within a situation of risk”, we concentrated, in particular, on the concept’s affective aspect. On a theoretical level, this research presents a double advantage:

First, it proposes a valid and reliable measurement scale which completes the lack of research on the emotional dimension of trustworthiness, a dimension which tends to be recognized more and more. Secondly, the results obtained validate, in a French context, the theoretical approach of the separation of the three components of trust: cognitive, affective and conative, echoing recent research (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002; Johnson and Grayson, 2005).

In fact, structured by the perceptions of trustworthiness such as benevolence, honesty (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Ganesan, 1994; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Geyskens et al., 1998) and competence, trust – an emotional state – (Derbaix and Pham, 1989), is based, above all, on a flow of information from the environment and on the communication exchanges, direct or indirect, between the partners.

On the managerial level, the recognition of the importance of the irrational aspects in the formation and development of trust could lead certain purchasing directors to give more time and energy to the understanding and follow-up of their suppliers. From that moment on, the interface personnel, who are responsible for keeping the relational link alive, become crucial to maintaining this trust. The ultimate goal is to create tacit trust, the most stable and the most advanced form, whose corollary is to decrease the transaction and maintenance costs. This demands a reworking of the relationships between the purchasing and the sales directors by deepening the personal links in which communication would constitute an invaluable tool in animating the relationship. The proposed scale could be of great use to companies in evaluating the state of a relationship whenever necessary, as well as the link’s strength, and thus in anticipating the relation’s orientation.

This is all the more necessary as the cognitive “short-cuts” which avoid having to completely start the whole relational process again, are never eternal considering the perpetual changes which characterize the present environment. Consequently, is trust the price to pay in the permanent effort which a company must make in terms of communication, in a normal or a crisis situation, in order to preserve, maintain and develop a relationship?

8.2. The limits and paths of research

There are two types of limits which this communication give rise to: the first concerns the relatively static aspect of this study. As a matter of fact, not having a long enough period of time to do a longitudinal study, we were thus obliged to do it quickly, over a period “t”. We think that it would be interesting to test this model on different time periods which really correspond to the phases of the development of trust, that is to say, to follow the different stages in relationships of trust: the beginning, the evolution, the maintaining and even perhaps

the disappearance of this feeling (even if sometimes all trusting relationships do not follow this developmental process). Such a study would deepen the knowledge of the interactive nature of the relationships which the different forms of trust link.

The second limit concerns the gathering of information through the use of a questionnaire. In fact, taking into account only the respondents' answers by using a questionnaire to measure emotional and behavioural concepts, does not allow exploring in depth the sometimes invisible and not easily detectable emotional factors. It would therefore be interesting to do, for example, a comparison between trust and the investment in the relationship (by crossing the answers to the percentages of the investment made).

Appendix A. Measurement scales

PERCEPTIONS OF TRUSTWORTHINESS

BENEVOLENCE

BENE 1: This supplier is really concerned by what counts for us

BENE 2 : This supplier replies with understanding to our problems

BENE 3: Concerning the future, we can count on this supplier to be as concerned about our interests as his own

HONESTY

HON 3: This supplier usually keeps the promises he makes to us

HON 4: It is necessary to be careful with this supplier

HON 5: We can count on this supplier's sincerity

COMPETENCE

COMP 1: This supplier's does good work

COMP 2 : This supplier knows our sector well

COMP 3 : This supplier can adapt to special and unforeseeable situations

TRUST

TRUST 1: We feel safe with this supplier

TRUST 2 : We don't feel reassured when working with this Supplier

TRUST 3: Facing new and unforeseeable situations, we still feel safe with this supplier

TRUST 4 : Even if we have problems with this supplier, we still feel safe with this supplier

INVESTMENT IN THE RELATIONSHIP

INV 1: We have spent time and energy developing our relationship

INV 2 : We have made efforts because our relationship endures

INV 4: We invested in training our staff for this relationship

CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNICATION

COMC 1: We communicate informatiothis supplier that we don't want others to know

COMC 2 : We exchange information concerning our responsibilities (training programs, responsibilities and objectives) with this supplier
COMC 3 : We share confidential information with this supplier

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