

# What Do We Know About B2B Branding in Marketing Research? A Comprehensive Status Quo Analysis

*Competitive Paper*

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## ABSTRACT

While brand management has long been a central tenet of consumer marketing, its systematic use is less established in industrial markets (Leek & Christodoulides 2011; Kotler & Pfoertsch 2007). However, the increased competition in business markets – where service, reliability, and quality are now assumed minimum requirements rather than order-winning criteria – has recently led industrial firms to pay more attention to the branding concept (Humphreys & Williams 1996; Zablah, Brown & Donthu 2010). In a highly competitive business environment, business-to-business (B2B) marketers are forced to successfully differentiate themselves by systematically steering their brands (Bendixen, Bukasa & Abratt 2004). Consequently, the analysis and management of B2B brands is highly important for marketing research and marketing practice.

Although there is currently a trend towards status quo analysis within marketing research (e.g., the status quo analysis of buyer-seller negotiations (Herbst, Voeth & Meister 2011), of relationship marketing (Palmatier et al. 2006), and of customer satisfaction (Szymanski & Henard 2001)) in order to reveal which topics in the corresponding research area require deeper investigation, there is no study that provides a comprehensive overview of marketing studies with regard to B2B branding. Even the recent literature review provided by Leek and Christodoulides (2011) only focuses on selected issues in the B2B branding context.

Consequently, our study's main purpose is to provide an overview of the current status quo of B2B branding in marketing based on a broad literature review. In this context, we first conducted a quantitative analysis of extant literature on B2B branding within marketing. Specifically, we undertook a screening of all the top marketing journals to identify B2B branding-related articles. In a next step, we subjected the identified articles to qualitative

analyses. Furthermore, we conducted co-citation analyses to investigate whether the existing findings are built upon each other; that is, whether they refer to one another.

Our quantitative analysis revealed that there are only 98 articles deal with branding in the B2B context, representing only about 1% of all articles (around 9 825 articles) published in the most relevant (top) journals over the last 25 years. This number definitely does not reflect the actual significance of B2B branding in practice. Moreover, our qualitative analysis showed that some areas of B2B branding, such as building long-term buyer-seller relations by means of strong brands (e.g., Merz, Yi & Vargo 2009; Dahlstrom & Dato-on 2004), have been investigated much more thoroughly than other areas, such as brand emotions within buying centers (e.g., Lynch & de Chernatony 2004).

Overall, it can be argued that further research is still required on B2B branding, as important areas of branding, e.g., the construct of brand personality or B2B brands in the international context, have not yet been investigated in the B2B context. This lack of research makes it difficult for B2B marketers to optimize their brand management.

**Keywords:** *B2B Branding, Status Quo Analysis, quantitative literature overview, qualitative literature overview.*

## INTRODUCTION

The importance of business-to-business (B2B) brands has long been disregarded, both in theory and practice (Bendixen, Bukasa & Abratt 2004; Roberts & Merrilees 2007). However, due to the increasing competition in B2B markets – where service, reliability, and quality are now assumed minimum requirements rather than order-winning criteria (Humphreys & Williams 1996) – firms are now forced to strengthen their brands to create and maintain a competitive advantage (Beverland 2005; Keller 2009). Thus, brand management has become a central tenet in many B2B companies. Companies such as Boeing, Bosch, Caterpillar, Dell, IBM, and Intel are very good examples of how to generate successful B2B brands (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2007). Bosch, for example, is branded by values that symbolize its technological leadership, quality, durability, environmental responsibility, and product benefits. These values are summarized in its slogan: “invented for life.” Hence, Bosch has been very successful in differentiating itself from its competitors (Meier 2007). Similarly, Boeing was able to become the global leader in airplane manufacturing and space technology by constantly improving its brand management. Today, the Boeing brand is one of the company’s most valuable assets, with a globally recognizable brand logo, which includes its name in blue Stratotype letters. The Boeing brand is associated with a worldwide leadership that maintains knowledge, innovation, commitment, and services integration, not only through a well-established brand representing strength and quality but also through the integration of these values throughout the entire business process (Boeing 2012).

In line with the growing relevance of brands in B2B markets, research on B2B brands has steadily increased since the late 1990s. Whereas the increase in publications is strongly commendable, this also makes it difficult for researchers and practitioners to be aware of all the implications that can be drawn, as well as which topics still require investigation. While there is currently a trend towards status quo analysis within marketing research (e.g., the status quo analysis of buyer-seller negotiations (Herbst, Voeth & Meister 2011) as well as relationship marketing (Palmatier et al. 2006), no study has yet provided a comprehensive overview of marketing studies concerning B2B branding. While the recent literature review

by Leek and Christodoulides (2011) might be considered a first approach, it only focuses on selected issues in B2B branding.

Our study’s primary purpose is to provide an overview of the current status quo of B2B branding in marketing based on a broad literature review. We first conducted a quantitative analysis of extant literature on B2B branding within marketing. Specifically, we undertook a screening of all the relevant (top) marketing journals to identify B2B branding-related articles, and conducted a co-citation analysis to investigate whether or not the existing findings refer to one another. We then undertook a qualitative analysis of the relevant articles to ascertain which topics require deeper investigation. Within this analysis, we classified the articles into categories that we developed to this end: branding principle, brand management, the role of brands in organizational buying, brand performance, and brands as part aspects. Finally, we derived implications for both research and practice.

### STATUS QUO ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

Recognizing that B2B brands play a key role in industrial markets and have been analyzed fairly intensively over the past few years in marketing research, this paper seeks to provide an overview of the B2B branding research status quo. Because no such analysis has yet been conducted, we first screened a large amount of marketing literature for articles dealing with B2B brands in order to conduct a quantitative analysis. These articles were then subjected to a qualitative analysis.

We selected the most relevant journals with a clear reference to B2B and/or branding. Additionally, we included several highly ranked marketing journals that address general marketing issues. We chose the highly ranked journals as they are assumed to have a significant impact on marketing research and practice. We based our cutoff criteria on the journal quality list compiled by Harzing (2012). She quotes various rankings that have different quality levels. For simplicity, we used the VHB ranking as a basis for our journal selection. Simultaneously, we compared the quality grading of these journals with the other rankings, which indicated a similar quality level. In addition, we used the ranking of the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC 2010), as it implies a similar ranking system. Overall, our literature sample consists of 10 international (top) marketing journals. Our analysis considered journal articles mainly within the past 25 years. The reason for this is twofold: First, according to the literature, B2B branding started to attract researchers’ attention in the late 1990s (e.g., Sinclair & Seward 1988); second, by screening the relevant journals, we discovered that the first article on B2B branding was published by Sinclair and Seward in 1988. Therefore, we decided to concentrate our analysis only on the past 25 years. Table 1 presents an overview of our literature sample.

Table 1: Ranked journals included in the sample of our status quo analysis: 1986 to 2011

Journal	Period screened	VHB (ABDC)
Industrial Marketing Management (IMM)	1986 – 2011	C (A)
Journal of Business Research (JBR)	1986 – 2011	B (A)
Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing (JBIM)	1986 – 2011	C (B)
Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing (JBBM)	1992 – 2011*	C (B)

Journal of Product & Brand Management (JPBM)	1992 – 2011*	D (B)
International Journal of Research in Marketing (IJRM)	1986 – 2011	A (A+)
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (JAMS)	1986 – 2011	A (A+)
Journal of Marketing (JM)	1986 – 2011	A (A+)
Marketing Science (MS)	1986 – 2011	A+ (A+)
Marketing Letters (ML)	1989 – 2011**	A (A)

\* First published in 1992

\*\* First published in 1989

### QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

As noted, our first step was to conduct a quantitative analysis of the articles analyzing aspects of B2B branding. We were particularly interested in the total number of articles and the relative number of articles that have addressed various B2B branding topics within the past 25 years, in order to conclude this topic's relative research intensity. We also sought to identify the most relevant journals concerning B2B branding. We therefore examined the absolute and relative number of articles addressing B2B branding in each journal. Finally, we investigated the identified articles' co-citation rates in order to assess the most influential articles in the B2B branding area.

We first identified the total number of all published articles in the abovementioned journals within the corresponding period. We counted only the original research articles, thereby excluding editorials, errata, calls for papers, introductions to new sections or special issues, volume indexes, book reviews, commentaries, and any other publications without a certain research intention. Our counting yielded a total of 9 825 articles (see Table 2). Simultaneously, we screened the abovementioned journals for various articles on B2B branding by using keywords, such as B2B branding, industrial branding, buying center branding, and organizational branding. These keywords are necessary, because branding activities differ between B2B and consumer markets (Ballantyne & Aitken 2007). While B2B marketing addresses product sales between companies or retailers and companies, consumer markets sell their products to the last person in the value chain (e.g., Mentzer et al. 2001; Yan 2011).

Table 2: Total number of all articles and B2B branding-related articles within the screened journals

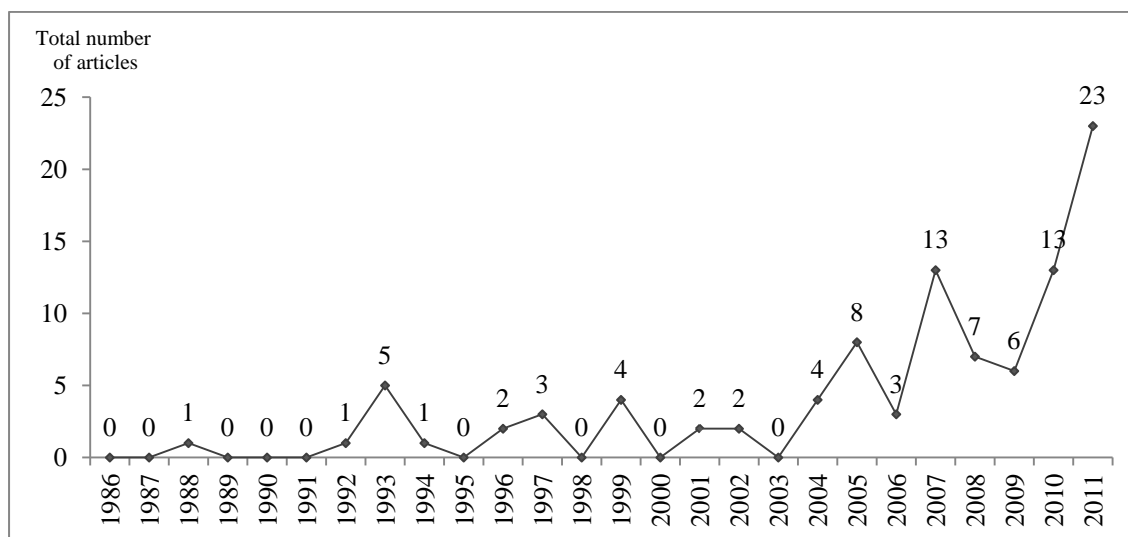
Journal	Total number of articles	Identified B2B branding-related articles
Industrial Marketing Management (IMM)	1 602	43
Journal of Business Research (JBR)	2 436	6
Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing (JBIM)	817	17
Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing (JBBM)	188	4

Journal of Product & Brand Management (JPBM)	722	13
International Journal of Research in Marketing (IJRM)	628	3
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (JAMS)	956	1
Journal of Marketing (JM)	932	8
Marketing Science (MS)	946	1
Marketing Letters (ML)	597	2

### ANALYSIS OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF B2B BRANDING ARTICLES

Based on the total number of 9 825 articles published in our journal sample over the past 25 years, we identified 98 articles addressing B2B branding. This represents a relative amount of 1% of all articles included in our analysis. Figure 1 provides an overview of the development of B2B branding publications within the abovementioned journals per year between 1986 and 2011. The large number of publications in 2007 and the noticeable increase in the B2B branding articles in 2010 are the results of special issues on B2B branding in the *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* (2007) and *Industrial Marketing Management* (2010; 2011).

Figure 1: Total number of articles on B2B branding published between 1986 and 2011



### ANALYSIS OF B2B BRANDING ARTICLES PER JOURNAL

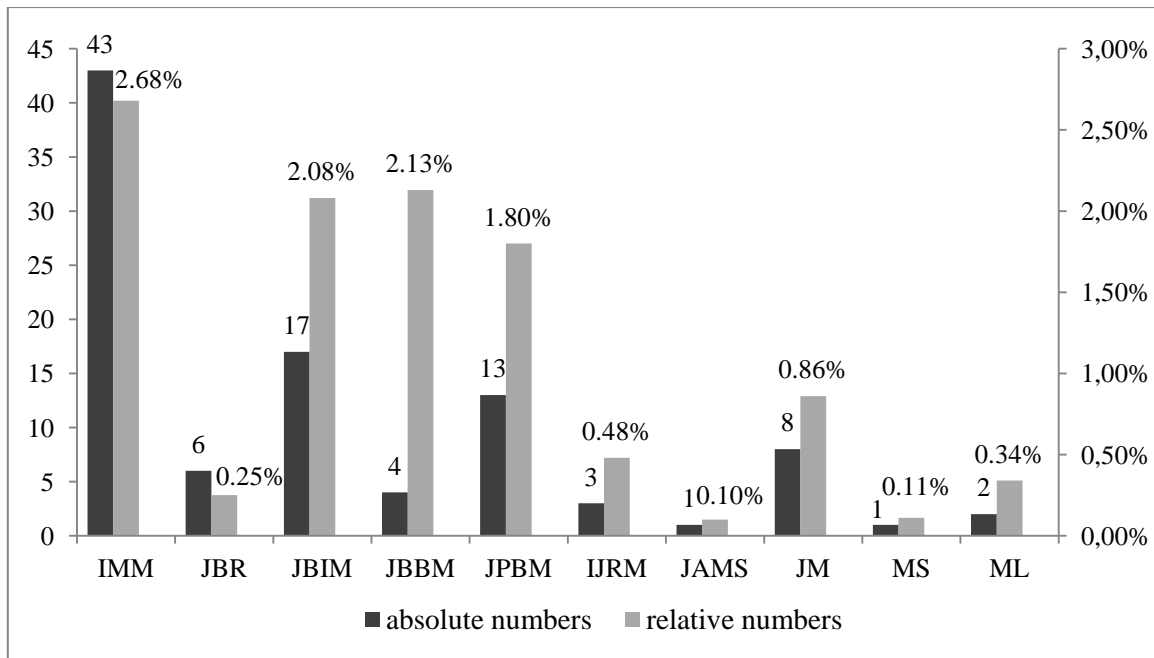
We are also interested in the relative amount of articles on B2B branding in each journal. This is noteworthy, because four of the journals included in our analysis specialize in B2B marketing research: *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of Business &*

*Industrial Marketing*, *Journal of Business Research*, and *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*. Thus, it can be assumed that these journals have a higher publication rate concerning B2B branding than more general marketing journals. As expected, our analysis reveals that the journal *Industrial Marketing Management* and the *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* published the majority of articles related to B2B branding, with 43 and 17 articles each (see Figure 2), which is partly due to both journals releasing a special issue on B2B branding. Furthermore, with 13 published articles, the *Journal of Product & Brand Management* revealed a strong interest in B2B branding, which is unusual because this journal does not have a B2B marketing focus; yet this is also unsurprising, because it focuses on brand management. All other journals published less than 10 articles in total over the past 25 years.

Whereas the absolute distribution of B2B branding-related articles across the journals is of particular interest, it must be considered with caution, because the total number of articles published varies between the journals. We therefore compared not only the absolute number of published articles, but also the relative amount of B2B branding-related articles published in each journal. In doing so, we identified a different ranking of interest in B2B branding. Again, *Industrial Marketing Management* published the most B2B branding articles, with a publication rate of 2.68% of all articles and 44% of all identified B2B branding-related articles published in it. As this journal also published the first article on B2B branding, written by Sinclair and Seward (1988), we rate *Industrial Marketing Management* the top journal in the B2B branding area. Even though only four B2B branding articles could be identified in the *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, it is ranked as the second best journal in the B2B branding area (2.13%; due to a total of 188 articles). Despite its special issue, the *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* is only ranked third, with a relative number of 2.08%, which is slightly higher than the *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, with 1.80% (ranked fourth).

Although the *Journal of Marketing* published eight articles, which is twice as many as the *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, this constitutes a relative number of only 0.86%. With only one article and a relative number of only 0.11%, the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* and *Marketing Science* is ranked the lowest. Given the importance of B2B branding, this shows that the top marketing journals lag behind, with only a very small relative number of B2B branding articles. Figure 2 provides a complete illustration of the total and relative numbers of articles per journal and the amount of B2B branding articles.

Figure 2: Absolute and relative numbers of relevant articles per journal



### CO-CITATION ANALYSIS OF IDENTIFIED B2B BRANDING ARTICLES

The last part of our quantitative analysis assesses the co-citation frequency in our identified sample, in order to assess the most influential B2B branding articles. Furthermore, a co-citation analysis renders insights into the amount of articles on B2B branding that build on each other.

In a first step, we analyzed the bibliography of each B2B branding article by screening it for any references to the other relevant 97 articles. In doing so, we developed a 98x98 matrix (see Appendix) similar to that of Backhaus, Lügger, and Koch (2011). Next, we calculated an index to show the co-citation density. This index is quoted by the ratio of the number of articles that indeed co-cite each other (414) and the total number of possible citation pairs (4 753). Our result revealed an index of 8.71% (= number of publication pairs that cite each other divided by the number of theoretically possible citation pairs), indicating a very low co-citation density (Backhaus, Lügger & Koch 2011).

We also determined the most frequently cross-cited articles. The article by Mudambi (2002) was the most cited article in our literature sample, with 35 co-citations (8.54% of all the co-cited articles). This is followed by Mudambi, Doyle, and Wong (1997) and Michell, King, and Reast (1993), both referred to 32 times (7.80% of all the co-cited articles). Table 3 provides an overview of the five most frequently cited articles. Interestingly, the first ever article on B2B branding – by Sinclair and Seward (1988) – received only a small amount of citations (9 co-citations exactly, which is 2.20% of all the co-cited articles); the reason for this is discussed in the qualitative analysis.

Table 3: Co-citation ranking of B2B branding articles

Ranking	Publication	Journal	Absolute (relative, %) number of co-
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			citations
1	Mudambi (2002)	Industrial Marketing Management	35 (8.45%)
2	Mudambi et al. (1997)	Industrial Marketing Management	32 (7.73%)
2	Michell, King & Reast (1993)	Industrial Marketing Management	32 (7.73%)
3	Bendixen, Bukasa & Abratt (2004)	Industrial Marketing Management	29 (7.00%)
4	Gordon, Calantone & di Benedetto (1993)	Journal of Product & Brand Management	28 (6.76%)
5	Hutton (1997)	Journal of Product & Brand Management	23 (5.56%)
6	Shipley & Howard (1993)	Industrial Marketing Management	19 (4.59%)
6	Van Riel et al. (2005)	Industrial Marketing Management	19 (4.59%)

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

### *General procedure*

As noted, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive status quo analysis of the existing body of B2B branding-related publications. We therefore thought it necessary to complement our quantitative analysis with a content analysis of all the identified B2B branding articles. We carefully read and analyzed all 98 articles. As we seek to provide some kind of B2B branding research map, we classified the identified B2B branding articles, according to their results, along a suitable categorization scheme. However, there is no standard schema for structuring articles within a certain research field (for different approaches, see: Palmatier et al. 2006; Herbst, Voeth & Meister 2011; Leek & Christodoulides 2011). Therefore, we needed to develop a suitable categorization scheme that is directed towards the specific peculiarities of B2B branding. We did so using an iterative process. First, we sought to identify categories that describe various specific research areas in B2B branding based on diverse B2B branding conceptualizations (e.g., Mudambi, Doyle & Wong 1997; Mudambi 2002; McQuinston 2004; Persson 2010). We then matched the identified articles to the categories. Then, we discussed and adapted the previously determined categories, so as to find classifications with great homogeneity of all the articles belonging to this category and great heterogeneity of the articles between the different categories. We came up with the following five categories: *branding principles* (investigating fundamental B2B branding matters), *brand management* (papers that analyze various levels of the branding process), *the role of brands in organizational buying* (the meaning of brands for sellers and buyers in B2B markets), *brand performance* (the factors that determine a brand's value and possible measuring approaches), and *brands as part aspects* (papers that investigate brand issues only indirectly). Within these categories, we – in turn – identified different subcategories, which we will discuss later. However, we do not go into detail about the last category, because the articles assigned to this category do not focus on B2B brands as a core aspect. Table 4 provides an overview of our complete categorization scheme.

Table 4: Classification of identified articles to each category



Category	Subcategory	Publication	Number of Publications within the cluster		
Branding Principles	Basics in B2B brand research	Leek & Christodoulides (2011) Merrilees, Rundle-Thiel & Lye (2011)	7		
	Benefits from B2B brands	McQuiston (2004) Kotler & Pfoertsch (2007)			
	B2B brand challenges	Low & Blois (2002) Blois (2004) Ballantyne & Aitken (2007)			
Brand Management	Brand development	Collins-Dodd, Zaichkowsky(1999) Cheng et al. (2005) Krake (2005) Morhart, Herzog & Tomczak (2009)	26		
	Brand strategies	Sinclair & Seward (1988) Alpert, Kamins & Graham (1992) Norris (1993) Shipley & Howard (1993) Ferne & Pierrel(1996) Rosenbröijer (2001) Dahlstrom & Conway Dato-on (2004) Bengtsson & Servais (2005) Erevelles et al. (2008) Brown, Sichtmann & Musante (2011) Burnaz & Bilgin (2011) Westberg, Stavros & Wilson (2011) Zachary et al. (2011)			
	Brand architecture	Karray & Zaccour (2006) Beverland, Napoli & Lindgreen (2007) Gomez-Arias & Bello-Acebron (2008) Damoiseau, Black & Raggio (2011) Sheikh & Lim (2011) Vallaster & Lindgreen (2011)			
	Brand conceptualization approaches	Beverland, Napoli & Yakimova (2007) Coleman, de Chernatony & Christodoulides (2011) Herbst & Merz (2011)			
	The role of brands in organizational buying	Brands as relationship builders		Panigyrakis & Veloutsou (1999) Andersen (2005) Blombäck & Axelsson (2007) Cretu & Brodie (2007) Glynn, Motion & Brodie (2007) Morgan, Deeter-Schmelz & Moberg. (2007) Campbell et al. (2010) Glynn (2010) Mäläskä, Saraniemi & Tähtinen (2011)	31
		The role of brands in decision-making processes		Selnes(1993) Yoon & Kijewski (1996) Hutton (1997) Bennett, Härtel & McColl-Kennedy (2005) Roberts & Merrilees (2007) Russell-Bennett, McColl-Kennedy &Coote (2007) Walley et al. (2007) Han & Sung (2008) Koll & von Wallpach (2009) Gupta, Melewar & Bourlakis (2010) Homburg, Klarmann &Schmitt (2010) Persson (2010) Brown et al. (2011) Kenning et al. (2011) Leischnig & Enke (2011) Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides (2011)	
		Brand relevance in different purchase situations		Fein &Anderson (1997) Mudambi (2002) Zablah, Brwon & Donthu (2010) Hughes & Ahearne (2010) Backhaus, Steiner & Lügger (2011) Yan (2011)	

Brand performance	Performance drivers	Gordon, Calantone, & diBenedetto (1993) Mudambi, Doyle & Wong (1997) Kim et al.(1999) Bendixen, Bukasa & Abratt (2004) Wong & Merrilees (2005) Weerawardena, O’Cass & Julian (2006) Bahadir, Bharadwaj & Srivastava (2008) Lee et al. (2008) Bogomolova & Romaniuk (2009) Lambkin & Muzellec (2010) O’Cass & Weerawardena (2010) Baumgarth & Binckebanck (2011) Biedenbach, Bengtsson & Wincent (2011) Chen, Su & Lin (2011) Nyadzayo, Matanda & Ewing (2011)	27
	Brand measurement	Simon & Sullivan (1993) Michell, King & Reast (2001) Van Riel, Pahud de Mortanges & Streukens (2005) Seggie, Kim & Cavusgil (2006) Davis, Golicic &Marquardt (2008) Kim & Cavusgil (2009) Mizik & Jacobson (2009) Baumgarth &Schmidt (2010) Bogomolova &Romaniuk (2010) Wang (2010) Zaichkowsk, Parlee &Hill (2010) Kim & Hyun (2011)	
Brand as part aspects		Starr & Bloom (1994) Capron & Hulland (1999) Hellman (2005) Jensen & Jepsen (2007) Seggie, Cavusgil & Phelan (2007) Nath & Mahajan (2008) Lim &Tan (2009)	7

### *Branding principles*

Within the category branding principles, dealing with fundamental issues of B2B branding, we identified three sub-categories: basics in B2B brand research (e.g., Merrilees, Rundle-Thiel & Lye 2011), general benefits from B2B brands (e.g., McQuinston 2004), and B2B brand challenges (e.g., Ballantyne & Aitken 2007). Merrilees, Rundle-Thiel, and Lye (2011), for example, found innovation and branding to be the key capabilities that determine marketing performance. However, their study focuses only on small and medium-sized companies. Different marketing performance factors might be crucial for large companies. Furthermore, the authors admit that the separation of their sample according to various demographics resulted in a small sub-sample for some demographic factors. As no other studies build upon these authors’ idea, there is further potential for research. Moreover, we found two articles investigating whether branding industrial products really benefits companies. Both McQuinston (2004) as well as Kotler and Pfoertsch (2007) conclude that, in general, brands are potential differentiators, and that companies are able to create competitive advantages by building strong brands. However, while Kotler and Pfoertsch (2007) base their conclusion on theoretical insights, McQuinston (2004) derives his results from sales differences that could be observed within a certain steel company. In this manner, an empirical study is necessary to prove these authors’ claims. Moreover, the degree of success of branding industrial products might vary between different industries. This has not yet been considered in the literature. Finally, only three publications address brand-related barriers, which should be considered during the branding process. The most important insight of these studies is that brands should be managed with care as, for example, generic brands indicate a high potential for product piracy (Low & Blois 2002). Once again, this claim is based on theory rather than an empirical assessment. Therefore, further research on this topic is necessary to consolidate these findings.

## *Brand management*

The second category – *brand management* – comprises articles that focus on brand development (e.g., Collins-Dodd & Zaichkowsky 1999), brand strategies (e.g., Westberg, Stavros & Wilson 2011), brand architecture (e.g., Vallaster & Lindgreen 2011), and brand conceptualization approaches (e.g., Coleman, de Chernatony & Christodoulides 2011). Concerning brand development, Morhart, Herzog, and Tomczak (2009), for example, investigate the internal perspective of B2B brand development, i.e. how managers can help employees to adopt brand-building behavior. Even though their results show that compliance generates an influence by brand-specific transactional leaders on followers, their sample is limited to frontline employees, possibly implying common method variances. Other researchers investigated the brand development process within SMEs (Krake 2005) or in the international context (Cheng et al. 2005). Even though these studies provide meaningful insights, they only assess a few relevant determinants. Most brand management publications address brand strategies, such as co-branding, ingredient branding or brand extensions. For example, Bengtsson and Servais (2005) investigate stronger brands' motivation to cooperate with weaker brands. They find that only the weaker brand benefits from this kind of cooperation. However, their analysis is only applicable in the short-run. In the long-run, the cooperation might harm one of the parties or even both. On the contrary, Erevelles et al. (2008) report a win-win situation for both cooperating parties. However, they only focus on analyzing the cooperation between manufacturers and suppliers with similar market power and brand strength. In reality, suppliers and manufacturers usually imply different market power and brand strengths. Other effects might occur in this situation. All in all, articles that deal with brand strategies should be analyzed empirically as most of them establish models based on theory alone. Moreover, further variables, such as the firm size, as well as moderating and mediating variables that have not yet been considered, should be included in future (empirical) research. Similarly, it is not clear whether the results are applicable to all countries or industries, since previous studies are based on only a certain country or a specific industry. Cultural differences should be taken into account when generalizing the results. There have been only few articles on brand architecture. While Sheikh and Lim (2011) discover a conflict between engineering consultants' identity and the corporate brand, Beverland, Napoli, and Lindgreen (2007) assess the design of global brands. They conclude that companies should adapt their brand to satisfy their heterogeneous customers. Once again, the generalization problem due to cultural differences and industry-specific characteristics occurs. Similarly, only three studies on brand conceptualization approaches were identified, of which two focus on brand identity (Beverland, Napoli & Yakimova 2007; Coleman, de Chernatony & Christodoulides 2011), while one investigates brand personality (Herbst & Merz 2011). Beverland, Napoli, and Yakimova (2007), for example, find several key factors that improve a brand's image: products, services, logistics, adaptation, and advice. In contrast, Coleman, de Chernatony, and Christodoulides (2011) identify the following key dimensions: employee and client focus, visual identity, brand personality, consistent communications, and human resource initiatives. However, other determinants, such as the organizational structure, system, and skills might impact the brand identity and thus constitute potential for further research. Herbst and Merz (2011) take a different approach and, contrary to the brand personality scale developed by Aaker (1997), introduce a newly developed brand personality scale and identify three brand factors: performance, sensation, and authenticity. However, as this article is the only one that engages in a brand personality investigation of the developed brand personality scale from different perspectives and using different methods, for example, multidimensional scaling is necessary.

## *The role of brands in organizational buying*

Articles assigned to the category the role of brands in organizational buying discuss brands as relationship builders (e.g., Campbell et al. 2010), the role of brands in decision-making processes (e.g., Leischnig & Enke 2011), and the relevance of brands in different purchase situations (e.g., Mudambi 2002). Within the sub-category brands as relationship builders, for example, Glynn (2010) discovers that brand strength determines the manufacturer-reseller relationship, and that minor brands rather than major brands increase the trust and loyalty between these two parties. This was also claimed by Glyn, Motion, and Brodie (2007), who proposed a conceptual framework without testing it empirically. However, situations such as modified rebuying were not part of these studies and are worth analyzing. Furthermore, as noted by Glyn, Motion, and Brodie (2007), depending on the type of products, for example computer equipment, software or office supplies, different brand strengths are prevalent, which might imply other results. With regard to brand image Morgan, Deeter-Schmelz, and Moberg (2007) propose post-sales business services to be essential in establishing brand image or brand equity. They developed a structural model which has not yet been tested. Two other articles addressed how a brand's image influences the relationship. In this context, Cretu and Brodie (2007) discovered that brand image has an impact on customers' product and service perception, implying a higher loyalty, while Blombäck and Axelsson (2007) indicate that corporate brand image is important for the relationship between buyer and subcontractor. However, neither study takes all the relevant determinants into consideration, which might be for example different purchase situations, product quality or purchase importance. Finally, Anderson (2005) makes the first approach in assessing the impact of the internet on buyer-seller relationships. They found the internet to be very important for initiating and sustaining buyer-seller relationships, but simultaneously request further research to confirm their findings. This is not surprising since social media plays a considerable role in today's world. This was extensively analyzed in the B2C context but is still lacking in B2B markets research. The role of brands in the decision-making process was empirically analyzed by Leischnig and Enke (2011), who identify a brand's potential to reduce risk as dependent on the extent of brand strength. However, their study was based on data from the food industry alone. Similarly, Walley et al. (2007) established the importance of brands, but only in the UK tractor market. Furthermore, the literature suggests a stronger role of emotions in organizational buying situations (Jensen & Jepsen 2007). Against this background, several researchers approached the emotional influence. Koll and van Wallpach (2009), for example, found out that a higher brand response intensity implies more favorable brand associations and a higher brand awareness. In this context, other types of brand behavior might be interesting, for example the amount spent on the brand or the willingness to pay for the brand, as mentioned by the authors. Finally, in the sub-category brand relevance in different purchase situations, Mudambi (2002) highlights that brands' influence might vary between different purchase situations as well as in relation to the role of a buying center member. This supports the statement that a differentiation of purchase situations is worth further analysis. The same applies to Zablah, Brown, and Donthu (2010), who investigate various determinants of brand importance, and yet do not include all of them. Backhaus, Steiner, and Lügger (2011) revive the research on brand importance with other determinants and across specific brand categories. Even though almost all of their variables had a significant impact on brand relevance, they questioned only one key informant. Furthermore, as buying centers imply people with different functional backgrounds, it might be interesting if the brand investigated is equally relevant to all members.

### *Brand performance*

Next, we analyzed the category brand performance, which consists of brand performance drivers (Weerawardena, O'Cass & Julian 2006) and brand performance

measurement (e.g., Baumgarth & Schmidt 2010). Within the studies focusing on brand performance drivers, the market process (i.e. a manager's perception of environmental changes) and a well-organized brand management system were found to be potential brand performance enhancement factors (e.g., Lee et al. 2008; O'Cass & Weerawardena 2010). An industry-specific analysis was not possible in these studies due to a small sample size. Therefore – as mentioned before – further comprehensive analyses in various industries and countries are needed. Moreover, Kim et al. (1999) built a framework on how to investigate the impact of various sales variables (e.g., price, service level) on brand equity. To derive more concrete managerial implications, Kim et al. (1999) also included the moderating impact of buying company variables (e.g., buying decision type) and environmental variables (e.g., competitive intensity and environmental uncertainty). Even though, their model might be meaningful, they did not test it empirically. As researchers include different variables in their models, it is not surprising that the publications addressing brand measurement approaches could neither determine a standard definition of the term B2B brand value, nor could a method be developed to correctly measure a brand's value (Kim & Cavusgil 2009). Furthermore, there have been many research attempts to measure brand equity, i.e. the financial and marketing-related (non-financial) approach (e.g., Kim et al. 1999; Simon & Sullivan 1993). Van Riel, Mortanges, and Streukens (2005), for example, divide brand equity into product brand equity and corporate brand equity. They assume that overall satisfaction, a higher perceived value for money, and perceived product quality have a positive effect on a product's brand equity, while service quality, better information, and skilled employees impact corporate brand equity. They find that a corporate brand is more important than an individual product brand and has a stronger impact on brand loyalty. On the contrary, Bendixen, Bukasa, and Abratt (2004) assign – based on their results – a minor relevance to brands in decision-making situations, while asserting that price, delivery time, and technological innovations have a greater impact during decision-making. Mostly, researchers base their study – similarly to consumer markets – on the determinants developed by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), such as brand awareness, loyalty, and brand image (Michell, King & Reast 2001; Davis, Golicic & Marquardt 2008; Kim & Hyun 2011), which constitutes the marketing-related approach. The reason for this might be that the financial approach is more relevant for assessing the brand value of mergers and acquisitions and less suitable for estimating the marketing-related brand equity (Kim et al. 1999). However, the financial approach seems to be equally relevant in B2B markets and thus should be further investigated.

### *General findings*

Overall, we noticed a shift in brand perceptions within industrial markets. While brands were seen to play a minor role in industrial markets, they are now considered a company's most valuable asset (Davis, Golicic & Marquardt 2008). This becomes clear when comparing articles from different periods. For example, Sinclair and Seward (1988) report evidence that brands play a minor role in industrial markets, whereas price and swift supply are the most important differentiation factors. Six years later, Shipley and Howard (1993) notice that a huge amount of brands in industrial markets serve as a differentiator in this competitive environment; however, this result was more applicable to large companies than small businesses. Several years later, Mudambi (2002) states that brands are important, being the key aspect in industrial decision-making, but that the degree of importance varies between industries and in relation to the functional backgrounds of buying center members. Furthermore, researchers find that industrial buyers do not buy only according to rational criteria; instead, their purchase decisions are informed by emotions (Lynch & de Chernatony 2004). This is mostly because customers no longer buy only products; instead, they buy a

whole problem solution package that includes service experiences, referred to as the service-dominant logic of marketing (Merz, He & Vargo 2009).

## DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to provide a comprehensive overview of the current status quo of B2B branding in marketing. Our quantitative analysis shows an increasing interest in this research area, seemingly a result of the growing importance of B2B branding in practice. Owing to the highest relative number of articles on B2B branding and the first article published on this topic, we rate *Industrial Marketing Management* as the top B2B branding journal. Despite increasing research interest in B2B branding, only few articles related to B2B branding have been published thus far. The reason for this is that, on the one hand, the number of researchers in the area of B2b branding is still on the rise. On the other hand, journals, such as the top marketing journals (i.e. *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of the Academy Marketing Science*, *Marketing Science*) that include very few B2B branding articles should become more open-minded towards B2B branding as these journals primarily entail B2C marketing articles. During our qualitative analysis, we classified the relevant articles into the following categories and sub-categories, which we developed for this purpose: branding principles, brand management, the role of brands in organizational buying, brand performance, and brands as part aspects. Concerning these categories, we propose an agenda for further research.

Interestingly, few articles address *branding principles*, while more specialized topics draw more research interest. However, especially because the branding principles area is important to industrial companies that begin to engage in branding, more research in this category would be desirable. For example, further research is needed to investigate the determinants of a successful implementation of B2B brands. Furthermore, the question of whether B2B brands are equally important across different industries remains to be answered. Future research should also investigate the distinct relevance of B2B brands in different B2B market sectors.

Despite the relatively large number of articles within the *brand management* category (26 publications in total), our overview reveals that deeper analyses of the interdependencies among the sub-categories as well as the articles' analyzed aspects are necessary. Also, there are other topics that have not yet been considered at all. For example, the relevant literature does not address the extent to which organizational systems or the company structure impacts a brand's image. Furthermore, as industrial companies, similar to consumer markets, begin to implement different brands within their brand portfolio, these brand portfolios' impact on the company's performance should be assessed. Furthermore, given that industrial buying is a complex process, where buying center members with different functional backgrounds must come to a joint purchase decision, it is important to know how the brand values should be defined to attract most buying center members. In this context, the question of brand personality requires further research if one is to be able to provide in-depth advice.

Our third category – *the role of brands in organizational buying* – is the most investigated B2B branding research area in terms of our categorization scheme, with 31 publications. Although this category does provide valuable insights, there is still potential for further research here. Russel-Bennett, McColl-Kennedy, and Coote (2007), for example,

analyzed the impact of satisfaction and involvement on brand loyalty. Their results reveal strong emotional influences in organizational buying. However, this is contrary to the general assumption that organizational buyers make rational purchase decisions. Further research can shed light on this by investigating the role of emotions in organizational buying. Furthermore, neither the impact of all relevant stakeholders on a brand strategy, nor how a B2B brand influences purchase decisions in uncertain situations has yet been analyzed.

In a similar vein, several publications fall into the category *brand performance*, which addresses brand value drivers and brand value measurements. However, because brand value is an ambiguous concept, it is not clear what determinants affect a brand's performance and in what way they influence the brand. Furthermore, a proper measurement model must be developed to evaluate a brand's performance, because the attempts in the articles we identified do not agree on what determinants are suitable to assess brand value, especially in the context of B2B markets.

Overall, our literature analysis reveals that most articles related to B2B branding only provide first conceptual and / or empirical insights, without verification in or expansion to different contexts. In particular, the international context of B2B branding is still lacking. This is, however, very important, since companies are operating internationally and thus have to be aware of any cultural differences. Moreover, several topics require a more industry-specific focus while additional studies should be carried out from a more general perspective. As a result, a deeper analysis of B2B branding as a whole seems to be necessary.

Whereas our research map provides concrete implications for further research in B2B branding, our study also contains some caveats: First, we only developed one possible categorization scheme. Another categorizing schema of the identified B2B branding articles could provide different insights into research interests and interdependencies in this area. Furthermore, even though we could identify 98 different articles, we do not claim to be complete in this regard. Further research could thus investigate B2B branding efforts in other journals, including non-English journals. Finally and generally, a standardized procedure or at least an indication of how articles should be structured in the context of a status quo analysis is needed to support further attempts at status quo analyses. Such literature overviews are necessary, because they enrich this important new area both in theory and practice, and can reveal under-researched topics.





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