# Effects of Suppliers' Branding on the Decision-Making Process of Small Companies in Brazil

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# Abstract

**Purpose**

This thesis aims to investigate the gap in the current literature targeting how small companies in Brazil with one level of decision-making are influenced by their suppliers' branding. This topic is important as over the last decade the transactions in B2B and the Brazilian market are increasing making it an interesting target for local and international companies. Nevertheless, the limited information available complicates this endeavor. Therefore, the purpose of this work is to compare the current theories to this market and generate knowledge and recommendations for companies aiming to target that niche. By doing that time and risk can be reduced and the learning curve can be smoother for these suppliers.

**Method**

This thesis is based on a qualitative research method that seeks to inspect the small Brazilian companies' decision-making process and its relation to their suppliers' branding. The semi-structured interview method was utilized to collect the data according to the designed interview guide. Ten companies were interviewed to investigate their experiences concerning their suppliers' branding and how this is associated with their decision-making process. After the data was collected it was examined using the theme analysis. The analysis exposed matches and discordances with the proposed theories and also generated a set of recommendations to help companies that are willing to explore this market.

**Results**

The analysis revealed that a supplier's branding does play a role in the decision-making process of small companies in Brazil. The Relationship aspect tends to be critical and there is a degree of loyalty, on the other hand, companies are still flexible to change suppliers. Quality of the product and easy payment methods are key aspects during the selection and interaction with a supplier. There seems also to be a tendency to an increase in online encounters and a reduction in the importance of in-person interaction. There is also a proneness of the use of social media channels and online searches for gathering information in the B2B sector.

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# 1. Introduction and Problem Formulation

Today the Business to Business (B2B) market is over five times more valuable than the Business to Consumer (B2C) one (Statista, 2021). Despite representing a big part of the world's type of consumption, the B2B market has not been studied as much as B2C (Cortez and Johnston, 2017, p. 90). Scholars also outline that the academic inquiry on the B2B branding is fragmented, limited, unsettled, and concentrates mostly on the capacity of big companies disregarding the small ones. Simultaneously, the B2B branding body of research adopts a limited and myopic view of this concept compared to the B2C one which has embraced a multidimensional perspective (Leek & Christodoulides, 2012, p. 835).

Thus, taking into consideration the gap in the research literature related to B2B and the untapped potential of emerging markets, it was decided to closer investigate this area. Brazil was chosen as the emerging market around which the study is going to be conducted. Being the largest country in South America (Statista, 2019) and the 12th largest economy in the world (Investopedia, 2022), it promises exceptional opportunities to companies considering expanding to this part of the world. Also, using metrics that included sales volume, number, and size of transactions of Brazil was appointed the 9th country with the largest new business formation growth in 2020 by Dwyer (2021). This leads to the idea that Brazil is also a country with substantial growth in small firms in recent years. As follows, becoming an interesting market for both academic research and businesses expanding to Brazil and willing to sell and partner with other businesses from this country.

However, seen from the perspective of companies positioned in the mind of the decision-makers in these small Brazilian firms, they might hold certain difficulties and dilemmas. Especially from the consideration that even though these are businesses, if they have a small number of employees and one level of the decision-making process their branding might resemble B2C more than B2B. The academic research does not intensively target this issue, thus there is limited information in that regard, if more data and guidance are created that can influence the way companies may approach the branding strategy and may contribute to the increase of their success overall. Therefore, we aim to generate new, empirically-based knowledge that can push forward the academic and the business world and will additionally guide companies targeting the Brazilian

market. For this purpose, our main focus will be on branding and its influence on decision-making in small B2B companies in Brazil as this knowledge is key to the success of the sellers. The decision-making factor was especially taken into consideration since in order to comprehend the methods of successful branding implementation, it is necessary to understand the structure of the decision-making process and evaluation criteria for making a purchase (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011, p. 831).

Based on the above reflections, the thesis will address the following problem formulation:

*How important are the branding efforts of a selling company in B2B when the buyer is a Brazilian small company with one level of decision-making?*

Three sub-questions will guide the study:

- What branding efforts influence the choice of a certain product or service?

- What promotional efforts work in the case of a small B2B company?

- How does the decision-making work in small companies made of one employee or one decision-making level?

# 2. Literature Review

The literature review seeks to provide insights into the existing academic literature on branding, especially the concepts emphasized by scholars in order to describe a brand. Moreover, it consists of an overview of the history of branding, followed by the theoretical insights of branding in B2B and a general picture of Brand Equity Models existing in the body of research. Additionally, it gives a glimpse into the theoretical frameworks behind the brand culture ideas. Overall, this section represents a preliminary step in the coming chapter presenting the theoretical framework utilized to analyze the gathered data to answer the research question.

## 2.1 Historical Overview of Branding

Exploring the history of branding concepts, Bastos and Levy (2012, p. 349) write that the origin of all branding activities is the human aspiration to become something of significance, generate an identity, introduce itself as alike or different from others, and own a good reputation. Stern (2006, as cited in Bastos and Levy, 2012) indicates that the term 'brand' launched into the world in 1922, as part of a complex expression denoting a trade or a possession name. Butler (1914, as cited in Bastos and Levy, 2012) was viewing branding as the root of the conflict between manufacturers, distributors, and retailers rivaling to become the dominant brand of customers' choice.

Another early research work on branding conducted by Cherington (1920) regarded branding as an ascending phenomenon realized by both sales representatives and advertising referring to it as assertive sales tactics (p. 150, as cited by Bastos and Levy, 2012). However, the scholar admitted the critical role of advertising and the usage of labels or trademarks and regard quality as a fundamental attribute of branding (Bastos and Levy, 2012, p. 353).

Within the second half of the twentieth century, the perception of branding advanced and expanded from both an applicative and thinking perspective (Bastos and Levy, 2012, p. 357). Meenaghan (1995, p. 27, as cited in Bastos and Levy, 2012) suggests that to an emotional and symbolistic degree, one of the main roles of advertising is to reach a certain character for a brand in the perception of its market. This is accomplished by imbuing the brand with certain values and

associations of both functional and symbolic meaning. Nevertheless, the concept of branding and allied ideas were eventually stimulated by the writings of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). These scholars centered their work on brand equity and brand strategy management (Bastos and Levy, 2012, p. 357).

## 2.2 Branding

Branding is associated, by a lot of people, with multinational corporations, while many brands exist with or without a competitive marketplace (Davis, 2005, p. 26). The brands assist us in the selection process of products or services, especially in today's world, with increased choices difficult to differentiate and evaluate (Davis, 2005, p. 26). Therefore, a classic definition of a brand is "the name, associated with one or more items in the product line, that is used to identify the source of the character of the item(s)" (Kotler, 2000, p. 396, as cited in Guzman, 2005, p. 1). Simultaneously, Keller (2003) states in technical terms that a brand is created whenever there appears a new name, logo, or symbol for a certain product (p. 3, as cited in Guzman, 2005, p. 1). However, the scholar admits that brands have evolved beyond this (Guzman, 2005, p. 1). Other researchers advocate that for a long time, branding has been utilized as a part of the product (Urde 1999, p. 119, as cited in Guzman, 2005, p. 1), while the communication strategy functioned to expose the brand and construct a brand image (Kotler, 2000, as cited in Guzman, 2005, p. 1). Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000, as cited in Guzman, 2005, p. 1) state that for the traditional branding model the aim was to build a brand image which was seen as a strategic tactic to drive quick sales. At the same time, other scholars indicate that a brand is an external sign that has the purpose of showing hidden qualities of a brand that are unavailable for contact (Kapferer, 1997, p. 28, as cited in Guzman, 2005, p. 1).

## 2.2.1 Branding in B2B

Analyzing the role of branding for B2B companies, scholars come to different outcomes. Some researchers view branding as an irrelevant attribute in the B2B context (Robinson et al. 1967, as cited in Leek & Christodoulides, 2012, p. 830), while others claim that branding actually carries some intangible advantages. Scholars outline that brands are capable of impacting customers' behavior and purchasing decisions (Keller, 2013, p. 35). Branding can grow the buyer's assurance in their choice (Michell et al 2001, Low et al 2002 as cited in Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). At the same time, good branding can reduce the degree of perceived risk and confusion when making a purchase (Mudambi 2002, Bengtson et al 2005, Ohnemus 2009, as cited in Leek & Christodoulides, 2012).

Business marketers have also been considering branding as mostly unimportant for the business to the business area. Due to the fact that brands are usually associated with the emotional side, they have been viewed as irrelevant in a process that is traditionally considered a rational one like the decision-making procedure in a company (Robinson, Faris, & Wind, 1967 as cited in Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). Simultaneously, some firms hold the belief that buyers of their products are well-informed enough and professional that brands have no importance (Keller, 2013, p. 38). The prevailing research work focuses mainly on branding for big enterprises and lacks data concerning small companies (Odoom et al., 2017, as cited in Leek & Christodoulides, 2012).

## 2.2.2 Brand Equity

In his book, 'Managing Brand Equity', Aaker (1991, p. 26-27) stresses the importance of brand-building activities and brands possessing specific assets characterizing them which he places under the umbrella of brand equity. In Aaker's (1991, p. 27) perception brand equity concept can be underlined by five categories named brand loyalty, awareness, perceived quality, brand associations additionally to perceived quality, and other proprietary brand assets such as channel relationships, trademarks, and patents.

Keller (1993), on the other side, developed a brand equity conceptual model from the position of an individual customer. The customer-based brand equity framework has at its base the notion of

knowledge. While brand knowledge holds other sub-dimensions called brand awareness and brand image (Keller, 1993). Through awareness, the scholar distinguishes brand recall and brand recognition. While the brand image is described as having four categories named types of brand associations, favorability of brand associations, the strength of brand associations, and uniqueness of brand associations. Nevertheless, Keller (1993) focuses mostly on types of brand associations categorizing them in attributes, benefits, and attitudes. Through attributes, the scholar views the non-product related and product-related ones. Sequentially, non-product-related attributes are categorized as price, packaging, user image, and user imaginary. Going back to the benefits part of the framework, Keller (1993) classified it into functional, experiential, and symbolic brand benefits.

**FIGURE 1**
**Dimensions of Brand Knowledge**
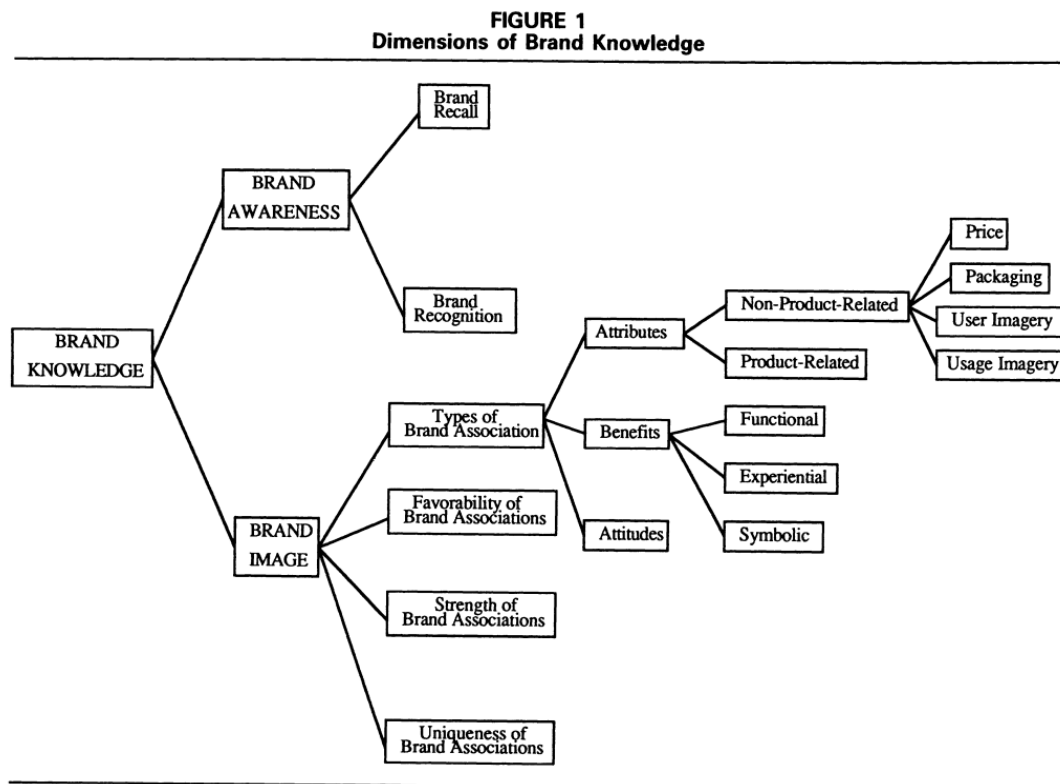


*Figure 1 (Keller, 1993, p. 7).*

Other scholars Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) analyzed the brand equity concept from a Business-to-Business perspective taking Keller's model as a base. Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) created a pyramid made up of six brand-building blocks and four steps following them. The blocks are

named "[...] brand salience, brand performance, brand imagery, customer judgments, customer emotions, and brand resonance" (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 167) while the steps bringing the brand through each step to the top are brand awareness, points of difference, positive reactions and loyalty (p. 167).
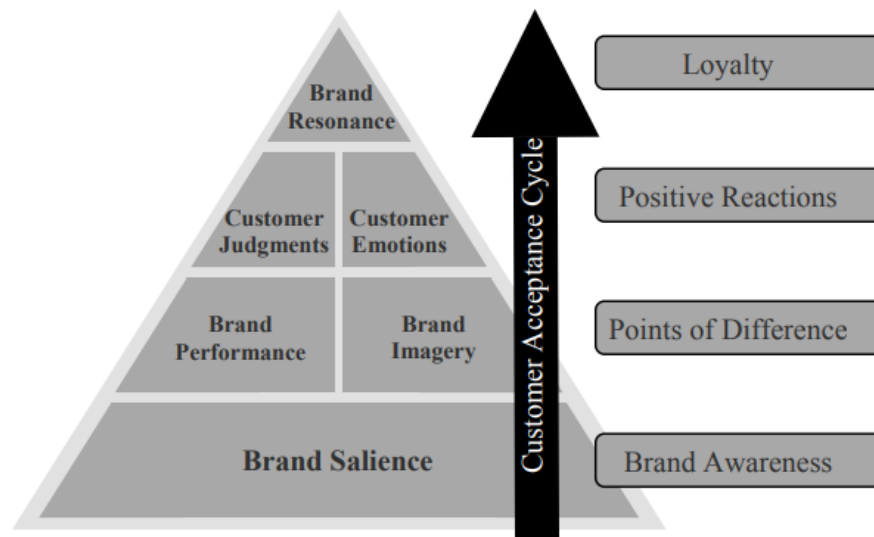
**Fig. 42.** Customer-based brand equity pyramid (CBBE model)

*Figure 2 ( Kotler, 2006, p. 167).*

In another study, Leek and Christodoulides (2012) interrogated B2B managers to create a framework focused on brand value in Business to Business relationships. Thus, this framework divides brand value into functional and emotional qualities. It supports the idea that the functional values of a brand are provided by the product's quality, technology, capacity, infrastructure, after-sales service, capabilities, reliability, innovation, and price. At the same time, the emotional brand value is supported by the risk reduction factors, reassurance, trust, and credibility. In their framework, Leek and Christodoulides (2012) indicate that the functional brand values in B2B are triggered by environmental factors such as economic situation (recession) or the market situation (competition). Simultaneously, the emotional brand values are generated by situational factors like

the type of product (commodity) or criticality of purchase (Leek and Christodoulides, 2012, p. 112).
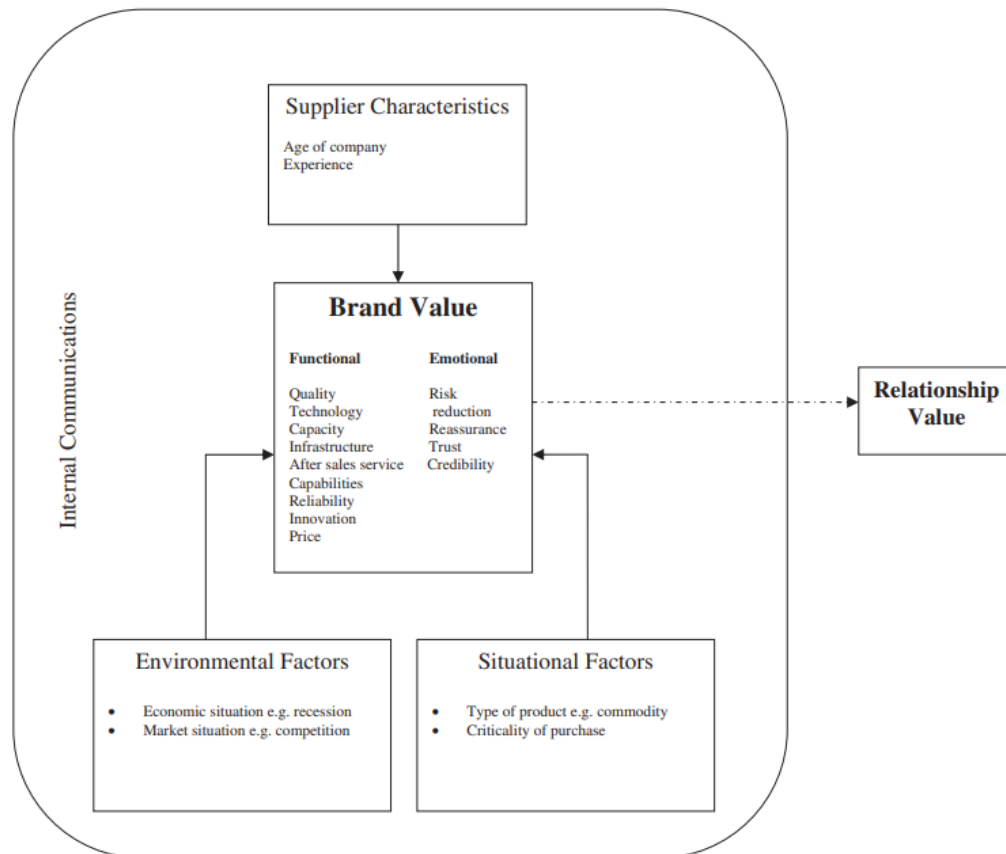


**Fig. 2.** The B2B brand value framework.

*Figure 3 (Leek and Christodoulides, 2012, p. 112).*

## 2.3 Branding and Culture

The brand culture concept described below gives a glimpse of how branding can overall influence the surroundings of its presence. However, these models do not hold accountability for quantifying and evaluating the level of occurring changes.

Branding is part of a culture and therefore views brand from the regard of "[...] how branding has opened up to include cultural, sociological, and theoretical inquiry that both complements and complicates the economic and managerial analysis of branding" (Schroeder, 2008; Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling, 2006, as cited in Schroeder, 2009, p. 123-124). Thus, anthropologists, historians, and sociologists regard brands from a cultural view, highlighting the significant role held by brands in society and offering a needing complement to the managerial and psychological perspective of branding (Bently et al., 2008; Koehn, 2001; Lury, 2004, as cited in Schroeder, 2009, p. 124). Brand culture emphasizes the brands' representational and rhetorical power simultaneously as cultural entities and as carriers of meaning mirroring wide cultural, societal, and ideological codes (Askegaard, 2006; Cayla and Eckhardt, 2008; Lury, 2004, as cited in Schroeder, 2009, p. 124). Thus, since we exist in a branding world, brands fill cultures with meaning, and branding influences a deep level the modern society (Schroeder, 2009, p. 124).

Also, scholars claim that brand culture represents the third dimension for brand research along with the classical areas such as brand identity and brand image and that all three together provide the needed historical, cultural, and political base to comprehend brands in context (Schroeder, 2009, p. 124). Finally, Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling (2006, as cited in Schroeder, 2009, p. 125) state that "[...] along with brand identity and brand image, the realm of brand culture serves as a necessary complement to brand meaning and brand value creation". Also, being an increasingly crucial, powerful, and noticeable part of the culture requires distinctive and additional research perspectives capable of covering the cultural codes of branding. Consequently, brands have also become a debated managerial field (Schroeder, 2009, p. 125).

# 3. Theory

The following chapter is going to provide an account of the three main parts constituting the theoretical foundation of this study. The utilized theoretical framework will serve as a guide in the data analysis process performed in this thesis. The first part will inspect the concept of brand equity and how it creates and influences the perception of a brand. The second part of the theoretical chapter focuses on B2B market characteristics, especially in terms of market opportunities and ways of communicating and purchasing from brands. The third part regards the theoretical frameworks related to the decision-making processes occurring in small firms.

The three sections of the theory represent the sub-themes attempting to first measure the branding efforts utilizing a customized brand equity model and second estimate whether the branding efforts for these small firms balance towards B2B or B2C characteristics. Simultaneously, it will look into the decision-making process and aspects that may influence it, since as mentioned in the introduction, successfully implementing the branding efforts depends on comprehending how this process works and what is the criteria for making an acquisition.

## 3.1 The Customer-Based Brand Equity Model

Since the models of the brand equity concept presented in the literature review are overlapping, as a base for this master paper, it will use the Customer-Based Brand Equity Model created by Keller in 1993. Nevertheless, elements from other Brand Equity Models might be added in case they are missing from the chosen framework. This is especially crucial since Keller's model fits the purpose of this study, but is an aged one and might not incorporate all the elements required.

Bellow can be identified, the customized Brand Equity Model for this thesis based on Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model:
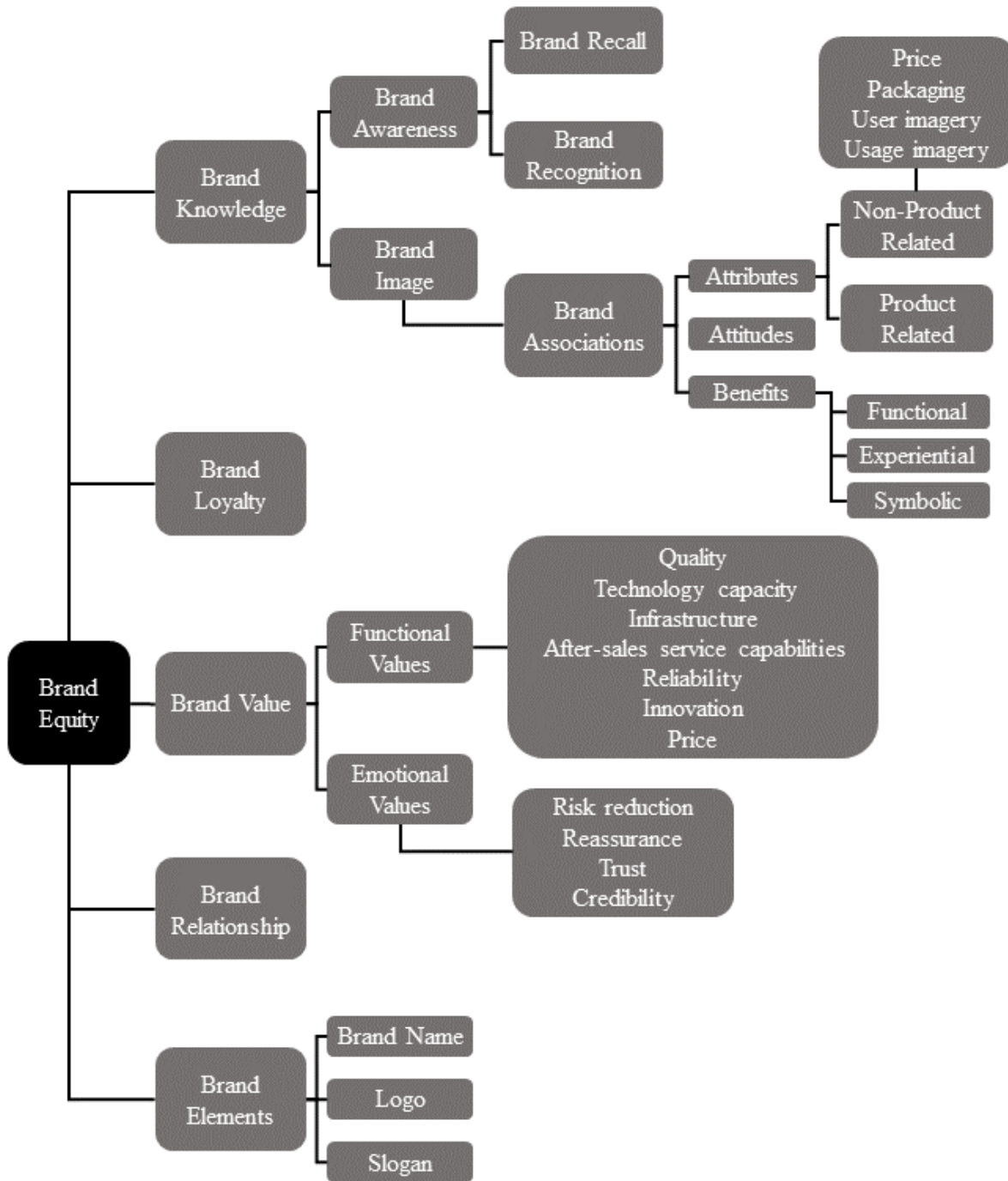
*Figure 4.*

The following part explains the meaning and perspective of each element from the customized brand equity model assembled in Figure 4.

**<u>Brand equity</u>** is seen by Aaker (1991, p. 27) as the brand assets and liabilities associated with a brand, its name, and symbol that either build on or subtract from the value offered by a product or service to a company or company's customers. Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 166) affirms that brand equity emerges from the variety of customers' responses to the previous promoting endeavor.

The scholar highlights that the overall brand equity process is important for customers and companies at the same time (p. 27). Concerning customers, brand equity helps to "[...] interpret, process, and store huge quantities of information about products and brands" (Aaker, 1991, p. 27). It simultaneously influences customers' confidence in the buying decision (p. 27). Regarding firms, brand equity assets have the power of adding value to a company and bringing cash flow. Aaker (1991, p. 28) suggests that the above-mentioned five brand equity dimensions co-exist holding similar interrelationships. For instance, perceived quality might be affected by awareness, associations, and even loyalty. Studies have also found several advantages of industrial brand equity offered to the supplier companies. At the same time, branding was discovered to positively influence the considered quality of the product (Cretu & Brodie, 2007, as cited in Leek and Christodoulides, 2012, p. 107).

As mentioned above in the literature review, the chosen customer-based brand equity developed by Keller (1993) has at its core the idea of brand knowledge. Keller (1993, p. 2) highlights that **<u>brand knowledge</u>** is perhaps the most valuable asset owned by a company as a result of previous promotional activities, which in the end can enhance productivity. The scholar also argues that comprehending the content and constitution of brand knowledge is critical because it impacts what comes into the customer's mind when reflecting on a brand. According to Keller, (1993, p. 3) [...] brand knowledge is conceptualized as consisting of a brand node in memory to which a variety of associations are linked".

Another dimension labeled by Keller and playing a critical role in viewing branding in this thesis is **<u>brand awareness</u>**.  By brand awareness, Keller (1993, p. 3, citing Rossiter and Percy 1987)

denotes the power of the brand to be identified under various conditions. Another scholar Aaker (1991, p. 61), states that it represents the quality of a brand to be recognized by a consumer in terms of belonging to a certain category.

According to Keller's model (1993, p. 3), brand awareness, consequently, entails other two sub-dimensions named **brand recognition** and **brand recall**. The term brand recognition is described as the customer's ability to accurately differentiate the brand after being exposed to it before. Whereas brand recall demands that consumers generate the brand from memory when having something related to the brand as a clue (Keller, 1993, p. 3).

**<u>Brand image</u>** is another concept distinguished by the Brand Equity Model of Keller (1993, p. 3). Brand image refers to perceptions about a brand created in the customers' memory by the brand associations. While the **brand associations** are the informational nodes in the customers' minds connected with the brand node and containing the essence of the brand (Keller, 1993, p. 3). As for brand associations, Aaker (1991, p. 101) views these as representing 'anything linked in memory to a brand'. Keller (1993) describes various three categories of brand associations named: **attributes, benefits, and attitudes**.

**Attributes** that are explanatory features characterizing either a product or service (Keller, 1993, p. 4) can be classified as **product-related attributes or non-product-related attributes.** Product-related attributes are seen as the ingredients necessary to realize the product, whereas non-product-related attributes are considered to be the external properties of the product associated with its purchase. Among non-product-related attributes (Keller, 1993, p. 4) encounters **price information**, **packaging or product appearance information**, **user imagery,** and **usage imagery**. The scholar writes that the price of the product plays a critical role in the acquisition process but does not influence the performance of the product. Furthermore, consumers usually have powerful beliefs related and the value of the brand might sometimes be categorized in their minds due to the price differences of various brands (Blattberg and Wisniewski 1989 as cited in Keller, 1993, p. 4). Identically, packaging plays a role in the acquisition and consumption process but does not directly affect the performance of the product. Regarding user and usage attributes, Keller (1993, p. 4) writes that these can be shaped by customers' experience and connection with the brand. Simultaneously, user and usage attributes can also create brand personality attributes. Keller (1993, citing Plummer, 1985) advocates the idea that one of the brand's image features is

the personality or character of the brand. Thus, brands can be characterized by their personality (i.e., youthful, gentle, colorful).

**Brand benefits** are depicted as "[...] the personal value consumers attach to the product or service attribute" (Keller, 1993, p. 4), and are categorized as **functional**, **experiential,** and **symbolic benefits**. Functional benefits are seen by Keller (1993) as the essence of the product and are created by the psychological needs of the customers. At the same time, the experiential benefit of the product is related to what it feels like to utilize the product. Meanwhile, the symbolic ones showcase the more extrinsic advantage of the product. Keller (1993, p. 4) also suggests that they are associated with the underlying needs related to social approval.

**Brand attitudes**, the last category of brand associations, are described as general evaluations related to a brand (Wilkie 1986 cited in Keller 1993, p. 4). Keller (1993), ads that brand attitudes are at the base of consumer behavior, or in other words 'brand choice'. Stepping back to the brand image Keller (1993, p. 5) writes that there are different types of brand associations created at the end of the brand image naming them as favorability, strength, and uniqueness of brand associations.

As mentioned above, the master thesis will use as a base for analysis the Keller's (1993) Customer-Based Brand Equity model still, adding facets influencing the branding power and purchase decisions.

**<u>Brand loyalty</u>** is defined by Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 42) as the level of commitment that the brand has accomplished among its customer base and beyond. Scholars places brand loyalty as the last step of its Brand Equity Model for the B2B businesses. Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) also advocate that this branding aspect is the most critical driver of the Brand Equity Model for businesses. Aaker (1991, p. 27) writes that brand loyalty estimates the attachment that a customer shows towards a brand. Simultaneously, Aaker (1991, p. 28) stresses that this dimension is especially crucial when competitors come with innovative products on the market that have a higher advantage. Also, the scholar points out that it is expensive for any company to gain new customers, thus, brand loyalty comes to help reduce the costs of this process and discourages competitors from attempting to attract satisfied customers (Aaker, 1991).

**Brand value** is another branding concept inspected by Leek and Christodoulides (2012). Scholars examine brand value from a B2B perspective dividing it into functional and emotional. Regarding **functional values**, Leek and Christodoulides (2012 p. 112) outline the quality, technology capacity, infrastructure, after-sales service capabilities, reliability, innovation, and price. Functional brand values are co-dependent on environmental factors such as economic and market situations. Whereas **emotional brand values** carry the risk reduction, reassurance, trust, and credibility and are created by situational factors like the type of product and criticality of purchase (Leek and Christodoulides, 2012 p. 112).

Some scholars argue that the value obtained from a B2B brand is primarily due to the functional and performance features of the product (Kuhn et al., 2008 as cited in Leek and Christodoulides, 2012, p. 112). Simultaneously, it may include other tangible features such as after-sales service, and the extent of the supplier's profit (Mudambi et al., 1997 cited in Leek and Christodoulides, 2012, p. 112). However, Leek and Christodoulides (2012, p. 107) suggest that these ideas are linked with the perception that in B2B the purchasing decision holds a more rational than emotional characteristic.

Thus, scholars found that when buyers were questioned to rate nine features of their favorite brand, quality was the most appreciated one followed by "[...] reliability, performance, after-sales service, ease of operation, ease of maintenance, price, supplier's reputation, and finally the relationship with the supplier's personnel" (Bendixen et al., 2004 as cited in Leek and Christodoulides, 2012, p. 108). Nevertheless, Bendixen et al., 2004 (as cited in Leek and Christodoulides, 2012, p. 108) emphasize that the functional performance of the brand holds a higher importance than the less tangible and emotional ones. However, another research characterizes the value of B2B brands as having the following four components such as the product, its distribution of it, supporting services, and the firm itself (Mudambi et al. 1997, as cited in Leek and Christodoulides, 2012, p. 108). Finally, scholars conclude that companies should be able to deliver these functional benefits to at least avoid triggering negative emotions if not generating positive ones.

However, other researchers indicate that in high-risk situations, purchasers are more likely to carefully reflect on the brand compared with the low-risk buying situations (Bennett et al., 2005, as cited in Leek and Christodoulides, 2012, p. 108). Moreover, when there is a higher level of risk marketers might take advantage of the emotional aspect of the brand in order to comfort buyers

and lower the level of assessed risk. The type of product or service might also affect the use of the emotional value of the brand (Keenan, 2000, as cited in Leek and Christodoulides, 2012, p. 108).

**Brand relationships** are defined by scholars as to the way humans make long-term commitments to lifeless objects that they purchase and utilize as well as assist in making, selling, and distributing (Kumar, 2006, as cited in Ghani & Tuhin, 2016, p. 951). Keller (2001, as cited in Ghani & Tuhin, 2016, p. 951) describes brand relationships through the notion of brand resonance. Thus, outlining this concept as what describes the environment of this relationship and the extent to which customers perceive themselves as being aligned with the brand.

Scholars outline that the relationships with the employees are traditionally more essential in the B2B setting than in a B2C one. In many buying circumstances in B2C context, the customer does not have to form a relationship with the supplier which is the complete opposite in the B2B market where researchers found that around 70 - 88% of B2B relationships have more than five years length (Ford et al., 2002; Håkansson, 1982, as cited in Leek and Christodoulides, 2012).

However, scholars claim that a brand might be helpful in the early stages of a relationship and decision-making process when the sides lack experience in dealing with each other (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011, as cited in Leek and Christodoulides, 2012, p. 108). Thus, under these circumstances, brand awareness might play the initiator or driver of the relationship. In this way, the internal communication inside the suppliers' company is critical because it can determine how the company is perceived by the other customer-company (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010, as cited in Leek and  Christodoulides, 2012).

**Brand Elements** are defined by Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 92) as the visual and physical tools that assist in identifying and differentiating a firm's product or service. Thus, in order to construct a strong brand, a company needs to have as brand elements the following components called **name, logo, tagline (or slogan)**, and brand story. Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) also adds that brand elements should mirror the brand essence, personality, and culture of the firm. According to scholars, in the brand elements of a B2B, the perspective should follow a set of guidelines in order to lower the risk of weakening the brand (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 92). Thus, brand elements should be available, meaningful, memorable, protectable, future-oriented,  positive, and transferable (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 92-93). Simultaneously, Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006,

p. 95) suggest that one of the most critical aspects of B2B brand management is reducing the complexity.

Regarding **brand name** Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 95) outline that it is the first and maybe the most prominent way of expressing the face of the product. Usually, all names hold a certain type of associated image that might be personal, linguistic, or cultural. Thus, a carefully selected brand name might represent a valuable asset exactly as the brand itself, while an ineffective brand name can deter the promotional efforts due to the miscommunication caused when using or mispronouncing it. The scholar affirms that one problem of brand names in B2B is the inefficient use of stereotypical names and lack of distinctiveness (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 95).

Related to the **logo**, Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 98-99) describe it as the graphic look of the company. The scholar is outlining that a good one should accomplish both a graphical and functional command. Producing a strong visual image for a firm will reach not only a disclosure of the name but also a long-standing image connecting the consumers with the firm. Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 98) also write that the potential of symbols should not be underestimated because humans are prone to be responsive to images and symbols. Thus, the process of communication is more facile in using an image rather than factual information, especially in the B2B market "[...] where complex functional benefits need to be explained in a vivid and memorable way" (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 99).

When it comes to the **tagline or slogan**, Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 101) indicate that it represents a unique and distinctive part of building a balanced brand identity, having as a purpose the role of supporting the brand image created by the logo and name. "These three brand elements together provide the core of the brand" (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 101). Thus, a fine slogan captures a firm's brand essence, personality, and place on the market, serving also as a competitor's differentiator (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 102).

### 3.1.1 Limitations of Customer-Based Brand Equity Model

Even though Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model was chosen and represents the core of this thesis, it is critical to mention that it holds certain weaknesses and limitations. Thus, Szőcs

(2014, p. 104) writes that overall Keller's model developed in 1993 adjusts the idea of brand knowledge determining the brand equity but lacks indications on how to measure the other elements in the model in relation to consumer-based brand equity (e.g. brand awareness). Also, even if the model is regularly referred to, it did not suffer further development, and even if Keller created other brand equity models, the scholar did not make references to this one as well (Szőcs, 2014, p. 104).

## 3.2 B2B and B2C Characteristics

### 3.2.1 Similarities and Differences

When describing and distinguishing the B2B and B2C markets, Rėklaitis & Pilelienė (2019, p. 76, citing Kumar and Raheja, 2012), state that B2B relates to firms selling their products and services only to other companies, while the B2C applies to companies doing the same but for the consumers. Generally, the market size for the B2C markets may be restricted by the geographical borders in terms of the number of persons in the city or country. For instance, if a firm commercializes sunglasses, then most likely the target market is going to be the country or the population of that place. Whether this was a yoga studio likely, it will have a market for the local community within the distance of the city (Rėklaitis & Pilelienė, 2019, p. 76, citing Kumar and Raheja, 2012).

The B2B market is characterized by having a longer sales cycle, bigger value, and higher complexity than B2C (Rėklaitis & Pilelienė, 2019, p. 76). The market size is another differentiator highlighted by scholars. Whereas the B2C sector may be restricted by certain borders, the B2B sector faces limitations in terms of available specialized goods in the area. By this scholars highlight the idea that the B2C market might sometimes face physical barriers in distributing the products or services, as the B2B market is unlikely to be confronted with such a problem and is more flexible in terms of territoriality.

Another aspect describing B2B and B2C in different ways is the decision-making process. Thus, in B2C there is usually one particular person to make the decision, in the B2B sector regularly this process involves more than one person (Rėklaitis & Pilelienė, 2019, p. 76 - 77).

In addition, Rėklaitis & Pilelienė (2009, p. 76 citing Saha et al. 2014), display the differences between B2B and B2C markets referring to several characteristics. Thus, in the B2C market, the payment might be instant, while in B2B, the immediate payment might not be obligatory. Also, in the B2C, the transaction is quick, by either cash or card, whether as in the B2B it holds a more complex system.

Pagbrasil (2019) also explains that many B2B companies still have not understood the importance of *boleto bancário* as it is problematic to depend on international credit cards in Brazil. *Boleto* is a numerical payment method developed in Brazil in 1980. The bar code *boleto* was introduced in 1993, and since then this is one of the most used payment methods in Brazil, with the introduction of *PIX* the usage of *boleto* is decreasing (Adyen, 2021). Nevertheless, this payment method is commonly known and used in Brazil independently of the size of the businesses. Still, the use of *boleto bancário* can increase sales volume as the restrictions are lower compared to only the use of credit cards (Pagbrasil, 2019).

Simultaneously, scholars note that the demand in the B2C market is based on the wish and needs of the B2B market. Furthermore, the utilization of mass media is essential in a B2C environment and avoidable in the B2B one (Rėklaitis & Pilelienė, 2009, p. 77).

**Table 1. Differences between B2C and B2B markets**

| Criterion | Business-to-Consumer | Business-to-Business |
|---|---|---|
| Target | End User | Enterprise |
| Market size | Large | Smaller |
| Sales volume | Low | High |
| Decision making | Individually | By committee |
| Risk | Low | High |
| Purchasing process | Short | Longer |
| Payment | Often instant | Instant payment may not be required |
| Transaction | Can be in cash, by card | Requires more complex system |
| Consumer decision | Emotional | Rational |
| Demand | Based on wish | Based on need |
| Usage of mass media | Essential | Avoidable |

*Source:* adapted from S. K. Saha et al. (2014).

*Figure 5  (Rėklaitis & Pilelienė, 2009, p. 77).*

Other scholars, Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 20), write that one of the main differences between the business and consumer markets lies in the nature and complexity of industrial goods and services. Plus, adding that in the B2B, there is a different nature and variety of industrial demand, a notable lower number of customers, greater volume for a customer, and of course, closer and long-standing relationships with the final supplier-customer (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 21).

Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 21) affirm that overall the industrial market can be classified into three categories as materials parts (raw ingredients, manufactured ones, and parts); capital items (buildings and equipment), as well as suppliers and services (operational, repair and/or maintenance). Due to the high complexity level existing in the B2B market, the selling and buying process of industrial goods requires experts on both sides. Also, compared with the uniform consumer products, the industrial ones are inclined to be individual solutions requiring a high level of adjustment and, sometimes, have to be blended into larger systems that demand specific product parameters (Kotler, 2006, p. 21-23). The scholar also outlines that overall, the demand of B2B firms is determined by the final product's demand. Thus, everything begins and finishes with the end consumer command (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 22).

Another interesting distinction between B2B and B2C markets consists in the approach of internationality. Consequently, the B2C market can be influenced by the national differences related to culture, taste, and value, which impacts the way some goods and services are viewed and assessed. On the other side, the offerings for the business market do not need a lot of adaptations to be sold across the borders. Also, due to ongoing globalization, free trade, and innovation in terms of delivery and logistics, B2B businesses can eliminate the geographical barriers and brand their products and services worldwide (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 23). One more significant difference talks about the idea of brand function which manifests as risk reduction for the B2B business and image benefit to the B2C companies (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006).

Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 49) also suggest that brand relevance in the B2B market is co-dependent on the purchasing situation that the firm goes through. As presented in the graphic below, the brand relevance is high for B2B if there is a monolithic structure of the firms on the market. If there are not so many competitors, the purchasing process is simple, and there are a lot of people involved in the decision-making process. However, if the brand relevance is low, vice-versa is happening.



| High | Brand Relevance | Low |
|---|---|---|
| Monolithic | How is the structure of the suppliers in the market? | Fragmented |
| Few | How many competitors are in the market? | Many |
| Very simple | How complex is the buying process? | Very complex |
| Many | How many deciders are involved in the buying process? | Few |
| Clearly visible | Is the application of the brand visible? | Not visible |
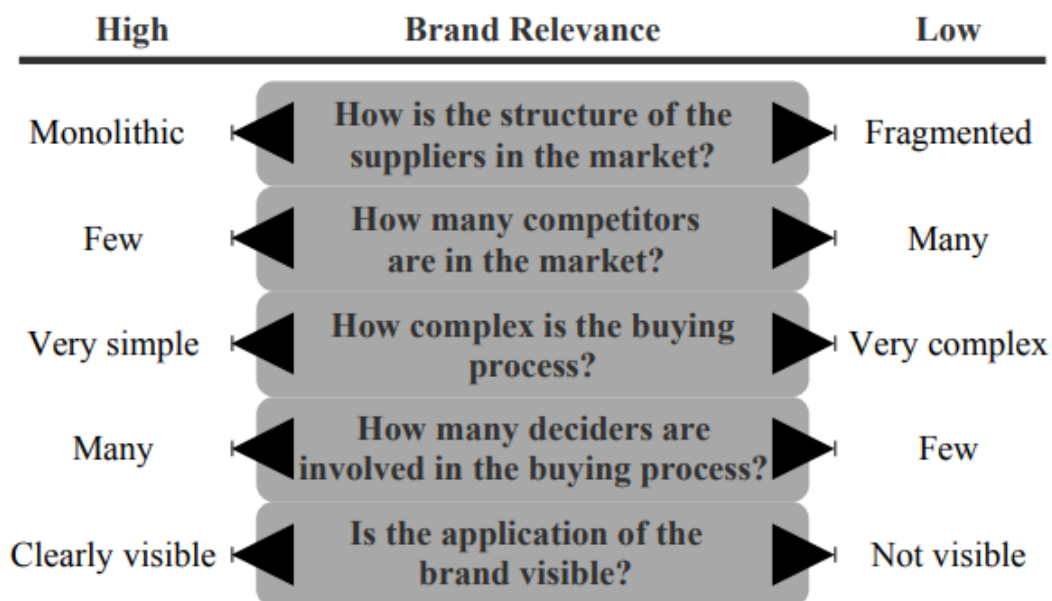
**Fig. 11.** Brand relevance according to context factors

*Figure 6 (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 49).*

Rėklaitis & Pilelienė (2019, p. 74, citing Saha et al., 2014) write that even though the methods of doing customer research might be the same, the promotional activities utilized to target the selected audience are determined by the type of market. Thus, the promotional efforts for the B2C market are built on the emotional aspects, while in the B2B sector the emphasis lies on professionalism. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand the distinctions between B2B and B2C markets, especially while seeking to implement communication strategies. Even though the main scope of B2C is to sell when it comes to communication the increase in sales might not always be the final scope (Rėklaitis & Pilelienė, 2019, p. 74, citing M. Malinowska, 2013). Consequently, in the process of selling, the emotional element plays an important part in sparking the final purchase. The B2C market is described as being focused on customers' feelings to be touched and the irrationality of the buying decision (Rėklaitis & Pilelienė, 2019, p. 74, citing Milichovský, 2013), whether as in the B2B market, firms are centered more on the logic of the product and offered features. However, even if B2B and B2C have different perspectives on communication, customer orientation is prevalent in both markets (Rėklaitis & Pilelienė, 2019, p. 74).

## 3.2.2 Suppliers' Communication Strategy Targeting B2B and B2C

Even though promotional effort strategies for B2B and B2C might have various applications, both of them start with identifying the target customer and the reasons that these potential clients might buy the product (Master Marketing, 2010).

When it comes to differentiating the B2B and B2C promotional effort strategies, Marketo (2020) suggests that the variation is usually related to the buying cycle, relationship building, and models of communication. In terms of promotional effort strategy, differences between B2B and B2C (Marketo, 2020) emphasize that for both B2B and B2C audiences companies aim to offer an authentic and customer-driven experience to customers. Nevertheless, the approach to every audience differs due to non-identical needs, attitudes, and behaviors.

Marketo (2020) writes that a B2B promotional effort strategy requires more time in acquiring customers since multiple internal stakeholders have to be convinced that the offered solution is not only obligatory but also worth from a price point. Simultaneously, Marketo (2020) notes that B2B

hardly relies on emotions, but more on expanding the knowledge of consumers. Thus, the goal is to center the strategy on logic and education. Also, it is critical to know the position of the buyer in the firm and help him with advertising materials to showcase the positive ROI (return on investment) of using your product/service (Marketo, 2020). Thus, the company should display case studies emphasizing how the goods can save capital, resources, or time (Marketo, 2020). Hosting workshops, events and webinars will offer potential buyers ideas on how to utilize them for the benefit of the business. On the other side, B2C firms should keep the message simple, avoiding buzzwords and jargon.

On the other side, Heidi (2017, p. 12) stresses that businesses operating in the B2B sector are way too concentrated on focusing their advertising on features, benefits, and price of their products, even though we live in a high and growing commoditized world where descriptions such as cheaper, faster, better, bigger are no more a compelling point for a customer to choose a product.

Regarding buying cycle and promotional efforts strategies for B2B and B2C, Marketo (2020) emphasizes that B2B firms need to create a plan which is personalized and has a multi-step scheme touching every stakeholder. Thus, it should showcase the long-term value of the good or how it can benefit multiple sectors of a customer's business. On the other side, B2C promotional efforts should take into account that the customers' time is limited thus the strategy needs to be extremely short and clearly capture and hold their attention. In this way, discounts and ads supplementing the product work the best (Marketo, 2020).

Master Marketing (2010) also notes that the B2B promotional strategy is built around a strong content advertising plan in which content delivered should meet customer's needs in the buying journey consisting of the top (awareness), middle (relationship building), and bottom of the funnel (actual buying decision). Simultaneously, B2C promotion efforts engage the usage of coupons, storefronts, and displays, while the campaigns are designed around transactions. Thus, these campaigns provide immediate deals in the form of coupons, discounts, and vouchers (Master Marketing, 2010).

Regarding the target audience, Marketo (2020) emphasizes that for B2B, firms need to surpass the existing security expectations, requiring to also market to each person in the process and being ready to give the consumer contacts for references. On the other hand, the B2C one should stress

how good it can improve customers' lives. Thus, the promotion strategy emphasizes the legitimacy of the product which can be proved through testimonials and social proof on the website. Also, B2C companies should consider the usage of influencer advertising to get even more audiences while keeping the content and landing pages clear and effective (Marketo, 2020).

Coming back to the B2B market, Marketo (2020) indicates that firms should avoid spam and promote the product rather in a subtle and sophisticated way. By using webinars, reposts, and long informative content, firms can establish themselves as leaders in the market for their B2B companies. B2C, on the other hand, should wow the customer and make it interesting while keeping the brand voice consistent. A stable brand will ultimately contribute to building trust in the brand (Marketo, 2020).

Talking about B2B promotional efforts statistics, Content Marketing Institute - Benchmarking Report (2016, as cited in Heidi, 2017, p. 13) indicates that the most successful tactic is the in-person event - 75%. While from the pack of online channels, Regalix (State of B2B Marketing Report, 2016, as cited in Heidi, 2017, p. 13) suggests that websites are at 86% and E-mail at 72%. Simultaneously, ALF Insight (2016, as cited in Heidi, 2017, p. 13) reports that 75% of marketers utilize e-mail as a way of directly distributing their content advertising while 56% of firms consent that e-mail provides them with good or excellent return on investment (Econsultancy, 2016, as cited in Heidi, 2017, p. 13).

Thus, scholars emphasize that face-to-face and e-mail continue to be the most used and efficient tools utilized for the B2B market (Heidi, 2017, p. 13). Comparing it with digital promotion Heidi (2017, p. 13, citing A Bias for Action) highlights that direct mail is simpler to comprehend compared to digital media it is also more persuasive, with messages going across faster in direct mail rather than digital media. Also, it indicates that direct mail is more inclined to influence consumers to act on the message compared to the digital medium.

Heidi (2017, p. 18) writes that comprehending and expressing the position of the brand while aligning it with the promotion activities represents an enormous challenge for the B2B. Thus, the brand dilemma is oftentimes confused with the new concept focusing on organizational purpose.

### 3.2.3 Communication Channels Usage

In this part, we will explore the differences in the media channel selection done by the companies depending on the targeted audience (B2B or B2C).

Fraccastoro, Gabrielsson, and Pullins (2021, p. 2) divide communication channels into three categories. The first is denominated traditional. This category comprehends communication involving direct interaction such as face to face, phone calls, or physical mail. The second category is called digital and involves electronic mailing, website, and online meetings. The third category is named social media and comprises platforms such as Linkedin, Quora, Youtube, Instagram, and Twitter. Thus, Murphy (2021) separates communication channels into two categories: (1) The traditional which includes Fraccastoro, Gabrielsson, and Pullins (2021, p. 2) suggestions and adds others such as radio, television, and events. (2) The digital that combines Fraccastoro, Gabrielsson, and Pullins (2021, p. 2) digital and social media categories.

According to Canillieri (2008, as cited in Reklaitis and Pileliene, 2019, p. 79) due to the constrained budget, small B2C companies usually select two and sometimes just one media channel. On the other hand, B2B companies usually use more media channels to communicate with the chosen audience. Some of the most employed media channels for B2B are, for example, television, print material, direct mail, and online communication. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that the diversity of channels has increased, escalating the complexity (Reklaitis and Pileliene, 2019, p. 79). Fraccastoro, Gabrielsson, and Pullins (2021, p. 7) findings revealed that B2B companies typically also engage in fairs or events. Regarding that aspect, some companies state that the number of leads generated is not substantial and others consider this promotional channel fruitful. Polvoná (2017, as cited in Reklaitis and Pileliene, 2019, p. 79) explains that while in B2B a close relationship with the buyer is important, in B2C it is key to making several campaigns.

An interesting change noticed by Povolná (2017, as cited in Reklaitis and Pileliene, 2019, p. 79) is that the B2B communication approach is more present online than it was before. Polvoná (2017, as cited in Reklaitis and Pileliene, 2019, p. 79) also foresaw that this tendency would prevail. The

reason for that change is that the contact online can save costs and the personal contact can happen later.

Keeping in mind that social media is one of the biggest communication channels online, it is interesting to explore how B2B and B2C promote their services and products on those platforms. Although in B2C social media is highly used and accepted as a communication channel, in B2B many scholars are still skeptical about its effectiveness. Some researchers even point out that this strategy is the least effective of the possibilities, saying that this tool is not important. On the other hand, recent analysis shows that this kind of communication can be potentially beneficial to B2B (Reklaitis and Pileliene, 2019, p. 80). Moreover, Reklaitis and Pileliene (2019, p. 84) say that social media is growing in usage and importance as a communication channel trend for B2B and B2C, although the researchers remain suspicious overall. According to the Institute for the Study in Business Markets (2020, as cited in Fraccastoro, Gabrielsson, and Pullins, 2021, p. 13) "B2B customers increasingly search for information and seek solutions online for their firms in a fashion similar to the way they shop for themselves".

Another important aspect is that the channels chosen have a direct impact on the budget (Reklaitis and Pileliene, 2019, p. 80). For example, while using social media can be inexpensive to a certain degree, printing media will always have a higher cost. Even though many of the authors consider companies in the B2B sector to have a bigger budget than those in B2C, that may not always be the case. For instance, small companies targeting the B2B sector also must deal with a very limited budget.

As presented, the B2C market is directly impacted by the company's online presence, but the online presence of a business can impact the decision-making process in a B2B relationship. According to Pandey, Nayal, and Athore (2020, p. 1191), the information that was previously not directly available to the buyers now can be accessed online as this can impact the credibility of a company. It is recommended not just to B2C companies but also to B2B enterprises to be online through websites, business communities, and social media platforms. But "there is a need to identify and leverage effective B2B social media tools and customizing social media strategy for B2B promotional efforts besides the need for developing the right KPIs for adoption and evaluation for B2B social media tools" (Pandey, Nayal, and Athore, 2020, p. 1195).

Pandey, Nayal, and Athore (2020, p. 1199) explain that recent studies have investigated the digital promotion role in B2B including topics, such for example, social media. Some of those studies show that the B2B companies are frequently using social media, but do not always analyze the outcomes of that usage. In that regard, there is an increasing demand for machine learning technologies to investigate big data and understand customer behavior (Pandey, Nayal, and Athore, 2020, p. 1200).

Canela et al. (2020) exposed that the COVID-19 pandemic played a role in the B2B preferences towards digitalization including remote human engagement instead of face-to-face interactions. Digitalization contributed to buyers in some actions such as support, placing orders, and getting information overall. According to the research "Only about 20 to 30 percent of B2B buyers say they hope to return to in-person sales, even in sectors where field sales models have traditionally dominated" Canela et al. (2020).

## Most B2B seller interactions have moved to remote or digital …

### … and that's exactly what customers want.

**Current way of interacting with suppliers' sales reps during different stages[1]**
% of respondents[3]

| | Identifying new suppliers | Evaluating new suppliers | Ordering | Reordering |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| In-person | 32 | 27 | 20 | 16 |
| Remote | 45 | 49 | 48 | 48 |
| Digital self-serve | 23 | 25 | 35 | 36 |

**68–84%**
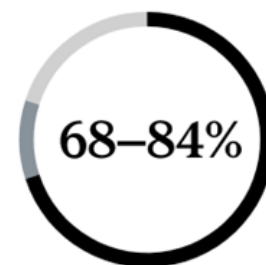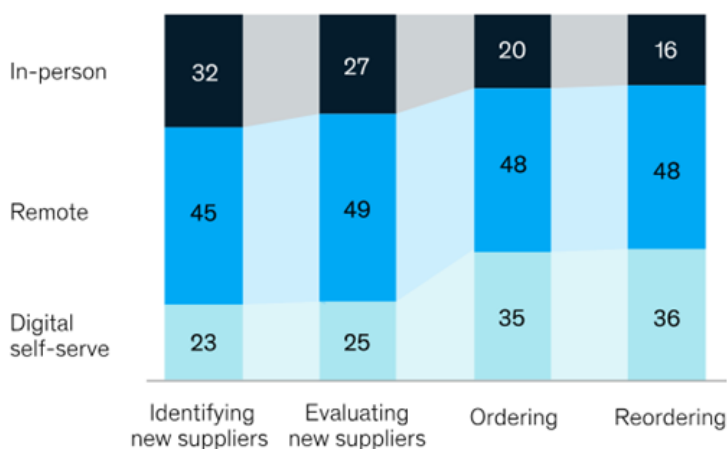
of B2B decision makers prefer remote human interactions or digital self-service[2,3]

**Why?**
• Ease of scheduling
• Savings on travel expenses
• Safety

[1]Q: "How would you currently interact with sales reps from your company's suppliers during the following stages of interactions?"
[2]Q: "How would you prefer to interact with sales reps from your company's suppliers during the following stages of interactions?"
[3]Figures may not sum to 100% because of rounding.
Source: McKinsey COVID-19 B2B Decision-Maker Pulse #3 7/31–8/10/2020, Brazil (n = 400)

*Figure 7 (Canela et al., 2020).*

According to Canela et al. (2020) the decision-makers in Brazil consider remote selling as much effective as face-to-face contact also for obtaining new clients.

> "With the massive shift to digital resulting from COVID-19, video and live chat have emerged as predominant channels for interacting and closing sales with B2B customers, while in-person meetings and related sales activities have dropped precipitously" (Canela et al., 2020).

While the traditional method was used by 77% percent of the B2B before the pandemic, it fell to 22% in 2020. On the other hand, the videoconference raised from 30 to 53% and the online chat from 31 to 50%. The research also showed that the companies intended to keep advancing in the new model for the upcoming years, not being restrained to digitalization just during the pandemic duration (Canela et al., 2020).

It is important to highlight the significance of WhatsApp in the B2B Brazilian context. According to Morning Consult (cited in Whebi, 2020), 73% of the medium and small Brazilian companies' managers state that the use of WhatsApp increased their sales. It is possible for example to find pages dedicated to educating the entrepreneurs on how to use this tool as a communication channel. For example, Atendare (2019) exposes that it has more than 120 million users in Brazil and it is installed in 99% of the Brazilian mobile phones. Moreover, as it reduces the sales cycle with faster responses and allows closer interaction with the customer WhatsApp can be a very efficient communication channel. Nevertheless, this tool complements calling or emailing but does not replace it.

A novelty is the WhatsApp Business which was created exclusively for the companies and has features that help the entrepreneurs to optimize the exchange of messages, organize their contacts, and measure the results (Canela et al., 2020).

## 3.2.4 Content in Social Media

As the overall use of the internet and social media platforms is continually increasing (Our World in Data, 2022) it is important to explore how this is being used as a tool by the B2B and B2C sectors. This can provide insights in order to understand how the types of content in social media can help these companies to achieve their goals.

There are not so many studies about the elements that influence the increasing popularity of a brand on social media. On the other hand, researchers have been interested in examining the branding and financial influences of those platforms (De Vries et al., 2012, Kumar, 2015, as cited in Swani et al., 2017, p. 77). The B2B sector especially faces an absence of information on that aspect. This factor can directly impact the success of a company in social media as the entrepreneurs do not have sufficient data able to guide them towards successful communication (Michaelidou et al., 2011, Leek et al., 2016, Lacka and Chong, 2016, as cited in Swani et al. 2017, p. 77). Moreover, the popularity of the brand content has been shown to be important as this can affect aspects such as sales and brand performance (Kumar and Mirchandani, 2012, Rapp et al., 2013, as cited in Swani et al. 2017 p. 77.)

According to Swani et al. (2014 p. 876) work, some scholars propose differences between the B2B, and B2C social media message strategies as shown in the table below.

| Message strategies | B2B | B2C |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Brand strategy | Corporate brand names | Product brand names |
| Message appeals | Functional | Emotional |
| Selling strategy | Few direct calls to purchase | Many direct calls to purchase |
| Information search | High | Low |

*Figure 8 (Swani et al., 2014 p. 876).*

Swani et al. (2017, p.78) pointed out three different types of content that result in an increased amount of likes for B2B than for B2C, being them: corporate brands, functional and emotional appeals, and information search.

The customer-to-customer conversation may not reflect the exact message that the brand is aiming to send. To target that situation the companies create pages on social media and post content

willing the customers like and comment helping to spread the message (De Vries et al., 2012, as cited in Swani et al. 2017, p. 77). The objective is to also create sharable content so the company's message can be accessed by a larger audience. (Swani et al., 2014, Lothia et al., 2003, Wallace et al., 2014 as cited in Swani et al. 2017, p.78).

Considering that aspect Swani et al (2017, p. 84) explore this perspective and their research showed that emotional and functional posts escalated the number of likes in B2B. This may point out that the B2B relationship being rational may not reflect the behavior in social media. Even though liking is not always equivalent to the success of sales, it is a good indication on social media platforms of what people relate to. Swani et al (2017) work also explains that informational posts induce more people to like and comment on B2B than on B2C messages. "Effective B2B brand communications emphasize both emotional and functional brand values to gain sustainable, differential advantages over their competitors" (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004 as cited in Swani et al. 2014, p. 879).

According to Swani et al. (2017 p. 79) "B2B offerings tend to be more technical and utilitarian […]. In addition, the practice of commercialism (so-called "hard-sell" approaches) is less frequent, whereas the practice of information dissemination is more frequent." Moreover, while for B2B the content should be logical and informational, for B2C it should be emotional and entertaining but, in the end, the target is always a human (Powell, 2021).

## 3.3 Decision-Making in Small Businesses

In this section, we present the definitions of a small company in order to guide us in setting our framework. Moreover, we explore the overall decision-making process in B2B.

There are different definitions and classifications of small companies. According to the European Commission (2003), small companies are those with less than 50 employees and a turnover not exceeding 10 million euros. Regarding the United States of America's regulation, a small company can have a maximum of 50 to 1500 employees and the revenue has to be below 1 to 41.5 million dollars depending on their niche (Small Business Administration, 2021). According to Brazilian law, small companies can have a maximum of 99 employees if it is within industry or 49 employees

if it is within commerce or service and the revenue cannot exceed 4,8 million reais (SEBRAE, 2013). As Brazil is our targeted country for this work we will use this definition when selecting the companies.

Not so many scholars have focused on the decision-making process in small companies, but Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes (1998) propose, in their article about strategic decision-making in small firms, those small companies are those with less than one hundred employees as this is in accordance with some classifications comprehending small size companies including Brazil. Thus, we will use his work as a theoretical base.

Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes (1998, p. 130) explain that small companies can be at strategic placements where the big companies are not able to economically join due to the complexity of their process or are in situations that involve an increased risk that the large business does not intend to act. Moreover, in some cases, they are what drive economic growth and increase job offers. Small businesses are also responsible for many innovations and are present in a broad diversity of sectors. On the other hand, due to its small size, affording specialists is not usually a possibility for these firms, being the management commonly the responsibility of one individual.

Some questions were raised by Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes (1998, p. 130), e.g. Is the decision-making process limited in small companies? Does the manager in this situation use rational decision-making as proposed in the literature? Are the strategies the same as the big companies?

Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes (1998, p. 131) used Henry Mintzberg's (1976) research that pointed out three phases of the decision-making process: Phase 1 is named the Identification. At this stage, there is the recognition of an opportunity or problem. Phase 2 is called Development which comprehends the research done by the managers for solutions and to design new or modify existing solutions to adjust to the occurrence. Phase 3 is named Selection which also includes three steps. First, the managers analyze the options and select some of them. Second, a deeper evaluation is done of the viable options selected in the previous step. Third, is the decision of which alternative is worth seeking.

Henry Mintzberg (1976, in Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes, 1998, p.131) among other researchers discovered that at least in big companies the decision-making process is not just a

rational and structured process as previously proposed, but also can suffer interference from three different points: Power and Politics, External Control and Managerial Characteristics. The first is not relevant to our work as it involves the relationship between the managers and the other players in the organization, and in our study, there is no such involvement in a strong way, therefore we are not going to consider the influence of this aspect. The second aspect is the influence that customers and suppliers, for example, may apply. Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes (1998, p. 131) state that in a small company the decisions can be highly influenced if the products or services delivered has one mainly purchaser, on the other hand, if the small company has many different customers this influence can be not so relevant.

The third aspect can also be relevant for our study, Managerial Characteristics relate to the personal characteristics of the decision-makers, being this a factor that influences the outcomes (Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes, 1998, p. 132).

> "Scholars have found that managers who are older tend to be more conservative in their strategic choices, while younger managers tend to select higher-risk strategies. Other personal characteristics such as their economic and social background, education, and work experience also influence the decisions managers make. Small firm strategic managers may therefore be less rational in their strategic decision-making process because of the owner/manager's personal characteristics. A vision that started a firm (especially a successful one) may, in the future, lead the firm in the wrong direction" (Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes, 1998, p. 132).

Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes (1998, p. 133) discuss the differences between **Information Research** and **Information Analysis** between big and small companies. Information Research comprehends the seeking for information and the gathering of data to be used as a base for the decision. According to them, this aspect had a great variation in the small companies, while some feel that they are very enlightened, others responded that they still lack information.

The next part consists of the **Information Analysis** which involves assessing the probabilities, taking into consideration the financial situation of the company and other variables with the goal to rank and prioritize the options. Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes (1998, p. 133) also state that:

"The literature on rational decision-making suggests that the more extensive the use of analytical techniques the better chance a firm has of selecting the optimal strategy. Firms that limit their information analysis may well misinterpret information through information processing biases."

This can be a pain point for the small companies as their decision-making process usually does not involve such profound research and analysis as they usually lack the dedicated personnel to perform those tasks. Nevertheless, during the study, the small firms responded that they had moderately engaged in the Information Analysis, indicating that the rational aspect was somewhat preserved. On the other hand, concerning techniques related to quantitative analysis, the small companies scored below average indicating that they are not so rational concerning the decision-making process.

Participants in Decision-Making discussed in Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes (1998, p. 134) work is an important aspect to be considered as it explains that people's beliefs can influence the strategy of a company.

"If strategic decisions are made by one or a few individuals then the chances of power or internal politics playing an important role in the decision-making process are greatly reduced. However, as the number of participants in the decision-making process increases so does the chance and opportunity to influence the outcome" (Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes, 1998, p. 134).

Among the findings of Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes (1998, p. 136) were that the companies make moderately rational strategic decisions and that small firms are not biased by the Power and Politics aspects. Thus, although the small companies are not rational in some of the main strategic activities the managers are usually on the rational side when concerning gathering information. The analysis of the information is commonly non-analytical and the final decision is based on intuition. The managers rely on their personal wishes instead of thinking about the best strategy presented by rational analysis.

To Berto and Soares (2009, p. 27), as a mistake can bankrupt the company, the decision-making process towards a purchase is very technical. Usually, the process starts when a need is detected and unfolds on a request for purchase, and some roles are involved in this process: The user, the

influencer, the executor, and the approver. The user is who uses the material. The influencer instructs the purchase, giving instructions regarding specifications. The executor is responsible for making a decision. And the approver can approve or reject the proposal.

As shown above, the foundation of the studies relies on the rational or nonrational perspective, as well as presents the interferences that may happen. That understanding was mainly developed inspired by the big companies and later extended to the small companies, but Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong (2009, p. 4) argue that other aspects have to be taken into consideration because the context of small firms can be very different from the big companies.

Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong (2009, p. 5) presented three main reasons for that: The first is the more hostile and uncertain environment due to the managers of small companies not having such a great information source because of the lack of other employees that can review the data. The second is the dynamism and complexity that tends to be more prominent in the small companies. While the big companies develop routines to support the decision-making process, the small companies act on opportunism. The third is the belief that personal characteristics can influence the decision-making process, in that regard, the entrepreneurs are often perceived as "[...] decisive, impatient and action-oriented individuals" (Brouthers et al., 1998; Mador, 2000 as cited in Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong, 2009, p. 7).

Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong (2009, p. 5) notice that the most used models of categorizing the decision-making process were not well related to the small companies and proposed a taxonomy of different types of decision-makers in the business environment. This is relevant because the supplier's understanding of that process may impact their results.

According to Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong (2009, p. 8), some studies suggest that entrepreneurs have other characteristics such as individualism and not believing that everyone should have the same rights or opportunities, feeling comfortable about taking risks, and having money earning as motivation. On the other hand, it can be too simplistic to define all the entrepreneurs in that way, so Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong (2009, p. 6) suggest that more variables should be taken into consideration.

The aspects studied by Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong (2009, p. 10-14) were: frequency of the decision-making, dependence, confidence, innovativeness, information research, alternatives, risk, problems, and economic situation.

**The frequency of the decision-making** comprehends how often the person makes decisions, being this an aspect that can reflect the level of the person's expertise (Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong, 2009, p. 11).

**Dependency** is related to the influence that others may lay on the decision-maker. According to Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong (2009, p. 11), although some studies suggest that entrepreneurs tend to appreciate independence, there is a great variation in the degree of dependence.

**Confidence** is related to the certainty that someone has regarding their decision. Even though many scholars refer to small businesspersons as overconfident, Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong (2009, p. 11) describe that this aspect may vary.

**The innovativeness** aspect is associated with the new plans and strategic decisions. Generally, entrepreneurs are more innovative than other professionals, but different levels of innovativeness can be perceived (McGrath et al, 1992 Shane, 2003 as cited in Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong, 2009, p. 12).

**Information research** envisioned the search for information to support the decision that has to be made. That is a relevant facet of the decision-making process as this can reflect the maturity of the decision-maker as the not-so-experienced ones tend to simplify their decision models (Gaglio, 1997, as cited in Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong, 2009, p. 12). On the other hand, beginner entrepreneurs can search more than the experienced ones, but that tends to be done in a limited way including just their familiar ambiance (Cooper et al, 1995, as cited in Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong, 2009, p. 12).

**The alternative** is related to how many and how fit are the alternatives that were considered before making a decision. The scholars defend that usually the entrepreneurs, in general, have limited time to explore alternatives not being able to study many options (Buseniz and Barney, 1977, as cited in Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong, 2009, p. 12). Moreover, they tend to consider a satisfying

option instead of an optimal one (Simon, 1986, as cited in Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong, 2009, p. 12).

**The risk** aspect relates to how high the entrepreneur perceives the risks. Although some entrepreneurs are prone to risks, others try to minimize them as much as possible, reducing uncertainty (Jackson et al., 1972 and Harris, 1998, as cited in Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong, 2009, p. 13).

**Problems** are the obstacles encountered to achieving a final decision. This can include for example financing, licenses, and contracts. As stated by Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong (2009, p. 13) that can vary greatly depending on the entrepreneur.

**The economic situation** is related to the demands and opportunities present on the market. As this aspect changes rapidly that can be a point of concern to the entrepreneurs and affect the decision-making process (Dess et al., 1997 and Dickson, 1992, as cited in Gibcus, Vermeulen, and Jong, 2009, p. 13).

# 4. Methodology

As already mentioned, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate the importance of branding efforts of a selling company in B2B when the customer is a small Brazilian company with one level of decision-making. The following chapter will present the methodology utilized to answer the research question mentioned above. First, we present the selected ontological and epistemological positions, then the chosen methods of data collection and data analysis, and finally, we address some ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Overall, this master thesis will employ qualitative research methods. This approach is more suitable for this project since the qualitative practice focuses on interpreting the view of people being studied rather than if people being researched were unable to make their own reflections and ideas related to the social world as it would occur for instance from the quantitative position (Bryman 2012, p. 402).

## 4.1 Ontological and Epistemological Positions

In terms of ontology, this thesis will follow the constructivism position. According to Bryman (2012, p. 32) ontology is preoccupied with the nature of social systems and realities. Thus, the main orienting point here is whether social entities can be viewed as objective beings that have a reality independent of other social actors or if they should be viewed as social constructions created from the insights and actions of other social actors (Bryman, 2012, p. 32).

From an ontological angle, constructivism is the position advocating that social phenomenon with their interpretation and meaning are constantly constructed by social actors, while categories are created not only by the interactions but always in a continual state of reexamination (Bryman, 2012, p. 33). Thus, in relation to the research question, constructivism benefits this thesis by supporting the idea that reality is created by the owners of a small business who are placed in the situation of deciding on buying a product benefiting their firm and the end customer. As a result, by making these decisions they are creating the investigated reality. However, this reality is also influenced by other companies' branding practices that are trying to convince the buyers to choose

specifically from them. Therefore, the knowledge is created by the interaction between two groups - one being small businesses as buying entities and the other one the selling companies commercializing B2B products and services. Nonetheless, this thesis will investigate the reality of the first group as it intends to support the second group with knowledge and insights of better targeting and reaching potential customers.

Epistemology is defined by Bryman (2012, p. 27) as what is viewed as admissible knowledge in a discipline. The epistemological position applied to this thesis is represented by interpretivism. One central epistemological issue is the question of whether the social world should be researched utilizing the same rules, procedures, and ideas as the natural sciences. Meanwhile, interpretivism is the epistemological position described by Bryman (2012, p. 30) as the one predicted upon the perspective that a strategy is needed in order to respect the variation between humans and objects of natural sciences which consequently demands social scientists to comprehend the subjective interpretation of social activities. In relation to this thesis, interpretivism allows collecting and viewing data that represents the reality of each business owner.

## 4.2 Iterative Approach

The following part overviews the relationship between theory and data in the realization of this thesis.

The idea behind the iterative approach consists in moving backward and forward between the collected data and theoretical reflection (Bryman 2012, p. 420). Thus, this method has the benefit of giving flexibility between the data and theory, especially if data might not be supported by the theoretical frameworks on a constant basis. Srivastava & Hopwood (2009, p. 77) outline that the purpose of iteration is not a repetitive, automatic task, but more a profound reflective process that stays at the heart of sparking insights and evolving new meanings. Thus, the reflexive iteration has at its core the idea of viewing and reviewing the data and associating them with the emerging insights continuity refining the focus and comprehension.

Related to the purpose of this study, the iterative approach is suitable as it allows us to first approach the existing theory on the subject and base the study on it, and second, it still offers room

for new insights to be explored and knowledge to be analyzed. Thus, relying on an iterative approach this thesis aims to utilize the existing theoretical knowledge on branding and the decision-making process and to generate new insights that will assist in responding to the research question.

## 4.3 Method of Data Collection

The following section will describe the selected method of data collection consisting of semi-structured interviews. Simultaneously it is going to showcase the realized interview guide as well as the sampling of the participants and the process of conducting the interviews.

### 4.3.1 Semi-Structured Interview

As mentioned above, semi-structured interviews are employed in order to gather the necessary data for analyzing the proposed research question.

Rapley (2001, as cited in Brinkmann, 2013, p. 1) outlines that qualitative interviewing has evolved into a key technique for human and social sciences. Some scholars are even claiming that interviewing became the main resource used by social science to comprehend and analyze problems concerning us. Brinkmann (2013, p. 1) states that humans always used conversations as a tool for obtaining knowledge about others. Humans speak with each other with the purpose of learning how they feel, think, experience the world, and develop, with time these knowledge-generating tools have been refined as interviews.

Brinkmann (2013, p. 18) classifies interviews into three categories: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured. The main differentiation is in the scope and way they are formatted and conducted. Thus, the semi-structured interview is positioned between the structured and unstructured ones.

Describing semi-structured interviews, Bryman (2012, p. 467) indicates that for this type - researchers usually have a prepared list of questions covering specific topics normally referred to

as an interview guide. The scholar also notes that the questions do not have to follow the same order as they are scheduled. In addition, the interviewer is allowed to ask additional, follow-up questions missing from the guide if he picks up on relevant things spoken by interviewees. Brinkmann (2013, p. 21) outlines that semi-structured interviews have the advantage of making better usage of the knowledge-producing perspective of dialogues by allowing more flexibility in pursuing any angle desired and important for the interviewer. Compared with structured interviews the semi-structured ones grant the interviewer the possibility of becoming more present as a knowledge-producing contributor rather than hiding behind a default interview guide. Simultaneously, in contrast with the unstructured one, it offers a greater saying nailing the conversations on problems that are truly crucial in connection to the research content (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 21).

As mentioned in the introduction this thesis aims to produce empirically based knowledge in order to assist the academic and business world with the problem of determining the importance of branding efforts in a B2B transaction where the buyer is a small Brazilian business with one level of decision-making. Thus, the semi-structured interview is the most suitable tool for gathering insights and data capable of dealing with the above research question.

## 4.3.2 Interview Guide

An interview guide has been developed in order to realize the current study. The interview guide can be found in the Appendix of the master thesis. Bryman (2012, p. 473) affirms that the crucial aspect of it is in permitting researchers to look into how the participants see the reality while preparing the guide to ask questions reflecting the research questions. Thus, the questions in this interview guide are formulated based on the theoretical framework discussed above.

The interview guide consists of 50 questions divided into three sizable sections mirroring the theoretical framework displayed above in project: 3.1. Customer-Based Brand Equity; 3.2. B2B and B2C Characteristics; 3.3 Decision-Making in Small Companies. However, since the research utilizes semi-structured interviews, more questions can be added during the interview process if the interviewer feels that a follow-up question is necessary and can add value to the project and

provide an answer to the research question. Thus, the interview is going to be structured in the following way.

| Section (Code) | Sub-section (Theme) |
|---|---|
| 3.1. CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY | branding |
| | product characteristics |
| | price |
| | relationship |
| 3.2. B2B AND B2C CHARACTERISTICS | seller's location |
| | reasons for choosing a supplier |
| | time allocation |
| | received information |
| | communication channels usage |
| | content in social media |
| 3.3. DECISION-MAKING IN SMALL BUSINESSES | understanding the need |
| | searching for a supplier |
| | influences |
| | self-evaluation |

*Table 1. Codes and Themes.*

The interview guide contains direct questions, specifying questions, and following up questions in case the reply is not complete. Plus, this interview guide is going to utilize the Likert scale in some

questions. Britannica (2015) defines the Likert scaling as a rating system utilized to evaluate human opinions, perceptions, and attitudes. Frequently, the response types are coded numerically, and these numerical values should be clarified for that specific study. For the current study, 1 is going to represent the lowest numerical value, while 5 is the highest one. Even if the Likert scale is a tool for questionnaires and quantitative research, it can bring benefits to qualitative research as well. Thus, scholars highlighted that questionnaires have the power of providing proof of patterns across data (Harris & Brown, 2010, p. 1). Also, that qualitative research often entails the study of meanings in the form of an attitude scale similar to the Likert scaling method Bryman (2012, p. 620). Furthermore, Bryman (2012, p. 239) writes that one of the values provided by closed questions of the Likert scale lies in pre-coding the answers and easing the task of processing the data. Simultaneously, it holds the role of assisting in easier measuring and presenting large amounts of data obtained in this research thesis. Thus, in relation to this research Likert scaling will be utilized to measure the beliefs and attitudes of small business owners.

## 4.3.3 Sampling

In order to select the participants for the realization of the thesis research, it was decided to make use of snowball sampling. According to Bryman (2012, p. 424), this sampling technique is a method characterized by starting to sample a small group of participants compatible with the research question and the chosen fellows recommend other possible participants with appropriate experience for the research project. Simultaneously, the latest participants suggest other ones, and so on. Scholars add that this sampling technique is usually used to reach difficult parts of the population where a sampling frame is missing. In relation to this thesis, snowball sampling was selected because of a lack of framework and endless possibilities to choose from. However, it was also a preference due to the distance between the participants and researchers of the project, plus the limited amount of time in order to select them.

## 4.3.4 Conducting the Interviews

To increase the transparency of the data collection, the next part will describe in detail how the interviews were conducted.

| Company | Date and time (UTC+2) | Duration |
|---|---|---|
| Petshop | April 12 - 17:00 | 34:38 |
| Clothing | April 13 - 17:00 | 32:53 |
| Wedding Decoration | April 9 - 17:00 | 50:32 |
| Dentist | April 11 - 14:00 | 36:02 |
| Beauty Salon | April 13 - 15:00 | 1:00:02 |
| Jewelry | April 8 - 17:00 | 48:17 |
| Restaurant | April 10 - 17:00 | 32:03 |
| Laboratory | April 12 - 15:00 | 42:11 |
| Painted China | April 10 - 15:00 | 42:39 |
| Photography and Photo Album | April 11 - 17:00 | 38:07 |

*Table 2. Interview dates and times.*

The interviews for this master project have been conducted online as video conferencing and recorded in a corresponding way. Nehls, Smith and Schneider (2015, p. 140) write that video conferencing is an available alternative to distance communication with the usage of technology. Among the advantages encountered by scholars in conducting the interviews, it is the overcoming of geographical barriers (Nehls, Smith and Schneider, 2015, p. 146). Simultaneously, it is a flexible way since participants have the chance of engaging in the research from their own place. In addition, they feel more comfortable than in a random location. It is also critical to mention that it also offers the benefits of face-to-face interviews in terms of non-verbal, sensory, and emotional clues. Also, scholars note that the quality of the interview is still unchanged. However, video conferencing is a more low-cost and convenient way of conducting the research than the face to face interviews. This is the only alternative, especially since Brazil, the researched market, is located at a considerable distance from the students realizing this thesis, thus this way provides the most value and makes it possible for this research project to be realized.

For this project, 10 interviews were conducted. All the interviews were carried out in Portuguese. This was the chosen language since the majority of the participants can only speak Portuguese. While for the others it would be difficult to express their business thoughts in English and feel more comfortable speaking their native language. Thus, it was decided to use the opportunity that one of us, Patricia, is a native speaker of Portuguese.

## 4.3.5 Reflections on Interviewing

In this section, we explore the main non-expected difficulties encountered during the interviews, their impact, and how they were dealt with. During the preparation for the interviews, we have anticipated some difficulties such as interviewees not responding to the main questions adequately or some aspects that would be difficult to measure with open questions and elaborated strategies to manage that, but during the interview process, we faced some extra challenges.

Some of the interviewees used very informal language in their responses and that impacted the transcription and translation processes. The use of transcribing tools such as Word in Office 360 was more laborious than expected as the software does not have the capacity of understanding some people's accents and frequently misunderstood the words pronounced. For that reason, we needed to carefully check the transcriptions.

The translation process presented an extra challenge since it was needed to translate expressions without losing the meaning. Moreover, some words used as *'PIX'* or *'boleto'* have no direct translation as they are payment methods used in Brazil but not in Denmark, for example. In this case, the meaning of these words is explained in this work.

Another difficulty that was not expected was the different understanding of meanings depending on the interviewee. While some interviewees seem to have understood the supplier as a person from the company, others understood the supplier as the company. To deal with that issue the interviewer asked more follow-up questions to clarify.

## 4.4. Method of Data Analysis

The following section will explore the chosen method for analyzing the collected data for this thesis. Thus, below will also be explained the reasons behind selecting this technique.

### 4.4.1 Theme Analysis

In order to conduct the analysis of the interview data, it was decided to utilize a thematic analysis framework. Braun & Clarke (2012, p. 57) define thematic analysis as a technique for systematically finding, organizing, and presenting patterns of meanings over a data set. Thus, by centering on meanings across a data set, theme analysis grants the researcher the prospect to glimpse and make sense of collective or mutual senses and experiences. Scholars also note that the perceptions of meaning allow the researcher to identify the specific patterns reflective and capable of answering the research question that is being explored. Simultaneously, Braun & Clarke (2012, p. 58) write that theme analysis represents overall a flexible method permitting to look at the data in diverse ways, also examining in-depth a particular side of a phenomenon.

One of the reasons for choosing theme analysis over other methods is the given accessibility and flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 58). Therefore, from a qualitative research perspective, theme analysis offers a way of doing research that overwise appears mystifying, complicated, and challenging. At the same time, theme analysis provides a way of instructing into systematically coding and examining qualitative data that can be later linked with wider theoretical and conceptual problems (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 58). Nevertheless, theme analysis represents an accessible method, where the results can be shown to a wider audience.

The flexibility of this method is also linked to the fact that it can be conducted in various ways (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 58). As follows, scholars present the inductive approach - where the themes and the codes derive from the raw collected data. In comparison, the deductive technique utilizes the approach of bringing into play an array of ideas, concepts, and topics that are later utilized to interpret and code the gathered data. In this way, the codes and themes are developed exclusively from theoretical knowledge and additional data do not have the power to influence the research or create new codes. However, scholars state that in the real world it is never either one approach or another, but more a combination of those two where one method is dominant over the

other one (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 58-59). Simultaneously when comparing these two, scholars note that the inductive method is suitable for essentialists and experiments, while the deductive one is more oriented to the constructionist side and thus examines how the world is assembled and built, and looks through the hypotheses and ideas behind gathered data (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 58).

Applied to this thesis, thematic analysis is going to be used because it represents an effective technique capable of systematizing collected data and finding meaning in a group of subjects proposed to be examined to reply to the formulated research question. Thus, theme analysis will assist in diving deeper into the three sub-questions mentioned above related to branding features influencing the purchase by a small B2B company, promotional and selling strategies to reach those firms, and how the decision-making process is made. Due to theme analysis, this project can analyze the common patterns exposed by business owners of small companies and estimate the extent to which the brand efforts are important in a B2B environment when the buyer is a Brazilian small company with one level of decision-making.

Since these questions cannot be addressed directly, by studying various sub-themes this thesis is aiming to dive deeper into different aspects related to branding that can finally enlighten the proposed research question. In regards to the approach utilized, this thesis is going to employ the deductive approach meaning that the themes and sub-themes will be theory-driven. However, as mentioned above, one approach can never be alone, but more the dominant version. Thus, even though the coding is based on theoretical insights, if new information, related to the research question, can be mapped and employed in the project, new codes are going to be generated and utilized.

When working with theme analysis as a framework, Braun & Clarke (2012, p. 60) indicate that there is a process of six steps involved. The first phase implicates the **familiarization with the data**. During this step, a researcher immerses himself with data by reading the textual data, watching the video, or listening to the recorded audio. Scholars emphasize the importance of making notes and writing comments, while also actively looking at the data and critically starting to reflect on the data's meaning. In the case of this project, the first step will consist of one student listening to the interviews one more time and taking notes in relation to the sub-questions that can be later utilized in the analysis.

The second phase mentioned by Braun & Clarke (2012, p. 61) consists of **generating initial codes**. Therefore, scholars outline that this process is where the analysis is systematized through coding while codes become the building blocks of the analysis. Simultaneously, codes identify and offer a label for a collection of data that represents a short summary of a section of data that does not require a long explanation. For the purpose of this thesis, it was decided to initially follow the codes generated by the theoretical frameworks of the three sub-questions from the problem formulation of the project. Consequently, the analysis is going to be structured in the following three codes: **Customer-Based Brand Equity, B2B and B2C Characteristics,** and **Decision-Making in Small Companies.** These three codes will hold the collected information into three large clusters of data. However, if provided data does not fit into the pre-decided codes, new ones are going to be generated.

The third step indicated by Braun & Clarke (2012, p. 63) concentrates on **searching for themes** to be placed under the codes. Thus, a theme is defined as "[...] something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 63). Scholars also add that at this stage the researcher is a sculptor who makes decisions that shape their piece of stone into a piece of art - the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 63). In relation to this project, themes are going to drive by the theory and in close relationship with the questions from the interview guide that consequently are built reflecting the theory on the topic.

The fourth stage according to Braun & Clarke (2012, p. 65) contains the **reviewing of the potential themes**. Thus, the evolved themes are reviewed in connection with the coded data, and the whole data set. Scholars note that this step is crucial for quality checking, especially in seeing if the codes are working in correlation with the gathered data. In case, they do not comply, the theme might be discarded, reallocated, or collapsed with other themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 65). In this thesis, the themes will be created by one student and reviewed by another one while diving deeper into the analysis. The principal criteria for keeping or changing a theme will be based on whether it is related to the research question or not.

The fifth step encountered by Braun & Clarke (2012, p. 66) consists of **defining and naming the themes** and it embraces the idea of stating what is unique and particular about each theme in a few sentences. Scholars also add that this stage is a paramount part of the analysis as it has the power

to shape in fine detail the analytical part (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 66). In relation to this thesis, the definition and naming of the codes are going to be provided at the beginning of the analysis.

The sixth and last phase of theme analysis relates to **producing the final report** (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 69). Thus, a compelling story based on collected data should be created. Scholars also add that the data should be presented in an understandable and transparent way, simultaneously replying to the formulated research question. In the case of the current thesis, the repost stage can be identified in the discussion part of the project where findings will be reviewed and presented in a way that reflexes and replies to the above-mentioned topic.

## 4.5 Quality Criteria

In terms of quality criteria, Bryman (2012, p. 389) emphasizes that establishing and assessing the quality of research can be achieved through reliability and validity. In this way, validity is concerned with the question of whether the study measures what it is meant to measure. On the other side, reliability is concerned with the problem of whether the study might be replicated (Bryman, 2012, p. 390). The validity of this thesis is assured by the research question and theory coming as support. Regarding reliability, these are supported by the interview guide, which can be utilized in repeating this study. Also, in order to verify the quality of the interview questions and guide overall, an interview test has been conducted before starting the proper data collection process.

## 4.6 Limitations of the Research Design

Limitations are viewed as an outline that these are restrictions and constraints in the investigation process of the study (PRO Academic Writers, 2020). Hence, among the limitations that can be found in a research project are encountered the following - sample size, access to data, lack of time, financial resources, data collection, and method. Concerning this thesis, one of the limitations relies on the language used to conduct the interviews - Portuguese, which is the native language of one of the students conducting the interviews but is completely unknown to the other one.

Consequently, the interview guide should be translated into Portuguese, and the transcriptions from Portuguese back to English. Therefore, in order to deal with any mistakes during the transcription, a second person native of Portuguese will supervise the translation and guarantee its accuracy.

Another limitation related to this thesis is the sample size. Even though the current thesis has a considerable size of participants, more can be added, and thus the results of the study might suffer certain changes. Also related to limitations can be added the distance between the participants and researchers that influenced the method of conducting the interviews online.

It is also crucial to take into consideration the fact that the research project is realized in one country - Brazil. Consequently, if another country was to be chosen as a target for the thesis the results could have suffered certain changes. Simultaneously, if the collection of data happens at a different time that might have also influenced the outcomes of the research since Brazil is currently in the pre-election days.

## 4.7 Ethical Considerations

When it comes to the ethical issues Bryman (2012, p. 130) states that they are crucial and cannot be overseen as they relate straight to the piece of research and topic involved. Generally, the ethical considerations revolve around the way people on whom the research is carried out are treated and what activities are allowed or not to engage with them. Discussing the issues of ethical principles Diener and Crandall (1978, as cited in Bryman, 2012, p. 135) iterate on the possibility of harming the participants, having a lack of permission and informed agreement, invasion of privacy, or the possibility of having a deception involved.

In relation to this thesis, harm to participants is one of the ethical issues encountered. Since the participants are working in small businesses from certain industries, there is a chance to be recognized by partners, clients, and so on. Usually, small companies are dependent on investments and if they are recognized and their answers are not what the investors are willing to see, that can decrease the likelihood of receiving funding or set conflicts with the current investors. Also, it is critical to remember that these companies are chased by potential sellers and the given replies

might be used to influence them to purchase and give away confidential decision-making details. Simultaneously, since some companies have more than one employee and the answers provided by the interviewees reflect their way of thinking, which can be different from what other employees perceive. Thus, in that case, the tension might occur between the person interviewed and the others in the company. Thus, in order to avoid this from happening, it was decided to keep the participants' names private and only utilize the business niche in the analysis of the project. Thus, wedding, jewelry, and restaurant - are going to be utilized in a recognizable way instead of the actual name of the participants or their businesses.

Another ethical consideration to be considered is the informed agreement. Therefore, after the selection of the participants, an email was sent informing them about the data to be collected and obtaining permission to realize this research. The third ethical consideration to be taken into account lies in the data protection related to recording the interview and storing the gathered data. Thus, in order to comply with the GDPR requirements, it was decided to utilize Zoom for recording the interviews and Microsoft OneDrive to store the transcripts as these tools are GDPR compliant.

# 5. Analysis

The following chapter will deal with the analytical part of this thesis, aiming to provide explanations to the proposed research question regarding how important are the branding efforts of a selling company in B2B when the buyer is a Brazilian small company with one level of decision-making. The analysis is going to be applied in order to extract the main points from the interview transcripts and connect them with relevant theory.

As mentioned in the methodology, this section will start with a table presenting the codes and final themes created through the analytical process. The table also contains the definition of each theme used. Afterward, the structure of the analysis is organized into three parts mirroring the theoretical foundation of the thesis and three subjects proposed in the sub-questions which are (1) Customer-Based Brand Equity, (2) B2B and B2C Characteristics, and (3) Decision-Making in Small Businesses.

The theme analysis is structured in the following manner. First, we have the code, inside every code the final themes will be displayed. Simultaneously, every theme contains a reflection of the analysis combined with the theoretical framework discussed in the theory chapter and quotes from the interviews.

| Section (Code) | Sub-section (Theme) | Description and Purpose |
|---|---|---|
| **5.1 CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY MODEL** | Brand Knowledge | Describing the role of knowing the brand when making a purchase. |
| | Brand Elements | Information about whether small businesses remember the logo, slogan, name, and package of the seller company and if these elements can influence the acquisition. |
| | Brand Value | Details about the value offered by a product and how it impacts the decision-making process, especially in terms of emotional and functional dimensions. |
| | Brand Loyalty | Describing how small businesses view loyalty towards a selling company and under which circumstances they are ready to choose another provider. |
| | Brand Relationships | Describing how small businesses see the importance of relationships with the seller company and if they have any long-term relationships with them. |
| | Product Characteristics | Prioritization among six criteria for describing products. |

| | Price | Information related to the link between the perception that a higher price means better quality. |
|---|---|---|
| **5.2. B2B AND B2C CHARACTERISTICS** | Seller's Location | Data on how small companies meet new sellers, especially if the trade happens physically or digitally. |
| | Local vs Global | Describes everything related to small businesses making local or global purchases and the difficulties occurring in this process. |
| | Adjustments | Relates to whether small businesses choose products that match the current business equipment and customers' wishes or operate outside these demands. |
| | Reasons for Choosing a Seller | Provides details related to what are the grounds behind selecting a selling company over another one. |
| | Changing the Seller | Gives details about whether a small company changed its provider due to customers' feedback. |
| | Choosing a Product | Reflects on whether a small company looks for products serving the scope or accepts the ones that are available. |
| | Personal Taste | Provides information related to whether personal taste and preferences influence the decision of which product to choose for the business. |
| | Payment | Reflects on the level of complexity related to payment methods for small companies. |
| | Timing Business vs Personal | Relates to any information about how much time is spent buying a business product vs a personal one. |
| | References | Gives details related to whether small businesses require references before choosing another firm. |
| | Received Information | Provides data on if small companies receive information from their selling partners and what format it holds. |
| | Searching for a New Supplier | Details on how small businesses usually lookout for new companies to buy from. |
| | Searching Suppliers through Social Media | Relates to whether small businesses find companies to buy from utilizing social media and what were the circumstances for this to happen. |
| | Online Research | Reflects the information about whether searching online for a potential seller company helps and influences their decision. |
| | Content on Social Media | Gives information about if small businesses remember any posts on social media from their selling companies and what those usually represent. |
| **5.3 DECISION-MAKING IN SMALL COMPANIES** | Understanding the Need | Provides information related to how small businesses usually recognize that there is a requirement to purchase a product. |
| | Effort | Describes how much effort is put in by company owners when buying a personal vs business product. |
| | First Selection | Defines how the small businesses do the first round of selection between possible suppliers. |

| | Influencing Factors | Refers to what and who are the influencers that impact the decision upon which selling company to be chosen in the decision-making process. |
|---|---|---|
| | Personality Influence | Gives information about whether personal characteristics can impact the purchase and how. |
| | Financial Influencers | Relates to how the financial situation in the market might impact the decision-making process. |
| | Economic Situation | Provides details on how the economic situation affects how the decisions are taken inside the company. |
| | Intuitiveness and Rationality | Defines the level of intuitiveness and rationality in the decision-making process. |
| | Confidence Level | Refers to the confidence level concerning the decisions made. |
| | Complexity and Time Spent | Defines the complexity and time spent while making decisions. |
| | Risks Comfortability | Reflects on how comfortable the decision-makers are with risks. |

*Table 3. Overview of codes, themes, descriptions, and purposes.*

The next section consists of quotes from the participants followed by the analysis. The complete transcription of the interviews can be accessed in the Appendix using the guiding table below.

| Company | Pages |
|---|---|
| Petshop | 111 - 115 |
| Clothing | 115 - 119 |
| Wedding Decoration | 119 - 124 |
| Dentist | 124 - 129 |
| Beauty Salon | 129 - 133 |
| Jewelry | 134 - 139 |
| Restaurant | 139 - 143 |
| Laboratory | 143 - 147 |
| Painted China | 147 - 153 |
| Photography and Photo Album | 153 - 158 |

*Table 4. Companies and appendix pages.*

# 5.1 CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY MODEL

## 5.1.1 Brand Knowledge

When the interviewees were asked about how important it was to have previous knowledge of a product or brand when choosing a supplier, the result was a mean of 4.1. In that regard, five was the highest possible value meaning very important. That shows that most of our interviewees give high importance to previous knowledge. Some of the interviewees explained why this is important to them and referred to the impacts the products that they buy can have on their own business and customers. One of the interviewees explained that knowing the origin of the product is important. That is in accordance with Aaker (1991) when he explains that a brand exposes to the consumer the origin of the product to give protection to customers and producers from the competition and to enable differentiation from similar products. Simultaneously, it resembles Keller's (1993) ideas of giving brand knowledge the highest importance and placing it as the most valuable asset owned by a firm.

**Petshop:** *It's 5 (...) I have to make sure it's a good product to offer my customer. I'm not going to offer something of low quality to later hear complaints or harm my business in any way.*
**Clothing:** *5. Because I wanted my company to be based on conscious consumption so if I'm going to offer a product I need to know the origin of what I bought to pass it on.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *4. In my market, because marriage is a market in which we cannot go wrong, there is no chance of making mistakes. And the reputation itself, of the supplier, is very important, isn't it?*
**Dentist:** *For me it's 5. (...) because it's the longevity of the treatments. It depends on my technique as well as the quality of the products. Dental treatments are expensive (...) It has to last many years, so I value the quality.*
**Beauty Salon:** *4. Look because you have to know what you're going to sell, don't you?(...) But I also don't have all that time to study so much about one thing, so that's why I didn't give it a five, I gave it a four, maybe three and a half.*
**Jewelry:** *I would say 4. Thinking a lot about cost-benefit not to have a problem in the future, right? It is also inevitable to happen some things or to regret it, but being able to avoid it is better.*
**Restaurant:** *More or less. I know chicken breast is chicken breast and it's going to be that way. Regardless of the supplier.*
**Laboratory:** *We buy a lot without knowing about the supplier, sometimes by indication, we buy because of the brand of the product I am receiving. The product can put 4. And the supplier 3.*
**Painted China:** *5, because I need a quality product and I also need to buy for a fair price.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *4. Because I always want to know about the product. I basically see the quality of the final product, so I see what paper they're going to use (...).*

## 5.1.2 Brand Elements

**Logo and Slogan**

When asked about the logo and slogan the responses showed that while all of them remembered the logo, just one remembered the slogan. All the interviewees attribute the fact of remembering the logo to the constant contact with the brands. Moreover, some of them find some logo designs appealing and think that can be a reason for the remembrance. Thus, it was possible to see that the brand recall dimension proposed by Keller (1993) is present in the daily life of the interviewees and consequently in their respective companies. That also corroborates with the importance of Kotler and Pfoertsch's (2006) idea of brand elements as all the interviewees have some degree of connection with the logo therefore this aspect is highly important. One of the interviewees said that the logo differentiates the brand and that he easily recognizes a product because of it. This is also proposed by Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) when he exposes that the brand elements can differentiate firms, products, or services. On the other hand, the slogan seems to have lower importance to the interviewed companies as just one of them remembered. The logo may be more recollected than the slogan due to the frequent contact of the companies with it as it is frequently exposed on the product that they use daily, while the slogan is not stamped on the products.

**Petshop:** *Yes. The Hydra has an H (...) In fact, I studied all these companies a lot before deciding on them, so I remember, because I had a lot of contact. No.*
**Clothing:** *Yes. There are two that I buy the most Penguin the brand the logo is like a little penguin (...) The other one (...) is called By you. That's like the monogram of the letters. I think because I buy it so I see it a lot I follow it on social media, so I see it a lot I think it sticks in my mind. No, slogan I think not.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Yes, It's just the name or it has a design. It is usually something that represents the name (...) Yes. It belongs to Aline Guimarães, who is an advisor. Beyond the obvious is her slogan. I think it's really cool that she does advising that she does this service beyond the obvious, right? So it's not more of the same thing.*
**Dentist:** *I remembered the Atlântica that sells equipment, so I can visualize them here in my head. There are some brands of products that I think that I have been using them for so many years, I already look at them like that, I already know. One I think is cute. It has a larger design that is kind of bluish. So maybe it caught my attention, right? No.*
**Beauty Salon:** *Yes. Because these are things that appear a lot like that. I pay a lot of attention to that in the logo there are things that I buy more for the logo than for the product, because it matches the shop environment because everything is very visual there. No.*
**Jewelry:** *I remember it because it's stamped on what I use. (...) It's like it's a machine wheel like that. (...) every time I use this machine, the logo is there, so I always look at it. No. (...)*
**Restaurant:** *At Friboi's Minerva, yes, I can. Product differentiation, I don't know, I look there, I know that it's from that supplier. I look and I already know which product it is. No.*
**Laboratory:** *If it's one we've been buying for a long time, yes. (...) I've had it for about ten years so it's easier to remember. No.*

**Painted China:** *I think it's Germer's, but it's Germer, that's the name, you know? It's a regular logo. Because I buy a lot and the logo comes on the back of the plate. So as I paint, I have to turn the plate over to sign, so I see it all the time. No.*

**Photography and Photo Album:** *From the album companies I buy, I know their logo is like a dream book, (...) it's like a drawing of a book. And another company called Fox. Fox is a kind... is like a camera thing. (...). So I remember these 2 pretty easily in my head. I think it's because I see a lot. I can't remember.*

## Name of the supplier

To nine of the interviewees, the name of a supplier company never had an important role when buying products for their business. One out of ten interviewees stopped buying from a company because of its name as it sounded misogynist and she was ashamed of presenting that to the client. That relates to Keller (1993, citing Plummer, 1985) when he explains that brands can be characterized by their personality, in this case, the personality trait was not pleasant and that made the interviewee stop buying the product. Two of the interviewees said that although the name of a supplier never influenced their decision related to the business purchases, that could have happened to their private purchases. Therefore, it was seen during the interviews that the name of the company can sometimes be the face of the product as suggested by Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006), and can have a negative impact if the message regarded is not positive in the eyes of the buyer.

**Petshop:** *No, it never made a difference to me.*
**Clothing:** *No, I never did.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *No, no, no, no.*
**Dentist:** *It doesn't matter at all to me.*
**Beauty Salon:** *Yes. The name of the product was Macholândia. It was a very good oil, an excellent product that worked very well. It's just that the name is ridiculous, it's just that I was so ashamed to say it. Then I said to all the customers, look, it's very good, but the name is ridiculous and we laughed together. But there was a time when I said: We can't sell this product because I'm embarrassed, I'm embarrassed I don't want to go through this situation anymore, let's look for an oil as good as and that has a coolest name.*
**Jewelry:** *Thinking about the company, I don't think so. My personal life maybe, but that's not in the company as far as I can remember.*
**Restaurant, Laboratory and Painted China:** *No.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *In the case of my business, I can't remember even a specific situation like that, no.*

## Packaging

Keller (1993) states that packaging plays a role in the purchase of a product, and six out of the ten interviewees considered it important to some degree. Some said that although it influences, this influence is minimal. On the other hand, Aaker (1991) explains that package design is one of the ways to differentiate from the competitors. As for the majority of the interviewees, packaging is somewhat important, this may be consistent with what is proposed by Aaker (1991).

**Petshop:** *Influences, but doesn't mean everything.*
**Clothing, Wedding Decoration and Beauty Salon:** *Yes.*
**Dentist:** *No. Even because the packaging is standardized.*
**Jewelry:** *Very little.*
**Restaurant:** *No.*
**Laboratory:** *Not as a company.*
**Painted China:** *No, because usually, they pack super well, nothing breaks, you can pack anyway even with newspaper arriving intact is the goal.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *A little, but not a lot.*


## 5.1.3 Brand Value

Six of the interviewees revealed to have recently bought products that they consider expensive. The reasons appointed in order to make that choice relies on aspects such as the quality of the product, the relationship with the supplier, the previous good experience with the same product, the lack of cheaper options and the reliability of the brand. This somewhat follows Leek and Christodoulides (2012, citing Keenan 2000) when he proposes that when the risk is high the emotional aspect can play a role in confronting the buyers. We can see that interaction, especially in the Wedding Decoration response where she stated that she is comfortable because they are well-positioned on social media and the service is in constant contact with her making her feel secure and relieved. Nevertheless, the feelings greatly differ from person to person, while some are happy and feel good, some feel bad and are scared because they consider it too expensive. Simultaneously it can be noticed that the brand value plays a significant role in choosing a product and it is manifested simultaneously in the emotional and functional brand value highlighted by Leek and Christodoulides (2012).

**Petshop:** *Yes. For the quality. Oh I felt good because the product is more beautiful and it is stronger(...).*
**Clothing and Restaurant:** *No.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Yes, (...) I already know the service, but also for being well-positioned on social media and such, even a little bit of marketing, right? The customer service is always talking to me. (...) So this flexibility of the supplier to negotiate also helped a lot and he already delivered. (...) I felt... a thing of security and relief, I think.*
**Dentist:** *Almost every day. (...) I work with security with that product. (...) I've had very good results with it. So, I don't risk it, you know? (...) Well, I'm kind of terrified, because I think it's really expensive, but on the other hand, I'm grateful for being able to buy what I'm buying is because I'm selling, right?*
**Beauty Salon:** *Yes. All gel products and hair products I think are very expensive, but it is necessary. We chose it because we did a survey with our employees. For us to see which is the best brand they are used to working with.*

**Jewelry:** *Expensive, no? So 200-something reais, ok? (...) The one I bought is steel, and the other one was bigger, but I didn't need a bigger one, so I'll go somewhere in between. (...) Very happy because I love to buy things on the internet, (...).*
**Laboratory:** *Yes. So sometimes because of the brand or if that brand I know that its performance is better (...) I feel bad when I buy something expensive.*
**Painted China:** *Yes, this porcelain, and especially the gold. Expensive nonsense. (...) So it's no use wanting to buy cheaper from another supplier that may be fake.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *Yeah, I'm going to make a purchase this week, man. For the finish, for the coating of this specific album, which is superior to another binder I was using more. I feel giving a better product to my client.*


## 5.1.4 Brand Loyalty

Although most of the interviewees said that they would change suppliers if there was a better offer, the majority also mentioned that they have a certain degree of loyalty. Trust seems to be an important aspect. This is in line with Aaker's (1991) work when he exposes that brand loyalty shows the connection between a customer and a brand. The interviewees mentioned that they tend to buy from the same supplier and some of them state that they do not search for other options if they are satisfied with the current ones, in this case, we can see that there is customer loyalty. Therefore client retention is in accordance with Aaker (1991) when he proposed that brand loyalty can reduce the costs of a company as it is expensive to gain new clients as they can continuously sell to the previous ones. Moreover, two of the interviewees explained that if the supplier is also a small company they would tend to stay longer with them. The main reasons for changing suppliers in the future are better prices, better products, or having issues with the current suppliers. When asked about the reasons that made them change suppliers, the lowering of the quality or issues with the delivery was what motivated the change, the majority of the interviewees do not mention new offers from the competition. One of the interviewees even declared that she would not easily change suppliers even if it was cheaper due to her connection to the current one. This is consistent with Aaker (1991) when he noted that brand loyalty reduces the chances of the competitors attracting satisfied customers.

**Petshop:** *I could change if the quality was equivalent and the offer was better, yes. The company is still very new. So I didn't have time to make this change.*
**Clothing:** *I think Penguin is a bigger brand, yes I would change. But I already have my admiration bond with By You, even with their proposal as a company, so I can support them. They are totally in line with what I believe and think so it wouldn't be so easy even if there was a cheaper company.*

**Wedding Decoration:** *I can change if there is a better offer, I'm not tied to anyone. They know that even with each contract you have to have the same or better quality to continue, otherwise we don't hire more. (...) Now yes. Quality even on delivery. It was left to be desired.*

**Dentist:** *Look, I'm usually loyal (...) I buy from the same company for almost 30 years, right? But I always keep an eye out if there's any promotion, any website or I buy too (...) On a daily basis, I am faithful. Yes, I've already changed it because I thought the quality was going down.*

**Beauty Salon:** *I have to be faithful to AmBev that is in the contract. The rest I can do whatever I want and generally it's kind of diverse there. Ease of purchase, delivery and communication with the supplier or if it doesn't sell, if there's a lot left and I throw a lot of stuff away, I'll exchange it. I stopped buying a kombucha that I was loyal to, but the customer stopped buying (...).*

**Jewelry:** *I can change if I feel that it's another offer from someone reliable, right? (...) There are 2 providers that I like the most and I know there are others, but I really don't even explore these others, because I already have confidence in them. (...) I think I'm satisfied with these, these suppliers that I already have, you know? Probably because of having a product that I wanted that the other didn't have. And then, taking into account, buying over the internet, it's not if I'm going to buy a part here, another one here, then I'd have to pay shipping twice. So, sometimes balancing like this, it's worth buying everything from one place.*

**Restaurant:** *I change suppliers with a better offer and my suppliers know this. I make it very clear to them if a better offer appears, I'll buy it. (...). Price. It's the only reason.*

**Laboratory:** *We have several suppliers of the same products. If the guy lets me down, I change. Yes. I changed it because it started to give problems, delays. And that burned my image with my clients, so I never hired again.*

**Painted China:** *I don't buy. I don't buy it because I don't trust it. I have not tested the product. So I only buy the ones I'm used to (...).*

**Photography and Photo Album:** *I'm generally loyal to some products, but I'm not exclusive (...) I wouldn't have a problem changing it like that, because I think in this case I don't buy from small companies, you know? (...) One reason would be another personalization offer, mainly album, something that doesn't exist in the normal market. I changed it, but it's because they've lowered the quality. Then I changed it.*

## 5.1.5 Brand Relationships

When companies were asked about how important their relationship with the seller company is, eight out of ten answered that it is very important. Most of the companies have had some of the same suppliers for over five years, one of them has been buying from the same supplier for over twenty years. That is in accordance with what Leek & Christodoulides (2011) propose that especially in the B2B relationship there are long-lasting bonds. Simultaneously, as Leek and Christodoulides (2012) outline, the relationships with the employees represent a more important element in B2B than in the B2C environment. In this context, this can be noticed through phrases

such as 'I like to have communication with a representative'; 'I like to have the one who saves you. Know that the person is there'.

**Petshop:** *There is certainly one that is very important, because I depend on it to provide good service. I depend on them to have good products, good equipment. No, the company is not 3 years old yet.*
**Clothing:** *I think it's very important that you have a relationship of trust that the information you pass on is true, in short, aligned thinking not only related to price and such, but everything. No, I started a year ago.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Very important because if the contract is wrong, the relationship is the one that will be there and will resolve it. And I have a lot of partners like that. Relationships are very important to me. Yes.*
**Dentist:** *Super important relationship, client, company has to exist and has to be bonded. I'm from the bonding period, still, you know? Know them by name. Yes.*
**Beauty Salon:** *For me it's very important, I think that communication has to be done and I like to have communication with a representative (...). Yes.*
**Jewelry:** *No, it's not important to me. As long as they solve my problem. Well, I don't like you texting and stuff like that. After-sales, the minimum, only. I have one.*
**Restaurant:** *(...) Not today, today they just send promotion on WhatsApp. If you are interested, get in touch. Every now and then a salesperson sends an audio, something like that. So a relationship with the company is not important to me. Yes.*
**Laboratory:** *It's important to me. It's good I like to have the one who saves you. Know that the person is there. We've known each other for more than ten years. Yes.*
**Painted China:** *Yeah. (...) That I have a friendship relationship, yes, you know? And very trusting. (...) It's a very nice relationship, she's the person I'm most free to ask (...) I think that's what I have more affection for, because Germer is a big company, it's very industrial, you know? It's very professional. The contact has no affective bond or anything like that. Yeah, I have Germer and I have Aladin, this firm is smaller than I told you. I have been working with them for over 20 years.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *This is very important to me. It's like I told you, it's one of the reasons that makes me work more with one company or the other (...). I have 2 at least.*

## 5.1.6 Product Characteristics

The interviewees were asked to prioritize between product quality, the performance of the product, delivery of the product, reliability of the selling company, if the selling company offers support and maintenance services or relationship with the supplier, the most voted aspects are shown on the table below:

| Criteria | Score |
|----------|-------|
| Quality | 9 |
| Reliability | 5 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Performance | 5 |
| Delivery | 5 |
| Relationship | 3 |
| Support | 3 |

*Table 5. Criteria and scores.*

The quality feature was the most important to the interviewees, being present in 9 out of 10 answers, therefore quality is still the most appreciated aspect as proposed by Bendixen et al. (2004, as cited in Leek and Christodoulides, 2012).

**Petshop:** *I think reliability first and when I say reliability, I also mean trusting the quality of the product, not just the company. And then if I can trust the quality, I don't need, for example, maintenance support, because it probably won't be a problem or at least not in the short term, right? So I wanted reliability first, then quality and performance third.*
**Clothing:** *I think quality, reliability and performance. Quality and then having confidence that the supplier is passing on information that is truthful and after performance.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Quality, delivery and relationship.*
**Dentist:** *Quality, delivery and relationship.*
**Beauty Salon:** *I know the ideal would be to talk about quality, but that's how we see that too but it doesn't have to be perfect if it sells well. So I'm being very honest you know? I would talk about performance, supplier relationship and delivery.*
**Jewelry:** *I think I would put reliability, quality and support.*
**Restaurant:** *So first delivery, then quality and performance.*
**Laboratory:** *Then product quality, product performance and support.*
**Painted China:** *Quality, delivery and reliability.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *Then, reliability, support and quality. The most important thing for me today, I think, because I've had some problems, I think it would be reliability. The support, and after the quality, since the communication with these companies is very important to be able to really work the work, understand?*

## 5.1.7 Price

When asked if a higher price meant better quality, six out of the ten interviewees did not agree. The remaining four think that somehow the product is better because it is more expensive. One of the interviewees explained that she believed that the product had to be superior to justify the price. Three out of the interviewees admitted that they bought expensive products because the more expensive price made them believe that they would be superior. However, this does not align with Keller's thoughts (1993) that brands are differently categorized in customers' minds due to different prices.

**Petshop:** *Not always. Not.*
**Clothing and Laboratory:** *No. Not.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Not my market at all. (...)*
**Dentist:** *(...) I do. (...) I don't buy it anyway, because it's expensive and if I don't like it, it's a loss, right?*
**Beauty Salon:** *No. I think there are nail polishes that are more expensive and nail polishes that are cheaper and the quality is kind of the same, you know? But it makes us think that, because it is more expensive, there must be something that is better or healthier or something like that. Yes. I've done it. (...)*
**Jewelry:** *(...) generally speaking, no. The opposite is nice. I want the cheapest.*
**Restaurant:** *In my view, yes. But it's not always that way. Yeah, yeah. Rare, very rare (...).*
**Painted China:** *(...) If the product is on sale, the price will not be the highest, I always have to look at the quality of the product. I always look at the quality of the product and not the price. (...) but depending on the quality, it will always be more expensive.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *In my opinion, most of the time. (...) Yes, already, several times.*

## Final Reflections

Brand knowledge is key when a company is choosing a supplier. Sometimes this is connected with the quality aspect, especially if the supplier's product can affect the end customer of the buyer's company. The Logo is recollected due to the interaction with its presence in the products, while the slogan seems not to have the same impact as it was remembered in just one case. Moreover, the name of a company does not hold an important significance. The packaging influence is very limited. Brand Value seems important when a company is choosing a product and is usually associated with quality. Thus, the price might trigger the risk reduction by emotional value. Brand loyalty does not possess the main role although that is still a component, therefore firms can consider changing suppliers if they get better offers. Some of the companies have long-term relationships with other businesses, for that reason, Brand Relationships are indeed considered important. Quality is the most relevant aspect considered by the companies, but it is not the only one and the small companies do not directly relate higher prices to better quality.

# 5.2. B2B AND B2C CHARACTERISTICS

## 5.2.1 Seller's Location

All of the interviewed companies revealed that they have bought products without knowing at least some of their suppliers in person. That may indicate that although the Content Marketing Institute - Benchmarking Report (2016, as cited in Heidi, 2017) states that the physical meetings are the

most successful way to B2B, not having an in-person encounter did not prevent the companies that took part in this study from acquiring products. One of the interviewees stated that the COVID-19 pandemic can be a reason for fewer in-person meetings. That corroborates Canela et al. (2020) findings that point to the change in the go-to-market model from the traditional in-person meetings to the digital interactions using video and chat.

**Petshop:** *I've never met a supplier personally before, only the one from Hydra who came here after I bought.*
**Clothing:** *Yes. Many.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Already, chat on WhatsApp or Instagram. Even more with the pandemic that we don't even know personally.*
**Dentist:** *Often. I buy a lot on the internet.*
**Beauty Salon, Restaurant, Laboratory:** *Yes.*
**Jewelry:** *Yes, quite a lot.*
**Painted China:** *Yes, already. This factory I told you about, where I buy imported paints. I don't know, but I was referred by a person who has been painting porcelain for many years and I have never had such problems. I buy everything over the phone.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *I already did, more than once.*


## 5.2.2 Local vs Global

Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) suggest that because of globalization, innovation regarding delivery and logistics, and free trade the geographical barriers are eliminated in the B2B. Our research revealed that some aspects coincide with the studied companies, but others are still a struggle. Seven out of the ten companies exposed that they have bought products internationally, showing that indeed it is possible to break barriers. Nevertheless, some difficulties addressed were: delayed shipping, the high price of other currencies, and bureaucracy. Two companies that denied buying from abroad are the restaurant and the laboratory. The restaurant's needed supply is mainly food products, in that case, this can be an advantage of having local products due to their freshness and because Brazil is able to internally sustain most of the food consumption. The second is the laboratory that uses products that have to have a special importation process. When asked if being Brazilian is an aspect taken into consideration when deciding for a product, most of the companies answered that usually, that is not relevant, but the ones that addressed some relevance pointed to being local (city wise) as well as having other aspects as being small, or made by women.

**Petshop:** *I bought it, but it hasn't arrived yet. Yeah, preparing to know that is going to be delayed. No.*

**Clothing:** *This is difficult because I like to buy from brands because they have a Brazilian production chain and I think this is a positive point. But if it was perhaps a product that I see that also has a nice initiative that respects the production chain, the people involved in the work would think so. Just not for that. I take it into account, but it's not exclusive.*

**Wedding Decoration:** *I bought things from abroad because I wanted to have a different vision that people don't have in Brazil. Yes, totally, no problem. Yes. And maybe even that most local thing about Brasilia itself. To strengthen the local market, then yes.*

**Dentist:** *Over the internet, yes. Well, because I needed to, because they are good, because I wanted to try them. No.*

**Beauty Salon:** *Yes. Because my father lives there in the United States. Not because it is Brazilian, but because it is local. I have already bought some products from Brasilia for example I wanted to buy because it is a small brand, a brand made by women this is more important to me than being Brazilian itself because I buy several Brazilian things because I am in Brazil, but for me it's more important to be local, to be artisanal, to be made by women, to be made by small companies, even because I am too. In order to have this support of this collaborative economy, you finally know how people help each other anyway.*

**Jewelry:** *Yes. Usually the price, often abroad is the same as what is sold here, and there will be a cheaper price. (...) I don't know either, maybe it's a different product than what you have here. Yes, I think so. I prefer to buy directly here in Brazil, to help the national trade, in addition to the support being much better, it is not like that, if you have any problems.*

**Restaurant:** *No. Abroad only if it was a better offer. No.*

**Laboratory:** *No. We always buy through someone because of documentation, don't we? I can't do it, we always have to have the middleman unless I create a company for that. No.*

**Painted China:** *I've bought it once, but it's not worth it (...) But it's currently impossible because of the euro, isn't it? (...) I would only buy it if I didn't have something similar in Brazil, you know? Because it's a lot of work, it's a lot of bureaucracy to buy from abroad. No, I buy, I buy what is good, it may be Brazilian and it may not be. Usually the best are not Brazilian.*

**Photography and Photo Album:** *Yeah, but I don't buy anymore. Because it's not worth it financially it would be too expensive. And the shipping issue too. The deadline is too long to deliver to my client. Not just for that reason, but all the ones I work with are Brazilian.*


### 5.2.3 Adjustments

Despite the fact that the majority of the interviewees considered high the importance of a product that they are intending to buy to match their current equipment and customers, one interviewee explained that she knows better than the client what their needs are, therefore she will follow her will and not the clients. It is important to notice that her business is regarding art, so it is in the first place very subjective for the consumer's evaluation as well. Nevertheless, the result was an average of 4.1, even though one interviewee did not respond in a numeric form. Overall this is in accordance with Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) when he exposes that in B2B the products can require

a high level of adjustment as they have to be integrated into complex systems and fulfill specifications

**Petshop:** *5 is very important.*
**Clothing, Beauty Salon, Restaurant, Laboratory:** *5.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *I think 4.*
**Dentist:** *5. It's super important.*
**Jewelry:** *100% important. So 5. It even happens, I already have something that I can't even use and I bought it thinking it would be super useful.*
**Painted China:** *(...) I always buy porcelain that I like and the customer is going to like what's there.(...) I never go to the customer's taste, no. (...) I don't do the customer's taste anymore, because what happens? The client doesn't understand anything. (...). It's my taste and the client has to adapt to my taste.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *I would say 3, middle ground.*


## 5.2.4 Reasons for Choosing a Seller

### Brand Descriptions

Six of the interviewees revealed that descriptions as cheaper, better, faster, or bigger a good enough reason are still good reasons to choose a product. Three of the interviewees said that these are not key when buying a product and one stated that this is important, but that is not enough. In that aspect, the result of the interviews shows that this description is still convincing in most cases contradicting what is proposed by Heidi (2017).

**Petshop:** *I think so. Because if it's better, I think being better is enough.*
**Clothing:** *Yes. What's best for me is value for money.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *No.*
**Dentist:** *(...) cheaper for me is not even interesting because most dental products are imported, they are expensive, so when it's cheap, I'm already suspicious. (...) So I don't look at price, so I look at quality.*
**Beauty Salon:** *More or less. I think there's more to it, but those reasons are important.*
**Jewelry:** *In my case, yes.*
**Restaurant and Laboratory:** *Yes.*
**Painted China:** *Yes, it is. If it is of good quality, I always look for a lower price.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *No, I think it depends.*

### Additional Offers

When asked about after-sales services being a dealbreaker when choosing a supplier, most interviewees revealed that this is not something that they have considered, one interviewee thinks that is already expected as part of the business and another one said that although she that was not considered during the decision-making process, the positive experience with the after-sales surprised her positively. Leek and Christodoulides (2012, citing Mudambi et al. 1997)  propose

that after-sales services can extend the suppliers' profit, but during our investigation, we can not find a strong relation to this when the first decision has to be made.

**Petshop:** *No, when I chose Hydra I didn't know they would do after-sales service, but I know it had good quality and then I was surprised by the service. Aham, yes.*
**Clothing:** *No. Yes.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Yes. Other benefits that they sometimes say are outside the contract, right?*
**Dentist:** *I think this is already part of the business. They have to give me support. I think so, out of curiosity. Sometimes I go to Congresses, and I find something so cool. But the bad thing is that it's such an impulse.*
**Beauty Salon:** *Yes. Yes that's what I said about the freezer. Yes.*
**Jewelry:** *I don't remember, but I think so.*
**Restaurant:** *No. Yes.*
**Laboratory:** *No. Not.*
**Painted China:** *No, no, because when I buy they always tell me how long it will take. So I have to accept it, mainly now in the pandemic. When you order a product from the factory, you pay in advance and they will only deliver it to you 3 months later. I think they only start making the product after they get the money. Just because I liked it, no, I think I already bought it to test.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *Now, like a discount coupon, like, I can buy some albums in advance and then have them made, you know? Yes.*

## Personal Likes

When asked if they already bought products because they like them despite the fact there was no specific need, most of them said they have done it and one of the interviewees related that to being an impulse. That specific aspect goes against what is proposed by Leek and Christodoulides (2012) when he states that B2B holds more rational than emotional characteristics. On the other hand, Brouthers, Abdriessen, and Nicolaes (1998) suggest that small firms are not rational in some activities and the managers can rely more on their wishes than on rational analysis which coincides with our findings.

**Petshop:** *Aham, yes.*
**Clothing:** *Yes.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *I think so, out of curiosity. Sometimes I go to Congresses, and I find something so cool. But the bad thing is that it's such an impulse.*
**Beauty Salon:** *Yes.*
**Jewelry:** *(...) I probably won't remember anything specific, but most likely I will.*
**Restaurant:** *Yes.*
**Laboratory:** *Not.*
**Painted China:**. *Just because I liked it, no, I think I already bought it to test.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *Yes.*

## 5.2.5 Changing the Seller

Six out of ten interviewees declared that they already faced at least one situation where they changed their supplier due to their customers' feedback. It is important to notice that some of them did not experience that because they are new to the market. Eight out of ten companies believe that their customers' orders and opinions have an influence on what they purchase. That means that the majority of the companies interviewed have changed suppliers and think that their acquisitions are connected to their clients' demands. That is in accordance with Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) when he exposes that the end consumer has a role in the B2B buying relations.

**Petshop:** *I still haven't had time for this. Nobody gave me bad feedback, because I chose well. I've already changed it by my feedback. Yes.*

**Clothing:** *No. Yes, it is very important to me.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Already. I got feedback. (...) It influences because he is my client, I have to listen. (...)*
**Dentist:** *Yes. X-rays took time and customers complained. I even tried to talk to the company, but (...) it didn't work, then I changed companies, I now send them to another competitor of theirs. I think so.*
**Beauty Salon:** *Yes. Very. For me what matters is the opinion of my customers so... Yes.*
**Jewelry:** *(...) it never happened, but I think I would be open to changing that way. No. (...) the customer doesn't have much perception of what I buy or what I don't buy, right?*
**Restaurant:** *Yes. Customers started to complain, they said the meat was different.(...) I changed supplier (...) Yes. Easily.*
**Laboratory:** *Already. We noticed that a needle that the customers complained more. Then we changed. Yes.*
**Painted China:** *For example, I have a client now that he ordered 30 cups from me. And he wants the plates, the glasses, so I had to buy more glasses to meet this demand (...)*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *I had some cases where the pendrive stopped working, and then one of the solutions was to remove it from the product. So I already had. There ends up being a little contrary. I have some desire to present new things, but until today I haven't been able to fulfill this request even for myself.*

## 5.2.6 Choosing a Product

All of the interviewees responded that the main goal is to find a product that serves the purpose despite the fact that two also said that they look for the best product available. That is in line with what is proposed by Simon (1986, as cited in Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong, 2006) when he exposes that the entrepreneurs usually consider a satisfying option instead of the optimal one, this can be

due to the limited time the business has to make a decision (Buseniz and Barney, 1977, as cited in Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong, 2006). It is interesting to notice that some of them stated that the best product usually comes with a more expensive price tag and their customers may also not be interested in the best product if that increases the price.

**Petshop:** *That serves the purpose, because sometimes the best is not so necessary (...).*
**Clothing:** *May it serve my purpose. (...) clients who sometimes do not look for what I as a businessman would necessarily like to offer (...)*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Serve the purpose for sure. Because I work in the market where the sky is the limit. And then each person has a priority, so the person is not always looking for the best in all aspects.(...) Looking for a better one will likely also see a higher price tag and the person sometimes doesn't want to invest in it.*
**Dentist:** *(...) has to be both, it has to meet my needs and it also has to have quality.*
**Beauty Salon:** *Things that serve my purpose, because if I'm going to choose the best product on the market, it might increase a lot my price(...) If I put something more expensive, the price will increase a lot and then we will lose a group of consumers and that is not ideal.*
**Jewelry:** *Serve my purpose.(...) You don't need to have specific equipment for anything. You can get a lot of other solutions to get the same result.*
**Restaurant:** *That serves the purpose. Because today the best is very much related to price.(...) So, if I usually choose the best product, it will be more expensive and my profit at the end will be worse (...).*
**Laboratory:** *That serves the purpose. Because not always the one that will be the best, sometimes it has the same performance as another that is cheaper.*
**Painted China:** *It is first to find the best product available that serves my purpose that is the truth. (...).*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *That serves the purpose is enough, in this case.*


## 5.2.7 Personal Taste

When asked if their personal taste can influence their purchases all of the interviewees admitted that this is a reality in their business. Thus, as it can be noticed, personal preferences might impact the decision-making process of a small company if the referred firm consists of one employee or one level of management.

**Petshop:** *There is for sure. It's my company, it has my face, everything here is colorful, so since it's mine, I did it my way.*
**Clothing:** *Much so.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Yes, I certainly cannot disassociate. I think it's hard.*
**Dentist, Restaurant and Painted China:** *Yes.*
**Beauty Salon:** *Absolutely. Everything we've done is everything I like.*
**Jewelry:** *Yes, yes.*
**Laboratory:** *I think so.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *Yes. Totally influences.*

### 5.2.8 Payment

All of the company's owners referred to the payment as easy and uncomplicated. Just the Laboratory pays their suppliers thirty or sixty days after the purchase, all the others pay in advance. Some of them divide the payment on a credit card, which is a common method in Brazil. In that case, the seller company receives the full amount, but the bank will divide the price for the buyer and charge a fee. Three interviewees referred to Boleto as their used method. That is in accordance with Pagbrasil (2019) when it is said that this is one of the most popular payment methods in Brazil and that it is important to digital shopping inclusion.

Moreover, eight of the ten interviewees referred to *PIX* as a common method. *PIX* is an agile and instant payment method created in 2021 by the Central Bank of Brazil. *PIX* allows people to use phone numbers, email, or the state person registration number, to make real-time transferences using the mobile phone (Banco Central do Brasil, 2022). The responses suggest that the small companies can easily adapt to the new models of payment. Regarding that, our findings differ from what is proposed by Saha et al. (2014, as cited in Rėklaitis & Pilelienė, 2009) when they say that while the payment in B2C is usually instant and using cash or card in B2B that instant payment may not be required and it usually involves a complex system. In that case, the company seems to resemble B2C interaction more than B2B.

**Petshop:** *Pay by card, boleto or PIX, without splitting.*
**Clothing:** *PIX. It's easy to do.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *It's not complex. (...) It makes the PIX or card, but doesn't have a billing service order like that, such a bureaucratic process. It's a more peaceful thing.*
**Dentist:** *Today I split on the card or I send a PIX. So it's simple.*
**Beauty Salon:** *Boleto or PIX.*
**Jewelry:** *Yeah, it's not very complex, no. I rarely divide the price in months. Sometimes I divide, but usually it is one payment. What if it's something more expensive, from 1000 upwards, right? Then we ask for that discount. But for most things I use the credit card.*
**Restaurant:** *It's easy, today you're using a lot of PIX and bank slips. You pay by cell phone much easier.*
**Laboratory:** *It's PIX, boleto, I've already divided there are companies that are kind of standardized for everyone thirty or sixty days is sometimes one payment, but it's not complex.*
**Painted China:** *I make a deposit in the bank immediately. (...) When you order a product from the factory, you pay in advance and they will only deliver it to you 3 months later. I think they only start making the product after they get the money.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *Nowadays, most things I have made a PIX. I place the order, I transfer it, put the receipt on the supplier's website (...) I paid by credit card, sometimes dividing in months, sometimes I paid in cash on the credit card, which was separate for company purchases, that's it, but it was just those 2 ways.*

## 5.2.9 Timing Business vs Personal

The participants needed to rate how much time they spend when searching, and buying a product for their business and for themselves.

| Company | Time allocated for searching and buying a product for the business | Time allocated for searching and buying a product for your themselves |
|---|---|---|
| Petshop | 3 | 4 |
| Clothing | 5 | 4 |
| Wedding Decoration | 3 | 4 |
| Dentist | 2 | 2 |
| Beauty Salon | 2 | 4 |
| Jewelry | 3,5 | 2 |
| Restaurant | 4 | 5 |
| Laboratory | 2 | 5 |
| Painted China | 2 | 1 |
| Photography and Photo Album | 4 | 3 |

*Table 6. Time allocated when searching for a product.*

Marketo (2020) proposes that while in the B2C market the consumer does not have a lot of time and the strategy to sell a product should be short and clear, in the B2B there is a long process and more time available therefore the strategy should involve a multi-step scheme. Nevertheless, our research revealed that there is not so much difference in the time spent when the interviewees are focused on finding and buying a product for themselves compared to the company. When the interviewees were asked to rate from 1 to 5 (1 is low and 5 is high) how much time they spend researching and buying a product for their business and themselves, the result was an average of 3 when related to their business and 3,4 when related for themselves. This reveals that the overall time spent is higher when looking for a product for their businesses compared to themselves. On the other hand, if we compare each participant, five spend more time when buying for themselves compared to their business, while four others are the opposite and one spends the same amount of time on the business or something private. The difference overall is low, as that was just a 0,4 increase in our scale and when comparing individuals there is no significant variability.

**Petshop:** *This changed a lot in the beginning, before starting the company I needed to buy more expensive products, I spent a lot of time, I researched a lot. Now that I know, I spend less. Take an average, so it would be 3.*

**Clothing:** *5.*

**Wedding Decoration:** *3.*

**Dentist:** *It doesn't take a lot of time. A lot of things I already use routinely. I will put 2.*

**Beauty Salon:** *I don't do a lot of research, I let the thing show up there or someone get to me. It's kind of unpretentious. I see on Instagram. I follow two thousand profiles and fifteen hundred are random brands. If I find something cool, I get in touch with the brands and to partner and many brands reach us too. So it's not much, it would be a two maybe.*

**Jewelry:** *About 3 or 4. I'm very indecisive, I wonder if I really buy? Do I need to? There are a lot of things I wanted to buy, but I think I can live without. If I made the decision to buy, I've been considering it for a long time.*

**Restaurant:** *4.*

**Laboratory:** *Two days when we need to buy stock, for example. Order via whatsapp. I think short time so put 2.*

**Painted China:** *2 so it's not too difficult, is it?*

**Photography and Photo Album:** *Currently, I haven't been doing a lot of research, but I'm going to put it from 3 to 4, I think 4, because it takes me a while until I find it like this, I take a while, but I haven't done that now. But back in the day, when I did, it took a while.*

**Petshop:** *Depends on the price of the product. If it's a more expensive product, I spend more time. I think I would put 4.*

**Clothing:** *Um from one to five? It's 4.*

**Wedding Decoration:** *4.*

**Dentist:** *Let's put 2 too, me and I still like going to the store part, don't we?*

**Beauty Salon:** *There's this unpretentious thing too, which is what I do for myself and for the company. And when I want a specific product I look for it well. 4.*

**Jewelry:** *Then it would be less and I'll put 2 for myself, I think it's easier.*

**Restaurant and Laboratory:** *5.*

**Painted China:** *1, I do not research to buy no. If I go to a store, I like it, I buy it.*

**Photography and Photo Album:** *It really depends on how much it costs. If it's cheap, I don't know. Up to 100 BRL if that's the case, I'm more immediate, but if it's an expensive product, let's say a television, then I'll take a while. So 3.*

## 5.2.10 References

The company owners were asked if they get in contact with other clients of their intended suppliers in order to obtain references. Five of the interviewees revealed that they got in contact with current or previous customers of the suppliers they intend to buy a product from in order to hear their opinion before making a decision. Two companies explained that they did not get in contact with other customers because they already had access to the opinions in other ways. Therefore seven

out of ten companies relied on feedback to base their decisions. On the other hand, none of the company's owners asked the selling company for contacts aiming to get feedback. That is a mix of what is presented by Marketo (2020) when saying that in B2B it is important to be ready to give contacts for reference, but also resembles B2C relationships when influencer marketing is considered important as at least two of our interviewees revealed that they have participated in groups or seeing someone talking about the product in social media.

**Petshop:** *I didn't have to ask, but I know the feedback because of the groups. I'm in Facebook groups of people who already work with this, and then everyone asks and comments. Even my course teacher, she already has a list that she indicates so that she already has a discount with these suppliers. So I personally haven't looked, but I already know everyone's feedback.*
**Clothing and Restaurant:** *No.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Yes. I get in touch with other advisors to find out how the delivery and reliability went, if it didn't generate any problems.*
**Dentist:** *Yes sure. Look like this equipment I bought. Now I called several colleagues, which one do you use there? Because then I already have a reference, right? If someone uses it and likes it, if I trust that professional, then I already think that product is good.*
**Beauty Salon:** *Look, I should, you even gave me a good idea. I never do that. I usually order one to try and have my customers try it out. I just find out on my own.*
**Jewelry:** *I don't think so, that I remember, no, I remember it being the opposite, seeing someone talking in social media and then I paying attention to that, but I go after asking that I remember, no.*
**Laboratory:** *Yes.*
**Painted China:** *No porcelain, but porcelain ink yes.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *Already, already. Look, I think it's to validate, isn't it?*

## 5.2.11 Received Information

When asked if the interviewees had received informational materials and in which format they received the answers had a great variation about the format but were consistent about receiving it. Nine of them claimed to have received materials from the selling companies. Some of the formats were: Newsletter and email marketing, social media post, leaflet, pamphlet, Whatsapp messages, folders, and catalogs. That matches Canillieri (2008, as cited in Reklaitis and Pileliene, 2019) when he explains that B2B companies tend to use several media channels to communicate with their audience and points to examples such as printed material, direct email, and online communication. Seven out of the ten company owners admit that receiving the information has influenced their purchase decision.

**Petshop:** *No, never.*
**Clothing:** *Newsletter by email and usually when I buy it comes a letter informing more about the lines and talking a little about the production chain and also on social media, but then I don't know if it's really an advertisement, they are posts. Yes.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Few but some have email marketing. (...) yes, it moves in this thing of being reminded that maybe the person meets a need that you may be seeking out.*
**Dentist:** *Enough. I get a leaflet and more now it's by email, isn't it? Instagram, email. Already.*
**Beauty Salon:** *Usually when they want to sell, they always take a pamphlet explaining or send a little text and to sell the product yes. More WhatsApp I think than leaflet. Yes.*
**Jewelry:** *Maybe some email marketing. In my case, no, no.*
**Restaurant:** *Usually information arrives via Instagram or email that arrives with products. That kind of stuff but more Instagram. Yes, for the price, which was sometimes cheaper than other places. I saw it on Instagram because that's how we have technology these days, right? You have to do the shopping, we'll do it for the restaurant and then you search Instagram for the day's offers.*
**Laboratory:** *Yes. Folders, e-mail that is in the registration with promotion. We are already starting to receive news about other things by email. Yes.*
**Painted China:** *Yes. It's printed, leaflet, they send emails, if you want the leaflet you ask for it, they send it too. No, but it's good, because you look for it in the catalogue (...).*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *Email. I receive both from camera lens sales, from albums, promotions. Sometimes they also release something new, so I get yes. I didn't plan on doing it now, but it's been really worth it, so I'm going to do it, so it's already influenced.*

## 5.2.12 Searching a New Supplier

The most common ways that the interviewees revealed getting to know their suppliers for the first time were: recommendations, online research on google, local stores, fairs and conferences, social media (WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook), folders and supplier visits and calls. That is a mix of what is recommended by Marketo (2020) for the B2B and B2C sectors. Thus, small businesses act in B2B and B2C environments simultaneously. Also, as it can be noticed fairs and conferences are one way of searching for suppliers - expected for B2B, but social media appears to also present an interest in looking into new purchases - which is viewed in a skeptical manner in terms of providing effectiveness to B2B environments. However, Reklaitis and Pileliene (2019) also expose that the most common media channels for B2B include print material, direct email, online communication, and television, but also state that the diversity of channels has increased.

Fraccastoro, Gabrielsson and Pullins (2021) suggest that B2B companies usually take part in fairs or events and some of our interviewees have indeed participated in those activities. Four of the interviewees state declared that they took part and met suppliers in events, one company had not

attended but is aware of their existence, and the five remaining companies did not take part in events, but it is key to recall that some of them were founded during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this can be a factor that has influenced the responses.

**Petshop:** *Most of them I already knew from the course, so it was by recommendation. Now, the ones I didn't know, I was searching on the internet. There is a very large fair in São Paulo. Every August, but I've never been, so they're there, I didn't go.*
**Clothing:** *At first, I went to the haberdashery and bought the needles, but I think I found the threads by researching (...) google. Fair? Never.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Before, there wasn't much on Instagram. So people were more on the website, sometimes at fairs you end up getting to know them (...) I went a lot by referral.*
**Dentist:** *Well, what I'm actually doing now is on Instagram. (...) At conferences too.*
**Beauty Salon:** *I ask a lot of my collaborators who have been dealing with this for years so I ask a lot if I go somewhere to talk I do a lot of field research. I go on Instagram and talk about everything on Instagram. Because I like to see the posts everything and then I get in touch.*
**Jewelry:** *(...) whether it's someone's recommendation or I see someone advertising, right? From the company's brand or in a Facebook group as well. There are many communities (...) In the group, then, I end up finding many suppliers like that too. For me it would be Facebook, Instagram and word of mouth. Not at fairs.*
**Restaurant:** *Most of them, they go to the place to look with interest to register, don't they? Then I register and start receiving messages, promotion by WhatsApp.*
**Laboratory:** *For example, I participate in a Whatsapp group for laboratory owners in Brazil. Everyone talks about the brands they liked, the prices, then we find out. Sometimes the supplier calls. Sometimes we leave our folder in clinics and some supplier picks it up and calls us. We find it on the internet too, Instagram. Not.*
**Painted China:** *I think it was in stores that I went in Brasília and saw the product, right? Then, contact the supplier. I would buy a product, see if it was good. If I liked it, I would look for a supplier, on the internet. In fair I only found ink.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *Going to the Photography Congress in São Paulo.(...) I think a lot of things are being offered online in a better way. So before online explanations weren't so good (...) And then we still needed face-to-face meetings, but I still think it's an important meeting point, especially for albums, in my case, photographic equipment, the Camera itself, but no, it was more researching on the internet, watching video. So it was all online.*

## 5.2.13 Searching Suppliers on Social Media

When asked if the company owners ever found a supplier on social media, seven out of ten responded positively. Two of them said that they never had found a supplier on social media and one said that some companies contacted her, but she never closed a deal without having recommendations. That reveals that the small business involved in this study may close deals with companies that they get to see for the first time on social media, being this an important

communication channel to them. That is in accordance with Reklaitis and Pileliene (2019) who disagree with other researchers that claim that social media is the least effective of the promotion strategies possibilities, suggesting the lack of importance of this channel while explaining that social media nowadays is more present in B2B. Our findings also relate to the statement made by Study in Business Markets (2020, as cited in Fraccastoro, Gabrielsson, and Pullins, 2021) saying that the B2B look for solutions for their business in a similar way as they do in their private lives.

**Petshop:** *I already, already found.*
**Clothing:** *No.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Yes. I met it on the internet, I saw it in an editorial. I saw and found very cool, and then I went there to meet. I was even close. On the day, I was on another technical visit nearby and then I went there to meet him. I often find it on the internet, facebook, and instagram.*
**Dentist:** *Yes. Many times.*
**Beauty Salon:** *It's definitely what I do most. It's the way I find it. They have a lot of similar followers so when we post photos it's a way of marketing and also associating brands.*
**Jewelry:** *There are many groups on Facebook in the jewelry area, right? And people share a lot about techniques, show what they did, how they did it, asking questions often those who have companies put their services in the group. So I've met people like that.*
**Restaurant:** *Advertisements started to appear on Instagram.*
**Laboratory:** *We receive direct messages. But don't buy from someone without having a recommendation or something.*
**Painted China:** *No, no, I don't.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *Already from this graphic part. It was through Instagram, a box supplier that I didn't get to work with directly, but it's here for when I want to work with it. I don't remember now if there was just an ad for that person. I confess that I don't remember or if it was a photographer citing it, and then I saw it and got interested and went after the price catalog.*

## 5.2.14 Online Research

Nine out of ten company owners think that analyzing a supplier online helps them to make a decision and some of the reasons cited by them were: the ability to check if the information is reliable, gain trust, see the feedback of clients, see the branding and check credibility. That is consistent with what is proposed by Pandey, Nayal, and Athore (2020) whey they expose that it is important for B2B companies to be present online as the information in that way can have an impact on a company's credibility.

**Petshop:** *It helps me, but I decide more after I've bought and used the product and then I decide if I'm going to continue, but a good website sure helps.*
**Clothing:** *Yes. Because it's mainly going to the website and seeing if the information is accurate and things are detailed. Greenwashing nowadays is very strong so when you just say it like that*

*it's ecologically correct it's a very loose thing so when you give more information explain where it came from and how it was done this for me is very important. Yes.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Yes, total, whoever doesn't have an online channel for me is almost dead, so I hardly buy. If there are many, I look at them all, social networks, websites (...).*
**Dentist:** *Yes, I think it's super important. Because there I'll get to know a little about the goods. Their standard. See even the feedback from other consumers, right? So I think it helps me like that, to give credibility and power of choice, right?*
**Beauty Salon:** *I think it helps. On the internet more than online what I see online is Instagram even if I like the brand if the communication, branding, works and matches mine.*
**Jewelry:** *It helps a lot, not necessarily to make me close a purchase, but it helps a lot. It's an easier way for you to get information without having to ask questions. (...) So, in the case of people who don't have much information, was it necessary to talk more on WhatsApp. Then I felt confident.*
**Restaurant:** *It doesn't make much difference.*
**Laboratory:** *Today yes. We go on Instagram, if you see a company that doesn't post anything, you're already, is this true? If you already have a website, if you already have something like this that is more reliable, we give it more credibility. Of the ones we buy more, almost all of us go in to see what it's like.*
**Painted China:** *I think it does help (...).*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *(...) But from the website, yes it helps. For example, look at the supplier's website. (...) But I think it's really important. Frederica is one of them, the one on the albums I always go to. I always come back to the site because they change something, so I'm always looking back to check the information as well.*

## 5.2.15 Content on Social Media

All of the interviewees remember posts on social media made by suppliers. Most of them are related to the usage of the product, such as demonstrations, just one of the interviewees revealed to have related to an emotional aspect on the post and one has remembered the 'hard-sell' approach when the company promoted the product and the price. That follows Swani et al. (2014) when they defend that B2B message appeals are frequently more functional than emotional.

**Petshop:** *On Instagram, I was looking at another company's Instagram and there was this natural grass (...) there was the supplier's brand and then I went after it.*
**Clothing:** *So the one that impressed me the most was from Penguin. They do, like, some comic strips (...) A girl who crochets (...) talking about the situations that I say damn it happens to me too.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *I remember (...) Showing suppliers.*
**Dentist:** *I remember (...) he has some ice bags with my company's logo if I want, to give to the patient after surgery.*
**Beauty Salon:** *The brand's ideological identity more than the product itself, more than the price.*
**Jewelry:** *(...) In another video, he will show him doing something, he will use it and he will say that you find it in such place. I see a lot of posts like this from them on Instagram, for example.*

**Restaurant:** *Usually showing a product and giving a price.*
**Laboratory:** *(...) They are usually sales post, informing that they sell fetal sex tests, for example.*
**Painted China:** *(...). It is exactly showing the product, what it is for, for example, brushes. There are several types of brushes, so it shows a little bit of how they can be used (...).*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *(...) Most of the time, it's really photos of the product in use, handling it, opening, closing, right? A video (...).*

## Final Reflections

Personal meetings are not crucial in a B2B transaction with a small company. Small companies do purchase internationally, however, they experience delivery, delays, and high shipping prices. New products sold by the suppliers are expected to match the existing equipment and customers of the buying companies. Cheaper, better, faster, or bigger are satisfactory descriptions to purchase a product. Small companies tend to expect after-sales services. If a company experiences negative feedback from their customers linked to the impact of a supplier they are willing to change them. The companies usually look for products that fit their needs and not for the best product available. The purchases can be influenced by personal taste. The payment is normally fast and uncomplicated. Small companies can ask for references and advice before choosing a supplier. The small companies respond to a mix of B2B and B2C promotional efforts. For example, attending fairs and having email marketing presents and a very well-used communication channel, on the other hand, social media has also been greatly used. In that regard, the small companies tend to remember social media posts that target the demonstration of the suppliers' products. The online presence helps the decision-making process.

# 5.3. DECISION-MAKING IN SMALL BUSINESSES

## 5.3.1 Understanding the Need

The company owners were required to explain how they notice that there is a need for purchasing a product for their business. Most of the interviewees' decision-making process starts when they realize a need is the result of the recognition of a problem or opportunity. This is similar to what Henry Mitnzbert (1976, as cited in Brouthers, Abdriessen, and Nicolaes, 1998) proposes. In the case of the interviewed companies, the most common situations are the end of the supply, the development of a new product or a new knowledge about a product, or service.

**Petshop:** *The team warns when it runs out, and then I buy it. I also noticed for a new offer that was, for example, this case of grass, I saw a post. Also sometimes out of necessity. I need the bell to be quiet so as not to disturb the dogs (…).*

**Clothing:** *These days I'm making a product and the line ended and then I had to replace it. And also this thing about having new ideas and I need new colors (…).*

**Wedding Decoration:** *I go there to check the suitcase for what is missing, so you have to buy it. (…) I also need to buy if I have an idea, I need to implement it. Every now and then I see the supplier talk about something new and I put it in the planning.*

**Dentist:** *Well, there is already a rule in the office like this, everything in between, I ask for another one. Now we're making lenses so now I keep an eye out for new cements and new materials, molding to improve. And news also whenever or when there is something new.*

**Beauty Salon:** *They know what's missing and are used to it. They make the list (…). When we want to launch something new (…).*

**Jewelry:** *(…) When the supply is running out, I really buy more. Or what do I need to get that result? Sometimes we need something.*

**Restaurant:** *When the product ran out. (…) There is a new one that is 17, I buy the product that I already use and I buy a product of the 17 to compare the quality.*

**Laboratory:** *A new purchase depends a lot on how will benefit me. Otherwise, I buy it when it runs out.*

**Painted China:** *(…) I see that the ink is running out, but when I say that it is running out, there is still a little bit. (…).*

**Photography and Photo Album:** *(…) Sometimes I take this trend and apply it to my business. (…) Sometimes it has already happened by customer demand as well. The last one I'm going to do this week was a client who wanted a specific album. Then I went looking for what I could offer him.*

## 5.3.2 Effort

The participants needed to rate how much effort they do when buying a product for their business and for themselves.

| Company | The effort put in when buying something for the business | The effort put in when buying something private |
|---|---|---|
| Petshop | 4 | 4 |
| Clothing | 5 | 4 |
| Wedding Decoration | 2,5 | 3 |
| Dentist | 1 | 3 |
| Beauty Salon | 2 | 2 |
| Jewelry | 4 | 2 |
| Restaurant | 5 | 5 |
| Laboratory | 5 | 4 |
| Painted China | 1 | 1 |
| Photography and Photo Album | 5 | 1 |

*Table 7. Effort when buying a product.*

When asked about how much effort the interviewees had to make to get information in order to buy a product for their business, there was a great variation in the responses, while some responded that the effort was low while some responded that the effort was great. The average response was 3,45 when related to the business and 2,9 when related to themselves. The minimum was 1 which meant low effort and 5 was the maximum meaning great effort.

## 5.3.3 First Selection

When asked about how the company owners narrow down the suppliers' options and if they have a step-by-step procedure in order to make a decision, most of them responded that they consider credibility, trust, quality, and price, but do not have a fixed structure or procedure to this activity. It is a fairly simple process, not relying on a fixed structure. The interviewees analyze the options and make a decision that does not include steps such as a deeper evaluation or the continuity of seeking the selected opportunities. That differs from what is proposed by Henry Mitnzbert (1976,

as cited in Brouthers, Abdriessen, and Nicolaes, 1998) when he explains that the process has three steps: analyzing options, deeper evaluation, and the decision of which of them is worth seeking, as we cannot see the difference between each one of them in a structured way. On the other hand, that is in accordance with Brouthers, Abdriessen, and Nicolaes (1998) who state that small companies do not have enough manpower dedicated to research and analyze a product before making a buying decision.

**Petshop:** *I will ask people's opinions. So I'm going to join the group, ask, who already has it? Do you consider the advantages and disadvantages of each? The company is very small, it's just me, so I get an opinion, I think about it for a few days and then I decide whether to buy it.*
**Clothing:** *I think one of the first criteria is to be 100% cotton (..) and the origin of the material. It exists, but it is not bureaucratic. Usually, I see the demand I have and then I look within the brands that I already know if there is someone who fulfills the need, then I do a price analysis.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *I go a lot for the price. (...) Along with the value. And in the end, that's it, a little bit of appearance too, isn't it? (..) When I enter a negotiation, then I see the person as very busy. Then I discard it. So, this issue of the relationship, the agility to resolve things. If I already have someone there in mind, some recommendations I don't research others unless I find the price very absurd. If so, then I do more research. I look at it from the internet, like, I do at least a comparison of two. There is, but it's not that methodical. Because I'm not that methodical either. I start budgeting, then I evaluate the budgets in general. So, I have this faster procedure, and I need to define it soon (...).*
**Dentist:** *I think I look for people I already know. Is not? If it's a very expensive product, then I do a survey of 3 companies, the biggest ones, so I can see if there's a difference in that value, right? My employees send me there, I call the same dental office that I always buy. They already deliver to me or I send a message on WhatsApp. When things are more expensive, more different like that, then I do this research or research on the internet, you know? I'm looking for value, I'm looking, sometimes delivery times, which are also important to me. That's more or less there.*
**Beauty Salon:** *Ease of communication with the company and price too (...). We have everything right for each service. So we see what's missing there and ask.*
**Jewelry:** *It's networking, see who is already a customer of this supplier (...). It's flexible, if it's what I already have a supplier, the tendency is for me to go back to it. I don't research another one as long as the price is in line with the market.*
**Restaurant:** *For quality. (...). Something more practical. I don't make a step by step.*
**Laboratory:** *If it's a new product that several people have, we'll send the price request to the first ones we always buy. (...). Today we already have a scheme. The girl who is in charge of the stock counts. Then she makes the list and Luciana makes the request. It does everything through WhatsApp.*
**Painted China:** *I always buy from the same. I'm not searching. No, I don't quote, no. I buy only from the supplier. (...) And I know that her price is fair, from this supplier that I buy and is already reliable, so I buy directly.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *I tend to start with the most reliable ones that have been on the market the longest, I think. (...). This album issue has some companies that have some really good material, it's not that hard to decide, it's just how much I can afford. If this one I can't pay, which one can I pay? Whatever is within the budget and which is good enough that it serves well (...).*

# 5.3.4 Influencing Factors

The participants were asked how many people are involved in the decision-making process when buying a product. They were then questioned about the influence of colleagues, family and friends, personal beliefs, and background on their decision-making process.

| Company | Number of people involved in the decision-making | Do colleagues' opinions influence? | Do family and friends' opinions influence? | Do personal beliefs influence when making decisions? | Do previous education and professional experience and social class influence your purchasing decisions and choosing a supplier? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Petshop | I, only one. | Yes. | No. | If I knew that a company mistreated animals, I would not buy from that company. | A for sure. I chose a target audience based on the experience I have, so they can pay a certain amount if I came from another social class, maybe my target audience would be different, and then I would need to have products with more or less quality to reach another audience, isn't it? So I think so. Yes, yes, if I had become a vet, it would certainly be more suitable. |
| Clothing | One. | I don't have co-workers. | It depends there are certain things that I think influence has certain things that I am very decisive and say ***** it's mine and I know how I'm doing it. | Yes. Precisely because it is a very small company (...) it is impossible for me to separate because there is no other person to talk to: (...) ***** what do you believe we have to do the best for the money (...). | Absolutely. Also yes. Even because I think we can't escape anything unscathed I think that everything crosses us and if I had lived different situations maybe I would be different. |
| Wedding Decoration | It's just me. | Sometimes. It's not that common, but I've already gone back on a contract because we talk and analyze (...). | Affect, but not much. It is in general I do not consult them for this. | Total, 100% (...). The product or service then has to be in accordance with my principles (...). | I think experience counts a lot. All of that is personality, but I think that everything you choose for education influences a lot. No, I don't think so, because this is a little more of experience and then, as a company, you are creating a methodology and a process and looking at it here I think it's not like that. But I don't believe so much in that sense, no. |
| Dentist | One. | Yes. (...) | Not for the family, not for the office. Profession friends affect because the opinion of other people in the field is important to me. | Oh, I don't think so. Unless that's what I know that this company is a ****** company, that's exploiting employees (...). | Look, I think for sure, because first, I have total empathy for everyone, don't you? I try to make it easy for everyone who comes to me. |
| Beauty Salon | I decide, but we discuss as a group. | Yes. I listen to my employees a lot (...). | Yes. Because I care a lot about the opinion of others (...). | It influences because I like to buy things that I believe I would consume, I do my | I think maybe I wouldn't be where I am if I had less money, but I wouldn't work any less. I think the biggest school is practice, you're |

| | | | | business with my taste. | there, you're going to make a mistake, then you're not going to do it anymore. Of course, you'd better go with background, but the best school is to make mistakes. I think that everything I've been through and all the places I've worked I've learned something for me to make all the decisions I have today. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jewelry | Only myself. One person. | I don't have colleagues, but it would influence if I did. | I think so (...). I'll weigh my opinion a little more. | I think so. I don't think there's a way to separate it, because I'm going to think of a very specific example and I know that a supplier is in favor of Bolsonaro. It would have a little influence (...). | I think so, we are already a product of our environment. I don't know, maybe if I had a degree in administration, I think maybe I would have some things on the management side, which would be different. Maybe I had theoretical knowledge that I don't, so maybe I believe so. I think so. Experience too is everything, isn't it? It will change, it will change the mistakes you make, I think. |
| Restaurant | Two. Me and the cook. | Sometimes because sometimes they complain. For example a cleaning product. They say you have to use twice as much if it was that brand, understand? So it ends up at the time of purchase, analyzing, I don't buy that product of lesser quality that I know they will spend more. The price is cheaper, right? But it won't be worth it. | Of course, only if it is my wife. But friends have no influence on my decisions. | Yes. I'm very correct, understand? If I see if something is wrong, even if I'm going to profit from it or something, I'd rather not buy it. Vendors with cargo, stolen goods and such. These spiritual beliefs of mine won't let me do something like that. | I don't know, well, I'm thinking this the way I was raised. If I had been raised the same way, probably not. It would not alter the decisions I make today. Yes, for knowledge, for other things, of course it could help to make better decisions, right? Yes Yes Yes. For sure. |
| Laboratory | If it's not monthly purchases, I'll decide. | Yes. I ask employees to test new products. | (...) Only my husband influences a lot. | We know, for example, that there is a company that delivers, I don't know, that can make a mess with something, we no longer buy it (...). | Yes. If I had taken a management course, for example, I wouldn't be suffering as I suffer today. I think so. |
| Painted China | I. | No. | No. | Yes. I only buy if I think it's right. | Yes, especially in porcelain. Every plastic artist who does not have at least a reasonable financial situation cannot survive. If I was poor, I could have given up on it a long time ago and I wouldn't have the slightest way to live of it. No graduation, I'm an economist. I've been painting since I was 5 years old, so, whether or not I did any kind of degree, my degree in fine arts was about life, traveling, seeing museums, researching my school. I did it then, but I didn't say like that, nothing, no. Yes, I don't know how to handle money, understand? If I had done |

| | | | | | something that would have helped me better with this money thing, I think yes, I would have changed. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Photography and Photo Album | It's just me, huh, then? Just me. | They influence, but the decision is really still mine. | I don't ask. (...) But it's because I've never had negative feedback. I think if I presented an album and the person said: Wow, I didn't like it. I think that would have an influence. | Yes. If I have a demand, an album that has already been contracted to a client and I find out that the owner of the company is Bolsonaro (meaning voting for Bolsonaro). And if the purchase is made and I have no way out, I'll have to go on. But if I can choose before, for sure (...). | I think so. The lower the higher. I think. I think so, too. Yes Yes Yes. |

*Table 8. Aspects that can influence a decision.*

When asked if colleagues' opinions influence their decisions, seven out of the ten interviewees think that they do, one said that she does not have colleagues, but if she did this would influence, one said that they do not influence and another said that she does not have colleagues. Overall the interviewees state that colleagues' opinions can influence their decisions.

Regarding if family and friends' opinions do influence, two said that this is not true in their business, one said that family does not play a role, but friends that have the same profession do and seven said that their friends and family do influence their choices. With that in mind, we can consider that in most cases family and friends' opinions can influence their decisions.

In relation to their education, professional experience and social class, most of them considered that all or some of these aspects can influence their decisions.

All of these findings are correlated to what is proposed by Brouthers, Abdriessen, and Nicolaes (1998) considering the Managerial Characteristics aspect where they defend that "Other personal characteristics such as their economic and social background, education, and work experience also influence the decisions managers make" (p. 132). Moreover, that is also compatible when they say that the personal beliefs of the people involved in the decision-making process can influence the outcomes of a company.

## 5.3.5 Personality Influence

All the company owners think that their personal characteristics can influence the decisions made corresponding to what some scholars propose (Brouthers et al., 1998; Mador, 2000 in Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong, 2006). On the other hand, the characteristics often perceived such as decisive, impatient, and action-oriented mentioned by them were not found among the interviewed companies instead, some of them referred to others for example: sociable, insecure, shyness, analytic, dominant, and careful. Moreover, some of them gave examples of how they think their or others' personal characteristics can influence the decision-making processes. Thus, it is critical to mention the Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong (2006) ideas that entrepreneurs hold certain characteristics such as individualism, feeling secure in taking risks, and seeing the financial earnings as a motivation. However, scholars also suggest that it would be too facile to characterize all entrepreneurs similarly. Thus, it is implied that more parameters should be taken into account (Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong, 2006).

**Petshop:** *Yes, yes, there are more carefree people who buy quickly, without analyzing properly. And then sometimes the quality is not so good. The price, when it wasn't the best, for sure.*
**Clothing:** *Yes, both positively and negatively. I'm always on ten projects at the same time instead of doing one piece and finishing the piece so my personality influences too.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Absolutely. (...) I'm very sociable, I'm a lot of thinking about the collective sometimes too. So, this question of personality and the way you deal with people, with friendships, with society certainly influences, you know? So I feel that I take the community a lot into consideration. (...).*
**Dentist:** *Well, yeah, I think it can, because sometimes it's if the person is more insecure and says my God, should I buy it? Do I not buy? I will, I will not, I will not buy. So I'll ask someone else. So I think so, I think it influences it.*
**Beauty Salon:** *Absolutely.*
**Jewelry:** *I think so. Maybe insecurity of doing things alone, having to make all the decisions alone. More caution to do some things. Shyness also to do, to warn everyone. Look, I'm doing this. I think in different ways, yes, people's personalities can contribute to their journey by facilitating or hindering, or both, depending on the points, right?*
**Restaurant:** *I'm not a shy person or anything, and I end up convincing a supplier to change some things.*
**Laboratory:** *Yes. For example, I am a person who analyzes a lot, so that profile issue, even in my profile, is analytically stable. It takes me a long time to buy a product because I'm going to look in several places, I'm going to read reviews to make sure that what I'm buying there is right. A person who was more dominant wouldn't waste as much time as I do, and sometimes opportunity is lost in that.*
**Painted China:** *Yes. I know exactly what I want.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *I think so. I also think that personality also influences. Because so I tend to be careful in that part of choosing the company's purchases. I am much more discerning*

*even than in my personal life. It's a part of my caution personality, isn't it? I think I'm cautious in this sense, mainly, that it's money that's not just mine, it's not like that, it's the company's money, in short, the client's money and such. If I were perhaps more immediate, I could make a wrong decision wrong. But at the same time I've already lost opportunities also because I'm afraid to spend money like that, you know? So, some equipment that I didn't buy before I regret it, because now it's more expensive.*

## 5.3.6 Financial Influence

Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong (2006) state that financing, licenses, and contracts can be a problem to achieve a final decision, and this has a great variation from company to company, during our interviews the responses pointed out that these issues are perceived by all of the entrepreneurs.

**Petshop:** *Yes. Sometimes the interest rate makes a purchase unfeasible.*
**Clothing:** *For me today yes.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *It's just a little.*
**Dentist, Beauty Salon, Restaurant and Painted China:** *Yes.*
**Jewelry:** *I think so. (...)*
**Laboratory:** *They are, but not necessarily.*
**Photography and Photo Album:** *It's for me, these are obstacles, funding, there could be an opportunity, but I see it more with obstacles.*

## 5.3.7 Economic Situation

All of the interviewees think that the economic situation, the market demands, and opportunities affect their decisions as it is proposed by Dess et al., 1997 and Dickson, 1992 (as cited in Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong, 2006).

**Petshop:** *Yes, if there was no demand, I would definitely not have started the company, although I did it with fear, betting, but I certainly imagined that there would be an audience.*
**Clothing, Laboratory and Photography and Photo Album:** *Yes.*
**Wedding Decoration:** *Yes, totally.*
**Dentist:** *Oh, I think so, why so? If the market isn't hot, if I have not so many costumes, I'm not going to buy at that moment, no. (...)*
**Beauty Salon:** *I think some do. Mainly because of the pandemic, we had to cut some things to reduce the menu a little, for example the latex glove we used for all the services, but it cost eighteen reais and in the pandemic it went up to one hundred and sixty. I would love to use it, but due to the current scenario I had to change the course. So it does influence.*
**Jewelry:** *I think so. Up to a certain point, and no, perhaps in others. I don't think it's possible to put this as a determining factor, as a blockade. People right now, for example, maybe in a moment that is not seen as a great time for big investments. Like it or not, people never stop consuming,*

*do they? I think, but at the same time it requires caution, you know? But I think it's not an impediment to doing things.*
**Restaurant:** *Yes, yes.*
**Painted China:** *Currently, yes.*


## 5.3.8 Intuitiveness and Rationality

The participants were asked to rate their intuitiveness and rationality aspects while making decisions.

| Company | Intuitive | Rational |
|---|---|---|
| Petshop | 3 | 4 |
| Clothing | 3 | 3 |
| Wedding Decoration | 3,5 | 3 |
| Dentist | 4 | 4 |
| Beauty Salon | 4 | 3 |
| Jewelry | 2 | 4 |
| Restaurant | 3 | 4 |
| Laboratory | 4 | 5 |
| Painted China | 5 | 3 |
| Photography and Photo Album | 3 | 4 |

*Table 9. Intuitiveness and rationality aspects.*

The average response was 3,45 when related to intuitiveness and 3,7 when related to rationality. The minimum was one and meant low and five 5 meant high. The interviewees rated slightly higher in intuitiveness than in rationality. That coincides with what is presented by Brouthers, Abdriessen, and Nicolaes (1998) when they expose that although the companies lack dedicated employees doing extensive research and analysis, they do preserve some of the rational aspects.

## 5.3.9 Confidence Level

The participants were required to rate their level of confidence when making decisions.

| Company | Confidence level |
|---|---|
| Petshop | 4 |
| Clothing | 3 |
| Wedding Decoration | 4 |
| Dentist | 4 |
| Beauty Salon | In general I am very confident. |
| Jewelry | 3 |
| Restaurant | 3 |
| Laboratory | 3 |
| Painted China | 4 |
| Photography and Photo Album | 4 |

*Table 10. Confidence level when making a decision.*

The confidence level was rated 3.6 on average. None of the interviewees described themselves as totally confident, rating five on our scale from one being not confident and five being totally confident. All of them rated three of four, being very similar overall. This contradicts Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong (2006) when they say that there is a great variation and also is contrary to what other scholars propose that the small business persons can be overconfident.

## 5.3.10 Complexity and Time Spent

The participants were required to rate the complexity and time spent regarding the decision-making process.

| Company | Complexity | Time |
|---|---|---|
| Petshop | 3 | 4 |
| Clothing | 2 | 5 |
| Wedding Decoration | 3 | 3 |
| Dentist | 3 | 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Beauty Salon | 3 | 2 |
| Jewelry | 3 | 4 |
| Restaurant | 2 | 3 |
| Laboratory | 3,5 | 2 |
| Painted China | 2 | 2 |
| Photography and Photo Album | 2 | 3 |

*Table 11. Decision-making complexity and time.*

The complexity achieved an average of 2,6. Overall the interviewees do not understand the complexity as high. That may be due to the non-existence of extensive research as the small companies usually cannot afford specialized personnel for these activities, this corroborates the finding of Brouthers, Andriessen, and Nicolaes (1998).

The time spent suffered a great variation among the interviewees, while some of them rated it as 2, others rated it as 5. The average was 3. Either way in general it does not seem that the time is so scarce as suggested by Marketo (2020) or Buseniz and Barney (1977, as cited in Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong, 2006).

## 5.3.11 Risks Comfortability

The participants were asked to rate how comfortable they are with risks.

| Company | Comfortable with risks |
|---|---|
| Petshop | 1 |
| Clothing | 4 |
| Wedding Decoration | 3 |
| Dentist | 4 |
| Beauty Salon | 3 |
| Jewelry | 2 |
| Restaurant | 3 |
| Laboratory | 1 |
| Painted China | 3 |

*Table 12. Risk comfortability level.*

When asked to rate from 1 to 5 being 1 not comfortable and 5 totally comfortable with the risks involved in the decision-making process, the answers had a great variation. While some responded with one on the scale, others responded with four. That is in conformity with what is proposed by scholars when they say that some business persons are inclined to risk, while others try to reduce the uncertainty (Jackson et al., 1972 and Harris, 1998, as cited in Gibcus, Vermeulen and Jong, 2006).

In a small business, the identification of the need for a new supplier or product starts with the recognition of an existing problem or the observation of a new opportunity. There is no fixed structure in taking a decision. The decisions taken can suffer influence by family and friends as well as by personal characteristics and background.

## Final Reflections

No fixed structure is held in the decision-making process of a small Brazilian company. Family and friends can sometimes influence the purchase. However, personal likes and preferences are also factors to be considered. Simultaneously, participants agreed that their education, background, and beliefs might play a certain part in the way a decision is taken. Along with all the encountered factors, the financing, licenses, contracts, and the economic situation in the market represent additional elements affecting this process.

Intuitiveness and rationality seem to have almost an equal rating in the decision-making process. The complexity of the decision-making process was considered medium. The time spent on taking a decision varied greatly. The same variation can be seen when asking about the risks comfortability.

# 6. Discussion and Recommendations

The following chapter will present the discussion of findings from the analytical part, plus recommendations to firms and organizations intending to market themselves to small Brazilian businesses with one decision-making level. Simultaneously, the recommendations reflect the empirical findings identified in the section above.

Summing up the findings related to brand equity, the analysis reveals that small companies in the B2B environment value relationships to a great extent, which is a characteristic of the B2B environment more than the B2C one. The distinction comes in terms of being attached to an employee from the seller company. As mentioned in the analysis, this is highlighted by phrases such as "I like to have communication with a representative", and " I like to have the one who saves you. Know that the person is there" (Appendix 9.2). This is likely to imply that even if these companies have one decision-maker (usually the owner) they still act as businesses. Therefore, when it comes to relationship practices, they should be treated like that. For instance, it seems to be beneficial for the selling firms to have a dedicated representative responsible for each client's needs.

Another finding points to how small firms from B2B view the concept of brand loyalty. As mentioned previously in the analysis chapter, these companies reveal that there is a certain degree of brand loyalty, meaning that they tend to buy products from the company. Sometimes this happens over an extended period if there is high satisfaction with the product. However, there are instances when companies might consider changes such as better prices, products, or problems with the current suppliers. Nonetheless, according to two informants, if the seller was also a small company, they might stay longer with it, while another one stated the difficulty of leaving a supplier due to the current connection.

Additionally, the results from the analysis indicate that the brand value is perceived by small businesses of one decision-making level from both the emotional and functional perspectives. Consequently, the participants emphasize the choice between brands being guided by both the emotional values such as risk reduction (also certain feelings attached) and functional ones such as quality. This highlights that even if the participants act as decision-makers behind businesses,

they do not rely only on functional values, as suggested by the theory. Emotional values might also come into play when selecting suppliers.

It is worth noting that all the informants indicate remembering the logo and most of them attribute this aspect to seeing this branding element on a daily basis. Nonetheless, none of them give importance to the package and do not seem to judge a company because of its name. The only exception revealed indicated the misogynistic sound of the brand name and having to drop out of the seller because of this. There is also a common consideration that quality is the first and primary criteria for a brand as stated in the theoretical framework. Simultaneously, the analysis shows that participants value reliability, performance, and delivery of a product.

Another aspect of this thesis aims to examine the B2B and B2C characteristics related to a brand promoting itself to a small business. As can be illustrated by the analysis, small businesses, with one level of decision-making, do not have issues in purchasing a product without meeting the selling company in person. Even though the theoretical ideas support the opposite, stating that meetings in person are the most lucrative method of conducting business for the B2B. It can be, therefore, argued that sellers should not be discouraged by a lack of physical meetings or consider them a barrier to branding themselves. As they further reveal, more than half of them have already purchased products from an international supplier. However, shipping, the high price of other currencies, and bureaucratic aspects are indicated by the informants in the analysis above to be the barriers to such transactions. Nonetheless, the theoretical insights support the opposite that no barrier or just a small one exists, which is not exactly what was found during the current thesis.

Furthermore, one of the aspects of the analysis took into consideration the way small businesses from the B2B interact with the content. As it was mentioned in the analysis, most informants admit to receiving informational materials from the selling company. Some of these are in the format of newsletters, email marketing, or catalogs while the others post on social media and send WhatsApp messages. In regard to social media posts, small businesses recall seeing the ones related to the usage of the product. However, one participant was able to mention an emotional aspect of a company's post. The aspect was treated skeptically by the scholars but proved to be important to this thesis.

Overall, results from the analysis show that when it comes to deciding between suppliers, small businesses might purchase from the ones identified on social media. It even happens that small businesses from Brazil do not meet physically with the selling company before making the purchase while the whole conversation and business exchange happen through applications such as WhatsApp. However, small businesses also mention having met suppliers on recommendation, online research on google, local stores, fairs, and conferences.

Furthermore, an aspect of interest for the thesis was the decision-making influences and aspects of this process. As highlighted in the analysis, informants indicate that searching for information online about a company might help in making the purchase decision. Participants emphasize as reasons for searching online - the ability to check if the information is reliable, gain trust, see the feedback of clients, see the branding and check credibility. Also, according to the replies, inspecting the seller's references might also advantage the potential business partner. Among other factors influencing the decision-making process might be their colleagues, sometimes family, and friends (especially those from a similar profession). Finally, the participants indicated that they have changed suppliers because of the customer feedback. A significant majority of the decision-makers stressed that customers' orders and opinions do actually influence their purchase.

Additionally, the small business owners admit that their education, social class, and profession might hold a certain impact on the product selection and final decision. Similarly, participants imply that their personal likes and preferences come into play in the decision-making process. However, this contradicts the theory, emphasizing that the B2B holds more rational than emotional characteristics. Nevertheless, apparently, this might not be accurate if the company size is extremely small, and the decisions are taken by one person - the owner.

Taking into consideration, the analyzed data and received replies from the semi-structured interviews, the following recommendations can be made to a foreign company (i.e. Danish) targeting small businesses in Brazil:

- Use social media and be aware that Instagram and Facebook seem to be the most used ones at the moment

- Post content related to the usage of the products (i.e. demonstrations and explanations)

- Get familiar with Brazilian payment methods such as PIX and Boleto

- Use WhatsApp for promotional activities and to interact with the possible clients

- Be aware of the frequent delay in shipments from abroad and implement a solution for the goods to be delivered on time

- Be prepared to deliver after after-sales even if they are not explicitly said in the contract

- Place your company's logo on the products so the consumers can remember them

- Certify that the name of your company or product does not mean something negative in Portuguese

- Certify that the quality of the product offered is good

- Be attentive if your prices are competitive in the Brazilian market

- In a one-to-one interaction try to understand the buyers' background as this can play a role in the decision-making process

- Be prepared to offer references from previous clients as some Brazilian companies are willing to get in contact with them

- Keep searching for new clients and be certain to give good offers to the current ones as most companies tend to hold long relationships with their suppliers, but they are willing to change if there is a better offer.

# 7. Conclusion

This thesis aims to answer the following problem formulation and research questions:

*How important are the branding efforts of a selling company in B2B when the buyer is a Brazilian small company with one level of decision-making?*

- What branding efforts influence the choice of a certain product or service?

- What promotional efforts work in the case of a small B2B company?

- How does the decision-making work in small companies made of one employee or one decision-making level?

To address the first research question about the branding efforts and their influence on the buying company's choice, brand knowledge plays an important part when the buying companies are selecting a supplier. This is sometimes linked with the quality, especially of the final product if that can affect their end customers. The logo is recalled mostly due to frequent interaction with the brands and the slogan does not seem to have a big impact. Simultaneously, the name does not hold a major positive significance although it can sometimes influence in a negative way. Moreover, the packaging influence is minimal. Brand value plays a significant part in choosing a product from a supplier and is oftentimes associated with quality (functional value) and price that might be triggered by the risk reduction (emotional value).

Relationships are viewed as a critical part of the interaction with companies, some of them hold long-term relationships with other businesses. However, even if brand loyalty is a present component, it does not possess the main role and thus firms might consider changing the company if a better offer presents itself. Customers' feedback represents an important point in keeping or changing a supplier. Thus, if complaints emerge, small firms are going to definitely search for another company to buy from.

Quality wins the race of product characteristics. Still, quality is not always everything. Regarding the price, a higher price tag does not translate into greater quality for small companies in a B2B transaction. Products should and are expected to adjust with existing business equipment and

customers and fulfill customers' expectations. Cheaper, better, faster, or bigger are good enough reasons to purchase a product. After-sales services are an expected additional offer for a small company in a B2B transaction.

The payment is usually quick and instant and does not require a complex system as anticipated by scholars in a B2B transaction. Small companies break the local boundaries and purchase internationally, however, physical barriers are still present and can be reflected in delivery, delays, shipping, and higher prices. Moreover, personal meetings might not be necessary for a B2B transaction with a small company consisting of one level of decision-making.

The second research question is concerning the promotional efforts that may succeed when targeting small companies. In that regard, the identification of the required products begins with the step of recognizing existing problems or opportunities in small businesses. New suppliers are searched utilizing both expected B2B promotional efforts, such as trade shows and events, but the B2C ones as well, for instance, social media. Searching and verifying companies' online presence helps and influences the decision-making process made by small companies when acquiring a product. Social Media is utilized by small businesses in finding new companies to purchase from. Small businesses can recall posts on social media channels, predominantly those about the usage of the product. Small businesses might ask for references that can influence the purchase but are also up to seeking advice from other sources uncontrolled by the selling company. Email marketing is an active and the main communication channel between small businesses and selling companies even if the buyer part consists of just one employee or has one level of decision-making. However, information is received through other channels as well such as social media.

The third research question is related to the decision-making process. In answer to that, overall there is no fixed structure concerning the decision-making process. Family and friends might actually play a certain role in influencing the choice that has to be made. Personal background can impact what the final decision would be in the process of selecting a product. Personal taste influences the purchase and which brand might be chosen. Other relevant findings are that WhatsApp was cited several times as a tool to receive promotional material and also to keep in contact with the sellers. WhatsApp can be used as an online chat tool and for video conferences and that tool has proved frequently used by our interviewees. *Boleto* and *PIX* were the two more referred payment methods by the participants. Although we could not find evidence that this was

already present in academic research, it is relevant to the businesses that wish to make deals in Brazil to get familiar with the local payment options.

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# 9. Appendix

## 9.1 Interview Guide

**BRANDING**

1. On a scale of 1 to 5 how important is it whether you already know something about the product or the company when choosing a supplier? Why?

2. Have you ever denied or accepted to buy from a company because of its name? Why yes, or why not?

3. Can you recall the logo of any of your suppliers? What does it represent? Why do you think you remember it?

4. Do you remember any slogans of firms that you are buying from? Which are they?

5. Prioritize the three most important features from the following list when buying a product:

   - product quality,

   - the performance of the product,

   - delivery of the product,

   - reliability of the selling company

   - if the selling company offers support and maintenance services or

   - your relationship with the supplier

6. Think about a supplier, what does this company mean for you? What does this brand mean to you? If this supplier was a person, how would you describe it?

**PRODUCT CHARACTERISTICS**

7. Is cheaper, better, faster, or bigger a good enough reason to choose a product?

8. Does the package influence your decision to buy a product?

9. On a scale of 1 to 5 how important is it for the product to fit your current equipment/product/customer? 1 being low importance and 5 high importance.

10. When looking for a product is your goal to find one that serves the purpose or the best product available? Why?

**PRICE**

11. In your view, does a higher price mean better quality of a product? Have you ever bought a pricey product because you thought that it was superior?

12. Have you recently bought an expensive product? Do you remember why you chose that product rather than other options? How did you feel when making the purchase?

**RELATIONSHIP**

13. Is your company loyal to your suppliers, or can you change it if there is a better offering? Why would you change it or why wouldn't you? Can you recall changing the supplier you have been loyal to for a long time? If yes, what was the reason? If not, why not?

14. Have you ever bought a product because the company promised certain after-sales services (for instance, technical support, delivery, others)? How about buying the product just because you like it?

15.  Can you recall a situation where you were positively or negatively surprised by a product or a company? How did that impact your relationships with the company?

16. How important is the relationship with the supplier company for you?

17. Do you have companies among your suppliers that provide you with products for more than 3-5 years?

18. Do you buy products without meeting the supplier in person?

## B2B and B2C Characteristics

### SELLER'S LOCATION

19. Do you buy products from abroad? Why? Would you buy a product from abroad if it was a better offering in price and quality? Why?

20. Are you buying something just because the product is local or Brazilian?

### REASONS FOR CHOOSING A SUPPLIER

21. Have you ever changed your suppliers because of your consumers' feedback? Do you think your customers (opinion, orders) have an influence on the products you buy?

22. Do you think that sometimes your purchases might be influenced by your personal taste?

23. How do you usually pay for the goods bought for your company? Is this normally a complex system? Do you normally pay instantly for products?

## Suppliers' Communication Strategy for B2B and B2C

### TIME ALLOCATION

24. On a scale from 1 to 5 how much time do you usually allocate for searching and buying a product for your business?

25. On a scale from 1 to 5 how much time do you spend when searching and buying a product for yourself?

### RECEIVED INFORMATION

26. Did you ever contact your suppliers' customers for references? Why?

27. Can you recall receiving a lot of material and information about a supplier's company or products? In what format? (flyers, emails, social media advertising) Did this influence you to choose a supplier?

### COMMUNICATION CHANNELS USAGE

28. How did you come into contact with the potential suppliers **for the first time**? Have you ever got in contact with your suppliers at a fair?

29. Have you ever found a supplier on social media? Can you tell more about it?

30. Do you think that analyzing the supplier online helps you to decide? Why? Can you remember any current supplier that you have researched about before making a deal?

## CONTENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA

31. Do you remember any of your supplier's posts on social media? Can you tell me what were they about?

# Decision-Making in Small Businesses

## UNDERSTANDING THE NEED

32. How do you realize that you **need** to buy something? (The ending of the previously bought supply? New product development? New service at your disposal?)

    *Supposing that you know what you need and you are searching for a supplier:*

33. If you have to choose between many suppliers, how do you narrow down the options? (What do you take into account?)

## SEARCHING FOR A SUPPLIER

    *Thinking about your research process to buy a product:*

34. On a scale of 1 to 5 how much effort do you think you put in when you buy something for your business?

35. On a scale of 1 to 5 how much effort do you think you put in when you buy something for yourself as a consumer?

36. How do you **decide** on purchasing a product? Is there a step by step procedure?

## INFLUENCES

37. How many people are involved in the decision-making process?

38. Do you think that other colleges' opinions influence your decision?

39. Do you think that the opinions of your family and friends affect your decision? To what degree?

40. Do you think your personal beliefs influence when making decisions? Why? Can you remember a situation that that happened?

41. Do you think that if you were part of another social class that would influence your decisions? Do you think that if you had another education that would influence your decisions? Do you think that if you had other professional experience that would influence your purchasing decisions and choosing a supplier? If yes, how do you think you could influence it?

42. Do you think that your personality can influence the decision process? In what way?

43. Do you think that financing, licenses and contracts are obstacles when making a decision?

44. Are your decisions influenced by the economic situation including the current opportunities and demands of the market?

**SELF EVALUATION**

45. On a scale from 1 to 5 how intuitive is your decision? Why? Being 1 not intuitive and 5 very intuitive.

46. On a scale from 1 to 5 how rational is your decision? Why? Being 1 not rational and 5 very rational.

47. How confident are you usually with the decisions you make? 1- Not confident 3- Very little confident 2- Little confident 3- Medium confident 4- Very confident 5- Totally confident

48. On a scale from 1 to 5 how complex do you think your evaluations are when deciding whether or not to proceed with the possibility of purchasing the product? Being 1 as less complex and 5 more complex.

49. On a scale from 1 to 5, being 1 very limited time and 5 a lot of time, how would you rate the time you have for making a decision?

50. On a scale from 1 to 5, being 1 not comfortable and 5 very confortable, how comfortable are you with the risks when making a decision?

## 9.2 Interview Transcripts

### 9.2.1 Interview with the PetShop

1. It's 5, because if I'm going to offer the product the company sells, I have to make sure it's a good product to offer my customer. I'm not going to offer something of low quality to later hear complaints or harm my business in any way.

2. No, it never made a difference to me.

3. Yes. The Hydra has an h, which stands for hydra, so it represents the initial of the company's name. I remember the logo. In fact, I studied all these companies a lot before deciding on them, so I remember, because I had a lot of contact.

4. No.

5. I think reliability first and when I say reliability, I also mean trusting the quality of the product, not just the company. And then if I can trust the quality, I don't need, for example, maintenance support, because it probably won't be a problem or at least not in the short term, right? So I wanted reliability first, then quality and performance third.

6. Attentive, concerned with offering the best, because when I bought their product, they offered me training, they didn't charge, a person came to train my team and me. Available.

7. I think so. Because if it's better, I think being better is enough.

8. Influences, but doesn't mean everything.

9.5 is very important.

10. That serves the purpose, because sometimes the best is not so necessary. I thought about the beds I bought. It costs 500 BRL. But I bought one of 200, and it's enough and then I don't need to increase the price to my client.

11. Not always. Not.

12. Yes. For the quality. Oh I felt good because the product is more beautiful and it is stronger to serve my purpose and I'm thinking about this colored fence and I had another fence that broke, which was cheaper. Here it rained, wet and broke. It rusted, so I switched to this more expensive one, and now it's more beautiful and functional.

13. I could change if the quality was equivalent and the offer was better, yes. The company is still very new. So I didn't have time to make this change. But not for now.

14. No, when I chose Hydra I didn't know they would do after-sales service, but I know it had good quality and then I was surprised by the service. Aham, yes.

15. I bought Hydra's products and I didn't know they were going to offer me this training and this after-sales support and I was positively surprised. Yes, it is for sure I will continue to buy from them, not only for the quality but also because I see that they can help me when I have questions. My team with more training is able to sell more, including me selling more baths now after training, because I learned about other possibilities that I didn't know about and then I started selling what they taught me.

16. There is certainly one that is very important, because I depend on it to provide good service. I depend on them to have good products, good equipment.

17. No, the company is not 3 years old yet.

18. I've never met a supplier personally before, only the one from Hydra who came here after I bought

19. I bought it, but it hasn't arrived yet. Yeah, programming me to know that is going to be delayed.

20. No.

21. I still haven't had time for this. Nobody gave me bad feedback, because I chose well. I've already changed it by my feedback. Yes.

22. There is for sure. It's my company, it has my face, everything here is colorful, so since it's mine, I did it my way.

23. Pay by card, boleto or PIX, without splitting.

24. This changed a lot in the beginning, before starting the company I needed to buy more expensive products, I spent a lot of time, I researched a lot. Now that I know, I spend less. Take an average, so it would be 3.

25. Depends on the price of the product. If it's a more expensive product, I spend more time. I think I would put 4.

26. I didn't have to ask, but I know the feedback because of the groups. I'm in Facebook groups of people who already work with this, and then everyone asks and comments. Even my course teacher, she already has a list that she indicates so that she already has a discount with these suppliers. So I personally haven't looked, but I already know everyone's feedback.

27. No, never.

28. Most of them I already knew from the course, so it was by recommendation. Now, the ones I didn't know, I was searching on the internet. There is a very large fair in São Paulo. Every August, but I've never been, so they're there, I didn't go.

29. I already, already found.

30. It helps me, but I decide more after I've bought and used the product and then I decide if I'm going to continue, but a good website sure helps.

31. On Instagram, I was looking at another company's Instagram and there was this natural grass. Which is inside the house, inside a closed environment, and then there was the supplier's brand and then I went after it.

32. The team warns when it runs out, and then I buy it. I also noticed for a new offer that was, for example, this case of grass, I saw a post. Also sometimes out of necessity. I need the bell to be quiet so as not to disturb the dogs. Then I thought of the vibration bell on the clock, right? So I went there and bought it.

33. I will ask people's opinions. So I'm going to join the group, ask, who already has it? Do you consider the advantages and disadvantages of each?

34. I would say 4.

35.4, too.

36. The company is very small, it's just me, so I get an opinion, I think about it for a few days and then I decide whether to buy it.

37. I, only one.

38. Yes.

39. No.

40. If I knew that a company mistreated animals, I would not buy from that company.

41. A for sure. I chose a target audience based on the experience I have, so they can pay a certain amount if I came from another social class, maybe my target audience would be different, and then I would need to have products with more or less quality to reach another audience, isn't it? So I think so. Yes, yes, if I had become a vet, it would certainly be more suitable.

42. Yes, yes, there are more carefree people who buy quickly, without analyzing properly. And then sometimes the quality is not so good. The price, when it wasn't the best, for sure.

43. Yes. Sometimes the interest rate makes a purchase unfeasible.

44. Yes, if there was no demand, I would definitely not have started the company, although I did it with fear, betting, but I certainly imagined that there would be an audience.

45. 3.

46. 4.

47. 4. I buy with confidence because I researched a lot.

48. Again, it depends on the price. If it's a more expensive product, I do a lot of research beforehand, so if it's cheaper, it's easy to return. If it's Mercado Livre, which you can return, then I don't even think about it. I'd say it's a medium complexity.

49. 4.

50. 1. Not comfortable.

## 9.2.2 Interview with the Clothing

1. 5. Because I wanted my company to be based on conscious consumption so if I'm going to offer a product I need to know the origin of what I bought to pass it on. To pass this information on to the consumer. I think it's something that everyone has to think about these days like that.

2. No, I never did.

3. Yes. There are two that I buy the most Penguin the brand the logo is like a little penguin it's just the design. The other one, which is a more conscious brand, is called By you. That's like the monogram of the letters. I think because I buy it so I see it a lot I follow it on social media so I see it a lot I think it sticks in my mind

4. No, slogan I think not.

5. I think quality, reliability and performance. Quality and then having confidence that the supplier is passing on information that is truthful and after performance.

6. Eclectic. Urban. Modern.

7. Yes. What's best for me is value for money.

8. Yes.

9. 5.

10. May it serve my purpose. Because this is already very much related to the previous question from the client who also has clients who sometimes do not look for what I as a businessman would necessarily like to offer and when you work with orders you see this a lot. Sometimes you find something cheesy, but the person likes it, so they are paying in a way

11. No. Not.

12. No.

13. I think Penguin is a bigger brand, yes I would change. But I already have my admiration bond with By You, even with their proposal as a company, so I can support them. They are totally in line with what I believe and think so it wouldn't be so easy even if there was a cheaper company.

14. No. Yes.

15. Already positively and a negatively. I once bought a string made from recycled yarns that are waste from the textile industry and I found that they shed a lot of fibers and fell apart. And positively also from yarns that were the opposite and even after washing the quality was maintained. Yes definitely. I didn't buy more from the other one even though they had this recycled footprint, I thought that's what I said, quality is something that is much more important to me. It's first I think. The company that surprised me positively, I bought from it, only made it more loyal.

16. I think it's very important that you have a relationship of trust that the information you pass on is true, in short, aligned thinking not only related to price and such, but everything.

17. No, I started a year ago.

18. Yes. Many.

19. This is difficult because I like to buy from brands because they have a Brazilian production chain and I think this is a positive point. But if it was perhaps a product that I see that also has a nice initiative that respects the production chain, the people involved in the work would think so.

20. Just not for that. I take it into account, but it's not exclusive.

21. No. Yes, it is very important to me.

22. Much so.

23. PIX. It's easy to do.

24. 5.

25. Um from one to five? It's four.

26. No.

27. Newsletter by email and usually when I buy it comes a letter informing more about the lines and talking a little about the production chain and also on social media, but then I don't know if it's really an advertisement, they are posts. Yes.

28. Good question. At first, I went to the haberdashery and bought the needles, but I think I found the threads by researching myself, I researched like sustainable threads, so I went back to google. Fair? Never.

29. No.

30. Yes. Because it's mainly going to the website and seeing if the information is accurate and things are detailed. Greenwashing nowadays is very strong so when you just say it like that it's ecologically correct it's a very loose thing so when you give more information explain where it came from and how it was done this for me is very important. Yes.

31. So the one that impressed me the most was from Penguin. They do, like, some comic strips, some illustrations and then they show one that I identify with, I think you know. A girl who crochets her and she has a kitten there the comics are like her talking about the situations that I say damn it happens to me too.

32. These days I'm making a product and the line ended and then I had to replace it. And also this thing about having new ideas and I need new colors, but it's still kind of limited this market knows there are many options, but for those who are looking for a more conscious business it's more difficult so I end up staying loyal to those brands that I know.

33. I think one of the first criteria is to be 100% cotton I don't like working with synthetic fiber if it's synthetic fiber without it coming from textile waste recycling so I think the first thing I look for is the material and the origin of the material.

34. 5

35. 4

36. It exists, but it is not bureaucratic. Usually I see the demand I have and then I look within the brands that I already know if there is someone who fulfills the need, then I do a price analysis.

37. One.

38. I don't have co-workers.

39. It depends there are certain things that I think influence has certain things that I am very decisive and say ***** it's mine and I know how I'm doing it.

40. Yes. Precisely because it is a very small company that I am, in fact, it is impossible for me to separate because there is no other person to talk to: No Tais, ***** what do you believe we have to do the best for the money. Every time I see a beautiful synthetic fiber I say no and it doesn't come into my proposal.

41. Absolutely. Also yes. Even because I think we can't escape anything unscathed I think

that everything crosses us and if I had lived different situations maybe I would be different.

42. Yes, both positively and negatively. I'm always on ten projects at the same time instead of doing one piece and finishing the piece so my personality influences too.

43. For me today yes.

44. Yes.

45. 3. Because I think that intuition matters, but nowadays I'm trying to pay more attention to the facts and what I've researched too.

46. 3. That's why today I try to stick to the facts as much as possible and be less than I'm too emotional so these days I make an extra effort to make up for the other side.

47. 3.

48. I think two. It's not complex because I go deeper into specific things so it's not like I evaluate everything.

49. 5

50. 4.

## 2.3. Interview with the Wedding Decoration

1. 4. In my market, because marriage is a market in which we cannot go wrong, there is no chance of making mistakes. And the reputation itself, of the supplier, is very important, isn't it? So, if I

have the approval of other advisors, other suppliers, I can have more secure support for the client, right? And when I cannot get the approval from advisors, I will look at Procon and Reclame aqui (two platforms to review and complain – similar to Trustpilot). So I always will try a supplier that I didn't work with, I will check if anyone has already worked. And also see if it has any complaints in a more formal way.

2. No, no, no, no.

3. Yes, It's just the name or it has a design. It is usually something that represents the name. Like an association like that. Because in this case, I think it's a person who has a very well-established business like this and does constant branding and talks a lot about the brand too, not only shows, but talks a lot.

4. It belongs to Aline Guimarães, who is an advisor. Beyond the obvious is her slogan. I think it's really cool that she does advising that she does this service beyond the obvious, right? So it's not more of the same thing.

5. quality, delivery and relationship.

6. Well-connected. Young. Value more quality than quantity. Demanding. A good price. Good quality.

7. No.

8. Yes.

9. I think 4.

10. Serve the purpose for sure. Because I work in the market where the sky is the limit. And then each person has a priority, so the person is not always looking for the best in all aspects. We don't work with anyone bad, but one is excellent, and the other is good, you know? Looking for a better one will likely also see a higher price tag and the person sometimes doesn't want to invest in it.

11. Not my market at all. No, because I investigate a lot like that, so I try to understand the construction of the price. Saying it's the best doesn't justify it, so no.

12. Yes, I think they are well-positioned on social media. On top of that, they did a good price negotiation. So that's why I chose it. Reliability is important, and it is a supplier I've been working with, so I didn't even research prices with others. I already know the service, but also for being well-positioned on social media and such, even a little bit of marketing, right? The customer service is always talking to me. They paid a lot of attention, they were very agile, didn't they? So this flexibility of the supplier to negotiate also helped a lot and he already delivered. So, this question of attention and dexterity is not like that, the person also being fast, right? I felt... a thing of security and relief, I think..

13. I can change if there is a better offer, I'm not tied to anyone. They know that even with each contract you have to have the same or better quality to continue, otherwise we don't hire more. Because if it's a person who makes my life difficult, I'll cut it out. Now yes. Quality even on delivery. It was left to be desired.

14. Yes. Other benefits that they sometimes say are outside the contract, right?

15. Yes, definitely, mostly positively. For example, there is a supplier that sends more than the contract. Like, so this is pretty cool. You're not even waiting. I think it shows, it's not an affection that, in addition to the contract, you're worried about a partnership there, you know? The path even leads to a friendship in some cases, you know? So I think that's cool because that's it, right? People, the person buys from the person, is dealt with the person, so that's it. It is very important there in the marriage community.

16. Very important because if the contract is wrong, the relationship is the one that will be there and will resolve it. And I have a lot of partners like that. Relationships are very important to me.

17. Yes.

18. Already, chat on WhatsApp or Instagram. Even more with the pandemic that we don't even know personally.

19. I bought things from abroad because I wanted to have a different vision that people don't have in Brazil. Yes, totally, no problem.

20. Yes. And maybe even that most local thing about Brasilia itself. To strengthen the local market, then yes.

21. Already. I got feedback. Rethink. Then, perhaps understanding the situation, seeing that the person has changed, then I buy again. It influences because he is my client, I have to listen. Otherwise, I'll be without my client later.

22. Yes, I certainly cannot disassociate. I think it's hard.

23. It's not complex. In general, it is just a matter of having formalized the contract budget. Then I pay myself. But we cast. It makes the pix or card, but doesn't have a billing service order like that, such a bureaucratic process. It's a more peaceful thing.

24. 3

25. 4

26. Yes. I get in touch with other advisors to find out how the delivery and reliability went, if it didn't generate any problems. Sometimes the product is great, but the person is terrible to deal with, so if the person really doesn't know how to be a good human being, I prefer not to sign the contract, because it will just be a headache for me. If there is a problem and the person is a robot, he is not the person, so he has little flexibility and I don't like very inflexible people, you know? It is different from being a demanding or restricted person, an inflexible person.

27. Few but some have email marketing. Yeah, that thing of remembering that the person is there, isn't it? So I think it helps you to start a dialogue, see the news that the supplier has been talking about, wow, this has everything to do with that customer, so, yes, it moves in this thing of being reminded that maybe the person meets a need that you may be seeking out.

28. Before, there wasn't much on Instagram. So people were more on the website, sometimes at fairs you end up getting to know them, taking the card. It's still a lot of indication, right? When I started, I asked, who is good until I make my own selection. From also understanding who my client was. Because I know there are suppliers that are not for my client. I went a lot by referral, so I trust the referral a lot.

29. Yes. I met it on the internet, I saw it in an editorial. I saw and found very cool, and then I went there to meet. I was even close. On the day, I was on another technical visit nearby and then I went there to meet him. I often find it on the internet, facebook and instagram.

30. Yes, total, whoever doesn't have an online channel for me is almost dead, so I hardly buy. If there are many, I look at them all, social networks, websites, I search Google to see who is talking, then practically all of them, as soon as I know them. See if the person is moving, if they don't look like they're broke.

31. I remember Aline a lot from the wedding business. Showing suppliers.

32. I go there to check the suitcase for what is missing, so you have to buy it. Tape, glue, ruler, scissors. I also need to buy if I have an idea, I need to implement it. Every now and then I see the supplier talk about something new and I put it in the planning.

33. I go a lot for the price. Then I see that it is linked to that price, because the price alone doesn't tell me anything. Then I see how much value he delivers with his price. And then I go a lot for the recommendations too, don't I? So how much more recommendations does the person have, and if the price made sense to me. Along with the value. And in the end, that's it, a little bit of appearance too, isn't it? If the thing looks beautiful, the delivery of the product, the product in. When I enter a negotiation, then I see the person as very busy. Then I discard it. So, this issue of the relationship, the agility to resolve things.

34. I don't think 2 or 3.

35. 3. I think there's a lot that I want it on my wishlist, but I keep putting it off.

36. If I already have someone there in mind, some recommendations I don't research others unless I find the price very absurd. If so, then I do more research. I look at it from the internet, like, I do at least a comparison of two. There is, but it's not that methodical. Because I'm not that methodical either. I start budgeting, then I evaluate the budgets in general. So, I have this faster procedure, and I need to define it soon, so I have to be as fast as possible, so when I take a long time, I'll only take 3 weeks to solve a thing like this, you know? In general, I will take less time.

37. It's just me.

38. Sometimes. It's not that common, but I've already gone back on a contract because we talk and analyze. They're part of the operation, so I also need to know if it's working or not.

39. Affect, but not much. It is in general I do not consult them for this.

40. Total, 100%. Because those who have a religion have to seek greater coherence. In fact, everyone had to be coherent in life, but those who have a region have greater consistency. I am Catholic. The product or service then has to be in accordance with my principles and with the things I believe in, right? I think there are the values of the company that are guided and that created the company, understand?

41. I think experience counts a lot. All of that is personality, but I think that everything you choose for education influences a lot. No, I don't think so, because this is a little more of experience and then, as a company, you are creating a methodology and a process and looking at it here I think it's not like that. But I don't believe so much in that sense, no.

42. Absolutely. I am very sociable, although my temperament is more choleric than sanguine these days. But I'm very sociable, I'm a lot of thinking about the collective sometimes too. So, this question of personality and the way you deal with people, with friendships, with society certainly influences, you know? So I feel that I take the community a lot into consideration. Sometimes I even put it a little above what I as a businesswoman should say no to. I also need to say no to them. Not having a bad mood with anyone of not being able to access a place, a person, because I feel like I have this blockage, of having a time, something in there or a fight, an annoyance, a heartache. So I'm a lot of: Let's solve it, let's talk, so much so that I give feedback every 3 months with my clients. I discovered that not everyone can speak. So when I at least ask, maybe they get to talk sometimes, but if I don't ask, will they never speak out of their spontaneity? So I started to force this line from them, you know? And also in a way that is not so direct and that they can write, feel more comfortable. So I think it has worked. I've been able to correct things that they sometimes have an expectation of. Realign communication because sometimes that's not what I'm doing wrong. It's just what they got wrong, got it? Like, it wasn't quite that then. Communication was. Fails, so I can align better, you know?

43. It's just a little.

44. Yes, totally.

45. Nowadays yes, I've never been that intuitive. I think it was 2. In intuition, I won't say one. You're a woman, aren't you? Now it's one more, 3, almost 4. And people are working, not robots, I don't have machines. My personality will be in everything. So if I was more than one way and now I'm in another way, the company will be more of another way.

46 . 3. Because even so, I think I'm very moved by people, so that's what I said before, it could be 2 and then the same thing is now another 3 walking. I am humanistic. But it's like that, you know? I want a collective well-being, I think about the things that affect people that make them sad.

47. Look, I was over 5, but now 4, let's put it this way.

48. 3 no, it's not very complex.

49. 3

50. 3

## 9.2.4 Interview with the Dentist

1. For me it's 5. Well, because I work with oral health. I really appreciate the quality of the products I use, because it's the longevity of the treatments. It depends on my technique as well as the quality of the products. Dental treatments are expensive, but I think the patient has to see it as an investment in health and this investment has to last, right? It has to last many years, so I value the quality. Only the products that I think are the best.

2. It doesn't matter at all to me.

3. I think so. I remembered the Atlântica that sells equipment, so I can visualize them here in my head. There are some brands of products that I think that I have been using them for so many years, I already look at them like that, I already know. One I think is cute. It has a larger design that is kind of bluish. So maybe it caught my attention, right?

4. No.

5. quality, delivery and relationship.

6. Yeah, first, we're partners, aren't we? We have a partnership. Sometimes I call there to ask for a product, they don't have it, but they provide it from another store. They always let me know if there's a promotion. They always answer me promptly when I need it in any situation. We already have friendship, we have trust.

7. Patrícia, in my case, cheaper for me is not even interesting because most dental products are imported, they are expensive, so when it's cheap, I'm already suspicious. So, actually, Patricia, I don't look at the price to tell you the truth, I already have the brands I use that I know and I don't even know much about prices, because I have to buy them. So I don't look at price, so I look at quality. I look at the name of the product, if I already know that someone used it, if I see a live that a famous dentist, a professor is using, I buy it too, you know?

8. No. Even because the packaging is standardized.

9. 5. It's super important.

10. A good question has to be both, it has to meet my needs and it also has to have quality.

11. Look, Patricia, you know I do. I'm talking about the office, right? Yes, for example the materials as I said are imported, they are in dollars. Most of the materials are from Germany, Americans, Japanese, so they're expensive, aren't they? No, I always have to have some indication, you know? I have to have seen it there, somewhere or a colleague or a post, a live, or I have a product reference for me to buy. I don't buy it anyway, because it's expensive and if I don't like it, it's a loss, right?

12. Almost every day. I bought, for example, the molding material. It must have been about 2 weeks since I paid 1200 BRL in a pot. Copy of it is reliable, so I work with security with that product. It's because I've been using it for some time and I've had very good results with it. So, I don't risk it, you know? I'm not going down another if the path that I already know I'm taking the path that is working for me. Well, I'm kind of terrified, because I think it's really expensive, but on the other hand, I'm grateful for being able to buy what I'm buying is because I'm selling, right?

13. Look, I'm usually loyal, as I told you, I buy from the same company for almost 30 years, right? But I always keep an eye out if there's any promotion, any website or I buy too, but that's just small

things, you know? On a daily basis, I am faithful. Yes, I've already changed it because I thought the quality was going down.

14. I think this is already part of the business. They have to give me support. I think so, out of curiosity. Sometimes I go to Congresses, and I find something so cool. But the bad thing is that it's such an impulse.

15. Often. And now, lastly, I bought a piece of equipment for 5000 BRL. I bought it after doing research with several experts in the field and when the equipment arrived, it was leaking air. Then I was a little disappointed because I had good references and it came with a defect, but the company responded promptly, but I was disappointed. Look, I think so, you know, I think if someone asked me about my experience I would say that I had this problem.

16. Super important relationship, client, company has to exist and has to be bonded. I'm from the bonding period, still, you know? Know them by name.

17. Yes.

18. Often. I buy a lot on the internet.

19. Over the internet, yes. Well, because I needed to, because they are good, because I wanted to try them.

20. No.

21. Yes. X-rays took time and customers complained. I even tried to talk to the company, but I talked to the manager and I think it didn't work, then I changed companies, I now send them to another competitor of theirs. I think so.

22. Yes

23. Today I split on the card or I send a pix. So it's simple.

24. It doesn't take a lot of time. A lot of things I already use routinely. I will put 2.

25. Let's put 2 too, me and I still like going to the store part, don't we?

26. Yes sure. Look like this equipment I bought. Now I called several colleagues, which one do you use there? Because then I already have a reference, right? If someone uses it and likes it, if I trust that professional, then I already think that product is good.

27. Enough. I get a leaflet and more now it's by email, isn't it? Instagram, email. Already.

28. Well, what I'm actually doing now is on Instagram. I'm sending messages that I'm looking to buy a product. Sometimes I browse, then I find something interesting. At conferences too.

29. Yes. Many times.

30. Yes, I think it's super important. Because there I'll get to know a little about the goods. Their standard. See even the feedback from other consumers, right? So I think it helps me like that, to give credibility and power of choice, right?

31. I remember, there's one I want to go after too, he has some ice bags with my company's logo if I want, to give to the patient after surgery. I found this interesting and I want to get in touch with them.

32. Well, there is already a rule in the office like this, everything in between, I ask for another one. Now we're making lenses so now I keep an eye out for new cements and new materials, molding to improve. And news also whenever or when there is something new.

33. I think I look for people I already know. Is not? If it's a very expensive product, then I do a survey of 3 companies, the biggest ones, so I can see if there's a difference in that value, right? I think it's there.

34.1.

35. 3.

36. My employees send me there, I call the same dental office that I always buy. They already deliver to me or I send a message on WhatsApp. When things are more expensive, more different like that, then I do this research or research on the internet, you know? I'm looking for value, I'm looking, sometimes delivery times, which are also important to me. That's more or less there.

37. 1.

38. Yes. There's a guy there who does the implants, so when I go to buy I ask Leo, so what do you think about it? Because we are partners and what they say I think is valid.

39. Not for the family, not for the office. Profession friends affect because the opinion of other people in the field is important to me.

40. Oh, I don't think so. Unless that's what I know that this company is a motherfucker company, that's exploiting employees who are stealing here, you know? But as a rule, not yet.

41. Look, I think for sure, because first, I have total empathy for everyone, don't you? I try to make it easy for everyone who comes to me.

42. Well, yeah, I think it can, because sometimes it's if the person is more insecure and says my God, should I buy it? Do I not buy? I will, I will not, I will not buy. So I'll ask someone else. So I think so, I think it influences it.

43. Yes.

44. Oh, I think so, why so? If the market isn't hot, if I have not so many costumes, I'm not going to buy at that moment, no. I'll wait for things to improve so that I can get a return, so I think so, that it influences.

45. There's a lot, I think my intuition is worth a lot, yes, I'm super intuitive and I always think I should follow what I'm thinking there. 4.

46. Maybe on the same, on the same path of intuition, you know? 4 too.

47. 4.

48. Well, it depends on the product, doesn't it? If it's an expensive product, a new product. Yeah, it's not complex, but I think, yes, I think about the amount I'm paying. 3.

49. I need to optimize my time. It's not that my time is short for me to make a decision, but I don't have much time. Most of the time I don't. two.

50. Patrícia thinks that in my case it is a small risk. So 4.

## 9.2.5 Interview with the Beauty Salon

1. 4. Look because you have to know what you're going to sell, don't you? So you have to know what you are using so you can offer it because you are going to resell a product so when you are going to resell a product you have to know how to explain well what you are selling. But I also don't have all that time to study so much about one thing, so that's why I didn't give it a five, I gave it a four, maybe three and a half.

2. Yes. The name of the product was Macholândia. It was a very good oil, an excellent product that worked very well. It's just that the name is ridiculous, it's just that I was so ashamed to say it. Then I said to all the customers, look, it's very good, but the name is ridiculous and we laughed together. But there was a time when I said: We can't sell this product because I'm embarrassed, I'm embarrassed I don't want to go through this situation anymore, let's look for an oil as good as and that has a coolest name.

3. Yes. Because these are things that appear a lot like that. I pay a lot of attention to that in the logo there are things that I buy more for the logo than for the product, because it matches the shop environment because everything is very visual there.

4. No.

5. I know the ideal would be to talk about quality, but that's how we see that too but it doesn't have to be perfect if it sells well. So I'm being very honest you know? I would talk about performance, supplier relationship and delivery.

6. Good relationship. Because I have to have this channel open to do an action, make an event with this company. I need a creative person. For me the presentation is important because it has to match my space.

7. More or less. I think there's more to it, but those reasons are important.

8. Yes.

9. 5.

10. Things that serve my purpose, because if I'm going to choose the best product on the market, it might increase a lot my price because my price is already expensive, it's not cheap, you know? So maybe if we increase the price because we work with good products, we would have to... it's because we have a high level, but that serves everyone. If I put something more expensive, the price will increase a lot and then we will lose a group of consumers and that is not ideal.

11. No. I think there are nail polishes that are more expensive and nail polishes that are cheaper and the quality is kind of the same, you know? But it makes us think that, because it is more expensive, there must be something that is better or healthier or something like that. Yes. I've done it. For example if there's a nail polish I don't know and it costs one real and Colorama costs five, if I've never seen this nail polish I think I'll buy Colorama because I already know it's a little more expensive yes.

12. Yes. All gel products and hair products I think are very expensive, but it is necessary. We chose it because we did a survey with our employees. For us to see which is the best brand they are used to working with.

13. I have to be faithful to AmBev that is in the contract. The rest I can do whatever I want and generally it's kind of diverse there. Ease of purchase, delivery and communication with the supplier or if it doesn't sell, if there's a lot left and I throw a lot of stuff away, I'll exchange it. I stopped buying a kombucha that I was loyal to, but the customer stopped buying. Then comes the freezer part, which for us is a very positive point that they lend this freezer and look nice there. The representative has to be very cool, he has to be a communicative person who knows how to talk and who knows how to explain the product.

14. Yes Yes that's what I said about the freezer. Yes.

15. Yes. Some of those cheaper nail polishes that when a manicurist of mine said, look, buy these is not bad quality because it's cheap. We bought several and it's excellent and has really cool colors. And I was also negatively surprised with very expensive things, for example I bought a French nail polish that was like two hundred reais that it has eighty-five percent less chemical additives, but nobody wanted to use it. I charged an extra fee. One I stopped buying and the other I keep buying.

16. For me it's very important, I think that communication has to be done and I like to have communication with a representative who answers me whenever I call by name: hi Gabriel, it's ok, I wanted to make an order with you. even if it's not just his department, he takes care of us, he knows even if he himself has to pass it on inside from the company to the financial and such.

17. Yes.

18. Yes.

19. Yes. Because my father lives there in the United States.

20. Not because it is Brazilian, but because it is local. I have already bought some products from Brasilia for example I wanted to buy because it is a small brand, a brand made by women this is more important to me than being Brazilian itself because I buy several Brazilian things because I am in Brazil, but for me it's more important to be local, to be artisanal, to be made by women, to be made by small companies, even because I am too. In order to have this support of this collaborative economy, you finally know how people help each other anyway.

21. Yes. Very. For me what matters is the opinion of my customers so... Yes.

22. Absolutely. Everything we've done is everything I like.

23. Boleto or PIX.

24. I don't do a lot of research, I let the thing show up there or someone get to me. It's kind of unpretentious. I see on Instagram. I follow two thousand profiles and fifteen hundred are random brands. If I find something cool, I get in touch with the brands and to partner and many brands reach us too. So it's not much, it would be a two maybe.

25. There's this unpretentious thing too, which is what I do for myself and for the company. And when I want a specific product I look for it well. 4.

26. Look, I should, you even gave me a good idea. I never do that. I usually order one to try and have my customers try it out. I just find out on my own.

27. Usually when they want to sell, they always take a pamphlet explaining or send a little text and to sell the product yes. More whatsapp I think than leaflet. Yes.

28. I look for it on the internet, on Instagram I really like Instagram. I ask a lot of my collaborators who have been dealing with this for years so I ask a lot if I go somewhere to talk I do a lot of field research. I go on Instagram and talk about everything on Instagram. Because I like to see the posts everything and then I get in touch.

29. It's definitely what I do most. It's the way I find it. They have a lot of similar followers so when we post photos it's a way of marketing and also associating brands.

30. I think it helps. On the internet more than online what I see online is Instagram even if I like the brand if the communication, branding, works and matches mine.

31. The brand's ideological identity more than the product itself, more than the price.

32. They know what's missing and are used to it. They make the list because everything is already very clear. When we want to launch something new, I search Instagram and work with a supplier to organize an event.

33. Ease of communication with the company and price too so for example if I have three very good brands L'Oreal, Vella and Wins I would like to work with Wins which is the top one is an Italian brand is a brand with a cool concept is a brand it's pretty but it's twice the price of Vella, which is excellent too, it's wonderful, it's a well-known brand so I'm going to work with Vella right now, you know? In this current moment of a pandemic, there's no way to escape.

34. Depends on the product. Nowadays, when everything is very correct, I don't make much effort. I think two.

35. Two too.

36. We have everything right for each service. So we see what's missing there and ask.

37. I decide, but we discuss as a group.

38. Yes. I listen to my employees a lot, we always have a meeting with this feedback, you know, I see who agrees and who doesn't.

39. Yes. Because I care a lot about the opinion of others, it should be much less, but then it ends up influencing and I like to know the opinion is mainly my family's opinion, which I'm very connected to.

40. It influences because I like to buy things that I believe I would consume, I do my business with my taste.

41. I think maybe I wouldn't be where I am if I had less money, but I wouldn't work any less. I think the biggest school is practice, you're there, you're going to make a mistake, then you're not going to do it anymore. Of course, you'd better go with background, but the best school is to make mistakes. I think that everything I've been through and all the places I've worked I've learned something for me to make all the decisions I have today.

42. Absolutely.

43. Yes.

44. I think some do. Mainly because of the pandemic, we had to cut some things to reduce the menu a little, for example the latex glove we used for all the services, but it cost eighteen reais and in the pandemic it went up to one hundred and sixty. I would love to use it, but due to the current scenario I had to change the course. So it does influence.

45. 4.

46. 3. The other people in the company are more rational, so there is a balance.

47. In general I am very confident.

48. 3.

49. 2.

50. 3.

## 9.2.6 Interview with the Jewelry

1. I would say 4. Thinking a lot about cost-benefit not to have a problem in the future, right? It is also inevitable to happen some things or to regret it, but being able to avoid it is better.

2. Thinking about the company, I don't think so. My personal life maybe, but that's not in the company as far as I can remember.

3. I remember it because it's stamped on what I use. This specific one I'm thinking about has to do with the product. It's like it's a machine weel like that. Fit, rotate. Sometimes it's in my imagination that the logo looks like this, but as every time I use this machine, the logo is there, so I always look at it. Yes. This question is funny, because there are websites that I use often and the logo doesn't come to my mind.

4. No. My suppliers are very basic product. It's true, isn't it?

5. I think I would put reliability, quality and support.

6. I don't know if they're very tech-savvy. Many years of experience, a lot that I don't even know what it's about, they have. It's a store I've never had a problem like that, so someone very reliable. That it's been on the market for a long time, that it's on the internet because they need it. Someone older, I don't know, a very busy street store. It's always a store full of stuff. There are a lot of things, it must have been a lot of work to register a product is a lot of work. I'm seeing here.

7. In my case, yes.

8. Very little.

9. 100% important. So 5. It even happens, I already have something that I can't even use and I bought it thinking it would be super useful.

10. Serve my purpose. In my field, specifically, it's very much about creative problem solving, so you're going to use things that you wouldn't even think about to do something else, you know. You don't need to have specific equipment for anything. You can get a lot of other solutions to get the same result.

11. No, not necessarily. It really depends on the product, I think, but generally speaking, no. The opposite is nice. I want the cheapest.

12. Expensive, no? So 200-something reais, ok? But there was one that was 20 BRL less and one that was 20 BRL more. So I took a middle one, but what was 20 BRL less, it was made of wood,

so I thought that maybe, with use over time, it would lose quality. The one I bought is steel, and the other one was bigger, but I didn't need a bigger one, so I'll go somewhere in between. For me, it was good. Very happy because I love to buy things on the internet, I bought it on the internet, I like it.

13. I can change if I feel that it's another offer from someone reliable, right? If I think I'm not going to be scammed I can change it. I wouldn't change if I know them. There are 2 providers that I like the most and I know there are others, but I really don't even explore these others, because I already have confidence in them. It is a store that has a lot of variety and has a very strong presence on the internet. But the other one is the one I met first, which was an indication even from my teacher at the time that I think it's a group that doesn't use the internet. And they're a little cheaper, I've never had a problem with either of the 2, never on the contrary or the support of the 2, they've always served me very well, but I end up asking more of this one from the people who have a smaller presence on the internet, because it ends up that the price is a little better there. I don't feel I need to explore these other options as much. I think I'm satisfied with these, these suppliers that I already have, you know? Probably because of having a product that I wanted that the other didn't have. And then, taking into account, buying over the internet, it's not if I'm going to buy a part here, another one here, then I'd have to pay shipping twice. So, sometimes balancing like this, it's worth buying everything from one place.

14. I don't remember, but I think so. I already bought a course that said I would be able to use it up to a 1 year and that was definitely something that helped finish the purchase so to speak. I probably won't remember anything specific, but most likely I will.

15. A negative in this area, as far as I can remember, not yet, but positively, yes, with the support of these companies. I have a lot of doubts about how to use things, as I look at something on the website, I don't know it, I don't know how it works, so they have a lot of support to talk. It has happened that I bought the thing and they say, look, unfortunately, we don't have it, can we exchange it. And it was all very fast. They are uncomplicated, and very easy to solve. I just don't remember having a bad experience. Sympathetic, you are in good hands. It increases the trust you have in the company, doesn't it? When you have a positive response. I know that in marketing this is very important, people are much more loyal when they have a problem than when everything goes well, right? For me, this is very true.

16. No, it's not important to me. As long as they solve my problem. Well, I don't like you texting and stuff like that. After-sales, the minimum, only.

17. I have one.

18. Yes, quite a lot.

19. Yes. Usually the price, often abroad is the same as what is sold here, and there will be a cheaper price. It's like I've said many times, in this specific context, I don't mind waiting a little more time. For shipping in my personal life, I care a little more, don't I? I don't know either, maybe it's a different product than what you have here.

20. Yes, I think so. I prefer to buy directly here in Brazil, to help the national trade, in addition to the support being much better, it is not like that, if you have any problems.

21. Yes, it never happened, but I think I would be open to changing that way. No. I think that in my specific case, like the things people buy from me, they are my creations, the products I buy are suppplies. So, the customer doesn't have much perception of what I buy or what I don't buy, right?

22. Yes, yes.

23. Yeah, it's not very complex, no. I rarely divide the price in months. Sometimes I divide, but usually it is one payment. What if it's something more expensive, from 1000 upwards, right? Then we ask for that discount. But for most things I use the credit card.

24. About 3 or 4. I'm very indecisive, I wonder if I really buy? Do I need to? There are a lot of things I wanted to buy, but I think I can live without. If I made the decision to buy, I've been considering it for a long time.

25. Then it would be less and I'll put 2 for myself, I think it's easier.

26. I don't think so, that I remember, no, I remember it being the opposite, seeing someone talking in social media and then I paying attention to that, but I go after asking that I remember, no.

27. Maybe some email marketing. In my case, no, no.

28. The suppliers I have none I Googled. All of them I found somewhere else, whether it's someone's recommendation or I see someone advertising, right? From the company's brand or in a Facebook group as well. There are many communities, people tell you many things, right? In the group, then, I end up finding many suppliers like that too. For me it would be Facebook, Instagram and word of mouth. Not at fairs.

29. There are many groups on Facebook in the jewelry area, right? And people share a lot about techniques, show what they did, how they did it, asking questions often those who have companies put their services in the group. So I've met people like that.

30. It helps a lot, not necessarily to make me close a purchase, but it helps a lot. It's an easier way for you to get information without having to ask questions. Saves your time, doesn't it? Yes, check it out, but there are suppliers that sometimes don't even have much information. So there are things that I bought with my courage. There are people without much information on the internet and others who have a lot of information like that. So, in the case of people who don't have much information, was it necessary to talk more on WhatsApp. Then I felt confident.

31. There is, yes, for sure, yes, there is, there is. Because one of the biggest goldsmith Facebook groups, it's from the same person who ended up opening a tool store which I think is the one I mentioned that has a very large online presence. I won't remember anything specific, but I do remember more or less how it happens. For example, there is an Instagram that would be the jewelry manual, and then they advertise a lot with this guy, so they send him tools and he shows tools and how to use. In another video, he will show him doing something, he will use it and he will say that you find it in such place. I see a lot of posts like this from them on instagram, for example. But that's the only company I see doing marketing. All the other companies I use don't.

32. I am very stubborn. I take time to buy things that I think I can get a result without. When the supply is running out, I really buy more. Or what do I need to get that result? Sometimes we need something.

33. It's networking, see who is already a customer of this supplier, if they are people I trust, and then I feel confident to buy from the same person, so if I go alone, buy from someone I saw advertising there on Facebook, I I'm a little suspicious.

34. I think 4.

35. Less, maybe 2.

36. It's flexible, if it's what I already have a supplier, the tendency is for me to go back to it. I don't research another one as long as the price is in line with the market.

37. Only myself. One person.

38. I don't have colleagues, but it would influence if I did.

39. I think so. Um, the 40% I'll always take into account, but if I want to, I do it because I understand that I'm in a place that other people aren't, right? So I'll weigh my opinion a little more.

40. I think so. I don't think there's a way to separate it, because I'm going to think of a very specific example and I know that a supplier is in favor of Bolsonaro. It would have a little influence, maybe. In my environment this is complicated.

41. I think so, we are already a product of our environment. I don't know, maybe if I had a degree in administration, I think maybe I would have some things on the management side, which would be different. Maybe I had theoretical knowledge that I don't, so maybe I believe so. I think so. Experience too is everything, isn't it? It will change, it will change the mistakes you make, I think.

42. I think so. Maybe insecurity of doing things alone, having to make all the decisions alone. More caution to do some things. Shyness also to do, to warn everyone. Look, I'm doing this. I think in different ways, yes, people's personalities can contribute to their journey by facilitating or hindering, or both, depending on the points, right?

43. I think so. It's because you have to have more responsibility there. You can't do something and forget you did it, can you? A year from now, that contract will be there, hold you accountable and everything. So I have to be a little more planned, don't I?

44. I think so. Up to a certain point, and no, perhaps in others. I don't think it's possible to put this as a determining factor, as a blockade. People right now, for example, maybe in a moment that is not seen as a great time for big investments. Like it or not, people never stop consuming, do they?

I think, but at the same time it requires caution, you know? But I think it's not an impediment to doing things.

45. Um, I think a little. Intuition indeed. Then I think I'll buy this one here because I felt good, right? It's not impulsive, you might even think about it more, but you say, oh I liked this guy. I think I'll go for that one, because I like it. Yes, it's not zero, but little would put it in 2 maybe. The tendency is that I want to rationalize things a lot, don't you? So I end up spending a lot of time there. It's hard for me to buy it if only I want to.

46. Maybe 4.

47. Medium confidence. People fluctuate, don't they? There are times when we are very confident, but there are times when we are zero confident. So I'll put the 3.

48. I think 3. A medium complexity. Okay, I stay, I stay there for a while thinking about that thing.

49. And I have a comfortable time, don't I? But I needed to cut back on those decisions for things that could go further, didn't I? 4.

50. 2 little comfortable.

### 9.2.7 Interview with the Restaurant

1. More or less. I know chicken breast is chicken breast and it's going to be that way. Regardless of the supplier.

2. No, no.

3. At Friboi's Minerva, yes, I can. Product differentiation, I don't know, I look there, I know that it's from that supplier. I look and I already know which product it is.

4. No.

5. So first delivery, then quality and performance.

6. First, it would be reliable with good performance and excellent product quality.

7. Yes.

8. No.

9. 5

10. That serves the purpose. Because today the best is very much related to price. I have the profit margin that I have. So, if I usually choose the best product, it will be more expensive and my profit at the end will be worse, better.

11. In my view, yes. But it's not always that way. Yeah, yeah. Rare, very rare, very rare happens, but I did a test. Let's say I think it's going to be better and it didn't perform as I expected.

12. No.

13. I change suppliers with a better offer and my suppliers know this. I make it very clear to them if a better offer appears, I'll buy it. I have 5 or 6 chicken suppliers as well, 5 or 6 clean products and the other products as well. Price. It's the only reason.

14. No. Yes.

15. Yes. So, a meat arrived there that I expected to be of inferior quality for the price I was going to pay, right? And it arrived with quality of the price, which I was going to pay almost double, you know? It was positive, it surprised me positively and that made me stay with this supplier, like a month, 2 months, until the quality, even if he sent some bad quality, I accepted because I hoped to see that quality of the first purchase. And then I switched.

16. We talk a lot on WhatsApp, understand? I was a seller in the past, I used to visit the customer, see the customer, talk to the customer, sell to the customer. Not today, today they just send promotion on WhatsApp. If you are interested, get in touch. Every now and then a salesperson sends an audio, something like that. So a relationship with the company is not important to me.

17. Yes.

18. Yes.

19. No. Abroad only if it was a better offer.

20. No.

21. Yes. Customers started to complain, they said the meat was different. It was the closed box supplier and with a closed box you don't have the option to choose, so the product was arriving with poor quality. I opened the complaint, then he said that it was the same. I changed supplier, then it was getting bad too until I stopped buying from the supplier and I'm going to the market to choose the product even if I pay a little more, but I end up having a quality that I didn't have with them. Yes. Easily.

22. Yes.

23. It's easy, today you're using a lot of PIX and bank slips. You pay by cell phone much easier.

24. 4

25. 5

26. No.

27. Usually information arrives via Instagram or email that arrives with products. That kind of stuff but more Instagram. Yes, for the price, which was sometimes cheaper than other places. I saw it on Instagram because that's how we have technology these days, right? You have to do the shopping, we'll do it for the restaurant and then you search Instagram for the day's offers.

28. Most of them, they go to the place to look with interest to register, don't they? Then I register and start receiving messages, promotion by WhatsApp.

29. Advertisements started to appear on Instagram.

30. It doesn't make much difference.

31. Usually showing a product and giving a price.

32. When the product ran out. As it is a popular restaurant, product runs out. I go after the price, sometimes I do a test. There's a rice there that I always use is 18 BRL. There is a new one that is 17, I buy the product that I already use and I buy a product of the 17 to compare the quality.

33. For quality. If I look at the package, rice came very broken. An example, I don't buy that rice anymore, I'm going to eliminate thos.

34. 5.

35. 5.

36. Something more practical. I don't make a step by step.

37. Two. Me and the cook.

38. Sometimes because sometimes they complain. For example a cleaning product. They say you have to use twice as much if it was that brand, understand? So it ends up at the time of purchase, analyzing, I don't buy that product of lesser quality that I know they will spend more. The price is cheaper, right? But it won't be worth it.

39. Of course, only if it is my wife. But friends have no influence on my decisions.

40. Yes. I'm very correct, understand? If I see if something is wrong, even if I'm going to profit from it or something, I'd rather not buy it. Vendors with cargo, stolen goods and such. These spiritual beliefs of mine won't let me do something like that.

41. I don't know, well, I'm thinking this the way I was raised. If I had been raised the same way, probably not. It would not alter the decisions I make today. Yes, for knowledge, for other things, of course it could help to make better decisions, right? Yes Yes Yes. For sure.

42. I'm not a shy person or anything, and I end up convincing a supplier to change some things.

43. Yes.

44. Yes, yes.

45. 3.

46. 4.

47. 3 Medium, sometimes I make a decision and I keep thinking, is it right or not? So, I think it's a middle ground.

48. With complex, I think it's a little. two.

49. 3

50. 3

## 9.2.8 Interview with the Laboratory

1. We buy a lot without knowing about the supplier, sometimes by indication, we buy because of the brand of the product I am receiving. The product can put 4. And the supplier 3. Because of the quality, even more now after the pandemic, this was very evident. Sometimes the brand is good, but the product is sometimes not so good, so we end up with a lot of false positives.

2. No.

3. If it's one we've been buying for a long time, yes. But not so much from the supplier, sometimes more from the brands that we actually use. I've had it for about ten years so it's easier to remember.

4. No.

5. Then product quality, product performance and support.

6. Quality, good lead time. They facilitate my payment method. All are trustworthy.

7. Yes.

8. Not as a company.

9. 5.

10. That serves the purpose. Because not always the one that will be the best, sometimes it has the same performance as another that is cheaper.

11. No. Not.

12. Yes. So sometimes because of the brand or if that brand I know that its performance is better, we bought from it leaving another brand, sometimes the brand is also well known but the test is not so good. I feel bad when I buy something expensive. Just now we made a very wrong purchase. We bought from a person I didn't know, something I've never done before. Here in Brazil there was no test and these guys showed up who had a test. I bought it cheap and paid in cash and they took forty-five days to deliver it.

13. We have several suppliers of the same products. If the guy lets me down, I change. Yes. I changed it because it started to give problems, delays. And that burned my image with my clients, so I never hired again.

14. No. Not.

15. Yes. We took a brand that almost no one used here and it was very cheap. I thought it would be bad for **** and when we actually tested that little pink ribbon it turned red so people with very few symptoms it was already pretty good. I bought more.

16. It's important to me. It's good I like to have the one who saves you. Know that the person is there. We've known each other for more than ten years.

17. Yes.

18. Yes.

19. No. We always buy through someone because of documentation, don't we? I can't do it, we always have to have the middleman unless I create a company for that.

20. No.

21. Already. We noticed that a needle that the customers complained more. Then we exchange. Yes.

22. I think so.

23. It's PIX, boleto, I've already divided there are companies that are kind of standardized for everyone thirty or sixty days is sometimes one payment, but it's not complex.

24. Two days when we need to buy stock, for example. Order via whatsapp. I think short time so put 2.

25. Five.

26. Yes.

27. Yes. Folders, e-mail that is in the registration with promotion. We are already starting to receive news about other things by email. Yes.

28. For example, I participate in a Whatsapp group for laboratory owners in Brazil. Everyone talks about the brands they liked, the prices, then we find out. Sometimes the supplier calls. Sometimes we leave our folder in clinics and some supplier picks it up and calls us. We find it on the internet too, Instagram. Not.

29. We receive direct messages. But don't buy from someone without having an recommendation or something.

30. Today yes. We go on Instagram, if you see a company that doesn't post anything, you're already, is this true? If you already have a website, if you already have something like this that is more reliable, we give it more credibility. Of the ones we buy more, almost all of us go in to see what it's like.

31. We follow them because the vast majority talk a lot about COVID. They are usually sales post, informing that they sell fetal sex tests, for example.

32. A new purchase depends a lot on how will benefit me. Otherwise, I buy it when it runs out.

33. If it's a new product that several people have, we'll send the price request to the first ones we always buy. There I see the price. But usually it's the same people who sell because of the import issue because everything comes from outside, so they are middlemen who already deliver to a lot of people here.

34. 5.

35. 4.

36. Today we already have a scheme. The girl who is in charge of the stock counts. Then she makes the list and Luciana makes the request. It does everything through WhatsApp.

37. If it's not monthly purchases, I'll decide.

38. Yes. I ask employees to test new products.

39. My father wants to give a hint, but we end up not telling him because he has a different mind. Only my husband influences a lot.

40. We know, for example, that there is a company that delivers, I don't know, that can make a mess with something, we no longer buy it even knowing that it is very cheap. There's that story is very cheap why is he managing to do this? So there is.

41. Yes. If I had taken a management course, for example, I wouldn't be suffering as I suffer today. I think so.

42. Yes. For example, I am a person who analyzes a lot, so that profile issue, even in my profile, is analytically stable. It takes me a long time to buy a product because I'm going to look in several places, I'm going to read reviews to make sure that what I'm buying there is right. A person who was more dominant wouldn't waste as much time as I do, and sometimes opportunity is lost in that.

43. They are, but not necessary.

44. Yes.

45. 4. More intuitive so relatively high on intuition because the times I didn't follow through on my intentions I ****** myself.

46. 5. Because I'm always very aware of what can go right, especially what can go wrong, so I calculate a lot to be able to know that that is being a correct decision.

47. 3.

48. 3 or 4. I do a lot of research.

49. 2. It's always a short time. It depends a lot on the product and why but it's usually not something so I have a lot of time to make a decision I can put two.

50. 1. I'm always thinking it can go wrong.

### 9.2.9 Interview with the Painted China

1. 5, because I need a quality product and I also need to buy for a fair price. So, I buy a lot in stores when there is one that I see that the piece is wonderful and has a promotion. So that I can earn a

little more, because otherwise I don't earn anything today, because the prices are absurd. At the factory, there's no way, at the factory, it's the price they charge. But as I buy in large quantities, I already know the product I'm buying, because I've been buying it for a long time and I only buy from a specific factory, because the others I've already tested and I don't like it.

2. No, I never bought it. I always research before I buy. I never bought. Whenever I bought it I liked the purchase, because I researched it before, ok?

3. I think it's Germer's, but it's Germer, that's the name, you know? It's a regular logo. Because I buy a lot and the logo comes on the back of the plate. So as I paint, I have to turn the plate over to sign, so I see it all the time.

4. No.

5. Quality, delivery and reliability.

6. I think it would be an old and reliable company, because I've been buying from the same company for over 20 years and I've never had any problems.

7. Yes, it is. If it is of good quality, I always look for a lower price. When I discover a wonderful product and if the price is right, I buy a lot. I always have a stock of this product, so I think it has price and quality.

8. No, because usually, they pack super well, nothing breaks, you can pack anyway even with newspaper arriving intact is the goal.

9. It has to be my taste first. That's how it is, I always buy porcelain that I like and the customer is going to like what's there. Ready, isn't it? I never go to the customer's taste, no. First I do a lot of things that I like and if he wants to, it's like that. I don't do the customer's taste anymore, because what happens? The client doesn't understand anything. He will say what he wants. I've done this before, I did it even though I knew the end result might not be good. Then the client arrives and says this is not what he wanted. So now I don't anymore. It's my taste and the client has to adapt to my taste.

10. It is first to find the best product available that serves my purpose that is the truth. If I go to a store, I always buy the same things, practically because I know that's what will sell. So I always

buy cups, plates and coffee cups, tea cups. It is sometimes a small salad bowl. But that's it, dish, dessert, normal dishes. I always look for a really good paint and I usually buy from a supplier that is not in Brasilia and I always buy in large quantities. But generally I always try to work with the best paint, because in porcelain paint can cause a problem in the final result.

11. Not from a product. No, just what I was telling you. If the product is on sale, the price will not be the highest, I always have to look at the quality of the product. I always look at the quality of the product and not the price. I don't think so, because I always look at the quality, but depending on the quality, it will always be more expensive. For example, I am currently working with a porcelain that I buy in a store called Camicado. It is not Brazilian porcelain, it is wonderful, it is much more expensive. But then, to be similar to the national ones, I always buy them when they are on sale, because then the price is similar, but it will always be more expensive. But the quality is wonderful.

12. Yes, this porcelain, and especially the gold. Expensive nonsense. Gold simply tripled in price, so much so that I always warn customers, that I only do it depending on the amount of gold used in the plate, only on order, because they have no idea how much it will be. Because it really tripled because of the dollar, so it's something like that that you can't even work with. I'm working very little with gold. I still work because I think it looks beautiful, but not like it used to be. I painted the entire plate. It's more of a touch-up, a detail like that. So it's no use wanting to buy cheaper from another supplier that may be fake.

13. I don't buy. I don't buy it because I don't trust it. I have not tested the product. So I only buy the ones I'm used to precisely for that reason, so I don't have future problems, because in porcelain if you paint and put it in the oven, depending on the porcelain when it comes out of the oven you can lose the piece. So I don't want to take that kind of risk, so I always buy from the same ones, because I'm used to it or else I research in a store like I'm telling you, when it's a factory, it's always the same. When it's a store, I buy a piece, and do a test. If it is good, I'll go there and buy everything in the store. No, I never changed, because I always buy from very good suppliers, I never had any problems.

14. No, no, because when I buy they always tell me how long it will take. So I have to accept it, mainly now in the pandemic. When you order a product from the factory, you pay in advance and

they will only deliver it to you 3 months later. I think they only start making the product after they get the money. Just because I liked it, no, I think I already bought it to test.

15. Yes, I always buy paint from one supplier, I buy porcelain paint from several suppliers, but I always buy from one that I have never had a problem with, until I had a huge problem that I bought a white paint. Before I passed the white paint on the plate, burned and after the chemistry I painted on top. That I have always bought from this supplier for over 20 years, I have never had a problem, but 2 years ago, I think he sold me a paint that was not porcelain, it was glass. I think when it was time to pack, he packed it wrong. It was a paint for glass, only it was the same. So what happened is that at the time of painting I didn't notice anything, but when it came out of the oven, after 1 hour of firing the paint started to come out. Then I thought it was the copaiba oil, which mixed the paint, that was the problem. Then I repeated it again, all because I had never had problems with this supplier. I know I lost 50 plates until I realized it wasn't copaiba oil, but the paint that wasn't porcelain, but that was the only time I had problems. And it was no use complaining, because I was going to complain, he was going to say that it's the ink, he was right that it was my problem, but in reality I have the impression that even he didn't know he had sold me wrong. I think the person who packed it, packed it in the wrong batch, knows why he sells both porcelain and glass paint and it's the same thing. I had a loss of more than 5000 BRL until I found out that the problem was the paint, but as I had never had a problem in 20 years, it is, but it was the only time. Yes a little. You know, I stopped, I started to buy from another supplier that I told you, which is very good, I buy a lot of imported paint from her. I think I started to buy more from her, I think I stopped buying from him a little bit. I think I lost some confidence.

16. Yeah. There is a supplier that sells porcelain and also paints, sometimes from the interior of São Paulo. That I have a friendship relationship, yes, you know? And very trusting. So sometimes I call her and ask her when I can't get it from the factory, she gets it from other factories for me and sends me everything, she has it done. It's a very nice relationship, she's the person I'm most free to ask for, for example, the glasses I paint are in this Germa factory, they don't make the size I like so she has them made in another factory. Yeah, so I have complete confidence. Yeah, look, I tell you to do it, she sends it to me, I pay and everything arrives just right. I think that's what I have more affection for, because Germer is a big company, it's very industrial, you know? It's very professional. The contact has no affective bond or anything like that.

17. Yeah, I have Germer and I have Aladin, this firm is smaller than I told you. I have been working with them for over 20 years.

18. Yes, already. This factory I told you about, where I buy imported paints. I don't know, but I was referred by a person who has been painting porcelain for many years and I have never had such problems. I buy everything over the phone.

19. I've bought it once, but it's not worth it. I already bought the porcelain dishes. But it's currently impossible because of the euro, isn't it? But I don't get anything at all. I could only buy it because my mother has a hotel, it only sells to hotels. Then I came to my mother's hotel, I already paid the higher freight, because it's inland. I had to get it, take it to Brasília, but the porcelain is wonderful. I only bought it 2 times. Then I stopped because it was too expensive. I would buy it, because porcelain is very good, but I would only buy it if I didn't have something similar in Brazil, you know? Because it's a lot of work, it's a lot of bureaucracy to buy from abroad.

20. No, I buy, I buy what is good, it may be Brazilian and it may not be. Usually the best are not Brazilian.

21. For example, I have a client now that he ordered 30 cups from me. And he wants the plates, the glasses, so I had to buy more glasses to meet this demand, you know, which is from the shop, I had to buy, I don't know, sixty. Then I make a bigger purchase because of it.

22. Yes.

23. I make a deposit in the bank immediately.

24. 2 so it's not too difficult, is it?

25. 1, I do not research to buy no. If I go to a store, I like it, I buy it.

26. No porcelain, but porcelain ink yes. For example, there is Clara, who is a porcelain store here. Sometimes I get in touch with her, especially now with gold, right? I contacted her to find out who she would refer me to, who she trust, because she has more practice than me in these purchases. She is the only person I trust in Brasilia to ask for that kind of opinion. She has been teaching porcelain for many years, and she knows a lot about porcelain, so she knows what is good and the supplier is good.

27. Yes. It's printed, leaflet, they send emails, if you want the leaflet you ask for it, they send it too. No, but it's good, because you look for it in the catalogue. It's easier for you to see what you want, isn't it? The photo is more readable, I like paper, you know? I don't really like virtual things, no. I like to open the catalog paper and check.

28. I think it was in stores that I went in Brasília and saw the product, right? Then, contact the supplier. I would buy a product, see if it was good. If I liked it, I would look for a supplier, on the internet. In fair I only found ink.

29. No, no, I don't.

30. I think it does help. It's because the people who are writing there are people who paint, isn't it? So if there's a problem with the paint, they'll put it on. But before that, I always ask Clara that she owns the store here in Brasília. She participates in all porcelain fairs. She knows all the suppliers.

31. Yes, the one I told you that sells imported paints posts a lot. It is exactly showing the product, what it is for, for example, brushes. There are several types of brushes, so it shows a little bit of how they can be used. Yeah, they do it like that. For example, now that Easter they show the painted eggs, so many things.

32. I actually go to the mall at the store and stock up. That's usually what happens. I always have a stash of things I'm not needing, so right away. But it's just, that's what I told you to earn a little more you have to have a stock at a cheaper price. I always have a huge amount of plates and cups and everything. And paints too. For example, I see that the ink is running out, but when I say that it is running out, there is still a little bit. It's just that I'm well-prepared, aren't I? Then I see it and buy about 10 more, you know? Because I always like to have at hand. At least 10 of each color is enough for a lot of things, right?

33. I always buy from the same. I'm not searching.

34.1.

35. 1

36. No, I don't quote, no. I buy only from the supplier. No quote. It's not that the price won't vary much, you know? And I know that her price is fair, from this supplier that I buy and is already reliable, so I buy directly.

37. I.

38. No.

39. No.

40. Yes. I only buy if I think it's right.

41. Yes, especially in porcelain. Every plastic artist who does not have at least a reasonable financial situation cannot survive. If I was poor, I could have given up on it a long time ago and I wouldn't have the slightest way to live of it. No graduation, I'm an economist. I've been painting since I was 5 years old, so, whether or not I did any kind of degree, my degree in fine arts was about life, traveling, seeing museums, researching my school. I did it then, but I didn't say like that, nothing, no. Yes, I don't know how to handle money, understand? If I had done something that would have helped me better with this money thing, I think yes, I would have changed.

42. Yes. I know exactly what I want.

43. Yes.

44. Currently, yes.

45. It's 5.

46. 3.

47. 4. I don't know how to deal with money much, do I?

48. 2

49. 2

50. 3

## 9.2.10 Interview with the Photography and Photo Album

1. 4. Because I always want to know about the product. I basically see the quality of the final product, so I see what paper they're going to use, what fabric they're going to use, the delivery time, the cost and I think that's it.

2. In the case of my business, I can't remember even a specific situation like that, no.

3. From the album companies I buy, I know their logo is like a dream book, so it's a little book like, it's like a drawing of a book. And another company called Fox. Fox is a kind… is like a camera thing. You know? That camera square? So, taking the photo, it makes that camera click, more or less. So I remember these 2 pretty easily in my head. I think it's because I see a lot.

4. I can't remember.

5. Then, reliability, support and quality. The most important thing for me today, I think, because I've had some problems, I think it would be reliability. The support, and after the quality, since the communication with these companies is very important to be able to really work the work, understand?

6. Well resolved, in the sense that it resolves quickly. I think it's elegant. Communicative.

7. No, I think it depends.

8. A little, but not a lot.

9. I would say 3, middle ground.

10. That serves the purpose is enough, in this case.

11. In my opinion, most of the time. Yes, but not all, but most of the time. Yes, already, several times.

12. Yeah, I'm going to make a purchase this week, man. For the finish, for the coating of this specific album, which is superior to another binder I was using more. I feel giving a better product to my client.

13. I'm generally loyal to some products, but I'm not exclusive, so I do some types of albums with vendors and some with others, but it's completely tied to what they really offer. I wouldn't have a problem changing it like that, because I think in this case I don't buy from small companies, you know? It's not something like that, it's a craftsman doing it. It's a big company, which has a chart of big photographers, so I'd have no problem moving without warning. One reason would be another personalization offer, mainly album, something that doesn't exist in the normal market. I changed it, but it's because they've lowered the quality. Then I changed it.

14. Now, like a discount coupon, like, I can buy some albums in advance and then have them made, you know? Yes.

15. Yes, it already happened. The two things are actually both good and bad in the case of albums too. Yeah, I ended up doing more with this company, didn't I? I changed my budget a bit, didn't I? I increased the value to work with this supplier. And what disappointed me, I took out the product from my company and I don't offer it anymore.

16. This is very important to me. It's like I told you, it's one of the reasons that makes me work more with one company or the other. It's how this communication is going, for example sending an email, being answered in a short space of time, or being able to call and ask a question, this is very important to me.

17. I have 2 at least.

18. I already did, more than once.

19. Yeah, but I don't buy anymore. Because it's not worth it financially it would be too expensive. And the shipping issue too. The deadline is too long to deliver to my client.

20. Not just for that reason, but all the ones I work with are Brazilian.

21. I had some cases where the pendrive stopped working, and then one of the solutions was to remove it from the product. So I already had. There ends up being a little contrary. I have some desire to present new things, but until today I haven't been able to fulfill this request even for myself.

22. Yes. Totally influences.

23. Nowadays, most things I have made a PIX. I place the order, I transfer it, put the receipt on the supplier's website and then I put it in the spreadsheet that this product was paid for. So it's actually been like that for a while now. I paid by credit card, sometimes dividing in months, sometimes I paid in cash on the credit card, which was separate for company purchases, that's it, but it was just those 2 ways.

24. Currently, I haven't been doing a lot of research, but I'm going to put it from 3 to 4, I think 4, because it takes me a while until I find it like this, I take a while, but I haven't done that now. But back in the day, when I did, it took a while.

25. It really depends on how much it costs. If it's cheap, I don't know. Up to 100 BRL if that's the case, I'm more immediate, but if it's an expensive product, let's say a television, then I'll take a while. So 3.

26. Already, already. Look, I think it's to validate, isn't it? The choice gives more security that way. So more for that. So, but deep down, I think deep down it wasn't that many times. I end up deciding on my own. I validate my opinion.

27. Email. I receive both from camera lens sales, from albums, promotions. Sometimes they also release something new, so I get yes. I didn't plan on doing it now, but it's been really worth it, so I'm going to do it, so it's already influenced.

28. Going to the Photography Congress in São Paulo. Then I, a supplier from Brasília, I met in São Paulo. Yeah, in the past I would say for sure, nowadays I think it's changed a lot. I think a lot of things are being offered online in a better way. So before online explanations weren't so good and there was so much, you know? And then we still needed face-to-face meetings, but I still think it's an important meeting point, especially for albums, in my case, photographic equipment, the Camera itself, but no, it was more researching on the internet, watching video. So it was all online.

29. Already from this graphic part. It was through Instagram, a box supplier that I didn't get to work with directly, but it's here for when I want to work with it. I don't remember now if there was just an ad for that person. I confess that I don't remember or if it was a photographer citing it, and then I saw it and got interested and went after the price catalog.

30. I see a lot of portfolios, I see all the material online. I talked a little with the person. But from the website, yes it helps. For example, look at the supplier's website. I always look at the website, there are suppliers that don't have a website, that's just the Instagram page, there are some, oddly enough, especially the smaller ones, when it's like a person who does it, understand? But I think it's really important. Frederica is one of them, the one on the albums I always go to. I always come back to the site because they change something, so I'm always looking back to check the information as well.

31. I can. I can remember, but do you want me to explain? So, for example, this is the one I said that I remember the name called Frederica. They sell leather envelopes and also leather bags and also the album, the album part as well. They sell with white sheets, so their posts are showcasing the product. Most of the time, it's really photos of the product in use, handling it, opening, closing, right? A video. Most of the posts are also showing the ready-made coatings and albums. Someone holding an album.

32. I follow many social networks from these suppliers and also from people in my area. Right? Other photographers, other graphic designers. And sometimes I see what people are doing. Sometimes I take this trend and apply it to my business. And so I think it's very much that way. Sometimes it has already happened by customer demand as well. The last one I'm going to do this week was a client who wanted a specific album. Then I went looking for what I could offer him.

33. I tend to start with the most reliable ones that have been on the market the longest, I think. Who is very new like that, sometimes I don't give the benefit of the doubt so much, because even for a practical reason. I had a problem with a supplier who has a beautiful job. Then I lost all confidence. I thought: I need someone bigger that I don't get so dependent on, you know? If the person doesn't deliver, I need an alternative then.

34. I think 5 I always find shopping super exhausting.

35. If it's cheap, it's faster. If it's expensive, it takes time. I will speak 3.

36. This album issue has some companies that have some really good material, it's not that hard to decide, it's just how much I can afford. If this one I can't pay, which one can I pay? Whatever is within the budget and which is good enough that it serves well, goes something like this.

37. It's just me, huh, then? Just me.

38. Ah! They influence, but the decision is really still mine.

39. I don't ask. You know, I arrive with the product ready. I only ask for those who have to do with it. But it's because I've never had negative feedback. I think if I presented an album and the person said: Wow, I didn't like it. I think that would have an influence.

40. Yes. If I have a demand, an album that has already been contracted to a client and I find out that the owner of the company is Bolsonaro (meaning voting for Bolsonaro). And if the purchase is made and I have no way out, I'll have to go on. But if I can choose before, for sure. I've already denied a client for that, but not the supplier, but a client already.

41. I think so. The lower the higher. I think. I think so, too. Yes Yes Yes.

42. I think so. I also think that personality also influences. Because so I tend to be careful in that part of choosing the company's purchases. I am much more discerning even than in my personal life. It's a part of my caution personality, isn't it? I think I'm cautious in this sense, mainly, that it's money that's not just mine, it's not like that, it's the company's money, in short, the client's money and such. If I were perhaps more immediate, I could make a wrong decision wrong. But at the same time I've already lost opportunities also because I'm afraid to spend money like that, you know? So, some equipment that I didn't buy before I regret it, because now it's more expensive.

43. It's for me, these are obstacles, funding, there could be an opportunity, but I see it more with obstacles.

44. Yes.

45. I think it goes in the meantime, 3.

46. I think it goes to 4, not to say it's 5.

47. 4. To say 5 is too much arrogance.

48. 2.

49. 3. I never have enough time, but I think that would be somewhere in between.

50. 4. It's because I've rationalized the decision process a lot and usually I'm not scared anymore.