

Abstract

Title: Factors influencing the power of weaker suppliers in their relationships with stronger customers, and the benefits for suppliers in a turbulent business environment: the case of the industrial manufacturing sector in Poland

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Interorganizational relationships play a crucial role in the functioning of contemporary organizations and constitute one of the major research areas in business-to-business (B2B) marketing and management studies. In the context of increasing specialization, the development of global supply chains, and intensifying competition, firms increasingly operate within networks of interdependent business relationships. Particular attention has been devoted to buyer–supplier relationships, where power asymmetry frequently emerges due to differences in resource endowments, market positions, and the ability to influence the terms of cooperation. In practice, many suppliers operate under the pressure of stronger buyers while simultaneously striving to maintain cooperation and reduce their dependence on their exchange partners.

Despite growing scholarly interest in power within business relationships, the literature still provides limited explanations of the mechanisms through which weaker suppliers can strengthen their power position. Existing research offers only partial insights into the relationships between supplier power, firm capabilities, environmental turbulence, and the financial and relational benefits achieved by weaker suppliers operating in relationships with stronger buyers. Moreover, there is a noticeable shortage of quantitative studies conducted in the manufacturing sector, particularly in the context of asymmetric relationships between weaker suppliers and stronger buyers.

The dissertation is grounded in the question of which factors determine the power of weaker suppliers operating in relationships with stronger buyers. The first objective of the study is to identify and systematize the determinants of supplier power. The second objective is to empirically examine the relationships among firm capabilities, environmental turbulence, supplier power, and the financial and relational benefits achieved by suppliers. The study also incorporates the relational context, with particular emphasis on relationship duration and firm size.

The empirical study was conducted among representatives of manufacturing firms operating in Poland that act as suppliers in relationships with stronger buyers. A sequential

research design was adopted. The first stage was exploratory and descriptive in nature, whereas the second stage focused on examining relationships among the studied variables. In the first stage, descriptive statistics were employed to identify the capabilities perceived by respondents as the most important for strengthening supplier power. In the second stage, the developed supplier power measurement scale was validated and statistical analyses, including difference tests and regression models, were conducted to assess the relationships among firm capabilities, environmental turbulence, supplier power, and financial and relational benefits. Relationship duration and firm size were also incorporated as contextual variables differentiating the examined relationships.

The findings indicate that supplier power in relationships with stronger buyers is dynamic in nature and depends on the relationship context. In relationships of relatively short duration, adaptive production and technological capabilities associated with adjusting processes and technologies to buyer requirements are more strongly linked to supplier power. In more mature relationships, marketing and relational capabilities related to trust building, relationship quality, and supplier reputation become more important. The results also suggest that environmental turbulence is associated with changes in the importance of specific firm capabilities, which subsequently remain related to supplier power.

The dissertation consists of five chapters. The first chapter presents the theoretical foundations of business-to-business relationships and discusses the concepts of power, power asymmetry, and relationship dynamics. The second chapter focuses on the determinants and practices influencing supplier power. The third chapter reviews research methods used in the literature to investigate power and power asymmetry. The fourth chapter presents the methodological assumptions of the empirical study, whereas the fifth chapter reports and discusses the research findings together with their theoretical and managerial implications and directions for future research.

The contribution of the dissertation to theory lies primarily in systematizing knowledge concerning the determinants of weaker suppliers' power and demonstrating the contextual nature of the examined relationships. An important methodological contribution is the development and empirical validation of a measurement scale for supplier power in relationships with stronger buyers. The dissertation also contributes to the literature by providing a quantitative examination of the determinants of supplier power in asymmetric business relationships, which have previously been explored predominantly through qualitative studies. The findings may provide a foundation for further research on power in business relationships as well as for the development of managerial recommendations

regarding relationships with stronger buyers. At the same time, they indicate that supplier power should be viewed as a relational, dynamic, and highly context-dependent phenomenon.

Keywords: B2B marketing; supplier power; power asymmetry; firm capabilities; environmental turbulence; buyer–supplier relationships

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