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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on customer-supplier relationships in the context of international sourcing. Even though relationships between actors in networks have been studied by the International Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP) over the last 30 years, the majority of work about this subject has been developed from the point of view of relationships between industrial companies. In this case, we would like to centre our attention on the relationships between a retailer and its suppliers.

The purchasing activity of companies has been assuming more and more relevance as a strategic function (Gadde and Hakansson, 1994). Moreover, in the actual global economy, where there is a growing market interdependence and need for competitiveness improvement, international sourcing has become a reality for many companies, who mainly look for suppliers who can offer lower prices (Alguire et al., 1994; Liu and McGoldrick, 1996). To do so, companies, and retailers in particular, often use intermediaries, who link customers with suppliers, so a triadic approach is followed (Havila et al., 2004).

However, we will not follow the traditional marketing approach, which takes the perspective of the supplier and how he distributes his products on the market. Instead, we will follow the perspective of the customer (a retailer) who uses an intermediary (an agent) to deal with various suppliers. Using the network pictures tool (Ford et al., 2002; Ramos et al. 2005), we intend to analyse how the actors behave and interact within this triad.

Our analysis shows that the actors in the triad have different network pictures, which inevitably will influence their behaviour. Our findings also suggest that the power and importance of the intermediary in international business will probably increase, as it has the necessary in depth knowledge of markets which the retailer needs to pursue its international sourcing strategy and thus improve its competitiveness. The study’s results may also point in the direction of an atmosphere of greater trust within the triad in the future, originated by a greater commitment of actors.
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