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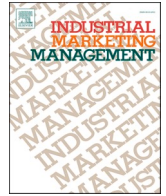
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Not quite alike: Supplier relationship management in B2B marketing and supply chain literature

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ABSTRACT

Many companies implement systematic supplier relationship management (SRM) approaches. However, while scholars from different disciplines (e.g., business-to-business [B2B] marketing, supply chain management [SCM]) have examined SRM, a clear picture of which aspects have been extensively studied and which have not is lacking. To address this gap, this study conducts a scoping literature review combined with a bibliometric analysis encompassing B2B marketing and SCM research. It aims to unpack the extent and nature of research activity in the fields of B2B marketing and SCM to identify key findings and areas requiring further investigation. The analysis indicates that these two perspectives exhibit some degree of overlap but also emphasize disparate foci. The literature on SRM lacks a comprehensive overview and focus on important areas, such as relationship termination and conflict management. This study highlights these “white spots” on the SRM map, encourages further investigation on them, and offers guidance for fostering more collaborative, effective, and sustainable buyer–supplier relationships.

1. Introduction

Business-to-business (B2B) marketing literature extensively discusses the importance of managing customer relationships (Webster, Malter, & Ganesan, 2005; Witell et al., 2020). Customer relationship management (CRM) and customer experience management are both crucial drivers of competitive advantage (Piercy, 2009; Pine & Gilmore, 2013). At the same time, however, building and maintaining relationships with key suppliers is essential to generate and deliver value to customers (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; Piercy, 2009; Saunila, Ukko, Sore, Rantala, & Nasiri, 2019). In other words, healthy supplier relationships are a vital resource that, in turn, engender successful customer relationships (e.g., Hunt & Lambe, 2000).

The roles of suppliers in a company's value chain are multiple and diverse, as they encompass a spectrum of engagements, from the one-time or long-term provision of goods and services to the status of strategic partners. For example, the outsourcing of activities to suppliers enables companies to concentrate on their core competences, enhance their operational efficiency, and simultaneously preserve organizational flexibility (Conner & Prahalad, 1996; Tangpong, Michalisin, Traub, & Melcher, 2015). Nevertheless, a growing perception is that suppliers are not merely one among many links in a company's value chain but

collaborative partners as well, offering their expertise and resources to help buyer firms respond rapidly and effectively to evolving customer demands (Birou & Fawcett, 1994; Möller, Fassnacht, & Klose, 2006; Wynstra, van Weele, & Weggemann, 2001). This notion has led to an increasing awareness of the role of buyer–supplier relationships in both theoretical and practical discourse in the past few decades and has underscored the importance of a systematic approach to supplier management (Gadde & Snehota, 2000).

In a company, different types of buyer–supplier relationships coexist (Gadde & Snehota, 2000; Ivens, van de Vijver, & Vos, 2013). Although a win-win collaboration may at a first glance seem the optimal situation for both parties, the benefits realized by each partner often differ significantly over the course of the relationship (Rokkan, Heide, & Wathne, 2003; Whipple & Frankel, 2000). For example, the nature of interactions and outcomes between buyer and supplier varies, as do the levels of effort both parties put into maintaining a long-term relationship (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Wagner, 2011).

In this context, supplier relationship management (SRM) represents a strategic approach for interactions with suppliers, encompassing activities from the initiation of relationships, to their stabilization, to their termination (Möller et al., 2006; Piercy, 2009). Researchers in various disciplines, particularly in B2B marketing and supply chain

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management (SCM), have studied SRM, each with distinct objectives and areas of focus. However, while both fields have made significant contributions to the understanding of SRM, their efforts have largely been independent, with limited interaction between them, resulting in a fragmented perspective of SRM lacking a holistic approach (Park, Shin, Chang, & Park, 2010; Su & Yang, 2017). Against this background, this paper aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How has the concept of SRM been explored in the fields of B2B marketing and SCM?
2. What are the key findings in each of these two disciplines?
3. What research opportunities remain for future exploration?

To address these questions, we conduct a scoping review combined with a bibliometric analysis. This approach enables us not only to map and synthesize relevant existing studies in the two fields but also identify key trends, research gaps, and influential works (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Baker, Kumar, & Pandey, 2020; Donthu, Kumar, Mukherjee, Pandey, & Lim, 2021). By employing this method, we systematically compare and contrast findings from both B2B marketing and SCM literature. This comprehensive analysis sheds light on how SRM has been explored in these two disciplines, offering valuable insights into their distinct contributions and potential areas for future research.

The results show that while both B2B marketing and SCM have made extensive contributions to the field of SRM, they have distinct foci with only limited interactions between the two fields. In general, research in SCM tends to focus on operational aspects and the strategic management of supplier relationships. In contrast, B2B marketing puts more emphasis on relational dynamics and focuses primarily on relational governance mechanisms, trust, and the evolution of buyer–supplier relationships. A substantial body of work in SCM is dedicated to sustainable supplier selection and supplier selection in general, a topic that is comparatively underexplored in B2B marketing. In addition, both fields extensively study the impact of SRM on performance, examining how effective relationship management influences operational and strategic outcomes. However, processes for managing the termination or switching of partnerships as well as for conflict management receive scant attention.

The structure of this research is as follows: it begins by outlining the key conceptual foundations of SRM, including a discussion on interactions in buyer–supplier relationships and the definition of SRM itself. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the methodological approach used in the study. Then, we present the distinct understandings of SRM from the perspectives of B2B marketing and SCM and examine the evolution of SRM and the changing levels of research attention over time. In addition, we analyze cross-disciplinary citation patterns in SRM research to unpack the extent of interaction between the research disciplines. Next, we identify and explore the main topics in SRM research as reflected in both B2B marketing and SCM literature. We conclude with a discussion of the findings, contributions to research and practice, study limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Interactions in buyer–supplier relationships

Buyer–supplier relationships constitute a specific type of business arrangement between suppliers of goods and services and professional buyers (customers), mostly organizations. The literature identifies several factors that distinguish buyer–supplier relationships from other types of business relationships and, in particular, from company–consumer relationships in business-to-consumer markets. These factors include derived demand, multi-personal buying decisions, investments in the relationships with key buyers or suppliers, and the long-term nature and interdependence of these relationships, which require trust, commitment, and coordination to ensure mutual benefits

(Anderson & Narus, 1990; Gadde & Snehota, 2000; Webster & Wind, 1972).

The involvement of several actors on both sides of the buyer–supplier dyad often creates highly complex situations (Ott, 2012). This complexity can be caused by actors' geographic distribution, their functional backgrounds and respective goals, their differing levels of know-how and experience, and other factors. High relationship complexity requires close coordination among all the actors to ensure that interactions are efficient and effective from both sides' perspectives (Pagani & Pardo, 2017; Pardo, Wei, & Ivens, 2022).

Different disciplinary perspectives of business relationships exist because, among other reasons, the actors involved in managing the dyadic business relationship come from different functional backgrounds, such as procurement, SCM, manufacturing, marketing, sales, customer service, and accounting and finance. Different backgrounds can lead to different conceptualizations of what a business relationship is and to different points of interest in relationship management.

The Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group, for example, suggests that three fundamental building blocks in business relationships require coordination: actor bonds, activity links, and resource ties (Hakansson & Snehota, 1995). Actor bonds refer to the interpersonal connections between individuals, activity links represent the coordination of joint tasks, and resource ties involve connecting and sharing tangible and intangible resources (Hakansson & Snehota, 1995). In buying and selling organizations, the actors may span different functional areas, hierarchical levels, or geographic regions. As a result, various interdependent activities occur in parallel or sequentially, requiring the coordination of both tangible and intangible resources from both sides to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of interactions between buyer and seller (Lacoste & Johnsen, 2015). Other disciplines in management research focus on other aspects or examine buyer–supplier relationships through different lenses.

Research has identified several factors that have a positive impact on the long-term performance and quality of business relationships, such as the fundamental norms of reciprocity, role integrity, and solidarity (Cox, 2004; Ivens, 2006; Ivens & Blois, 2004; O'Toole & Donaldson, 2002). Relationship quality in B2B relationships refers to the overall assessment of the strength and depth of the partnership, often measured by factors such as trust, commitment, and satisfaction between firms (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990; Parsons, 2002). Performance pertains to the outcomes of the relationship, including operational efficiency, financial gains, and mutual value creation, which in turn are influenced by the quality of the relationship (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006). For example, reciprocity (or, in some parts of the literature, mutuality) refers to the mutual exchange of value between parties, with each party expected to return favors or benefits received during the relationship (Thomas, Fugate, & Koukova, 2011). This norm fosters a cooperative dynamic by ensuring that both parties maintain an equitable balance in their exchanges, which is essential for building trust and reducing opportunistic behavior. As Ivens and Blois (2004) note, reciprocity plays a role in enhancing the stability of long-term relationships, as both parties are incentivized to act in each other's best interests, knowing that positive actions will be reciprocated. This mutual reinforcement of behavior helps create a stable foundation for long-term cooperation, thus improving the overall performance and quality of the relationship.

While fundamental norms and values are important for buyer–supplier relationships, actors' perceptions of relationship quality and performance are based directly on their experiences throughout the interaction processes between the buyer and seller (Lemke, Clark, & Wilson, 2011; Rasila, 2009; Su, Song, Li, & Dang, 2008). Interaction is a core concept for the analysis and explanation of buyer–supplier relationships in business markets (Hakansson & Ford, 2002; Kühne, Gellynck, & Weaver, 2013). According to Ford and Mouzas (2010, p. 956), interaction is a “problem-coping process that involves a set of choices for interacting actors within particular business relationships that are unique in time and space.” In B2B markets, interactions go beyond mere

transactional exchanges; they are oftentimes relational and processual in nature, evolving over time as both parties engage in a series of coordinated activities (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994). According to Hakansson, Ford, Gadde, Snehota, and Waluszewski (2009), interaction is the foundation of value creation in B2B markets, as it allows firms to jointly develop solutions, address challenges, and foster innovation. Interaction often involves negotiation, adaptation, and collaboration, where both firms must align their goals and adjust their processes to achieve mutual benefits (Kahkonen & Lintukangas, 2014). Furthermore, Wilkinson and Young (2002) suggest that interactions are not static; they are shaped by past experiences and future expectations, making each interaction unique and context-specific. This dynamic nature of interaction also implies that the quality of communication, trust, and the ability to resolve conflicts effectively play crucial roles in shaping the overall relationship quality and performance between buyers and suppliers.

Building on this foundation, recent research has enriched process models by integrating perspectives from the customer experience and customer journey in B2B marketing and sales research, concepts originally deployed in business-to-consumer contexts (Bont, 2018; Steward, Narus, Roehm, & Ritz, 2019; Witell et al., 2020). In B2B relationships, the customer journey encompasses the entire series of touchpoints that occur between the customer and the supplier, including interactions before, during, and after purchase, whether physical or virtual (Homburg & Tischer, 2023). The customer journey is influenced not only by the tangible exchanges between the buyer and supplier but also by the buyer's experiences – cognitive, emotional, and social responses to these interactions – which shape how future encounters are perceived.

Customer experiences in B2B contexts are multidimensional, comprising behavioral, cognitive, emotional, sensorial, and social reactions to a supplier's offerings (Dobrzykowski, 2019; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Each touchpoint during the customer journey provides an opportunity for the supplier and customer to affect these experiences. Moreover, as Purmonen, Jaakkola, and Terho (2023) note, the customer journey in B2B settings involves multiple actors in the customer's organization, all of whom contribute to the purchase decision and shape the overall experience as they engage with the supplier across various touchpoints. These touchpoints are influenced by the nature of the business relationship, meaning that relational aspects such as trust, role integrity, and reciprocity are crucial in determining the customer's experience throughout the journey.

2.2. Supplier relationship management

SRM and CRM, though often viewed as separate concepts, are closely interconnected. Both form links throughout the supply chain (Lambert & Schwieterman, 2012). While CRM focuses on managing customer interactions and experiences, SRM involves optimizing interactions with suppliers. In B2B contexts, in which relationships are long and complex, both systems are essential for value creation. Just as CRM emphasizes the importance of understanding customer experiences across the journey (Homburg, Jozic, & Kuehnl, 2017), SRM plays a similar role on the supplier side by fostering collaboration and ensuring that the supplier's contribution positively influences the buyer's overall performance and competitiveness (Choy, Lee, & Lo, 2003).

These two relationship management approaches are complementary, as the success of B2B relationships depends on how effectively both upstream (supplier) and downstream (customer) relationships are managed (Pardo, Henneberg, Mouzas, & Naudé, 2006). By maintaining strong interactions, firms can create value at both ends of the supply chain, driving long-term success. The integration of SRM with CRM highlights the importance of managing not just individual transactions but the entire network of relationships, ensuring consistent high-quality experiences across all touchpoints (Lambert, 2009; Oghazi, Rad, Zaeifarian, Beheshti, & Mortazavi, 2016; Piercy, 2009).

Möller et al. (2006) divide SRM into three sequential phases (for a slightly different perspective, see Park et al., 2010). Before a relationship

is established and maintained, the selection of potential suppliers is a necessary task (Jack & Powers, 2015; Möller et al., 2006). This phase, referred to as out-supplier management, entails overseeing suppliers that have yet to form a relationship with the acquiring company – so-called out-suppliers (Möller et al., 2006; Vaandrager, 2024). These potential suppliers are closely observed, compared, and, if appropriate, integrated, as close partnerships also involve investments that can be amortized through the benefits of interaction. With the first transaction of the partners, the potential supplier (i.e., former out-supplier) becomes an existing and so-called in-supplier. The goal of in-supplier management is now to build and maintain relationships with existing suppliers to increase value creation (Wee, Peng, & Wee, 2010). Möller et al. (2006) further describe existing relationships as being about maintaining and expanding the interaction, which requires further investment. If a partnership is to be terminated, in-supplier dissolution management is necessary. In parallel, the management of potential suppliers begins again to identify a new partner.

According to Möller et al. (2006), SRM is therefore a life cycle with different stages and points of interaction that require different investments and activities. Against this background, we adopt their definition of SRM as “the process of engaging in activities of setting up, developing, stabilizing and dissolving relationships with in-suppliers as well as the observation of out-suppliers to create and enhance value within relationships” (p. 73). SRM is one of eight macro processes identified by the Global Supply Chain Forum and interfaces with the other macro processes, such as demand management, order fulfillment, CRM, and returns management (Lambert & Cooper, 2000).

3. Methodological approach

To answer our research questions, we conducted a scoping literature review together with a bibliometric analysis. Literature reviews, in general, can serve a crucial role as groundwork for subsequent research endeavors by identifying relevant research activities or highlighting current research gaps (Munn et al., 2018; Snyder, 2019).

Two important forms of literature reviews are scoping reviews and systematic literature analyses. A scoping review is a type of literature review that aims to systematically map the breadth, scope, and characteristics of research in a particular field. While systematic literature reviews are usually designed to answer specific, more narrowly defined research questions, a scoping review is more exploratory in nature and provides a broader overview of a topic by mapping the breadth and scope of research in a given field, identifying key themes, and highlighting areas that may warrant further investigation (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

A bibliometric analysis quantitatively assesses the academic literature to identify patterns, trends, and the impact of publications in a specific field. It uses citation data to evaluate the influence of individual articles, authors, journals, and research topics, revealing the structure and development of a research area. When combined with a scoping review, bibliometric analysis enhances the understanding of the scope and evolution of a field by systematically mapping the research landscape and identifying key studies, influential authors, and emerging themes. This approach provides a comprehensive overview that not only outlines the extent of existing research but also highlights gaps and future directions for study (Donthu et al., 2021). With our study, we aim to give an overview of how SRM has been explored in the fields of B2B marketing and SCM. We aim to identify and contrast key findings in each discipline and to build a basis for future research on SRM.

We conducted the scoping review following the methodological framework initially established by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), with further enhancements provided by Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010). This approach ensures a systematic and rigorous process for mapping the existing literature on the chosen topic. The framework comprises several iterative stages, which we adhered to in order to identify, select, chart, and synthesize the relevant studies.

The first stage involved identifying a clearly defined research question to guide the scope of the review. This step was crucial for setting the boundaries for the study and determining the key themes and concepts that needed to be addressed. By doing so, we identified the need for a literature review on SRM because the existing literature seems fragmented between the B2B marketing and SCM disciplines (Ross, Buffa, Droge, & Carrington, 2009; Su & Yang, 2017). Researchers can benefit from a unifying perspective of interdisciplinary findings, which we aim to address with our study (Park et al., 2010; Su & Yang, 2017). We refined the research questions, ensuring that the scope was sufficiently broad to capture a comprehensive overview of the existing literature while remaining manageable in terms of search and analysis.

The second stage focused on identifying relevant studies through a comprehensive search strategy. Our search aimed to be as exhaustive as possible, encompassing two major electronic databases and reference lists of included articles to capture all pertinent studies. We iteratively refined the search strategy, adjusting search terms and sources to ensure that we covered the breadth of the topic while remaining feasible within the study's time frame. We limited our search to peer-reviewed articles written in the English language and published in academic journals between 1980 and 2024 (October). We deliberately selected a wide range of years to provide a comprehensive overview of the evolution of the SRM research over the past decades. We decided to focus on academic journals ranked within the category "3" or higher according to the Academic Journal Guide of the Chartered Association of Business Schools to ensure a high quality of the included studies. For the identification of suitable articles, we used Web of Science and Scopus (September 2024), which offer systematic search possibilities and provide access to a wide variety of peer-reviewed business journals. We used a predefined search string to identify relevant articles by their titles, keywords, and abstracts: (supplier relation* OR buyer supplier relation* OR supplier buyer relation* OR supplier relationship management OR supplier management OR purchasing relationship management OR supply chain relationship management). We decided to keep the search string very general to find as many studies from different research directions as possible.

Following the identification of studies, we engaged in the third stage: study selection. Appendix A provides a detailed illustration of the selection process in a flowchart. We applied predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria to screen studies for relevance. The initial search returned 25,415 results. After we limited the articles to the management, business, and operations research and management science categories of the databases, 13,787 studies remained. Following a quality screening and restriction of the articles specifically to the research fields of B2B marketing and SCM, 5389 studies were left in the set. A thorough title, abstract, and full-text screening followed, which narrowed down the articles further to 249. Appendix B contains a list of the 249 studies, including authors, titles, journals, and publication years.

Note that the distinct perspectives of B2B marketing and SCM are accompanied by varying terminology (Su & Yang, 2017). For example, some researchers appear to equate SRM roughly with SCM (e.g., Alvarado & Kotzab, 2001; Chen & Paulraj, 2004). Moreover, some researchers concentrate on the general management of buyer–supplier relationships, while others address specific areas such as supplier development, supplier selection, or other SRM-related topics without referring to the specific term "supplier relationship management"; as such, this term is not explicitly referenced in many studies. However, some studies treat SRM as a distinct construct (e.g., Forkmann, Henneberg, Naudé, & Mitrega, 2016). To ensure comprehensive coverage, we include articles that mention the term "supplier relationship management" as well as those that do not mention the term explicitly but address topics closely related to it.

The fourth stage involved charting the data from each selected study. We systematically extracted relevant information, such as study characteristics, methodologies, and key findings. Charting took the form of an iterative process, allowing us to refine data extraction fields to

capture essential elements that emerged during the review process.

In the fifth stage, we collated, summarized, and synthesized the data to obtain a comprehensive overview of the literature. This involved both a descriptive numerical summary and a qualitative thematic analysis to highlight key themes, trends, and gaps in the literature. Our approach aimed to go beyond a mere aggregation of data by offering insights into the implications of the findings for future research and practice. We coded the material and identified relevant themes to address the proposed research questions. We categorized the selected literature on the basis of its general research focus in relation to SRM. We first grouped the studies according to their focus on the three phases of SRM according to Möller et al. (2006) – out-supplier management, in-supplier management, and in-supplier dissolution management – and then categorized the studies by their specific thematic focus within the three phases. We used a mixed inductive–deductive approach to categorize the selected literature, following the Gioia methodology (Corley & Gioia, 2011; Gioia, 2021; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013), an established procedure in marketing and management research. Appendix C provides the data structure.

Simultaneously, we conducted a bibliometric analysis, using the software tool VOSviewer (Van Eck & Waltman, 2012), which we also employed to create a visual representation of the results. First, we conducted a citation analysis of the bibliographic references used in all the articles analyzed. Citation analysis, a key bibliometric method, evaluates the significance and impact of publications by counting how often they are cited by other works (Appio, Cesaroni, & Di Minin, 2014). Despite alternative approaches to assessing a publication's value, citation counts are a straightforward and objective measure of its influence (Stremersch, Verniers, & Verhoef, 2007). The use of citation analysis enabled us to identify cross-disciplinary citation patterns in SRM, allowing us to determine the extent to which the B2B marketing and SCM disciplines take each other into account in the field of SRM research. Second, we conducted a co-occurrence analysis. The recurrence of particular word combinations suggests the presence of underlying themes or topics. We took the words used from the author keywords, article titles, abstracts, or complete texts (Baker et al., 2020), to establish thematic links between words and identify themes and trends not evident in citation patterns (Donthu et al., 2021).

4. Results

This section presents the results from the literature review and bibliometric analysis. The aim is to answer the research questions on how SRM is explored in the fields of B2B marketing and SCM, to identify key insights from each discipline, and to suggest potential directions for future research. To provide an overview of the most significant thematic clusters, we also conduct a co-occurrence analysis. We then examine the three largest clusters identified in greater detail through a comprehensive review.

4.1. Understanding SRM from a B2B marketing and SCM perspective

SRM is a critical function in both B2B marketing and SCM, but the emphasis and outcomes differ slightly between the two domains. SRM in its broadest sense refers to the strategic approach organizations take to manage interactions with their suppliers and foster long-term collaboration (Carr & Pearson, 1999; Chen, Paulraj, & Lado, 2004; Cousins, Lawson, & Squire, 2006; Möller et al., 2006). In this section, we present a comprehensive account of the definition of SRM in the two research areas of B2B marketing and SCM, outlining the key similarities and differences between their understandings.

In the context of B2B marketing, SRM particularly emphasizes the development of trust, mutual commitment, and shared value creation (Ganesan, 1994; Heide & John, 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Dwyer et al. (1987) describe SRM as integral to building long-term relationships that foster loyalty and cooperation between firms and their

suppliers. B2B marketing mainly views supplier relationships as strategic assets that contribute to innovation, differentiation, and competitive advantage (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Jap, 1999). Anderson and Narus (1990) further elaborate on this, highlighting how close, cooperative relationships between buyers and suppliers can lead to co-innovation and improved market positioning. A key distinction in the B2B marketing approach to SRM is the focus on relational governance instead of the formal, performance-based governance often part of SCM (Heide & John, 1992; Yu, Liao, & Lin, 2006). Heide and John (1992) argue that in B2B marketing, relational norms such as trust, flexibility, and cooperation play a more significant role than formal contracts in regulating buyer–supplier relationships. This relational governance allows firms to adapt to changing market conditions and foster deeper collaborations with suppliers (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Ganesan, 1994; Heide & John, 1992). Morgan and Hunt (1994) further support this view with their commitment–trust theory, which posits that trust and commitment are fundamental to successful long-term relationships in the B2B context, leading to enhanced collaboration and value creation. In this light, SRM from the B2B marketing perspective “involves developing partnership relationships with key suppliers to reduce costs, innovate with new products and create value for both parties based on a mutual commitment to long-term collaboration and shared success” (Lambert & Schwieterman, 2012, p. 338).

In the context of SCM, SRM focuses primarily on operational efficiency, risk management, and the seamless integration of suppliers into the firm’s production and logistical processes. SRM plays a crucial role in ensuring the continuous flow of goods and services, thereby reducing supply chain disruptions and enhancing overall performance (Chen et al., 2004; Monczka, Petersen, Handfield, & Ragatz, 1998). As Chen et al. (2004) argue, SRM in SCM is critical for improving supplier performance and reducing uncertainties, especially in complex global supply chains. SRM, in this framework, emphasizes the evaluation of suppliers based on performance metrics such as cost, quality, and delivery reliability, which are essential for achieving cost reductions and operational efficiency (Chen et al., 2004; Harland, Lamming, & Cousins, 1999).

An important early contribution to the SCM understanding of SRM is the work of Kraljic (1983), who developed a supplier segmentation model based on strategic importance. Kraljic’s matrix, still widely used in SCM today, recommends different management strategies for suppliers depending on their categorization as strategic, bottleneck, leverage, or non-critical:

- Strategic suppliers come with both high supply risk and high profit impact. These suppliers require close, long-term collaboration and active management because of their critical role in achieving strategic goals.
- Bottleneck suppliers have high supply risk but low profit impact. Managing these suppliers requires risk mitigation strategies, as supply interruptions can disrupt operations despite their limited contribution to profit.
- Leverage suppliers have low risk but high profit impact. These suppliers allow for the use of purchasing power to negotiate favorable terms, as their market conditions are relatively stable.
- Non-critical suppliers have low risk and low profit impact. These suppliers require minimal management effort and are typically managed through efficient transactional processes.

This approach aligns with the SCM focus on managing risks and ensuring that resources are appropriately allocated to suppliers that contribute the most to the firm’s strategic goals (Cousins, Lawson, & Squire, 2008; Kraljic, 1983). Thus, in SCM, SRM serves predominantly as a tool that extends beyond traditional procurement, with a focus on reducing costs, achieving operational efficiency, and reducing risk, through sustained collaboration and performance-driven evaluations (Chen & Paulraj, 2004; Cousins et al., 2008).

In summary, the different orientations of SRM in B2B marketing and SCM stem from their distinct objectives. B2B marketing views SRM as a means to foster long-term relationships that can lead to innovative collaboration and competitive differentiation (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Dwyer et al., 1987; Ganesan, 1994). Here, supplier relationships are built on values such as trust and commitment, with the goal of achieving joint benefits over time (Jap, 1999; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In contrast, SCM, being primarily concerned with the optimization of the supply chain, emphasizes efficiency, risk management, and cost control (Chen et al., 2004; Cousins et al., 2006; Harland et al., 1999). Relationships with suppliers are often performance-driven, with an emphasis on integrating suppliers into the firm’s logistical and operational processes (Kraljic, 1983; Monczka et al., 1998). However, despite their slightly different orientations, both approaches recognize the importance of performance, cost-efficiency, and joint value creation as central objectives in managing supplier relationships.

4.2. Evolution of SRM research over time

The evolution of SRM in the past decades helps illustrate both perspectives and highlights significant shifts in focus in both B2B marketing and SCM fields. These developments are mirrored in the evolution of research attention to SRM over time. Fig. 1 illustrates how SRM has gained prominence in both research disciplines across the periods 1980–1990, 1991–2001, 2002–2012, and 2013–2024. This figure is based explicitly on the selected articles for the specific purpose of this study.

Initially, the management of supplier relationships was viewed in a transactional light, especially within SCM, in which firms sought to minimize costs through aggressive negotiation and short-term contracts (Kraljic, 1983; Williamson, 1975). This approach was influenced by transaction cost economics, as outlined by Williamson (1975), with the primary goal being to reduce procurement costs and avoid opportunism. Therefore, between 1980 and 1990, SRM received minimal attention in both research disciplines. From the selected articles, only two articles (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Dwyer et al., 1987), both published in *Journal of Marketing*, fall into this period. This dearth suggests that SRM was still in its infancy, particularly in the context of supply chain research, which was focused primarily on operational efficiency and transactional relationships at the time (Kraljic, 1983; Williamson, 1975).

However, with the rise of global supply chains and the increasing complexity of production networks in the 1990s, firms began to recognize the value of building more strategic, long-term relationships with suppliers (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Harland et al., 1999). As a result, the subsequent period, from 1991 to 2001, witnessed a modest increase in research output, with 11 articles of our selection published in B2B marketing (e.g., Doney & Cannon, 1997; Hult, Ferrell, Hurley, & Giunipero, 2000; Jap, 1999) and two in SCM (Carter, 2000; Harland et al., 1999). This period reflects an early phase in the recognition of SRM’s strategic importance. The increase in B2B marketing publications signals growing interest in relational approaches to supplier management, with firms beginning to recognize that closer collaboration with suppliers could lead to joint innovation and shared market success (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Gadde & Snehota, 2000; Jap, 1999). In SCM, the still relatively low number of articles indicates that SRM had not yet become a central concern in this discipline, though the emerging global supply chains during the 1990s began to shift the focus toward more integrated supplier relationships (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Harland et al., 1999).

The period between 2002 and 2012 is characterized by a notable increase in research activity in both fields. A review of the selected articles revealed 29 from the field of B2B marketing (e.g., Jean & Sinkovics, 2010; Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007; Laaksonen, Pajunen, & Kulmala, 2008) and 68 related to the area of SCM (e.g., Bai & Sarkis, 2010; Cousins, Lamming, & Bowen, 2004; Pagell, Krumwiede, & Sheu, 2007). This period reflects the integration of SRM as a critical component in both disciplines. The significant growth in SCM publications

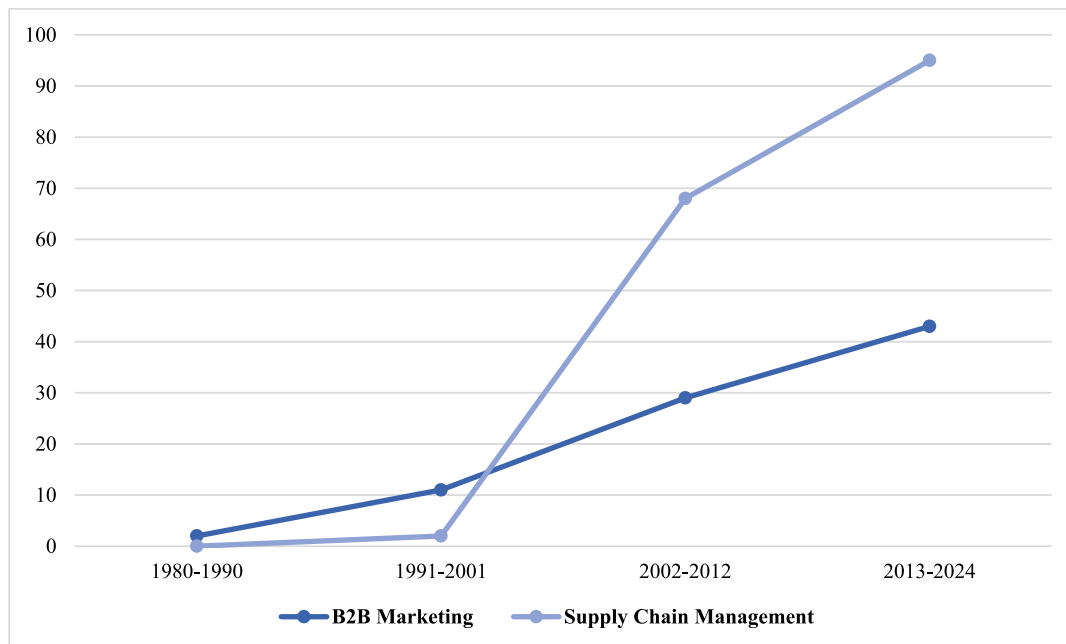


Fig. 1. Number of articles per research area by period.

suggests that SRM has become an essential topic, especially as global supply chains have become more complex, requiring closer collaboration with suppliers (Chen & Paulraj, 2004; Monczka et al., 1998). The corresponding growth in B2B marketing indicates that SRM has become an increasingly important strategic tool for companies seeking to improve innovation and value creation through stronger supplier relationships.

In the most recent era (2013–2024), SRM continues to evolve in both B2B marketing and SCM, driven by technological advancements and the growing importance of sustainability (Caniëls, Gehrsitz, & Semeijn, 2013; Fang et al., 2024). Digital tools such as enterprise resource planning systems and cloud-based SRM platforms enable firms to monitor supplier performance in real time, enhancing responsiveness and collaboration (Cui, Wu, Wu, Kumar, & Tan, 2023; Moradlou, Roscoe, & Ghadge, 2022). These technologies have streamlined the transactional aspects of SRM, allowing firms to focus on more strategic, long-term partnerships. At the same time, sustainability has become a key consideration in SRM, with firms increasingly aligning their supplier relationships with environmental and social goals (Ahmed & Shafiq, 2022). Consequently, from 2013 to 2024, research attention to SRM has continued to increase, with 43 identified articles related to B2B marketing (e.g., Blome, Paulraj, Preuss, & Roehrich, 2023; Griffith, Hoppner, Lee, & Schoenherr, 2017; Makkonen, Vuori, & Puranen, 2016) and 95 to SCM (e.g., Faraz, Sanders, Zacharia, & Gerschberger, 2018; Huang & Chiu, 2018; Pulles & Loohuis, 2020). This period shows the maturity of SRM as an established research area in both fields, with a particularly strong focus on SCM.

Overall, the evolution of SRM research shows a clear trajectory of increasing attention in both B2B marketing and SCM, with SCM showing a particularly sharp rise in more recent decades. While B2B marketing initially led the discussion on SRM, SCM has now arguably taken the lead, reflecting the growing complexity and strategic importance of supplier relationships in modern supply chains.

4.3. Cross-disciplinary citation patterns in SRM

The three journals with the highest average number of citations in the field of SRM are *Journal of Marketing*, *European Journal of Operational Research*, and *Journal of Marketing Research* (see Appendix D). Appendix

E lists the first 10 most frequently cited articles. We employed VOSviewer to analyze citation patterns in the field of SRM across the disciplines of B2B marketing and SCM. The software helped create a network visualization based on cross-citations, revealing clusters that indicate how journals from each discipline are connected. By identifying key bridging journals and examining the strength of connections within and between clusters, the analysis provides insights into the extent of cross-disciplinary engagement and thematic integration in SRM research. In a citation analysis of journals, VOSviewer generated a network map on which each node represents a journal, and the lines connecting the nodes represent citation links between journals (see Fig. 2). The sizes of the nodes in this case indicate how strongly a journal is connected within the citation network, reflecting its central role and importance in its linkage with other journals, while the thickness of the lines reflects the strength of the citation link (i.e., how often one journal cites another).

The network visualization indicates that certain journals serve as bridges between the B2B marketing and SCM disciplines in SRM research. These journals show linkages to both clusters, suggesting that they facilitate cross-disciplinary citation and contribute to integrating insights from both fields.

Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management is a significant bridging journal, with connections to both key SCM-focused journals such as *Journal of Operations Management*, *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, and *Production and Operations Management* and B2B marketing journals such as *Industrial Marketing Management*. This pattern indicates that the *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management* attracts research that intersects both procurement and supply chain topics, appealing to scholars from SCM while also addressing relational aspects of interest to B2B marketing researchers. The journal's position in the network highlights its role in linking operational and strategic themes in SRM across disciplines.

Similarly, *Industrial Marketing Management* acts as a central node in the B2B marketing cluster while also displaying notable connections to SCM journals, including *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management*, *Journal of Business Logistics*, and *Journal of Supply Chain Management*. The presence of *Industrial Marketing Management* as a bridge reflects its broader thematic coverage, which extends beyond traditional marketing topics to incorporate elements relevant to SCM. The journal's connections to both clusters suggest that it provides a platform for marketing

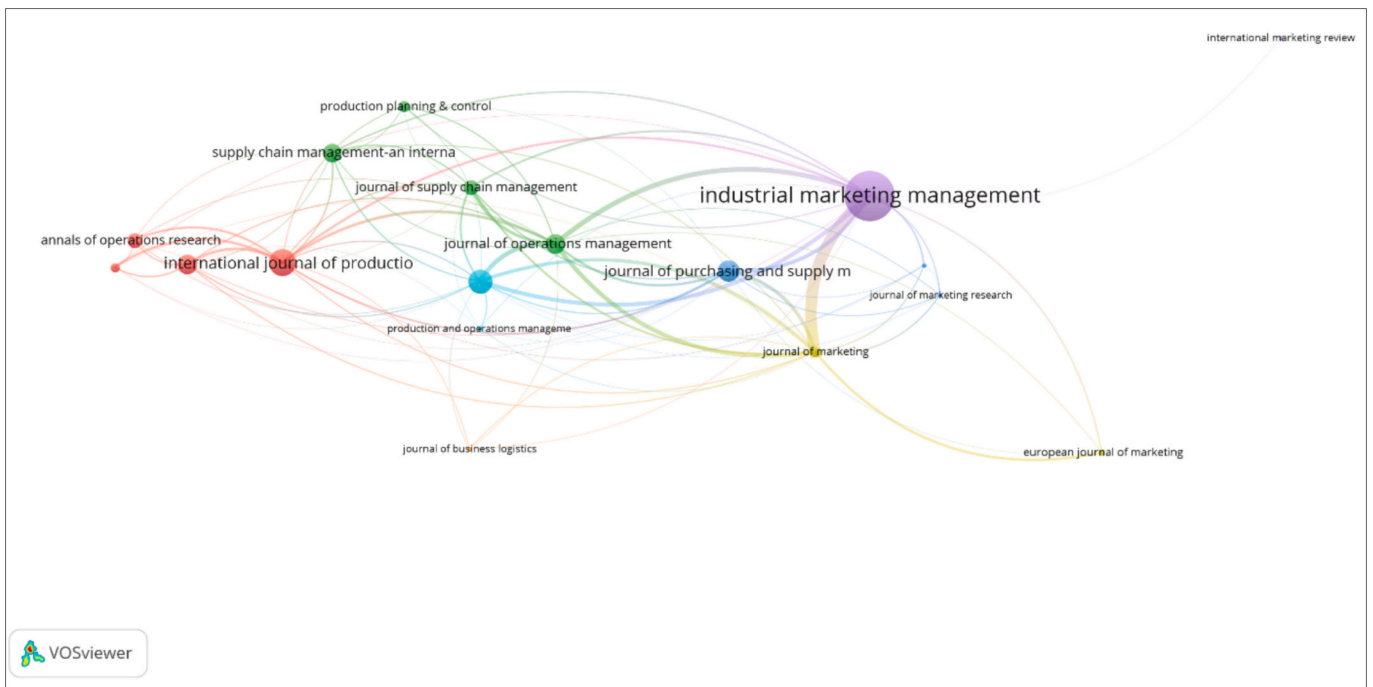


Fig. 2. Network visualization of citation patterns.

and supply chain research, particularly on topics relating to relationship dynamics and strategic management.

Journal of Supply Chain Management, though primarily situated within the SCM cluster, shows some linkages to B2B marketing journals, notably *Industrial Marketing Management* and *Journal of Marketing*. Its role as a bridging journal underscores its coverage of strategic aspects of

SRM, which may resonate with marketing scholars interested in the managerial and relational dimensions of supply chains. *Journal of Business Logistics* also exhibits some, though weak, connections to both SCM-focused publications such as *International Journal of Production Economics* and marketing-oriented journals such as *Journal of Marketing*.

Overall, as the visualization reveals, while there is some degree of

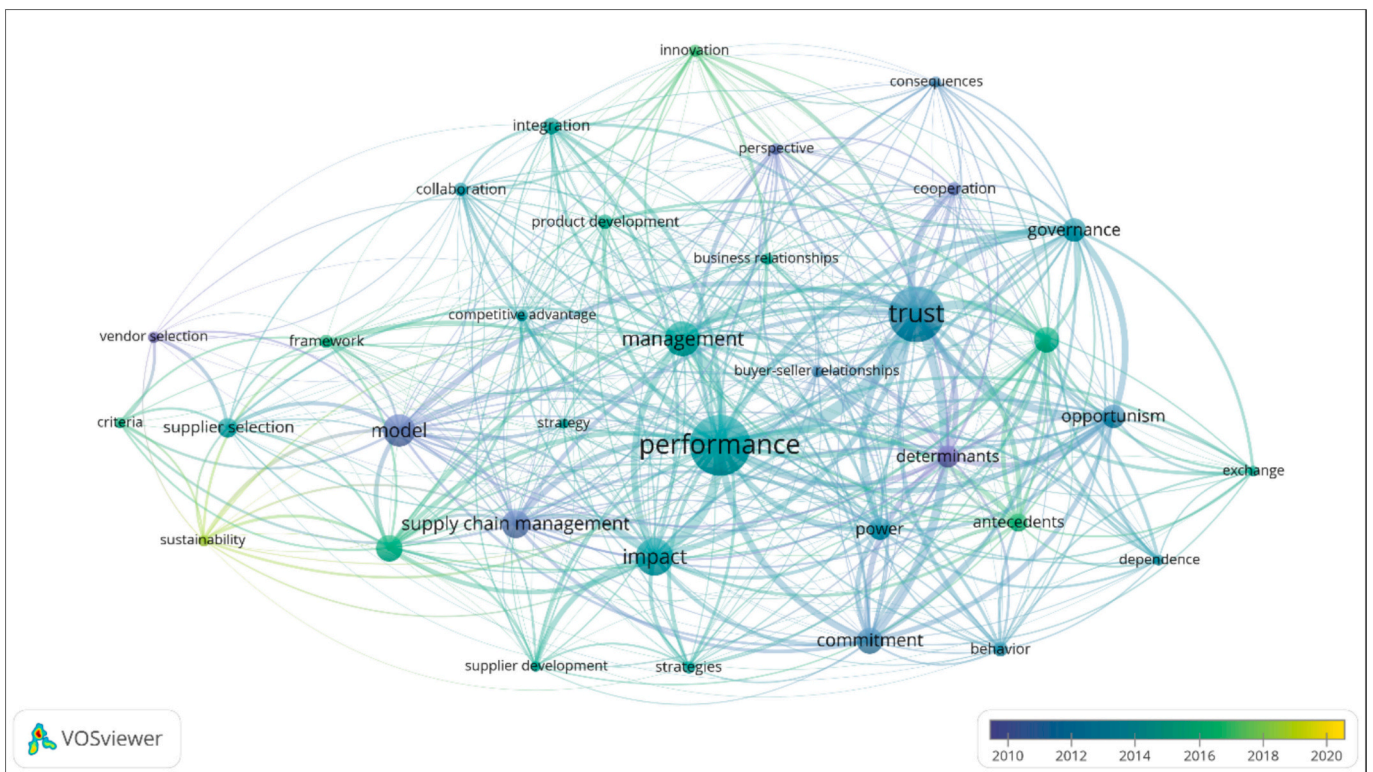


Fig. 3. Network visualization of co-occurrence patterns.

Notes: The colors reflect the average publication year of the documents in which each term appears, weighted by the term's frequency.

interdisciplinary integration in SRM research, evidenced by the bridging roles of journals such as *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management* and *Industrial Marketing Management*, the extent of cross-disciplinary engagement remains limited. The strength of the links between the interdisciplinary journals is generally relatively weak. The strong intra-cluster linkages within each discipline suggest that the B2B marketing and SCM fields primarily develop their SRM research independently, with selective integration facilitated by a few key journals that act as conduits for cross-disciplinary exchange.

4.4. Exploring key themes in SRM

4.4.1. Evolving trends in SRM

We carried out co-occurrence analysis to examine the evolving themes in the field of SRM, with a particular emphasis on its intersections with literature pertaining to B2B marketing and SCM. We developed an overlay visualization using VOSviewer software to map and analyze co-occurring terms, thereby highlighting major thematic clusters and the chronological evolution of research focus areas in SRM (Fig. 3). VOSviewer generated a network map on which topics are represented by circles and their co-occurrences are indicated by lines connecting the nodes. The size of a circle reflects the frequency of the item's occurrence, while the thickness of the lines represents the strength of the co-occurrence between items. Items that co-occur frequently appear closer together on the map.

The analysis reveals several dominant concepts that have consistently shaped SRM research. Among these, “performance,” “trust,” “impact,” and “management” emerge as the most central and frequently co-occurring terms in the dataset. These concepts form the central pillars of SRM studies, emphasizing the importance of supplier performance metrics (e.g., Dey, Bhattacharya, Ho, & Clegg, 2015; Talluri & Sarkis, 2002), trust-building mechanisms (e.g., Ashnai, Henneberg, Naudé, & Francescucci, 2016; Han & Dong, 2015), and management practices (e.g., Ellis, Oh, Henke, & Suresh, 2023; Holmen, Aune, & Pedersen, 2013) in shaping buyer–supplier relationships. Other critical concepts, such as “SCM” and “model,” also appear prominently, underscoring the role of SRM as a vital component of broader supply chain frameworks and the ongoing development of theoretical models to manage these relationships effectively.

The overlay visualization further reveals a temporal dimension in the evolution of SRM research themes. The color coding of the visualization, which ranges from blue (representing data from around 2010) to yellow (representing data from around 2020), provides insights into the progression of scholarly focus during the past decade. Earlier research predominantly explored the interplay between performance, trust, and management, as indicated by their blue-to-green shading, reflecting their foundational status in the SRM discourse. Furthermore, “governance” and “opportunism” gained prominence in early literature, reflecting a growing interest in the mechanisms for governing supplier relationships (e.g., Huang & Chiu, 2018; Shahzad, Ali, Takala, Helo, & Zaefarian, 2018) and the strategic responses to potential opportunistic behaviors (e.g., Blome et al., 2023; Hawkins, Pohlen, & Prybutok, 2013). This highlights an increasing concern with managing the risks associated with supplier opportunism and the formal and informal governance structures that can mitigate such risks. As SRM has matured as a field, the research focus has shifted toward newer themes, such as supplier selection (e.g., Amorim, Curcio, Almada-Lobo, Barbosa-Póvoa, & Grossmann, 2016; Chatterjee, 2023), sustainability (e.g., Aditi, Darbari, & Jha, 2023; Bai, Kusi-Sarpong, Khan, & Vazquez-Brust, 2021), and innovation (e.g., Patrucco, Frattini, & Di Benedetto, 2022; Pulles, Veldman, & Schiele, 2014), which appear in green-to-yellow shading, indicating increased attention in recent years.

The co-occurrence network also reveals distinct thematic clusters, with terms closely linked to specific areas of SRM research. One of the most prominent clusters centers on the concept of “trust,” which is strongly linked with the terms “governance,” “opportunism,” and

“cooperation.” This cluster highlights the crucial role of trust in SRM, particularly in managing and governing inter-organizational relationships. The prominence of the terms “governance” and “opportunism” suggests that trust is a key factor in reducing opportunistic behavior and fostering cooperation between buyers and suppliers. Relational governance mechanisms, which regulate and support trust-building, appear to be a central concern in managing effective and reliable supplier relationships (e.g., Jean, Kim, Shin, & Hult, 2021; Lumineau & Henderson, 2012).

A second central cluster focuses on “performance,” with key terms such as “management,” “competitive advantage,” “strategy,” and “impact” closely associated. This cluster suggests a strong emphasis in the literature on the relationship between supplier management practices and organizational performance outcomes. The connections between these terms indicate that the strategic management of supplier relationships is essential for achieving competitive advantage and improving overall performance. This thematic area reflects a broader trend in the literature of treating strategic supplier management as a critical driver of both operational efficiency and long-term competitiveness (e.g., Amoako-Gyampah, Boakye, Adaku, & Famiyeh, 2019; Carr & Pearson, 2002).

The third major thematic area involves “SCM,” with important terms such as “model,” “supplier selection,” “sustainability,” and “supplier development” featuring prominently. This cluster suggests that SRM is closely integrated with broader SCM practices, particularly in the areas of supplier selection and development. The inclusion of “sustainability” in this cluster reflects the increasing importance put on sustainable practices in managing supplier relationships. This focus on sustainability aligns with a growing recognition of the need for environmentally and socially responsible supply chains, which has become a critical area of concern in both academic and industry discourses (e.g., Alikhani, Torabi, & Altay, 2019; Kannan, 2018). The presence of “model” further indicates that conceptual frameworks and models are frequently employed to structure and optimize SRM practices.

In summary, the centrality of performance, trust, and management concepts reflects the foundational role of these elements in shaping supplier relationships, while the emergence of governance and opportunism as areas of focus highlights an interest in managing relational risks in increasingly complex supply chains. The findings suggest that SRM research is evolving to address contemporary challenges in supply chain governance and sustainability, thereby opening new avenues for future research on the strategic management of supplier relationships. In addition, the analysis reveals that a considerable number of studies in this field concentrate on supplier selection, which is a fundamental aspect of out-supplier management as defined by Möller et al. (2006). With regard to in-supplier management, research puts significant emphasis on fostering cooperation with existing suppliers through mechanisms such as governance, trust, and commitment.

Of the three process components of SRM (Möller et al., 2006), the literature has devoted considerably more attention to out- and in-supplier management than to in-supplier dissolution management, or the process of managing the termination and switching of supplier relationships. Only five of the 249 selected studies are explicitly linked to the topics of supplier switching and termination (Blessley, Mir, Zacharia, & Aloysius, 2018; Bygballe, 2017; Chen, Dooley, & Rungtusanatham, 2016; Helm, Rolfes, & Günter, 2006; Pfeiffer, 2010). Two of the studies (Blessley et al., 2018; Helm et al., 2006) originate from the field of B2B marketing, whereas the remaining three (Bygballe, 2017; Chen et al., 2016; Pfeiffer, 2010) come from the SCM literature. The B2B marketing studies tend to analyze the “why” of dissolution (e.g., trust breaches, relational breakdowns), while the SCM studies analyze the “how” (e.g., processes, models, firm-level strategies). Both perspectives are essential for a holistic understanding of supplier switching in theory and practice. The management of terminating partnerships is an area that is both underestimated in practice and underresearched in theory (Halinen & Tähtinen, 2002; Möller et al., 2006). SRM research has traditionally

emphasized building and maintaining long-term relationships with suppliers to enhance collaboration and efficiency. This focus may have led to less attention on the dissolution aspects of supplier relationships.

Furthermore, only a limited number of studies have explicitly addressed the issue of conflict management (e.g., Newell & Ellegaard, 2022; Yang, Gao, Li, Shen, & Zheng, 2017). This crucial aspect of supplier management seems to be underexplored as well, indicating a gap in the literature that warrants further investigation, especially given the growing complexity and dynamism of modern supply chains.

Also noteworthy is that the majority of the 249 studies adopt the buyer's perspective, with only a small number of studies explicitly taking the supplier's perspective. The predominance of studies adopting the buyer's perspective limits understanding of the relational dynamics in supply chains, as it neglects the supplier's strategic priorities, challenges, and decision-making processes. This imbalance can hinder the development of a comprehensive framework for SRM, potentially overlooking key factors that influence the sustainability and effectiveness of buyer–supplier relationships. In the following subsections, we conduct more detailed analyses of the three main thematic clusters identified in the field of SRM research: governance mechanisms, the impact of SRM on performance, and sustainable supplier selection.

4.4.2. Transactional versus relational governance mechanisms

The first thematic cluster, governance mechanisms, can be broadly divided into transactional or formal mechanisms, such as written contracts and relational mechanisms based on trust and communication (Kingshott, 2006; Shahzad et al., 2018). Governance as a part of buyer–supplier relationships has garnered significant attention in academic literature on SRM. Several key studies provide important insights into how governance frameworks shape the dynamics of buyer–supplier relationships. The literature analyzed herein suggests that both B2B marketing and SCM researchers are equally concerned with governance mechanisms in SRM. However, studies from B2B marketing focus more on relational governance mechanisms; the SCM literature also studies relational governance, but it mainly focuses on transactional governance.

From a B2B marketing perspective, Kingshott and Pecotich (2007) provide a foundational study on the role of psychological contracts in shaping trust and commitment in supplier–distributor relationships. Their research underscores the importance of unwritten, relational agreements that go beyond formal contracts to form the basis of long-term partnerships. Breaches in these psychological contracts can severely undermine trust, leading to a deterioration in the relationship's quality and longevity. This relational perspective highlights the value of informal governance mechanisms in sustaining buyer–supplier dynamics.

Similarly, Jean, Kim, Lien, and Ro (2020) focus on the interplay between virtual and relational governance. Their work demonstrates how virtual governance, facilitated by technology, supports coordination while relational governance, rooted in trust and relationship-specific investments, is vital for managing uncertainty and enhancing performance in cross-border collaborations. This highlights the need for a dual approach to governance, in which both virtual and relational mechanisms complement each other in managing supplier relationships.

Another important contribution from the B2B marketing literature on governance mechanisms is Sande and Haugland's (2015) study on the misalignment of formal contracting and the mediating role of relational contracting. They find that overly rigid formal contracts can hinder strategic performance while relational governance, through trust and flexibility, mitigates these negative effects. Their research reinforces the idea that a combination of formal and relational governance mechanisms is essential for managing complex inter-organizational relationships, especially as formal contracts alone may not address all relational needs.

In SCM research, Eckerdt and Hill (2012) provide a different perspective by focusing on information sharing as a key relational

governance mechanism to deter unethical behaviors in buyer–supplier relationships. Their study emphasizes the social contract between partners, where open communication and transparency reduce the risk of opportunistic behavior. This relational approach aligns with trust-building strategies, but the SCM context also incorporates the importance of information exchange as a governance tool, particularly in managing risk.

Liu, Luo, and Liu (2009) undertake a comprehensive analysis of both transactional (formal) and relational governance mechanisms. They argue that while relational governance is crucial in contexts with weak formal institutions, transactional governance mechanisms, such as formal contracts, still play an important role in providing legal safeguards. Their study highlights the need for a balanced governance approach, particularly in institutional environments that may not fully support one mechanism over the other.

Finally, Eckerdt and Girth (2017) examine buyer–supplier contract design in the context of risk management, focusing on how contract complexity and mission criticality shape the use of formal governance mechanisms. Their findings show that in high-risk environments, detailed formal contracts are necessary to mitigate potential hazards. However, the overreliance on formal governance can erode relational trust, suggesting that effective governance must incorporate both contractual detail and relational adaptability to respond to evolving risks.

In comparing governance perspectives from B2B marketing and SCM, a key difference emerges in the emphasis put on transactional versus relational governance mechanisms. In B2B marketing, the focus tends to be on relational governance, with psychological contracts and trust playing central roles in fostering long-term commitment and collaboration. Formal contracts, while recognized, are often secondary to the relational dynamics that sustain buyer–supplier relationships. In contrast, SCM literature puts greater emphasis on transactional governance mechanisms, particularly in managing risk, complexity, and uncertainty. While relational governance remains important, especially in fostering trust and cooperation, formal contracts are frequently regarded as essential tools for ensuring legal safeguards and managing risk in complex supply chains. Overall, both fields recognize the importance of a balanced governance approach, combining formal and relational mechanisms to manage buyer–supplier relationships effectively. The key difference lies in the relative emphasis each discipline puts on these mechanisms.

4.4.3. Impact of SRM on performance

The impact of SRM on performance, the second significant thematic cluster, is examined from two perspectives: the effect of SRM practices on firm performance and the influence on the performance of buyer–supplier relationships. From the first perspective, studies explore how SRM practices directly enhance firm performance by improving operational and strategic outcomes. Carr and Pearson (2002) show that strategic purchasing and supplier involvement positively influence firm performance by enhancing cost-efficiency, quality, and innovation capabilities. Prajogo, Chowdhury, Yeung, and Cheng (2012) further demonstrate that effective supplier management improves multiple operational dimensions, such as flexibility and cost, contributing to a firm's overall competitive position. Similarly, Amoako-Gyampah et al. (2019) show that SRM practices, when moderated by organizational factors such as flexibility capability and ownership structure, can lead to better financial performance in firms, especially in developing economies. Moreover, Gu and colleagues (Gu, Zhou, Cao, & Adams, 2021) examine how supplier development combined with big data analytics capabilities enhances firm performance, emphasizing the role of data-driven insights in optimizing supplier relationships and driving strategic decision-making. These studies collectively emphasize the internal performance gains that firms achieve through strategic SRM practices, including data-driven approaches and supplier development.

The second perspective focuses on the performance outcomes in

buyer–supplier relationships. [Autry and Golobic's \(2010\)](#) longitudinal study investigates the evolving dynamics of buyer–supplier relationships, noting that these relationships can experience performance spirals that affect both parties. [Giannakis \(2007\)](#) examines the effectiveness of performance measurement systems in managing supplier relationships and suggests that the ability to measure and manage these relationships leads to improved supplier performance and, consequently, better relationship outcomes. In addition, [Cousins et al. \(2008\)](#) explore the mediating role of socialization mechanisms in enhancing the quality of strategic buyer–supplier relationships and show that relational factors such as trust and collaboration significantly contribute to the overall performance of the relationship.

Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding of SRM's impact, with some studies emphasizing direct effects on firm performance through strategic, data-driven, and development practices and others focusing on relational outcomes that influence buyer–supplier dynamics. This dual focus enables SCM research to address both internal operational benefits and the quality of external relationships in enhancing supply chain performance.

The B2B marketing literature approaches the impact of SRM on performance with a more distinct focus than in the SCM field. Compared with SCM research, which often tackles multi-dimensional performance outcomes, B2B marketing studies tend to focus on how governance mechanisms, trust, and sustainability influence relationship quality and stability. This perspective complements the SCM literature by providing a deeper understanding of the relational and governance factors that shape buyer–supplier relationship performance rather than broad operational metrics.

A central theme is the role of contracting and governance mechanisms in relationship outcomes. For example, [Sande and Haugland \(2015\)](#) examine the effects of misaligned formal contracting and show that relational contracting can mitigate the negative impacts of contract misalignment on strategic performance. This suggests the importance of complementing formal governance structures with relational elements to strengthen buyer–supplier relationships. Similarly, [Griffith and Zhao \(2015\)](#) investigate contract specificity and violations in international relationships and find that well-defined contracts and adherence to terms enhance relationship stability by reducing uncertainty.

The emphasis on sustainability and trust is further explored by [Casidy and Yan \(2022\)](#), who analyze how a supplier's sustainability positioning affects buyer performance. They identify trust as a mediating factor, where a supplier's commitment to sustainability fosters trust, thereby enhancing relationship performance and improving buyer outcomes. This highlights the growing significance of sustainability in B2B relationships as a key factor for building trust and achieving performance benefits.

Moreover, [Jean et al. \(2020\)](#) examine the moderating role of virtual integration on intergenerational governance in international relationships, suggesting that such integration enhances coordination and reduces conflict, thereby improving relationship performance. By fostering real-time communication and seamless information sharing, virtual integration allows multiple generations within organizations to align their goals and expectations more effectively. This alignment minimizes misunderstandings and builds stronger trust, which is especially valuable in the complex dynamics of international customer–supplier relationships.

In general, both research disciplines are strongly focused on the impact of SRM on performance. Our selected literature dataset contains 45 articles in total that focus on performance. Compared with the SCM literature, B2B marketing research puts greater emphasis on governance mechanisms, contracting, and relationship learning rather than multi-dimensional performance metrics such as cost, quality, and flexibility. While SCM research frequently addresses firm-level operational outcomes, B2B marketing studies prioritize the conditions under which relational factors and governance strategies optimize relationship quality and stability. This suggests a complementary but narrower focus

in B2B marketing, with an orientation toward understanding the determinants of relationship performance rather than broader supply chain performance metrics.

4.4.4. (Sustainable) supplier selection

Third, research is increasingly emphasizing strategic supplier selection as an important means to ensure the effective management of supplier relationships ([Andersen, Ellegaard, & Kragh, 2016](#)). To date, research in this area has focused primarily on the criteria used for supplier selection, with the development of various frameworks and methods for supplier classification and selection.

However, despite the extensive discussion of supplier selection in the literature on SCM and the considerable research conducted on the topic, B2B marketing researchers have only marginally addressed the subject so far. Of the selected articles, only one from B2B marketing research ([Arvidsson & Melander, 2020](#)) explicitly addresses the topic of supplier selection. The study emphasizes the role of trust in the supplier selection process. According to the authors, trust operates at three levels in the supply chain: interpersonal (between individuals), inter-organizational (between companies), and system (within industry standards and regulations). These levels interact and influence supplier selection processes. Trust, at all levels, helps mitigate risks in the supplier selection process. Manufacturers aim to minimize uncertainties by selecting suppliers they believe will deliver consistently high-quality products and services, meet deadlines, and align with the company's strategic goals. Long-term collaborations tend to be more stable and beneficial for both parties due to deepened trust over time, leading to better mutual understanding and improved performance.

In contrast, more than 30 studies in the field of SCM address the issue of supplier selection. Several of these studies propose innovative models and methodologies to address the complex task of sustainable supplier selection, particularly balancing environmental, social, and economic criteria. For example, [Kannan, Jabbour, and Jabbour \(2014\)](#) emphasize the significance of selecting suppliers that prioritize environmentally responsible practices. Their approach accounts for the inherent uncertainties in supplier data, thereby providing a robust method to assess green suppliers, even when information is incomplete or unclear. This guarantees that companies can still make environmentally focused decisions in challenging circumstances.

Furthermore, [Alikhani et al. \(2019\)](#) present a strategic supplier selection model that integrates both sustainability and risk considerations. Their framework can assist organizations in selecting suppliers that not only meet environmental and social standards but also mitigate risks associated with disruptions. By balancing sustainability with risk management, this model contributes to the construction of more resilient supply chains, capable of withstanding environmental and social challenges.

[Bai, Govindan, and Dhavale's \(2024\)](#) study is also oriented toward the optimization of supplier selection and investment allocation for the purpose of sustainable supplier development. Their model provides guidance to companies on the strategic allocation of resources to suppliers based on their sustainability practices. This approach emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement, allowing firms to invest in key suppliers capable of driving long-term sustainable outcomes in the supply chain. In this regard, researchers in the discipline of SCM address the challenges of sustainable supplier selection, with the goal of companies not only aligning with sustainability goals but also strengthening the resilience and efficiency of their supply chains.

Other studies adopt a more general approach to the topic of supplier selection and present several models that address key challenges, particularly in contexts characterized by uncertainty and the necessity for continuous improvement. For example, [Basu, Jain, and Hazra \(2018\)](#) propose a supplier selection model that accounts for the effects of production learning and process improvements. Their approach puts emphasis on the dynamic nature of supplier capabilities, whereby suppliers can enhance their performance over time through learning and

process improvements. The model enables organizations to select suppliers not only on the basis of their current performance but also in consideration of their potential for future improvement. The incorporation of production learning curves and process efficiencies into the supplier evaluation process enables the formation of more strategic, long-term supplier partnerships.

In contrast, [Chai and Ngai \(2015\)](#) adopt a strategic approach to supplier selection in uncertain environments. Their model takes a multi-perspective approach, considering a range of factors, including price, quality, and risk, while also addressing the potential impact of uncertainty on supplier performance. By integrating these multiple perspectives, the model assists decision-makers in navigating uncertain conditions and making more informed, balanced supplier selection decisions, ensuring that the chosen suppliers are equipped to meet both strategic and operational needs.

In summary, SCM research has developed comprehensive models for supplier selection, focusing on sustainability, risk management, and dynamic performance improvements, while B2B marketing literature offers less coverage on the topic. The SCM field addresses multi-dimensional criteria and aims to build resilient supply chains, whereas the B2B marketing perspective emphasizes relational factors such as trust. This suggests the need for further research in the field of B2B marketing that focuses on the areas of supplier selection and out-supplier management, in general, as categorized by [Möller et al. \(2006\)](#).

5. Conclusion

5.1. Theoretical contributions

This study addresses the three research questions asked in the Introduction section. The aim was to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing literature, identify key themes in each field, and uncover areas where further exploration is necessary. This research contributes to the understanding of SRM by systematically mapping the literature in both B2B marketing and SCM, offering valuable insights for future theoretical and practical advancements.

First, employing a scoping review with bibliometric aspects, this study offers a comprehensive overview of SRM research in the B2B marketing and SCM disciplines. The study highlights the differences and similarities in the understanding of SRM. It reveals that while B2B marketing tends to emphasize relational dynamics such as trust, commitment, and joint value creation, SCM often focuses on operational efficiency, risk management, and cost reduction. By mapping these distinct but overlapping perspectives, the study provides a foundation for integrating the perspectives of both fields to develop a more holistic approach to SRM.

Second, this study analyzes the thematic research trends in the SRM field of B2B marketing and SCM in the past decades and identifies the central focal points of research. The analysis reveals evolving priorities in the fields, such as a shift from traditional cost-focused procurement strategies to more complex themes, including sustainability, digital transformation, and relational governance. It also uncovers recurring topics within each discipline, such as relationship-building and trust mechanisms in B2B marketing and performance measurement and supplier integration in SCM. By tracing these trends over time, the study provides valuable insights into how SRM research has developed in response to changing market conditions.

Third, the study lays the groundwork for future research efforts in SRM, suggesting avenues for further exploration and theoretical development. These include underexplored areas such as in-supplier dissolution management and supplier switching, in which current literature lacks strategies for managing relationship termination or transitions effectively. In addition, the study identifies conflict management as a crucial area requiring more attention, as existing research tends to focus on collaboration while neglecting how conflicts can be resolved or mitigated in buyer–supplier relationships. Furthermore, we identified a

need to shift the research focus to include the supplier’s perspective on SRM, which remains largely underrepresented, to better understand the reciprocal dynamics and motivations that shape buyer–supplier interactions. Addressing these gaps could enrich the theoretical frameworks of SRM and provide more comprehensive guidelines for managing complex supplier relationships.

5.2. Managerial implications

In recent decades, the role of suppliers has shifted from a purely transactional relationship to prolonged collaborative partnerships. While CRM has gained prominence, SRM still plays a minor role. This study has significant implications for managers in terms of managing supplier relationships.

First, adopting an active approach to SRM is important to enhance interaction and collaboration in the buyer–supplier relationship. Buyers need to recognize suppliers as strategic partners that can provide unique capabilities and contribute to achieving organizational objectives. Emphasizing strategic alignment and mutual benefit strengthens these partnerships. Organizations should prioritize trust-building initiatives to establish strong cooperation between buyers and suppliers. This can be achieved by creating an environment of transparency, reliability, and honesty, which helps mitigate risks associated with opportunistic behaviors.

Second, the study emphasizes the importance of adopting a balanced approach to SRM that integrates both operational efficiency and relational aspects. Managers should not exclusively focus on transactional factors such as cost control and performance metrics but also prioritize relational elements such as trust, collaboration, and long-term commitment. This dual focus can help firms establish more resilient and adaptable supplier relationships that are better equipped to handle dynamic market changes. In addition, incorporating a mix of transactional and relational governance mechanisms ensures that relationships are both legally secure and flexible. While formal contracts provide a structured foundation, relational governance, such as fostering joint problem-solving, open communication, and mutual adjustments, can help navigate uncertainties and enhance cooperation. This balanced approach can strengthen partnerships and lead to more sustainable supply chain outcomes.

Finally, though not extensively researched, organizations need to acknowledge the significance of effectively managing conflicts and the switching or ultimate termination of supplier relationships. Developing strategies and protocols that allow for the smooth termination of supplier relationships while minimizing disruption to supply chain operations is crucial.

5.3. Limitations and future research avenues

While this study provides a comprehensive overview of SRM research through the lenses of B2B marketing and SCM, several limitations offer opportunities for further exploration. First, the scope of this review was restricted to literature from the fields of B2B marketing and SCM, potentially overlooking valuable insights from other disciplines, such as organizational behavior, information systems, and general management. SRM is inherently multidisciplinary, involving aspects that extend beyond just operational and relational perspectives. Future research could incorporate insights from these other disciplines to better understand factors such as organizational culture, leadership influence, and technological adoption in the context of SRM. Integrating these perspectives could lead to a more comprehensive theoretical framework that addresses the complex nature of supplier relationships.

Second, this study employed a scoping review combined with a bibliometric analysis to provide a general overview of the SRM research landscape. While this approach allowed for the identification of major themes, research trends, and gaps across a wide range of literature, it inherently lacks the depth that more targeted systematic literature

reviews could provide. Specifically, detailed systematic reviews focusing on distinct areas such as out-supplier management, in-supplier management, and in-supplier dissolution management could yield more comprehensive insights and nuanced understandings. For example, a systematic review on out-supplier management could better explore criteria and processes for engaging new suppliers. Future research should therefore consider conducting more narrow systematic reviews in these specific areas to gain a more detailed understanding of each aspect of SRM.

Third, the study mainly reflects a buyer-oriented view of SRM, as much of the existing literature tends to focus on the buyer's strategies, criteria, and governance mechanisms. Research examining SRM from the supplier's perspective, including how suppliers experience buyer practices, manage conflicts, or navigate relationship terminations, is limited. Collaborative research between B2B marketing and SCM could address this imbalance by incorporating the supplier's viewpoint, exploring questions such as: How do suppliers perceive different governance mechanisms? and What factors drive their decision to continue, change, or dissolve a relationship? Understanding the supplier's side could lead to more balanced and effective SRM strategies that account for the interests and challenges of both parties.

Last, several underexplored areas in SRM could benefit from collaboration between B2B marketing and SCM. For example, research on the dissolution and termination of supplier relationships is limited, as most studies focus on maintaining and building relationships. Future research could combine SCM's structured approaches to risk management could be combined with B2B marketing's insights into relationship dynamics to develop frameworks for managing supplier exit strategies, including exit planning, managing relational ties post-termination, and supplier switching. Joint research should explore how to minimize negative impacts during relationship dissolution while retaining the potential for future collaborations. Similarly, conflict management in SRM remains underdeveloped, with existing literature emphasizing collaboration rather than how to handle disputes effectively. Combining SCM's operational focus on process improvements and metrics with B2B marketing's relational governance techniques can provide a comprehensive approach to conflict resolution. Future research should examine how firms can integrate both fields' insights to develop conflict management strategies that maintain trust and collaboration even during disputes, ensuring that disagreements do not jeopardize long-term partnerships.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Désirée A.C. Wieland: Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Björn S. Ivens:** Writing – original draft, Supervision, Conceptualization.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2025.02.004>.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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