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THE EVOLUTION OF B2B BRANDING IN THE AI ERA

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, branding has become an important strategic asset not only in B2C markets but also in B2B markets. While B2B branding was traditionally associated with rational purchasing decisions, long-term customer relationship, increasing global competition and digitalization have expanded its strategic importance.

Today's firms rely on brand value, trust, reputation and customer experience in order to differentiate themselves in competitive markets. At the same time, developments in the digitalization have led to change in the way of communication with customer through social media, digital content, storytelling, and omnichannel communication strategies. Recently, Artificial Intelligence (AI) had impact on the transformation of B2B branding through personalization, automation, intelligent customer interaction and predictive analytics. The increase in the use of AI in business environments has brought important managerial and ethical questions. While AI offers opportunities such as enhanced personalization, automation, and data-driven decision-making, it also raises concerns related to privacy, transparency, trust, and the preservation of human relationships. These opportunities and challenges matter in B2B markets, where long-term partnerships and customer trust remain fundamental elements of successful branding strategies.

Although previous studies discuss B2B branding, digital transformation, and AI separately, limited research examines the connection between these developments. Therefore, this thesis focuses on this gap by analyzing how B2B branding has evolved and how AI is reshaping branding strategies, customer engagement and value creation in contemporary business markets.

The thesis is organized into three chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the foundations of B2B branding, including brand equity, trust, and relationship marketing. Chapter 2 examines the impact of digital transformation on B2B branding. Chapter 3 focuses on AI-enhanced branding strategies, covering personalization, automation, the emerging role of generative AI in the B2B buyer journey, and the related opportunities and challenges. Finally, the conclusion presents the main findings, organized around three interconnected stages in the evolution of B2B branding, and outlines directions for future research.

Chapter 1 – Foundations of B2B Branding

1.1 B2B vs B2C Branding

Branding is traditionally understood to be closer related to B2C rather than to B2B market. Traditional branding theory has a special emphasis on symbolic values, emotional communication, mass-market advertising as well as mass-market positioning when defining B2C branding. While for B2C markets it is believed consumers are affected by emotion and psychological aspects, it is often assumed that the decision-making behaviour of industrial buyers is rational and depends on attributes such as quality, technical performance and price. For this reason, Branding has received less attention among studies related to industrial marketing. Many industrial companies believe their relations with their clients, the quality of their products and their sales force, are more significant than activities related to Branding. Gradually, it has been understood that Branding is also playing an important role in the business-to-business market. According to Leek and Christodoulides (2011) B2B Branding helps in achieving differentiation, building up trust, reducing risk and development of the relation with customers. In highly competitive industrial market, the branding helps simplify the complex purchasing decisions of the customers and communicates reliability and competence of the firm. However, the B2B Branding can be contrasted with the B2C Branding on certain dimensions. For example, in B2B markets purchasing decision usually involves numerous decision makers and longer purchase cycles, as well as stronger relational dimension. The industrial customers evaluate potential suppliers not just on their products performance, but also on their reputation, constancy, quality of services, and potential for a long-term partnership. Therefore, the industrial branding represents more often the indication of confidence and competence than other brands. Moreover, recent studies have proved that emotion is also an influencing factor for industrial buying decisions, and not only rational considerations are guiding the purchasing process but also feeling of trust and perceived security. The above leads to changing the view of industrial buying behaviour in the sense that the previous theory of its rationality is being more substituted with its relational perspective. The evolving perspective of B2B Branding can therefore be compared with the transformation from transactional to relation oriented and value-based view (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007; Leek and Christodoulides, 2011). The branding activity is not viewed as just a communicative tool, but as a strategic resource for a competitive advantage for an organization.

1.2 Brand Equity in B2B Markets

Brand equity is one of the most important concept in branding literature and usually represents added value to the product or the service thanks to customer perceptions, awareness, trust, associations and loyalties, the concept having been originally applied to the B2C market but then successfully adapted to the B2B market. Kuhn et al. (2008) applied Keller's brand equity model to industrial markets, showing that customer awareness, product perceived quality and organizational trust affect brand equity among industrial buyers too. Similarly, Kim & Hyun (2011) focused on IT software companies, investigating the influence of marketing-mix and company image on brand equity. They concluded that the communicative efforts, the corporate reputation and the relation with customers strongly influence the industrial brand value. Recently there has been a deepening of this research toward integrating the idea of co-creation with the customer involvement. Zhang et al. (2015) indicated that a B2B brand equity can be influenced by the firm capabilities and by the collaborative creation of value together with the customer. The common findings across the recent studies show that industrial brand equity is a multi-dimensional concept with functional, relational and reputational aspects (Kuhn et al., 2008; Kim & Hyun, 2011; Zhang et al., 2015), which supports customers in the decision process by reducing uncertainty and providing a basis for the long-term relationship.

1.3 Relationship Marketing and Trust

Relationship marketing can be regarded as one of the main theories which evolved the B2B marketing literature. The traditional transactional view focuses on product based strategy and aims to achieve customer transactions and prices competition, whereas the relationship marketing theory highlights the co-creation of value, customer loyalty and acquisition based on long-term relationships between the organizations. As it is obvious in B2B market the purchase decisions imply financial investment and the technical complexity of the product necessitates to rely on suppliers which may provide high quality product but also guarantee stability in time and support to their customers. For these reasons trust becomes an essential element of the relation. According to Ballantyne & Aitken (2007) the industrial branding must be understood from the service dominant view and is a tool to build relations and to create value. Similar idea comes from Leek and Christodoulides (2011), according to whom the industrial branding reduces the risks perception and the complexity that are characteristic of B2B relationships, especially in contexts characterized by the high switching costs. Therefore, relationship marketing contributes not only to building solid relations and developing loyalty among B2B customers but, especially in technology-intensive and customized markets, allows organizations to benefit from the support provided by the suppliers throughout the utilization of the products/services. The importance of the relational aspect of the branding seems to expand with time and it also reflects on the changing technological landscape which favors the digital channels to establish and maintain strong relationships with the customers.

1.4 Emotional and Functional Dimensions of B2B Branding

One of the major findings regarding B2B branding is that not only functional, but also emotional factors play a role in the purchasing process. Traditionally it was assumed that B2B customers would always act in a perfectly rational way, valuing only concrete elements, while now it is widely agreed that this is not always the case. According to Leek and Christodoulides (2012) the emotional and functional dimensions of B2B branding influence together brand value. The former involves trust, emotions such as safety or feeling of being cared for, the organizational image, while the latter includes more tangible elements such as technical performance and product quality. This is a departure from the theory of two-different buyer typologies (B2C consumers on one hand, B2B customers on the other one), because even for the customers from the industrial sector there are emotional aspects that impact the decision. Elsasser & Wirtz (2017) studied the emotional dimensions and the influence of emotional satisfaction on customer loyalty and long-term relationship building. Emotional dimensions reinforce and supplement the functional ones rather than replacing them. They become very important for differentiation purposes especially in sectors that face similar technical specifications in their product portfolios and are increasingly valued as important elements of the organizations identity. Emotional branding has found even a stronger resonance thanks to the digital communication which is allowing to reach emotionally the target, communicating corporate values and brand vision. The emotional branding is seen as especially important for technology companies as this allows them to enhance customer engagement with its products/services, by presenting them in a context that is not just functional but also desirable and emotionally satisfying. Overall, the evolution of B2B branding demonstrates that industrial markets are no longer driven exclusively by rational and transactional considerations. Instead, successful B2B branding strategies increasingly integrate functional excellence, relational trust, emotional value, and strategic communication.

Chapter 2 – Digital Transformation in B2B Branding

2.1 Digitization of B2B Markets

During the past decade, business markets and their communication systems has gone through digital transformation. Proliferation of digital technologies, on-line platforms, data analysis, and interconnected communication channels has redefined business to business communication with their customers, suppliers and stakeholders.

The traditional B2B communication strategies involved, besides product or service focused communication, direct sales forces, exhibitions and trade fairs, meetings and face-to-face interactions. Today, industrial organizations still rely on traditional ways of building relations, although they are no longer the sole means of generating, distributing and communicating value.

Digital transformation in B2B terms describes integration of digital technologies in business operations, communication and interaction with customers. Digitization in B2B marketing allows for enhanced information flow, improved customer relations, customization, and overall business processes (Lipiainen & Karjaluoto, 2015). According to Lipiainen and Karjaluoto (2015), digital aspects are increasingly important in industrial branding: 'a company's visibility in the digital world and its capabilities in using digital communication strategies and managing content has become vital. Thus, companies will be even more required to be able to produce a digital identity that supports its brand building in the long-term'.

Customer attitudes in industrial markets are also affected by digitalization. Customers search for product and supplier information online, perform digital comparisons and consider companies' Web pages, use of social media, and their online image before making buying decisions. Thus, it is critical for industrial brands to present consistent and trustworthy brand image through a number of digital channels.

Furthermore, in the age of digitalization, data have gained strategic significance. Now firms can gather and analyze a large quantity of data related to their customers and use it to deliver personalized messages and implement highly tailored engagement strategies. Such data-driven environment shifts branding from communication to active interaction with customers.

As a result, B2B branding has evolved from stable, relationship focused activity to dynamic, technologically driven and ever changing one. In highly competitive markets industrial companies now compete not only based on their products but also through their digital customer experience and networked brand environment.

2.2 Social Media and Content Marketing

One of the most apparent impact of digital transformation in B2B branding has been emergence of social media and content marketing as key branding tools. Previously used almost exclusively in B2C, social media has gradually turned to be important business tool.

As noted by Cawsey and Rowley (2016), social media channels allow for strengthened customer engagement, increased brand visibility, and stronger relationships through consistent communication. By utilizing digital platforms, industrial organizations can more effectively communicate their knowledge, innovation, and overall company identity.

The application of content marketing is even more significant in B2B due to the complexity of industrial products/services that often requires detailed explanation before buying decision can be made. Therefore, organizations increasingly use white papers, webinars, blogs, case studies, videos and various educational content.

In contrast to direct advertising, content marketing's main goal is to offer value through information and expertise, instead of purely persuasive message. It is a particularly suitable branding tool in industrial markets that are characterized by complex product offerings and long purchase cycles.

Tiwary et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of social media in B2B marketing, which offers the possibility not only to develop more efficient communication processes, but to build customers' relationships and increase brand awareness through enhanced interaction. As per review of Tiwary et al. (2021), digital media can better support strategic B2B branding. For instance, social media such as LinkedIn are commonly used by technology organizations for professional networking, to disseminate thought leadership and develop trust among business customers.

However, utilization of social media does carry some challenges for industrial brands. It requires efficient and continuous updates and maintaining brand consistency across all digital channels. Firms should therefore focus on building internal communication capability.

Overall, social media and content marketing have resulted in the evolution of B2B branding as an interactive communication system. They provide companies with tools to develop and manage relationship with their customers through information dissemination and knowledge sharing (Cawsey & Rowley, 2016; Tiwary et al., 2021).

2.3 Narrative and Storytelling Strategies

As communication becomes increasingly digital in B2B markets, companies tend to incorporate deeper storytelling in their brand strategies to create a stronger emotional bond between the stakeholders. Whereas traditional communication was focused on the tangible benefits of product and service, companies now recognize the importance of communicating their mission, vision, values and long-term purpose to achieve brand differentiation.

A narrative approach focuses on telling a compelling story that positions the brand within its relevant context and enables consumers to relate to it. Such strategy can bring even most complex solutions and information more comprehensible for the consumers (Bonnin & Alfonso, 2019). Bonnin and Alfonso (2019) investigated how technology companies such as IBM and Cisco used narrative to support the diffusion of their IoT technology. They reported that successful organizations are successful not only because they have high technological competence, but because they also are able to construct broad, overarching narratives, metanarratives, that help to frame the legitimacy of the new technology. In their report Bonnin and Alfonso (2019) found that metanarratives were utilized as brand framing tools and helped to legitimize new technologies.

They also pointed out the concept of transmedia storytelling where different stories of the brand are spread through various platforms and formats. This could be the company's website, blog, case study, or social media presence, and can thus affect various stakeholder groups. This provides brand with constant reinforce through different touchpoints and different brand channels.

Building the trust continues to be a key driver of B2B marketing, and narrative strategy aids in establishing trust in different ways, by providing evidence of past performance, success stories with customers, or through the display of innovation and thought leadership (Bonnin & Alfonso, 2019). Storytelling complements already established dimensions of branding, such as product and service quality, reputation, and reliability.

The development of narrative branding shows how the shift from a transaction-based marketing communication toward a relationship-oriented one, that relies more on emotions and deeper meaning for the brand, can influence B2B strategies. Even though functional and emotional needs still matter, the ability of a brand to craft compelling narrative is likely to provide sustainable competitive advantage in a crowded market.

2.4 Technology Brands and Digital Positioning

Technology companies are likely to be the ones to adapt digital branding fastest in B2B market. Unlike traditional industrial firms, technology marketers are likely to work in dynamic environments with advanced technological products and services and strong competition, and they are therefore able to gain a competitive edge by using Branding strategies for positioning purposes.

Digital positioning is the practice of forming an image for a brand within a specific digital context. B2B technology companies often find themselves dealing with a significant amount of perceived risk from potential customers who are unsure about their offering. Brand building is therefore crucial to reduce the customer's risk.

While traditionally B2B tech companies were competing based on the quality of their product and technical specifications, increasingly their product quality and specs are not the only way for a company to differentiate from their competitors, as technological solutions have grown much more advanced and competitive. In order to stand out, technology firms must leverage and showcase deeper company values, such as innovation, customer success, sustainability, and long-term partnerships. Major technology firms like IBM, Cisco, Microsoft, SAP and Salesforce have spent tremendous amounts of time and money on digital branding efforts to increase their position in the market. These firms leverage whitepapers, thought leadership content, webinars, industry reports, social media interactions, customer success stories, and educational content to increase brand credibility and visibility. Thought leadership, in particular, has become essential for digital branding. Companies share research reports, expert insights and forecasts to gain their prospects' trust. It's important for a company to share their expertise in order to position themselves not as a provider but as a resource or partner for their prospects. Digital technology has also helped technology brands communicate and interact with their prospects and customers in many ways that they hadn't before. Websites, LinkedIn, blogs, podcasts, webinars, and virtual events allows the company to interact with the customer throughout the buying process to make sure they have what they need. Also important are customer success stories, case studies, and testimonials from customers to demonstrate the product value. While customer advocacy and a strong reputation has always been important to B2B technology brands, it became very evident during the pandemic as physical interaction and conferences became minimal, companies had to maintain the relationships with customers, communicate with potential customers and strengthen brand visibility with strong digital strategies. The evolution of B2B branding by technology companies illustrates how far and broad digital branding and the importance it carries within B2B markets. These events lay the groundwork for the next revolution in B2B branding which will involve using AI within the branding and customer engagement processes.

Chapter 3. AI-enhanced B2B Branding

3.1 AI-Powered Personalization

With easier access to customer data and advancements in artificial intelligence technologies, new opportunities for personalization arise in the B2B market. In contrast to B2C marketing where personalization has long been adopted, the advancements of technology now facilitate B2B organizations to integrate this practice at a higher scale. Based on the characteristics of their customers, like preferences and past interactions, they can make suitable content, recommendation, and communication to match their specific needs.

For decades, B2B personalization has been largely based on the direct interactions between sales representatives and account managers and their inherent understanding of their customers. However, with the increase in customer numbers and digital communication channels, this method has become impractical, and interest in AI capabilities has grown because AI systems can analyze large amounts of data and identify patterns invisible to humans.

Perhaps one of the most widely explored uses of AI within B2B branding is personalization of customers' interactions. By means of recommendation systems, predictive analytics, and machine learning, it is now possible to custom the delivery of information based on customers' specific needs and interests. This is to translate to more relevant information being delivered and a strengthened perception of the brand due to a higher rate of engagement.

Researchers have begun to study the impact of these new tools on branding outcomes. Khoshtaria et al. (2025) conducted a study of how AI powered personalization affects brand awareness in a B2B e-commerce context. The authors analyzed data from 371 B2B customers across retail and agriculture and found that AI enabled elements contribute positively towards brand awareness: customer service quality, information and recommendation systems, machine learning, and quality of information.

It was interesting to see that commonly studied features like privacy, access, and interaction do not impact on brand awareness in a statistically significant way, and perhaps this implies that, more than the technology features themselves, customers value the practical benefits gained from AI systems, i.e., its problem solving, providing of relevant information, and decision making capabilities.

On a branding perspective, AI powered personalization is beneficial because firms can use the available technology to tailor communication to customers and thereby deliver them the right information at the right time thus increasing customer satisfaction and reducing the amount of irrelevant information. The personalized relationship enhances the sense of connection between the firm and the customer, and the automation leads to a consistent delivery of the brand. However, this practice can also weaken the personal connection within the B2B relationships and as a result many are cautious about the increased level of automation due to the fact that a B2B purchasing decision often involves trust, relationship, and collaboration between parties, rather than just an automated decision, hence AI should be regarded as support for these processes and not a replacement.

In summary, AI powered personalization is one of the most important trends for the evolution of B2B branding, as it enables the use of technology for information to both customers and firms for improved interaction and brand awareness.

3.2 Automation and Customer Experience

By applying AI technology to various parts of business operations, companies have made fundamental changes to their relationship with customers. Not only through personalization, but AI is now facilitating a wide array of automatic operations which have had effects on the customer experience throughout the buying process. The importance of automation in the B2B world is now being felt more intensely, especially as the purchase processes have become increasingly complex and involve several departments.

Traditionally, customer interactions in the B2B sphere have been greatly dependent on sales representatives and customer service teams. With the continuous expectation for high service quality, and large volumes of data, businesses have turned to automation solutions to offer quicker and more reliable service for the customers.

One of the common ways in which AI is being used in B2B branding is through automated CRM systems. These are systems that collect, and analyze customer information, store interaction logs and patterns, and assist the sales process for identifying new customers or sales opportunities. The ability to access such information quickly enables companies to better understand customer requirements and use resources efficiently.

Another common application of automation in B2B is through chatbots and virtual assistants. These solutions can help provide instant answers to inquiries, deliver information to customers instantly, and help them make decisions without human interaction at almost any given point in time. Although there are limits to chatbots replacing human interactions, they help the firm increase accessibility and lower the reaction times for customers at the initial phase of their buying journey.

Marketing Automation is one more significant use of automation as it can help organize communications, launch automated campaigns, and track customer activities and behaviour to determine which marketing efforts need further implementation to improve customer satisfaction and further drive business. All these activities are implemented for a sustained relation with customers and efficiency of the human factor.

Apart from its operational benefits, automation has had a significant impact on the overall customer experience by making it much more seamless and convenient. Today's customers expect instant responses, tailored recommendations and a smooth and uninterrupted transaction process in each touchpoint. Automation provides support to the firm in addressing these expectations across all channels of business operations and communication.

One issue arises as reliance on automation increases. Businesses are afraid of losing the 'human element' in their relationships with their clients, since trust, human interaction and relationship building, and expertise, are core aspects of many B2B purchasing decision processes and these cannot be fully replicated by intelligent algorithms. For this reason, the use of AI should be carefully examined so that automation assists rather than substitutes human effort, as well as relationships with clients.

Indeed, research on the application of AI to branding and marketing in the B2B sector tends to consider the role of AI not as a replacement for human beings but rather as a catalyst in augmenting human capacities (Khoshtaria et al., 2025). The latter can perform strategic tasks like negotiation, thinking critically, empathy, building relationships, etc., while AI performs the heavy lifting of complex data analysis, pattern identification, and other routine tasks. The most competitive brands successfully combine these aspects of human-AI collaboration.

The increasing of AI use in B2B markets is reflected in practical applications that support branding activities. Instead of functioning as standalone technologies, AI tools are increasingly integrated into customer relationship management, communication processes, and data analysis systems. The following table presents some examples of AI applications used by companies and their potential contribution to B2B branding.

Table 3.1. - Examples of AI Applications in B2B Branding

AI APPLICATION	**PRACTICE EXAMPLE**	**BRANDING BENEFIT**
Recommendation Systems	Salesforce Einstein	Personalized communication
Chatbots	IBM Watson Assistant	Faster customer support
CRM Analytics	HubSpot AI	Better customer insights
Predictive Analytics	SAP Joule	Anticipation of customer needs

Source: Author's elaboration

The examples presented in Table 3.1 demonstrate that AI is already integrated into many B2B branding activities. These applications support branding indirectly by improving responsiveness, personalization and customer experience. Rather than replacing branding efforts, AI functions as a tool that strengthens communication processes and customer engagement.

Regarding customer experience, it is one of the main sources of competitive advantage. It impacts brand perception through each step a customer takes in his/her interaction with a company. The automatic nature of the information and recommendations system can only positively influence customer experience by increasing speed, customization and consistencies across channels of communication with clients.

There is little doubt that automation will play an increasingly significant role in the branding practices of the B2B sector as AI technology continues to evolve. Brands that adopt automation in a manner that is truly customer-oriented and builds trust will be best placed to secure brand value and competitive advantage over the long term.

3.3 Generative AI and the AI-Mediated B2B Buyer Journey

The AI applications discussed so far in this chapter — recommendation systems, chatbots, CRM analytics and predictive models — have been part of B2B marketing practice for several years. The emergence of generative AI since 2022 represents a further, and potentially more disruptive, layer of change for B2B branding. Generative AI refers to AI systems, such as large language models, that can produce new content — text, images, code or data — rather than only classifying or recommending existing content (Kshetri et al., 2024). Two interconnected developments are particularly relevant for B2B branding: the use of generative AI as a tool for content creation, and the emergence of AI assistants as a new channel through which B2B buyers discover and evaluate suppliers.

On the content-creation side, generative AI tools allow firms to produce drafts of blog posts, whitepapers, case studies, social media posts and personalized outreach messages at a scale and speed that was not previously possible (Chan & Choi, 2025). For B2B brands, whose branding strategies rely heavily on thought-leadership content, case studies and educational material (see section 2.2), this represents a clear opportunity to increase the volume and personalization of content. At the same time, it raises a question of authenticity: when content or personalized messages are generated by AI rather than by a human expert, customers may struggle to distinguish AI-generated material from human-created material. Pedersen and Ritter (2024) describe this as part of a new, AI-driven phase of digitalization in B2B markets, characterized by what they call "digital authenticity" — the difficulty of recognizing whether digital content, interactions and data are created by humans or by machines. For B2B brands, whose value proposition is often built on expertise and long-term relationships (see Chapters 1 and 2), this raises a new branding challenge: how to use generative AI to scale content production while preserving the perception of genuine expertise that B2B customers value.

A second, and arguably more disruptive, development concerns how B2B buyers search for and evaluate suppliers. Traditionally, B2B buyers researched potential suppliers through search engines, company websites and direct contact with sales representatives (see section 2.1). Industry research conducted in 2025 and 2026 suggests that this pattern is changing rapidly. Several surveys report that a substantial and growing share of B2B buyers now use generative AI assistants, such as ChatGPT, Perplexity or Gemini, as a primary tool for researching and shortlisting vendors — in some sectors, particularly technology, ahead of traditional search engines (Digital Commerce 360, 2025; Forrester, 2026). If buyers increasingly rely on AI assistants to summarize, compare and recommend suppliers before making direct contact, then a firm's visibility and accuracy of representation within AI-generated answers becomes a new dimension of brand management. In industry practice, this is often referred to as Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) or Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) (Forrester, 2026).

This development connects directly to the themes discussed earlier in this thesis. The brand equity literature has long emphasized that B2B brand value depends on customer perceptions of trust, competence and reliability (Kuhn et al., 2008; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011), while the digital transformation literature has emphasized the importance of a consistent and credible online presence across channels (Lipiainen & Karjaluoto, 2015). The emergence of AI-mediated discovery extends both arguments: if AI assistants increasingly shape which suppliers a buyer becomes aware of, and how their capabilities are described, then ensuring that a brand's expertise and credibility are accurately represented within AI systems becomes a precondition for the trust and brand equity discussed in Chapter 1 to even be perceived by potential customers. In this sense, generative AI does not introduce a fundamentally new set of branding goals — visibility, credibility and differentiation remain central — but it does introduce a new and, as yet, largely unstudied channel through which these goals must be pursued.

This development should nonetheless be interpreted with some caution. Most of the evidence currently available on AI-mediated B2B buyer journeys comes from industry surveys and consulting reports rather than peer-reviewed academic research, and practices associated with GEO and AEO are still being defined. Academic research on generative AI in B2B marketing has only recently begun to address these questions (Pedersen & Ritter, 2024; Kshetri et al., 2024), and the longer-term implications for B2B brand equity, trust and relationship marketing remain an open area for future research, discussed further in section 3.5 and in the conclusion of this thesis.

3.4 Opportunities and Challenges for AI in B2B Branding

The widespread adoption of AI has led to great opportunities for B2B branding. AI technologies such as machine learning, automation and personalization can significantly improve marketing performance and relationships by processing data and taking on boring jobs. However, besides these opportunities firms also encounter challenges related to privacy, ethics, transparency and customers' trust.

One of the main benefits of AI in B2B branding is efficiency. Traditionally, branding and marketing requires time and resources to acquire data about customers, analyze the market and design a communication campaign. AI can perform those tasks much faster and accurately helping firms to make sound decision and be reactive to any change in the market.

Another great opportunity is the personalized experience that AI allows. As shown in the previous paragraph, AI permits the firm to adapt information, suggestions and communication to each customer. This aspect is especially valuable for B2B customers who want tailored solutions for their specific needs. This customized experience strengthens brand perception.

Another benefit concerns the prediction capability. AI helps identify patterns in customer behavior, predict their needs and anticipate changes. This knowledge leads to better decisions and allows firms to proactively offer solutions, fitting better customer expectations.

The strategic value of predictive analytics lies in its ability to transform branding from a reactive activity into a proactive one. Instead of responding to customer needs only after they come out, firms can anticipate future expectations and prepare particular solutions in advance.

The ability of managing multiple customer relationships is another advantage. In the past, human interaction has been critical to build relations; however, AI can handle the increased numbers of customers while remaining consistent. Tools such as automated messages, recommendations and customer support help to maintain brand image in numerous markets.

The literature highlights several opportunities associated with the adoption of AI in B2B branding. These benefits extend beyond operational efficiency and influence customer engagement, brand positioning and strategic decision-making. The main opportunities identified in the literature are summarized in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. - Opportunities of AI in B2B Branding

OPPORTUNITY	**MAIN BENEFIT**
Personalization	Tailored customer communication
Automation	Faster processes and lower costs
Predictive Analytics	Better anticipation of customer needs
Scalability	Managing large customer bases
Data-driven Decision Making	More informed strategic decisions

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 3.2. summarizes that AI is increasingly viewed as a strategic branding resource rather than simply a technological tool.

Despite all these benefits, AI in B2B branding also presents various challenges. A major challenge is privacy of customers' data; since many AI applications require vast amounts of data it's crucial for firms to collect and use this information in a responsible way to prevent the loss of trust from customers.

Another challenge is ethics in the use of AI systems. Some AI, when programmed with biased information, may reproduce the same prejudices, giving wrong results and affecting the perception of a brand. Therefore, it is important to monitor the processes that AI uses for transparency.

Also, the reduction of human interaction is another challenge of the increased role of AI in branding. Since purchasing decisions in B2B markets involve complex negotiations and are long term relationships, human intervention in such processes is often required to maintain customers' trust and the personal nature of the interaction. An overuse of automation may deteriorate the relational aspects of the company.

A further challenge concerns transparency, which takes on an additional dimension in light of the developments discussed in section 3.3. Customers are increasingly aware of the use of AI and want to know how and where their data are being used; a lack of clear explanation can decrease customer trust in AI-powered services (Kshetri et al., 2024). Beyond data use, the rise of generative AI introduces a second transparency question: whether content, recommendations or interactions presented to a customer were created by a human or by an AI system. Pedersen and Ritter (2024) argue that this difficulty in distinguishing human- from AI-generated material — what they term "digital authenticity" — is itself a defining feature of the current phase of B2B digitalization, and that firms will increasingly need to make deliberate choices about when and how to disclose the role of AI in their communications.

Finally, a final challenge is managing the organizational changes that the adoption of such technology implies. In a world that evolves very quickly, firms need to invest time and resources for retraining personnel, developing new skills and acquiring innovative technologies to keep up with the competition. Firms without sufficient resources and skills may miss out on AI advantages.

Overall, AI in B2B branding presents many opportunities such as increased efficiency, personalized customer experiences, improved decision making and stronger customer relationships. However, it is critical for companies to face these opportunities by acknowledging the associated challenges; only by responsible deployment of AI will the benefits be successfully maximized.

3.5 The Future of AI-driven B2B Branding

During the last twenty years, branding evolved from merely looking at logo, visual design and campaigns, to being a complex system incorporating relationships with customers, technology, data and organizational capability. In this ever-changing environment, AI will probably continue to shape the B2B branding landscape.

AI's capability development will continue to revolutionize how firms perceive customers, communicate with them and deliver them value. Branding strategies will leverage AI's analytical power for better understanding customer needs and providing better solutions to them. Rather than relying on a standardized approach for everyone, firms will be able to create highly personalized experiences for individual industries, companies and persons involved in the purchase decision.

However, the definition of branding will probably evolve too. The value of B2B brands has always been based on reliability, quality and expertise. These attributes will remain essential but the future competition among brands will rely more on customer experience, promptness and relevance of value at every step of the customers' journey. AI will allow firms to anticipate customers' expectations and enhance interaction speed and personalization.

Another aspect to consider is the combination of several technologies within a firm's activities. For instance, it's becoming more common to see the integration of AI with CRM systems, predictive analytics tools, marketing automation platforms and digital communication. These integrations result in more unified and coherent customer experience. As the digital ecosystem grows larger, the firms that integrate all these elements will distinguish themselves while maintaining a clear brand image.

This does not mean that the future of B2B branding will be entirely automated. As emphasized throughout this thesis, trust, reliability and expert knowledge remain the foundations of B2B purchasing decisions, and AI is best understood as a tool that supports rather than replaces these relational foundations (see sections 3.2 and 3.4). What is new, and still largely unexplored, is the context in which this human-AI collaboration takes place. If, as discussed in section 3.3, an increasing share of early-stage supplier discovery is mediated by generative AI systems, the "human element" of B2B branding may need to be demonstrated earlier and more explicitly than before — for example through verifiable expertise, named experts and transparent sourcing of content — rather than relying mainly on direct human interaction later in the sales process. Pedersen and Ritter (2024) describe this broader shift as part of a fifth, AI-driven phase of digitalization in B2B markets, and call for further research into how firms can build what they term "digital authority" over how they are represented by AI systems. This represents a promising direction for future research building on the present thesis.

Responsible use of AI is another key point to consider for the future. As customers will be more aware of the uses of their personal data by brands, there will be higher expectations regarding privacy and ethics. This may even allow firms to use responsible AI practices to enhance their brand differentiation.

Overall, the future of B2B branding is expected to be highly automated and data-driven by AI. However, the fundamental goal remains the same, to build relationships, reduce uncertainty, deliver value and establish trust. What is changing is only the set of tools that will enable brands to achieve these goals.

The analysis presented in this thesis suggests that B2B branding has evolved through three interconnected stages. The first stage focused on relationship marketing, trust, and brand equity. The second stage was driven by digital transformation, social media, and new forms of customer engagement. The third and current stage is characterized by the growing integration of artificial intelligence into branding strategies. Understanding this evolutionary process is essential for both researchers and practitioners seeking to navigate the increasingly complex landscape of contemporary B2B markets (Tiwary et al., 2021; Khoshtaria et al., 2025).

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the evolution of B2B branding from traditional relationship-based approaches to contemporary digital and AI-enhanced branding strategies. Through the review of literature, the study explored how branding in business to business markets have developed from an auxiliary marketing function to a strategic asset for the organization that can create sustained value and competitive advantage.

The first chapter presented evidence that B2B branding is more than simply functional product features and rational purchase decisions. The research examined literature on the importance of brand equity, trust, relationship marketing and the role of emotional values in influencing customers and building lasting relationships with business customers. Though it is often said industrial markets are the domain of rational buyers and product-driven decisions, evidence suggested a strong relational and emotional element present in customers purchasing decisions and brand loyalty.

The second chapter analyzed the influence of digital transformation on B2B branding. In the age of digital transformation, it is important to look at how social media, the use of content marketing strategies, and other digital channels have shifted how companies connect and interact with customers and stakeholders. Digital channels allow companies to boost visibility and customer interaction, while also focusing on narrative and storytelling as the tools necessary to build the difference in a tech-focused and highly competitive industrial market.

The final chapter discusses the emerging impact of artificial intelligence on B2B branding strategies. Looking at personalization driven by artificial intelligence, marketing automation systems, AI prediction technologies and interactive communication platforms for the management of the customer relationship and the creation of a brand experience, the research found that the literature presented the potential for AI in improving all of these. The chapter also examined the more recent role of generative AI, both as a tool for creating branded content and, more importantly, as a new channel through which B2B buyers increasingly research and shortlist suppliers before any direct contact takes place. This development raises the question of "digital authenticity" — the difficulty of distinguishing AI-generated from human-generated content and recommendations (Pedersen & Ritter, 2024) — and introduces a new dimension of brand management, often referred to as Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) or Answer Engine Optimization (AEO). The study notes the challenges organizations will face regarding privacy, security, ethics, transparency, accurate representation within AI systems, and maintenance of the human element of relationships as important areas for consideration.

One of the most important findings of this research is that it should not be viewed as an "either/or" process but as an addition and evolution to the brand equity, relationship marketing principles established as core values. While branding in the future may include more automation and machine learning-driven insights, these efforts will build on the foundations of trust, credibility, customer value, and lasting relationships.

The study also indicated that an evolution of human-robot or human-machine interaction is likely the way of B2B branding's future. As artificial intelligence gains influence in the industrial sector, companies that leverage automation, predictive analytics, and customer support technologies will need to recognize the role humans will play. Human insight will be required for understanding strategy and the deeper understanding of the brand's purpose and value proposition.

This thesis therefore offers an examination of the three different eras of B2B branding: relationship marketing, digital transformation and the developing era of AI-enhanced branding. Understanding the progress between each era offers significant value to both academics and professionals.

Finally, future research can delve into the long-term effects of artificial intelligence on brand equity, customer trust, and relationship quality in industrial markets. With the advancements in technology now being seen on a regular basis, its impact on B2B branding will certainly grow into an important area of research. The evolution of B2B branding demonstrates that technological innovation does not replace the fundamental principles of branding. Instead, technologies such as AI extend the ability of firms to create value, strengthen relationships and deliver personalized experiences. As organizations continue to adopt intelligent technologies, the successful integration of human expertise and artificial intelligence is likely to become a defining characteristic of strong B2B brands.

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