Dark side of business-to-business (B2B) relationships

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Abstract

Despite growing research on the dark side of B2B relationships in the last two decades, there are still many gaps in this literature, which need to be addressed to provide a more complete understanding of the various dark side phenomena and the associated processes. This special issue addresses this need with 27 articles (including five invited articles), classified along seven distinct themes, including a) relationship characteristics and behaviors, b) process-view of dark side, c) coopetition and co-creation, d) channel partners and suppliers, e) internationalization and governance, f) certification and governance in finance sector, and g) role of emerging technologies. We begin this editorial by reviewing the dark side of B2B relationships literature to identify specific research gaps. Next, we describe the 27 articles and their findings, classified under the seven themes. Finally, we discuss their contributions and implications with some useful directions for future research on this important topic.

Keywords: business-to-business (B2B); dark side; psychological contract; relationships; trust

1. Introduction

The dark side of business-to-business (B2B) relationships has attracted great attention from researchers, to help understand the processes underlying these phenomena and solutions to minimize the negative effects arising from the dark side effects (e.g., Abosag, Yen, & Barnes, 2016; Abosag, Yen, Barnes, & Gadalla, 2021; Anderson & Jap, 2005; Borah, Mallapragada, Bommaraju, Venkatesan, & Thongpapanl, 2021; Malik, Ngo, & Kingshott, 2018). A recent special issue of *Industrial Marketing Management* highlights the importance of this area of enquiry with nine articles representing diverse B2B settings that provide useful insights about the dark-side of business relationships (Abosag et al., 2016). For example, Musarra, Robson, and Katsikeas (2016) explore the mediating role of process versus output monitoring in the impact of a partner firm's 'desire for control' on strategic alliance performance and the moderating role of information exchange norms in this process (Kwok, Sharma, Gaur, & Ueno, 2019). Similarly, Chung, Wang, Huang, and Yang (2016, p.70) identify "governmental interference in employment, blockage of information flow and conflicts of interest" as the elements of dark side of political ties, and "reciprocal obligations, time consuming factors and maintenance costs" as manifestations of the dark side of business relationships.

Heirati, O'Cass, Schoefer, and Siahtiri (2016) describe the conditions under which the 'bright-side' benefits of professional service firms' collaborations with their business partners may lead to some dark-side effects. For example, higher levels of competitive intensity and environmental turbulence faced by a professional service firm may reduce the positive impact of their interfirm collaborations on their service performance. Vafeas and Hughes (2016) also show that institutionalized creativity in B2B relationships consists of boredom, complacency and group think, which may not only stifle innovation but also adversely affect customer dissatisfaction and may even lead to relationship dissolution. They also identify that positive features of long-term B2B relationships, such as success, routinization and cohesion, may actually lead to the institutionalized creativity and unimaginative responses to problems. Schmitz, Schweiger, and Daft (2016) use a grounded theory approach to identify four interrelated mechanisms (convince, tie, complement, and lock-in) that explain dependence of buyer firms in a B2B relationship. Pressey and Vanharanta (2016) also identify the negative impact of opportunistic behavior in price-fixing cartels as a source of network tension.

Gupta, Väätänen, and Khaneja (2016) extend this research to the context of reseller networks who also provide after-sales service to show that interdependence among network members may adversely impact their shared goal of value co-creation. Similarly, Chowdhury, Gruber, and Zolkiewski (2016) identify similar negative aspects of value co-creation process in advertising service networks, such as role conflict and ambiguity, opportunism and power, which may lead to the dark side effects in these B2B relationships. Finally, Tangpong, Li, and Hung (2016) explore the impact of reciprocity norms on the possibility of ethical compromise in B2B relationships, wherein environmental uncertainty, exchange partner's retaliatory power status, with trust and opportunism in relationships mediate the relationship between reciprocity norm and ethical compromise. However, notwithstanding these considerable efforts by scholars in recent years, several gaps remain, which need to be addressed to provide a more complete understanding of the dark side phenomena and related processes. The purpose of this special issue is to focus scholarly attention on specific areas that need further enquiry in order to continue to develop this important stream of research.

Specifically, despite growing research on the nature and outcomes of the dark side of B2B relationships, a relative lack of its theoretical explanations has attracted criticism from several scholars. For example, Fang, Chang, and Peng (2011) note that the explanations of partnership termination are generally weak or incomplete; the focus is on the manifestations and not the underlying processes. Similarly, Chung et al. (2016) observe that the theoretical conceptualization of the dark side of B2B relationships is still under developed. New theoretical perspectives such as relationship tensions (Fang et al., 2011) and the behavioral theory of the firm (Baker, 2009) have been employed to inform this stream of research. To address these gaps, we invited papers that would add to the theoretical rigor of this stream by using a diverse range of theoretical perspectives. We also invited papers that proposed new constructs or introduce new lines of enquiry relevant to this area, such as the construct of betrayal in international buyer-seller relationships (Leonidou, Aykol, Fotiadis, Christodoulides, & Zeriti, 2017). Borrowed from social psychology, the construct offers new insights to understand buyer- seller relationships.

Other areas of focus for this special issue include, the dark side of social capital in B2B relationships (Pillai, Hodgkinson, Kalyanaram, & Nair, 2017), the influence of political forces such as trade tensions on relationship decline, the decline in relational orientation brought about by technological and business model innovations (Pillai & Sharma, 2003), and relationship dissolution (Halinen & Tahtinen, 2002). Finally, we invited papers exploring the unique aspects the dark side of B2B relationships in the international context, such as the growing impact of political connections (government-business nexus) on B2B relationships and firm performance in countries around the world (Cheng, Chan, & Leung, 2018). To summarize, we shared the following research questions to guide contributing authors about potential topics under the theme of this special issue:

a) What are the different manifestations of the dark side in B2B relationships? How does the current technological and business environment affect the emergence and continuance of dark side phenomena?

b) What factors lead to the dark side effects? What are the consequences of the dark side effects? What are the boundary conditions for the antecedent and consequent effects?

c) How do the dark side effects emerge in informal business networks?

d) When and how do the dark side effects emerge in B2B social innovation alliances?

e) How can new theories and new constructs enrich our understanding of the dark side of B2B relationships? What role does political connections play in B2B relationships?

f) What are the specific aspects associated with relationship decline/ termination/ dissolution in the present context? Do political connections result in these relational outcomes?

g) Are there any cultural differences in the dark side of B2B relationships via traditional socio-cultural practices such as Guanxi in China, Blat or Svyazi in Russia, Wasta in the Arab world, and Yongo in South Korea etc.?

h) What are the political and judicial implications of the dark side of B2B relationships from the legal and public policy perspectives?

i) What are the dark side effects of political connections (government-business nexus) on B2B relationships and corporate performance?

j) Are there any differences in the impact of political connections on the B2B relationships of firms with different ownership types (e.g., private vs. state-owned) and different types of B2B relationships?

k) How do language differences affect people and people management processes and outcomes in cross-border B2B relationships and strategic partnerships?

2. Special issue - Themes and articles

This special issue attracted 64 submissions from B2B researchers across the globe, out of which 22 articles survived the rigorous review process with at least two rounds of revisions. We also invited several experts in the area of B2B relationships to contribute their articles and have included five such invited articles in this special issue, resulting in a total of 27 articles, which are grouped into seven themes that emerged from our analysis and synthesis of the findings reported in all these papers. Interestingly, all these seven themes also collectively address most of the research gaps identified from our literature review as described earlier, albeit to varying degrees. Next, we briefly describes all the articles included in this special issue and their contributions to this literature.

2.1. Relationship characteristics and behaviors

One of the major themes in the dark side of B2B relationships literature relates to the characteristics of these relationships and the behaviors of the partners involved in these relationships, including customers, channel partners, service providers, suppliers etc. (Oliveira & Lumineau, 2019), including micro-foundational aspects such as episodes of power exchanges and interpersonal trust between global health partners (Patnaik, Pereira, Temouri, Malik & Roohanifar, 2020). Specifically, these characteristics and behaviors may include, low perceived personality dissimilarity between partners, high cultural sensibility and understanding of each other's domestic business practices, partners' beliefs about the purpose of their relationships, trading practices, knowledge diversity and corporate leadership styles coupled with partners' training, and codes of conduct in preventing unethical practices. Similarly, managers may exhibit opportunistic and self-interested behaviors, which could lead to distrust and cynicism among the partners and hamper the relationship. This special issue includes four articles related to this theme that further extend this literature.

In the first paper on this theme, Zhang, Du, and Zhang (2021) combine social exchange, social capital, and relational governance theories with transaction cost economics perspective, to investigate the impact of destructive acts on a firm's intention to exit an exchange relationship and its opportunistic behavior. They also explore the moderating roles of managerial ties (i.e., business ties and political ties) and relationship intimacy on the above effects. Using data from 158 distributors in China, they show that suppliers' destructive acts tend to increase distributors' exit intention and business ties positively moderate this effect but political ties do not. Moreover, a distributor's exit intention is positively related to its opportunistic behavior, and relationship intimacy amplifies this effect. These findings extend the current literature on B2B relationships that focuses on their formation and maintenance stages, to provide useful insights about the relationship dissolution stage.

Second, Lu, Zhuang, and Zhuang (2021) use the resource-based view (RBV) to test the moderating effects of the region's institutional development and the firm's information technology (IT) infrastructure capability along with interpersonal and government-firm (GF) guanxi on the distributor's opportunism and cooperative performance in China. This study combines survey data from 550 industrial manufacturers and secondary data, to show that both types of guanxi can mitigate the distributor's opportunism and facilitate cooperative performance. Moreover, the region's institutional development strengthens the effects of interpersonal guanxi while weakening the effects of GF guanxi, whereas a firm's IT infrastructure capability weakens the effects of interpersonal guanxi while strengthening the effects of GF guanxi. These findings extend the guanxi literature by exploring the differences in the impact of the two types of guanxi and extend RBV to the study of B2B relationships by testing the moderating effects of institutional development and IT infrastructure capability.

Third, Seggie and Griffith (2021) identify active and passive opportunism as key elements of the dark side of relationships and explore the moderating effects of economic and strategic relationship value on governance responses to active and passive opportunism. These authors use four studies with a total of 377 purchasing managers and 101 MBA students, to show that economic and strategic relationship value increase the tolerance to active and passive opportunism albeit to different levels, which in turn prolongs the relationship and subjects the partners to more dark side behaviors. They also find that in the context of this study (i.e., microchip supplier–buyer relationships), firms move to exit, as opposed to hierarchy, under all conditions of economic and strategic relationship value. These results highlight the importance of interorganizational context in governance choice, with the movement to exit driven by, a) the desire to maintain the firm's core competency, b) a hesitancy to bring problems into the firm, and c) the primacy of economic over strategic relationship value derived from an emphasis on short-term financial results. The authors also discuss some useful implications for academics and managers interested in the dark side of B2B relationship management.

Finally, Yang, Zhang, Zhou, and Zhang (2021) examine the effects of trust-dependence congruence on relational behaviors and relationship satisfaction (economic and social) in buyer–supplier relationships and explore the mediating role of relational behaviors in the link between trust-dependence congruence and relationship satisfaction. Using survey data involving 238 buyer–supplier relationships, they find positive effects of trust-dependence congruence on relational behaviors and relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, the level at which trust and dependence are congruent is positively related to relational behaviors and social satisfaction but has an inverted U-shaped influence on economic satisfaction. They also find that relational behaviors partially mediate the effects of trust-dependence congruence on both kinds of relationship satisfaction.

2.2. Process-view of dark side

The second theme in this special issue builds on the process by which the dark side effects emerge and survive in today's highly competitive and uncertain business environment (e.g. Chowdhury et al., 2016; Dugan, Rouziou, & Hochstein, 2019). For example, Chowdhury et al. (2016) show that sharing of responsibilities by B2B relationship partners may lead to a lack of clarity in managers about what is expected of them, which in turn could result in role ambiguity and misunderstandings between the partner firms. Similar challenges may be posed by managers engaging in opportunistic behaviors and exerting their power within service networks to mobilize appropriate resources and to influence network actors to adhere to value co-creation objectives. Similarly, Dugan et al. (2019) find that Machiavellianism, consisting of flattery, deceit and manipulative interpersonal behaviors, negatively moderates (attenuates) the positive effect of internal networking on objective sales performance in B2B context. Moreover, salesperson's political skills (e.g., social astuteness and interpersonal influence ability) increase their engagement in internal networking, which may also lead to dark side effects in B2B relationships. In this section, we briefly describe the four articles included in this special issue that further extend this theme.

First, Chung, Kingshott, MacDonald, and Putranta (2021) use the contingency theory, to postulate a match and mismatch conceptualization to highlight the dark and bright side of business-to-business (B2B) relationships in the environmental dynamism-performance framework. The authors use survey data from 180 B2B firms operating in New Zealand to confirm the mismatch of dynamism, B2B relationships and strategic performance, and a match of dynamism, B2B relationships and financial performance. This study expands the existing dark side relationship literature by showing that B2B relationships negatively moderate the effect of dynamism on B2B firms' strategic performance. The authors also offer new insights by confirming the positive integrative effect of B2B relationships and dynamism on financial performance. Overall, these findings extend the current literature on contingency theory to the research exploring the link between B2B relationships and firm performance.

Second, Vafeas and Hughes (2021) highlight the relative paucity of the role of inertia, boredom, and complacency compared to opportunism, as dark side variables in the current literature, despite their detrimental effect on B2B relationships. Specifically, these authors identify several antecedents and manifestations of these three constructs and discuss strategies to suppress their emergence. For example, they identify cognitive fatigue and positive reinforcement as antecedents of inertia; routine, formalization, instruction ambiguity, and self-concept incompatibility as antecedents of boredom; and excessive self-efficacy and relationship continuity as antecedents of complacency. Similarly, they identify response invariability, consensus seeking, shallow task engagement, reduced effort, and reduced attentiveness as manifestations of the three dark side constructs. In addition, this paper shows that in the context of resource deployment, complacency results from self-serving resource restriction, boredom and inertia result from involuntary (or well-intentioned) resource restriction. Finally, the authors highlight the different strategies that can be used to suppress the negative effects of these three dark side constructs on the firms' resource deployment.

Third, Zhang, Leischnig, Heirati, and Henneberg (2021) aim to advance the knowledge on the dark side of business relationships by introducing the concept of dark-side-effect contagion, which explains how dark-side effects may spread between business relationships. The authors develop a multi-level framework to account for inter-organizational, inter-personal, and intra-personal aspects of the dark-side effect contagion by looking beyond the traditional dyadic perspective related to single buyer–seller relationships. This highlights the nature of B2B relationships as parts of wider relationship portfolios and networks, with the characteristics of one relationship having implications for other relationships. These ideas further extend our understanding of how the dark side effects may emerge in B2B relationships and propagate among other members in B2B relationship networks.

Finally, Struwe and Slepniov (2021) advance our understanding of how to improve service design and service provider–customer relationships in business-to-business (B2B) environments. Drawing on the theoretical lenses of service-dominant logic, service design and institutional theory, they investigate how and why the dark side manifests itself in B2B relationships between service co-creating actors in professional service settings, and how these problems may be avoided. This paper uses an international context with an in-depth case study to help understand the relationship between a German creative agency and a German industrial client operating in China. The authors study the development of this relationship over time, up to the point when it breaks down, due to a range of factors (e.g., conflicts, opportunism and uncertainty) that are captured in their proposed conceptual framework. The authors also present some guidelines for B2B service providers on how to build more stable and robust agency–client relationships in order to avoid the dark side of B2B relationships.

2.3. Coopetition and co-creation

The third theme relates to the potential roles coopetition (including both cooperation and competition) and co-creation play in contributing to the dark side of B2B relationships (Chowdury et al., 2016; Crick, 2019). For example, Chowdury et al. (2016) show that value co-creation may have a dark side, including role conflicts and ambiguity, weak-form opportunism and power plays, which in turn could lead to coopetitive tensions due to a lack of transparency and information asymmetry. Similarly, Crick (2019) shows that lower levels of coopetition may help B2B firms improve their performance outcomes as it provides organizations with new resources, capabilities and opportunities. However, 'too much' coopetition may result in increased tensions, potential loss of intellectual property and dilution of their competitive advantages, which in turn have an adverse impact on firm performance. The four papers described in this section further extend these ideas and provide useful insights into the role of coopetition and co-creation in the emergence and impact of dark side in B2B relationships.

First, Crick and Crick (2021) highlight that although past research shows a positive effect of coopetition on firm performance, it ignores the impact of environmental and firm-level forces on this relationship. These authors address this gap by using resource-based view and relational view to explore the moderating effects of competitive intensity and aggressiveness on the coopetition-financial performance relationship. Using a mixed-method approach with New Zealand wine producers, this paper confirms a positive effect of coopetition on financial performance with a negative moderating effect of competitive aggressiveness and a positive moderating effect of competitive intensity on this relationship. These findings suggest that competitive intensity may provide business owners/managers an opportunity to select trustworthy rivals to target complementary product-markets. By contrast, the inability to manage competitive aggressiveness across product-market strategies may lead to potentially harmful outcomes, such as relationship tensions and dilution of competitive advantages.

Second, Appiah, Bonsu, and Sarpong (2021) acknowledge the importance of co-creation due to its exceptional benefits for B2B relationship partners, including its ability to empower previously passive or disadvantaged customers. Next, they explore the undisclosed and opportunistic motives and behaviors of weaker firms in the co-creation process, using data collected via semi-structured interviews, observations, and archival documents in the context of a small software business and its clients. Their findings provide useful insights into the organizing practices that reinforce the disadvantaged positions of business customers. The authors also identify three specific stages of opportunism used by weaker firms in the value co-creation process, namely a) scout and select qualified co-creators, b) create openings, and c) play channels to exploit customers resources, and through this discuss their implications.

Third, Gillani, Kutaula, and Budhwar (2021) draw upon the concept of psychological contract, underpinned by social exchange theory to examine the role of breaches in psychological contracts as a dark side in B2B relationships, using in-depth interviews with 24 consultants in the UK. They find that these breaches could take different forms, ranging from minor infractions and negative disruptions to intensified adverse events and intolerable transgressions, which result in varying levels (low, moderate, high, and very high) of the intensity of dark side effects. The authors also identify four behavioral outcomes of these dark side effects, namely self-adjusting, renegotiating, escalating, and departing, respectively. Finally, the authors offer eight testable propositions and managerial implications based on an integration of their findings with the psychological contract and B2B relationships literatures.

Finally, in their invited article, Munten, Vanhamme, Maon, Swaen, and Lindgreen (2021) acknowledge that addressing sustainability challenges requires cooperation among various stakeholders in diverse sectors, including not only the industry players and their customers but also regulatory authorities and nonprofit organizations, among others. They extend prior research on this topic by looking beyond sustainability-related coopetition tensions in bilateral relationships to study these tensions at a broader level and to highlight the dark side of business relationships for firms engaged in coopetition. Using data collected from in-depth interviews with 31 experts from the European automotive industry, the authors show that innovative efforts to achieve environmental sustainability can lead to negative environmental and societal impacts. These effects relate to four main dimensions of value net, namely a) value generation, b) temporal articulation, c) relational evolution, and d) knowledge circulation. Finally, this paper outlines the overall economic, social, and ecological sustainability impacts, to highlight the need to identify the factors that may potentially influence the dark side of coopetition.

2.4. Channel partners and suppliers

The fourth theme in this special issue focuses on the specific challenges faced by channel partners and suppliers who constitute a vast majority of B2B relationships (Glavee-Geo, Engelseth, & Buvik, 2021; Hurtak, Kashyap, & Ehret, 2021). For example, Glavee-Geo et al. (2021) study the dark side of power imbalance in agri-food supplier–buyer relationships to show curvilinear effects of switching costs on power imbalance and power imbalance on opportunism, which are further accentuated by dependency and lack of joint action. Similarly, the negative impact of power imbalance on financial performance and the positive impact of economic satisfaction on financial performance are stronger for non-cooperative (vs. cooperative) members. Similarly, Hurtak et al. (2021) show that despite the growing popularity of customer participation in B2B supplier relationships, it may also have a dark side too, whereby it may reduce the suppliers' autonomy and thereby, their affective and calculative commitment, which in turn would be detrimental to the success of the overall B2B relationship. This section summarizes four papers that address this important theme in this special issue.

First, Tran, Gorton, and Lemke (2021) use thematic and qualitative comparative analyses to investigate the links between supplier development initiatives, relational norms and supplier opportunism, as a potential 'dark-side' of supplier–buyer relationships. They find that buyers often employ supplier development initiatives to improve procurement but these can be ineffective and may even stimulate opportunistic behavior by suppliers. This paper also studies the role of relational norms in the impact of specific supplier development initiatives on different forms of opportunism in the agri-food supply chains in Vietnam. In contrast with the popular view that relational norms may reduce the level of opportunism, this paper shows that relational norms may actually lead to opportunistic behavior in supply chain relationships. The authors also discuss some ways in which buyers use supplier development initiatives to actually curb rather than encourage supplier opportunism.

Second, Jia, Wei, Jiang, Hu, and Yang (2021) extend the current research on the role of opportunism in marketing channel relationships and its antecedents by exploring the direct and indirect effects of manufacturer's influence strategies and reseller's fairness perception on the reseller's opportunistic behavior. These authors use data collected from a sample of mobile phone resellers in China to show that the manufacturer's use of coercive influence strategy increases and non-coercive strategy reduces, the resellers' opportunism tendency. Moreover, distributive and procedural fairness perceptions moderate the relationship between influence strategies and opportunism tendency. Specifically, procedural fairness perception strengthens the effect of non-coercive influence on opportunism tendency and distributive fairness worsens the negative impact of coercive influence on the reseller's opportunism tendency. These findings provide useful insights into the channel management process by which manufacturers' influence strategies impact their resellers.

Third, Zeng, Huang, Xiao, Wang, and Dong (2021) highlight that current research mainly focuses on the bright side of channel rewards, such as gaining distributors' positive feedback and avoiding their negative responses, with little attention on their potential negative effects. These authors address this gap by integrating social comparison theory with channel reward literature to explore the effects of supplier-initiated rewards to a focal distributor on the opportunism of an unrewarded distributor (or observer), and the moderating effect of reward approach (outcome vs. process-based) on this relationship. Data collected from Chinese distributors from multiple industries with a mixed-method approach, shows that reward magnitude increases competition intensity among distributors but also triggers opportunism from unrewarded distributors. Moreover, a process-based reward approach makes the positive relationship between reward magnitude and competition intensity stronger. This paper also uses a scenario-based experiment to find support for the causal effects of reward magnitude on observers' behavioral responses (e.g., competition, opportunism) in this context.

Finally, Zheng, Zhang, Zhan, and Sharma (2021) identify the paucity of research on the potential dark side effects of psychological tensions in B2B relationships, especially between entrepreneurial firms and their business clients, despite a major impact of these tensions on these entrepreneurial firms' performance. They address this research gap by exploring the nature and influence of psychological tensions between entrepreneurial firms and their clients during the conceptualization and commercialization stages of the new product development process. Using semi-structured interviews with 19 key informants from entrepreneurial firms from the artificial intelligence sector in China, they identify two types of psychological tensions at the conceptualization stage (fear of losing the B2B relationship and divergent expectations) and one type at the commercialization stage (attention embeddedness). Moreover, fear of losing the B2B relationship and divergent expectations were found to lead to technological decontextualization, while attention embeddedness yields singular learning. These findings extend the current research on the dark side of B2B relationships among channel partners and suppliers.

2.5. Internationalization and governance

The fifth theme in this special issue relates to the role of internationalization and governance in the dark-side effects of B2B relationships, which are topics of growing importance in this discipline (Pattnaik, Lu, & Gaur, 2018; Verbeke & Hutzschenreuter, 2021; Villena, Choi, & Revilla, 2021). For example, Pattnaik et al. (2018) highlight that business groups that dominate many economies across the globe, are able to use their market power to overcome the institutional gaps resulting from the inefficiencies of external markets. However, they also note this power could be economically and socially counterproductive, especially for unaffiliated firms. Thus, the relationship between market power of business groups and entry barriers is moderated by the business group size. Similarly, Verbeke and Hutzschenreuter (2021) identify the dark side of globalization as the new challenges and costs facing firms, including the overestimation of non-location-boundedness of firm-specific advantages and underestimation of the need to engage in novel resource recombination as a complement to their firm-specific advantages. Villena et al. (2021) address the dark side of buyer–supplier relationships from over-collaboration, including loss of objectivity, relational inertia, and redundant knowledge bases, which may harm the partner firms' performance, with three mitigation mechanisms, namely challenging goals, contractual explicitness, and expectation of continuity. The four papers described in this section further extend current research on both these themes.

First, in their conceptual paper, Oliveira and Johanson (2021) identify trust as a major component of firm internationalization and draw attention to its conflicting effects on speed of internationalization. These authors begin by arguing that the speed of internationalization is initially facilitated by the bright side of trust but subsequently, its dark side emerges as the firms' relationships with foreign business partners becomes stronger. Next, they identify the choice between causation and effectuation as the key to overcome the negative effects of trust on internationalization speed. Thus, this paper highlights the focal role of trust in the internationalization process and its impact on the speed of internationalization, per se.

Second, in their invited article, Verbeke, Hutzschenreuter, and Pyasi (2021) identify several human behavioral challenges in the governance of global value chains. Specifically, these authors use the New Internalization Theory (NIT) to explain and predict the governance choices made by multinational enterprises and their global value chain partners, based on a micro-foundational perspective that builds upon the concepts of bounded rationality and bounded reliability. The authors use data from nine case studies of international global value chains to identify three broad, non-mutually exclusive categories of governance tools, namely formal safeguards, relational tools, and entrepreneurship-oriented mechanisms, which may help prevent or mitigate the dark side outcomes in global value chains. These are important findings that extend our understanding of the dark side phenomena in the global value chains and the managerial strategies used to manage these challenges.

Third, Pedada, Padigar, Sinha, and Dass (2021) begin by sharing that many multinational firms from the developed markets have entered emerging markets, such as China and India, via international joint ventures with local firms in these emerging markets. However, they find that almost half of these joint ventures get terminated unexpectedly within five years of their formation, which is detrimental to the internationalization strategy and performance of the partner firms. This paper uses the organizational learning perspective with a novel dataset from India to explore the impact of relative control by multinational firms from the developed countries on the likelihood of termination of their joint ventures. Their findings show that higher relative control by multinational partner firms increases the likelihood of joint venture termination, especially when the scope of the partnership is high. This finding is important for both, multinational firms from developed markets and their partner firms in emerging markets, to help them manage their relationships with each other more effectively.

Finally, in their invited article, Singh and Gaur (2021) explore the role of institutions and governance in risk mitigation strategies in international B2B relationships due to their ubiquitous presence in the international business context. These authors present a comprehensive model of risks that multinational corporations (MNCs) face in different types of B2B relationships and also discuss the strategic choices that MNCs may need to follow in order to manage these risks. Specifically, they argue that the national differences could impact the nature and extent of risks that MNCs face in their B2B relationships. Next, they focus on equity-based B2B relationships and argue that governance structures chosen by MNCs help minimize the ex-ante and ex-post risks in B2B relationships. Finally, the authors also identify contingencies (e.g., national differences, intangible assets of the MNCs, and host country- and partnership-specific experiences) that may influence MNCs' risk management strategies in this context.

2.6. Certification and governance in finance sector

The sixth theme in this special issue relates to the growing research on the dark side effects in B2B relationships in the finance sector (Liu, Lin, Chan, & Fung, 2018; Sun, Hu, & Hillman, 2016; Tao, Li, Wu, Zhang, & Zhu, 2019). For example, Sun et al. (2016) combine resource dependence and agency theories with current research on board governance and corporate political strategy to show that board political capital can aggravate the problem of principal–principal agency by enabling large block-holders to appropriate more firm wealth and this effect is moderated by various ownership, industry, and environment level factors. Similarly, Liu et al. (2018) show rent-seeking as a dark side variable that results in greater level of earnings management and hiding of firm-specific information from the market. This effect is also stronger for non-state-owned enterprises (non-SOEs) than SOEs, especially those without political connections. Finally, Tao et al. (2019) use the agency–resource dependence perspective to show a negative impact of board network centrality on acquirer stock returns (stronger for state-owned enterprises) mostly due to inside directors' networks in the Chinese capital market. Specifically, Chinese firms with higher board centrality suffer more from mergers and acquisitions that destroy value, and board directors with higher centrality misuse their networks to benefit themselves at the cost of shareholders. All these results indicate the need to study board directors' motivations resulting from their individual abilities and social capital to understand the dark side of their advisory and monitoring roles. The four papers in this section extend current literature on this important research area.

In the first paper under this theme, Leung and Sharma (2021) explore the dark side of board political capital in B2B relationships to argue that politically-connected directors help firms improve their board political capital to gain preferential access to benefits but also make them indulge in activities that could expose them to greater regulatory enforcement by authorities. Data for 762 pairs of listed Chinese firms shows that regional (vs. central) board political capital, proportion of male (vs. female) politically-connected directors, and perk consumption have positive effects on the level of regulatory enforcement. Moreover, proximity to the regulatory authorities not only has a negative influence on regulatory enforcement, it also negatively moderates (dampens) the impact of board political capital and regulatory enforcement. These results provide many useful insights and extend the current research on the dark side of board political capital that may lead to unnecessary and cumbersome consequences of regulatory enforcement by authorities.

Second, Cheng, Sharma, Shen, and Ng (2021) explore the dark side of third-party certification effect in B2B relationships from a professional financial services perspective. Specifically, they extend the growing research on the dark side of B2B relationships by exploring the differences in third-party certification effects based on social capital with professional financial services firms. A proprietary dataset with confidential voting records of the nominations for Investor Relation Awards in Hong Kong confirms the dark side of B2B relationships by showing that firms nominated for these awards that attract more favorable voting from international (vs. local) analysts, achieve greater certification effect (i.e., higher valuations) upon announcement. Interestingly, nominated (but not awarded) firms with lower levels of information transparency exhibit stronger certification effect and information transparency after the event, a surprising bright outcome from this otherwise dark side effect. These results support the idea that international financial services firms may offer higher positive returns through their social capital via their professional and social network.

Third, Basu, Aulakh, and Munjal (2021) explore the roles of pluralistic ignorance, risk perception, and the governance of the dark side in peer-to-peer transactions using evidence from the Indian banking industry. Specifically, this paper investigates the role of pluralistic ignorance as a credible governance mechanism that may help mitigate the dark side effects in peer-to-peer transactions. This paper also identifies three underlying dimensions of pluralistic ignorance based on their origin - firm, relationship, and institutional factors, and relate these to peer-to-peer transaction preferences, particularly under uncertain conditions. These results offer an alternative governance mechanism to complement the formal and relational contract-based approaches to dealing with the dark side of interorganizational transactions.

Finally, in their invited article, Connelly, Shi, Cheng, and Yin (2021) explore the role of short sellers in B2B relationships using the screening theory perspective, to help managers identify the most promising relationships and make relationship-specific investments accordingly. Specifically, the authors suggest that short sellers may help shape suppliers' decisions to make relationship-specific investments in their B2B partners. Data on all firm-supplier pairs listed in the COMPUSTAT Industry Segment File, shows that suppliers reduce their relationship-specific investments in response to short interest from their B2B partners. This negative impact of short interest on suppliers' relationship-specific investments is stronger for B2B partners with less effective internal controls and weaker for B2B partners followed by a bigger number of financial analysts. Thus, short sellers perform the role of informed traders to help top managers make useful decisions about how much they should commit to a B2B relationship. These findings offer useful insights into the process by which firms make decisions when faced with the potential dark side effects of B2B relationships.

2.7. Role of emerging technologies

Finally, the seventh theme in this special issue relates to the potential dark side effects of emerging technologies on B2B relationships (Hadjikhani & Lindh, 2020; Tarafdar, D'Arcy, Turel, & Gupta, 2015). For example, Tarafdar et al. (2015) warn that digital technologies may have transformed workplaces and increased economic productivity but their overuse may increase levels of techno-stressors among the employees and reduce organizational well-being. Similarly, Hadjikhani and Lindh (2020) show that the growing use of Information Technology in industrial relationships could adversely affect commitment by increasing uncertainty, thus, confirming a dark-side to the use of technology in B2B relationships. The three papers in this section address this theme and extend the growing research on this topic.

The first paper on this theme by Malik, Mahadevan, Sharma, and Nguyen (2021) explores the roles of masking, claiming, and preventing innovation in cross-border B2B relationships as parts of a neo-colonial framework of power in global IT industry. This paper analyzes the role of innovation in cross-border B2B relationships in the information technology industry to challenge the assertion that some less-developed nations (e.g., India) are 'less innovative' than others. The authors also reveal three mechanisms of power that may enable this dark side in B2B relationships, including a) masking real ownership of innovation, b) preventing innovation through organizational structures, and c) institutionalizing practices that mask, claim and prevent innovation in multinational enterprises. This paper also provides useful insights into the process by which these dark side effects are embedded and propagated within business systems by means of neo-colonial influences and power imbalances across multiple interfaces, such as headquarters – subsidiary or service provider – client linkages.

Second, Gligor, Pillai, and Golgeci (2021) explore how new technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and big data analytics, can shape the management of B2B relationships and the manifestation of dark side effects in these relationships. They also identify the lack of adequate theorization on this topic despite the growing importance of new technologies in creating and managing B2B relationships, possibly due to a greater focus on the outcomes of the dark side rather than the processes underlying these effects. The authors address this research gap by exploring the likely impact of new technologies on B2B relationships, using theories not used in current literature, including social dominance, organizational inertia, organizational information processing, and role theories. This paper paves the way for future research that may use these theories to provide new insights into the process by which the dark side of B2B relationships emerge and impact businesses.

Finally, Grewal, Guha, Satornino, and Schweiger (2021) begin their invited article by identifying the potential of artificial intelligence to provide significant benefits, such as customized experiences in B2C settings and business efficiencies in B2B settings. Next, the authors reveal the drivers of the dark side effects of AI, namely lack of trust mostly in B2C settings and power asymmetries mostly in B2B settings. These power asymmetries may lead to two types of negative outcomes (opportunism vulnerability and fear of manipulation via constraints) that may adversely impact performance of weaker partners in B2B relationships. To conclude, this paper introduces a conceptual framework to guide future research on the bright and the dark sides of AI, in both B2C settings and B2B settings.

3. Discussion and implications

This special issue contains 27 articles that extend the growing research on the dark side of B2B relationships along seven distinct themes, which include a) relationship characteristics and behaviors, b) process-view of dark side, c) coopetition and co-creation, d) channel partners and suppliers, e) internationalization and governance, f) certification and governance in finance sector, and g) role of emerging technologies. All these articles address at least one of the six themes identified by us in our review of the current literature on this topic, namely a) B2B relationship characteristics, b) B2B governance, c) B2B relationship outcomes, d) International B2B relationships, e) Informal B2B relationships, and f) Non-traditional B2B relationships. In this section, we look beyond these 27 articles and their contributions to the extant literature on this topic by identifying additional themes that future studies on the dark side of B2B relationships may explore.

3.1. B2B relationship characteristics

Several past studies have dealt with the nature and the processes associated with relationship conflicts, opportunism, uncertainty, and similar constructs (e.g., relationship unrest) and through them contribute to our understanding of these phenomena (e.g., Yang, Sheng, Wu, & Zhou, 2018; Yang, Song, Zhang, & Wang, 2020). Similarly, four papers in this special issue explore the role of relationship characteristics and behaviors to help extend the current research on the contextual factors that influence the dark side effects within B2B relationships, such as conflicts, opportunism, tensions, uncertainty, and unrest (Oliveira & Lumineau, 2019; Yang et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2020). For example, Zhang et al. (2021) investigate the moderating roles of managerial ties (i.e., business ties and political ties) and relationship intimacy in the impact of destructive acts on a B2B firm's intention to exit an exchange relationship and their opportunistic behaviors, to provide a more nuanced view of why some partners may be more prone to failure in B2B relationships (Abosag et al., 2016).

Similarly, Lu et al. (2021) offer useful insights into the moderating role of two types of Guanxi (interpersonal and government-firm) on the impact of distributors' opportunism on their cooperative performance, which extends the current knowledge about the role of Guanxi in B2B relationships (e.g., Gu, Hung, & Tse, 2008). Next, Seggie and Griffith (2021) investigate the moderating effects of economic and strategic relationship value on the firms' governance responses to active and passive opportunism, which provides useful insights into the results reported in prior research (Abosag et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2020). Finally, Yang et al. (2021) confirm a partial mediating effect of relational behaviors in the positive effects of trust-dependence congruence on both economic and social satisfaction. They also find an inverted U-shaped effect of trust-dependence congruence on economic satisfaction. These results extend the prior research by Yang et al. (2018) and Yang et al. (2020).

We believe this theme to be a potentially rich area of exploration for future research on the dark side of B2B relationships by focusing on other aspects of B2B firms and their unique characteristics that may influence their motivation to indulge in the dark side behaviors, using diverse theoretical perspectives, such as resource-based view (RBV), resource dependency theory (RDT), dynamic capabilities perspective, and network theory, among others.

3.2. *B2B relationships governance*:

Some scholars have extended Rousseau's (1990) seminal work to highlight the significance of psychological contracts (PCs) within B2B relationships that are generally grounded in social exchange (e.g., Kingshott, 2006; Kingshott et al. 2021). Since PCs violations are known to erode trust in B2B relationships (Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007), this means its presence potentially undermines trust as an alternative governance mechanism. In this special issue, Gillani et al. (2021) use social exchange theory to position PC breaches as a dark side effect in B2B relationships, varying from minor infractions and negative disruptions to severe adverse actions and intolerable transgressions, which may lead partner firms to self-adjust, renegotiate, escalate, or depart, respectively. From these findings, it is clear that the impact of PC breaches (and potential violations) in B2B relationships is an important topic and needs further exploration, such as boundary conditions that underpin such breaches or violations and their long-term outcomes for the firms.

3.3. Dark side antecedents and outcomes

Over the last couple of decades, researchers have sought to examine the antecedents and outcomes of B2B relationships that grow and endure over time, such as inertia, boredom and complacency (e.g., Friend & Johnson, 2017; Vafeas & Hughes, 2016), loss of objectivity, relational inertia, and redundant knowledge (Villena et al., 2021). In this special issue, Vafeas and Hughes (2021) extend this research by identifying antecedents of inertia, boredom and complacency in B2B relationships along with their outcomes. They also discuss many strategies that can be used to minimize the adverse impact of these dark side antecedents on how firms deploy their scarce resources. However, despite this useful contribution, this topic is still relatively underexplored, and thus, remains a fruitful avenue for future research.

3.4. International B2B relationships

Many studies explore the unique challenges faced by B2B relationships in the cross-border and international business contexts, which exist due to cultural, linguistic, and communication distance (Makowski-Komura, Bebenroth & Malik, 2020; Malik & Bebenroth, 2018). This often assumes the form of global strategic business partnerships, such as joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions, and strategic alliances. Studies of international human resource management have discovered a power-laden discourse due to linguistic and cross-cultural issues, and in particular the potential role of cross-cultural and language training to avoid the dark-side of language in cross-border relationships by improving team cohesion, knowledge transfer, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, well-being, and resilience of social identity groupings (Beeler & Lecomte, 2017). Appropriate language strategies can also minimize power and politics and prevent issues such as employee turnover, absenteeism, and presentism (Makowski-Komura et al., 2020; Malik et al., 2018). B2B cross-border relationships between supplier-provider and subsidiary-parent dyads also highlight the importance of people management and strategic capabilities to deal with the excesses of power and ethno-centricity evident in such contexts (Malik et al., 2018). Others identify market power (Pattnaik et al., 2018), firm-specific advantages (Verbeke & Hutzschenreuter, 2021), and over-collaboration (Villena et al., 2021) as potential sources of dark side effects.

In this special issue, four papers extend the growing research in this area. For example, Oliveira and Johanson (2021) identify trust as a focal construct and a potential double-edged weapon in the internationalization of B2B firms and their cross-border relationships. Verbeke et al. (2021) also use the concepts of bounded rationality and bounded reliability to identify three broad categories of governance tools, including entrepreneurship-oriented mechanisms, formal safeguards, and relational tools, which could help minimize the dark side outcomes in international value chains. Next, Pedada et al. (2021) use organizational learning perspective to show that greater control by multinational firms from the developed markets increases the chances of termination of their joint ventures in the emerging markets. Finally, Singh and Gaur (2021) explore how national differences may influence the nature and extent of risks faced by MNCs in their B2B relationships and how the governance structures used by MNCs may help them address these risks. They also explore other boundary conditions, such as intangible assets and past experience of the MNCs on their risk management strategies. Once again, we believe this topic is a potential area for further exploration by future researchers.

3.5. Informal B2B relationships

Informal social and professional networks and cultural practices constitute an important basis of B2B relationships in several countries. An excellent example which has attracted considerable scholarly attention is guanxi in China (e.g., Gu et al., 2008; Lee, Shin, Haney, Kang, & Ko, 2017; Yen & Abosag, 2016). The dark side of guanxi warrants further scrutiny and better explication, especially the specific mechanisms underpinning the dark side effects of guanxi, such as cronyism and corruption (Lee, Tang, Yip, & Sharma, 2018). Similar informal networks are prevalent in other countries but these have received lesser attention, such as Blat or Svyazi in Russia, Jaan-Pehchaan in India (Berger, Barnes, Konwar, & Singh, 2020), Wasta in the Arab world, and Yongo in South Korea. More research on the dark side of these culture-specific phenomena will help extend the current literature on this topic.

3.6. Non-traditional B2B relationships

In recent times, the imperatives of sustainability and inclusivity have led to a focus on social innovation alliances. These alliances typically exist between social enterprises and for-profit or not-for-profit partners (Drumwright, 2014). While the relational outcomes are generally positive (e.g., better performance), the negative effects of such alliances merit further scrutiny. In this special issue, Munten et al. (2021) identify the importance of cooperation among stakeholders in diverse sectors (e.g., industry players, customers, regulatory authorities, nonprofit and social organizations) to address sustainability challenges. They use data from European automotive industry to show that innovative efforts to achieve environmental sustainability may actually result in negative environmental and societal effects, representing dark side effects of these efforts. However, this is a relatively new research domain within B2B settings, and therefore, there is a need for more research in this area due to the growing importance of sustainability in B2B contexts.

There is also mixed evidence about the role of coopetition and cocreation in B2B relationships, which suggests a need for further research (Chowdury et al., 2016; Crick, 2019). We have four papers in this special issue addressing this issue from diverse perspectives, including the moderating role of environmental and firm-level forces on the link between coopetition and firm performance (Crick & Crick, 2021), the role of value co-creation in empowering previously passive or disadvantaged customers (Appiah et al., 2021), types of psychological contract breaches and their outcomes (Gillani et al., 2021), and the impact of sustainability-related coopetition tensions in bilateral relationships (Munten et al., 2021). All these papers extend the current literature and offer many new insights into the impact of coopetition and co-creation on the dark side of B2B relationships. We hope that future studies would continue to explore such non-traditional B2B relationships.

3.7. Emerging technologies and B2B relationships

Finally, the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and machine learning, on the operational efficiency and competitiveness in B2B relationships needs further exploration (Hadjikhani & Lindh, 2020; Rana, Chatterjee, Dwivedi, & Akter, 2021; Tarafdar et al., 2015). There are three papers in this special issue that address this need, including the roles of masking, claiming and preventing innovation in cross-border B2B relationships (Malik et al., 2021), social dominance, organizational inertia, organizational information processing, and role theories to study the influence of emerging technologies on the dark side of B2B relationships (Gligor et al., 2021), and a comparison of the bright and dark side effects in B2B and B2C relationships (Grewal et al., 2021). All these papers provide diverse perspectives about the proliferation of new technologies in B2B relationships and their potential dark side effects, which augur well for the future research on this topic of growing importance in relation to the theme of this special issue.

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