

B2B exchange disruptions: an interdisciplinary bibliometric review

Vincent Jeseo

Department of Marketing and Business Information Systems, Rowan University, Glassboro, New Jersey, USA

Matthew M. Lastner

Department of Marketing, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, North Carolina, USA, and

Nina Krey

Department of Marketing and Business Information Systems, Rowan University, Glassboro, New Jersey, USA

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to synthesize fragmented literature from the marketing, management, operations and supply chain domains to provide the first multidisciplinary and longitudinal review of relationship disruptions in business-to-business exchanges.

Design/methodology/approach – This study reviews 1,351 peer-reviewed articles published between 1984 and 2025 using bibliometric analysis. Co-citation and co-occurrence analyses are performed to uncover the intellectual landscape, thematic clusters and evolution of these concepts over time. Based on the bibliometric findings, stage-based, cyclical and trajectory-based theories of relationship progression are integrated to create a composite conceptual framework that captures the dynamic, multidirectional nature of business-to-business relationships and serves as a guide for future research.

Findings – Four main themes emerge from the analysis: relationship (re)structuring, opportunism, relationship management and supply chain and risk. While interest in digital complexity and the service ecosystem is growing, citation trends show that foundational governance mechanisms remain important. Findings further support the notion that disruptions are rarely isolated events and are embedded within evolving governance and relational dynamics. Based on the data, a framework is proposed that introduces “relational guardrails,” “relationship accelerators” and “relationship disruptors” as vital components that influence the trajectory of business-to-business exchanges.

Research limitations/implications – This study shifts the lens of business-to-business relationship research from static, stage-based progression to a trajectory-based reasoning. This reorientation opens new conceptual space across marketing, management and supply chain disciplines. By demonstrating that governance and relational mechanisms are functionally interdependent rather than parallel constructs, the framework invites scholars from disparate fields to reexamine foundational assumptions through a more integrative lens. The identification of a governance lag further signals that disciplinary boundaries have allowed technological and relational theory to become disconnected, underscoring the need for cross-domain theoretical dialogue to keep pace with the complexity of modern business-to-business environments.

Practical implications – Insights can be used to enhance business-to-business relationships by tailoring governance strategies, monitoring for early indications of disruption and investing in initiatives that foster trust and serve as relational connectors. Managers can use the framework to help diagnose relational vulnerabilities, strengthen governance guardrails and strategically deploy digital tools to enhance resilience.

Originality/value – This study uses a cross-disciplinary approach to bridge disparate business-to-business disruptions literature. By incorporating bibliometric mapping with theoretical insights, this paper moves beyond a descriptive synthesis to develop a unified, process-oriented framework of relational evolution and disruption. The framework serves as a foundation for future empirical and conceptual investigations in complex, technology-driven business-to-business environments.

Keywords Business-to-business, B2B exchange relationship, B2B relationship disruptions, Buyer–seller relationships, Bibliometric analysis, Co-citation analysis

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

Business-to-business (B2B) exchange accounts for nearly two-thirds of total global economic activity (Piplovic, 2020), and this number is anticipated to grow, with B2B e-commerce expected to reach \$37tn by 2027 (Hoffmann and

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Mehta, 2023). Despite the clear magnitude and economic importance of B2B exchanges, academic understanding of how exchange relationships evolve, especially in the face of disruption, is limited (Rutherford *et al.*, 2024; Shamsollahi *et al.*, 2021). Scholars note the need for greater insights into how disruptions can affect B2B exchange relationships (Rutherford *et al.*, 2024), specifically how these disruptive events can alter relationship trajectories (Shamsollahi *et al.*, 2021). Addressing this research gap is paramount given the complexity of modern B2B environments, which feature large ecosystems (Gustafson *et al.*, 2024), dispersed and interdependent actors (Ahearne *et al.*, 2022) and rapid digitization (Koponen and Julkunen, 2022; Kumar *et al.*, 2020), which makes managing relationships more complex and challenging (Bamberger *et al.*, 2025).

Exchange relationships in this study refer to ongoing interorganizational interactions characterized by reciprocal value creation (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987) and governed through formal contractual mechanisms, relational norms (e.g. trust and commitment) or both (Cao and Lumineau, 2015). We define relationship disruptions as actions or incidents that negatively affect exchange outcomes, participant perceptions of the exchange relationship or both (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2011; Hibbard *et al.*, 2001). Such disruptions may include contract violations (Crosno *et al.*, 2021), trust breaches (Eckerd *et al.*, 2022), failing to meet partner expectations (Mir *et al.*, 2017), taking advantage of a partner to advance one's own interests (Crosno and Dahlstrom, 2008) or simple communication breakdowns (Sharma and Parida, 2018), among others. For example, Amazon was reported to be using data collected from its sellers to develop and launch competing private label products (Mattioli, 2020). Such behavior illustrates opportunistic conduct that can undermine trust, reshape governance expectations and strain long-standing exchange relationships (Wathne and Heide, 2000). Gaining greater clarity on how disruptions, such as those described here, affect B2B exchange relationships is important, given the sheer size and anticipated growth of this economic sector.

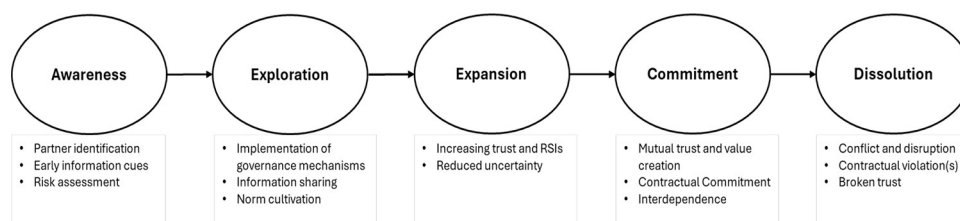
Although it is generally accepted that all exchange relationships experience disruption at some point (Hibbard *et al.*, 2001; Pulles and Loohuis, 2020), fundamental questions remain about how these disruptions emerge and how they ultimately affect the trajectory and quality of exchange relationships. To date, the literature on exchange relationship disruption is highly fragmented, both by discipline (e.g. marketing, management, operations, supply chain) and by the type of disruption studied (e.g. opportunism, conflict, trust violations, service issues). While previous research has provided valuable insights, no comprehensive synthesis of this broad,

multidisciplinary research stream exists. Existing reviews tend to focus on specific constructs (e.g. opportunism, service failure, supply chain risk) rather than examining disruption as an integrative, cross-domain phenomenon. We address this critical gap by providing an integrative review of disruptions in B2B exchange relationships. In addition, we draw on existing frameworks of relational dynamics to develop a composite model that illustrates how “relational guardrails” can safeguard exchange relationships against the negative effects of disruptions and help maintain a positive relationship trajectory.

Our study specifically focuses on relationship disruptions perpetrated by an exchange partner that negatively affect the exchange relationship. We omit other forms of disruption that are beyond the control of the exchange partners (e.g. natural disasters or other “acts of God”). While disruptions in the external environment are both prevalent and consequential (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic, economic trade wars), they typically affect a firm's ability to engage in exchange rather than the relationship itself. However, we do include disruptions that stem from how a partner responds to uncontrollable events, such as mismanagement during a crisis, which can exacerbate or introduce a new relationship issue. Therefore, our conceptual boundary centers on disruptions that originate within the exchange dyad or are enacted through partner behavior, rather than exogenous environmental shocks. Thus, our research provides the first comprehensive review of B2B exchange relationship disruptions by profiling the extant literature, classifying subdomains, analyzing scholarly trends and identifying directions for future research.

B2B relationship disruptions are not confined to a single domain; rather, they span marketing constructs (e.g. trust, commitment), operational concerns (e.g. process breakdowns, fulfillment failures), and supply chain risks (e.g. lead-time variability, network fragility). Across the lifecycle of an exchange relationship, these domains become sequentially and jointly implicated. Exchange relationships are commonly depicted as evolving linearly through a series of defined, intensifying stages, beginning with initial awareness of an exchange partner and progressing to a committed relationship (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Frazier, 1983) (see Figure 1), with distinct actors and governance mechanisms spanning the organization and becoming salient at each stage. Sales and procurement representatives are typically involved in the relationship initiation stage, while negotiations that formalize the relationship involve agents from sales, marketing, and operations, including managers from all levels. As the relationship evolves, operations teams from both parties

Figure 1 Exchange relationship lifecycle



Source: Author's own work; adapted from the stages model (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Frazier, 1983)

increasingly shape the exchange process with the goal of enhancing efficiency and effectiveness. When disruptions and failure points inevitably arise, actors across these functional areas become involved in diagnosing, managing and responding to these events. Yet little effort has been made to aggregate research from these different areas of study (Markovic *et al.*, 2021; Markovic and Jaakkola, 2024; Möller and Halinen, 2022). To address this shortcoming, we conducted a bibliometric analysis of 1,351 articles published between 1983 and October 31, 2025, spanning multiple domains.

Following established methodologies (Donthu *et al.*, 2021a; Krey *et al.*, 2022; Mustak *et al.*, 2021), we identify key journals, scholars and research trends within the B2B relationship disruption literature. A keyword analysis identifies four major clusters within the domain: general approaches to (re)structuring exchanges, opportunism, relationship management and supply chain risk. A temporal analysis of keywords across more than four decades reveals continuous growth in the field with new perspectives and subdomains steadily emerging. Importantly, our analysis also reveals meaningful overlaps among these clusters, suggesting that governance structures, relational trust, technological turbulence and risk management mechanisms collectively contribute to disruptions and shape relationship trajectories.

To begin, we provide an overview of key theories, concepts and prior reviews related to B2B relationship disruptions. Next, we detail the methodology used to collect, clean and analyze the data. We then present our findings and visualizations of the intellectual structure of the field, which highlight key journals, contributors and trends. We also develop a composite framework that integrates key theoretical perspectives on relationship dynamics. Finally, we discuss the study's contributions to theory and practice and outline future research directions.

Background of the study

Research on B2B exchange disruptions spans multiple disciplines – including marketing, management, operations and supply chain – and covers various issues such as opportunism, conflict and perceived injustice. Much of the literature focuses on preventive measures (e.g. contracts, norms, power structures, governance mechanisms, risk management) or on their effects, including trust, satisfaction, commitment and performance. However, this has produced a conceptually rich but fragmented body of literature.

B2B exchanges are complex and governed through contractual, relational or plural mechanisms. In contractual governance, formal agreements and “traditional promises” guide exchanges, while relational governance is driven by flexible, “non-promissory” norms (Nevin, 1995). Plural governance combines elements of both, creating a hybrid approach commonly employed in practice (Cao and Lumineau, 2015). Theories such as social exchange theory (SET) and relational exchange theory (RET) provide insights into relational governance processes (Heide and John, 1992; Poppo and Zenger, 2002). SET focuses on reciprocity and social behavior (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), whereas RET highlights the role of shared norms and

expectations (Cannon *et al.*, 2000; Cao and Lumineau, 2015), even in relationships bound by formal contracts (Kaufmann and Dant, 1992; Macneil, 1980). Together, these perspectives suggest that disruption cannot be viewed as a singular event, but rather as a breakdown in the broader governance architecture of the exchange relationship.

In addition to governance mechanisms, transaction-specific investments and relationship-specific investments (RSIs) demonstrate a partner's commitment and influence the formation and stability of B2B relationships (Rokkan *et al.*, 2003). Likewise, dependence and interdependence between partners impact the likelihood of disruptions, with greater balance promoting stability (Anderson and Narus, 1984, 1990; Hibbard *et al.*, 2001). Information sharing is another crucial mechanism, with greater information sharing (e.g. transparency) typically leading to more positive outcomes (Tong and Crosno, 2016). These interconnected factors emphasize the importance of blending strategic investments, balancing dependencies, and communicating openly to maintain successful B2B relationships. However, these mechanisms do not operate independently. Governance structures, investment levels, dependence asymmetries and information transparency often interact, particularly when disruption risk extends beyond the dyad to affect multiple levels of the supply chain (Harland *et al.*, 2003).

Despite efforts to prevent disruptions, they are inevitable within B2B exchanges. Transaction cost economics (TCE) explains that firms attempt to minimize opportunism (Heide and John, 1988; Poppo and Zenger, 2002; Williamson, 1985), yet this behavior still occurs. Consequently, opportunism, defined as “self-interest seeking with guile” (Williamson, 1975, p. 6), is one of the most widely studied forms of interfirm disruption and has consistently been shown to decrease firm performance and trust (Crosno and Dahlstrom, 2008; Simon, 1978). The TCE framework also views transaction uncertainties as an inherent risk to be accounted for and reduced when possible. Supply chain research has devoted significant attention to the study of risk management, which plays a critical role in the construction of the supply chain and the selection of exchange partners (Khan and Burnes, 2007). Despite clear theoretical overlap, integrative research examining the interplay between opportunism and supply chain risk-mitigation strategies remains sparse.

SET has also been used to explore dependence asymmetries between exchange partners, which can create power imbalances and cause disruptions (Scheer *et al.*, 2015). Justice theory, specifically distributive and procedural justice, explains how perceived unfairness in B2B exchanges (Lind and Tyler, 1988) can act as a “relationship poison” (Samaha *et al.*, 2011). Further, research has shown that power struggles and conflicts within exchanges have adverse effects on cooperation and satisfaction (Gaski, 1984; Heide and John, 1992). Other disruptions include service failures, supply chain breakdowns and fulfillment issues, which all have a significant impact on firm performance and trust. These streams – opportunism, justice, conflict, service failure and supply chain risk – are frequently examined in isolation, despite their shared relevance to relational stability and governance adaptation.

Although previous research has provided valuable insights into specific forms of B2B disruptions, the broader domain

remains fragmented (see Table 1 for a summary). For instance, opportunism has received significant scholarly attention, with studies demonstrating its detrimental effects on exchange relationships (Crosno and Dahlstrom, 2008, 2010) and exploring mitigating factors such as relational norms (Hawkins *et al.*, 2009), goal congruence (Wang and Yang, 2013), and contract specificity (Crosno *et al.*, 2021). Other focal areas include conflict (Oliveira and Lumineau, 2019; Sharma and Parida, 2018), justice perceptions (Alghababsheh *et al.*, 2023; Bouazzaoui *et al.*, 2020), service failure (Baliga *et al.*, 2021),

supply chain disruption (Bugert and Lasch, 2018), contract violations (Crosno *et al.*, 2021), information asymmetry (Tong and Crosno, 2016) and risk, including the failure to accurately assess and manage risk (Cousins *et al.*, 2004; Trkman and McCormack, 2009). Collectively, these studies demonstrate the breadth of disruption-related research, yet they fall short of synthesizing how these constructs co-evolve within exchange relationships.

While systematic and meta-analytic reviews are common in the field, bibliometric analyses are rarer. Sharma *et al.* (2022) is

Table 1 Notable review articles involving B2B disruptions

Citation	Type of review	Area of review	Key findings
Alghababsheh <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Systematic/qualitative	(In)Justice	Taxonomy of B2B justice developed comprising dimensions of relationships and events involved
Baliga <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Morphological analysis	Service failure	Identified 418 research gaps in B2B service failure and recovery
Bouazzaoui <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Systematic/qualitative	(In)Justice	Three main themes identified for the B2B justice literature
Bugert and Lasch (2018)	Systematic/qualitative	Disruption in supply chain	Explores modeling techniques to better mitigate disruptions
Crosno and Dahlstrom (2008)	Meta-analysis	Opportunism	Opportunism negatively affects performance, norms, communication, coordination and satisfaction
Crosno and Dahlstrom (2010)	Meta-analysis	Opportunism	Collaboration and commitment outweigh opportunism's impact on performance
Crosno <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Meta-analysis	Contract violations, opportunism	Contract specificity discourages opportunism, but utilization of contracts can backfire
Hawkins <i>et al.</i> (2009)	Meta-analysis	Opportunism	Relational norms have a strong, negative correlation with opportunism
Hawkins <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Systematic/qualitative	Opportunism	Reviews the theory, causes and effects of opportunism. Provides propositions
Dolgui <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Systematic/qualitative	Disruption and recovery in supply chain	Identifies forms of supply chain disruption; prevention includes inventory planning and backup suppliers
Oliveira and Lumineau (2019)	Systematic/qualitative	"Dark side" of B2B relationships	Conflict, opportunism and unethical practices are the most prevalent forms of B2B disruption
Sharma and Parida (2018)	Meta-analysis	Conflict	Organizational, interpersonal and environmental factors cause conflict
Tangpong <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Systematic/qualitative	Competition/win-lose partnerships	Proposes Four new B2B relationship types: supplier-led, buyer-led, competitive and free will
Tong and Crosno (2016)	Meta-analysis	Information asymmetry	Information sharing builds trust and commitment; information asymmetry reduces both
Wang and Yang (2013)	Meta-analysis	Opportunism	Goal congruence most strongly reduces opportunism
Present research	Bibliometric analysis	All forms of disruption	Perspectives on governance and disruption are interconnected. Emerging research addresses evolving technologies and globalization within exchanges

Source(s): Authors' own work

one exception, though their work did not specifically address B2B disruptions. This gap presents an opportunity to generate a more integrative and visualized understanding of the field. Correspondingly, this research utilizes a bibliometric approach to provide a comprehensive overview of all forms of B2B relationship disruptions, examine their connection to governance mechanisms, and integrate cross-disciplinary insights to provide a better understanding of how relationships are formed, maintained, and terminated. By mapping intellectual structures and identifying thematic intersections, this study moves beyond descriptive categorization to advance a more integrated conceptual and theoretical understanding of disruption dynamics within B2B exchanges.

Methodology

To synthesize the research on B2B relationship disruptions, we employ bibliometric analysis, which is a quantitative method that extracts meaningful insights from bibliographic data while minimizing author bias (Donthu *et al.*, 2021a, 2021b). We examine various metrics including the number of publications, total citations, and average citations per year. We also perform formal analyses, including co-citation and co-occurrence analyses (e.g. Donthu *et al.*, 2021a, 2021b; Mustak *et al.*, 2021) to uncover the structural relationships among publications and keywords (Donthu *et al.*, 2021a). Together, these methods provide a detailed mapping of the intellectual structure of the B2B exchange disruptions literature.

Data collection

Data were collected from two major academic databases – Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus – to ensure comprehensive coverage of the literature (Bahmani *et al.*, 2025; Lim *et al.*, 2024). To reflect the most current research, we extended our search to include peer-reviewed articles published through October 31, 2025. Conference papers, books, book chapters, surveys, editorials, corrections, notes, and errata were excluded. Only articles published in English were considered for inclusion. However, journal ranking thresholds (e.g. Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC), Association of Business Schools (ABS)) were not imposed to avoid bias toward established outlets and to capture emerging interdisciplinary contributions across all possible journal publications.

A total of 48 Boolean search strings were developed from prior literature and refined iteratively to capture a wide range of concepts related to B2B relationship disruptions (see Appendix). These included terms such as “B2B disrupt*,”

“interfirm exchange failure,” “opportunism or opportunistic behave* and B2B” and “supply chain failure.” Each Boolean string was searched independently and applied to titles, abstracts, keywords and keywords plus (WoS) or indexed keywords (Scopus). Keywords Plus refers to algorithmically generated indexing terms in WoS that are derived from cited references. Scopus uses a similar technique which they refer to as indexed keywords.

We did not restrict the search by journal but did limit results to business-related disciplines, allowing for interdisciplinary coverage across marketing, management, operations and supply chain domains. Business-related disciplines were identified using the subject classifications provided within WoS and Scopus (e.g. “Business,” “Management,” “Operations Research,” “Supply Chain Management” and related categories), ensuring consistency across databases.

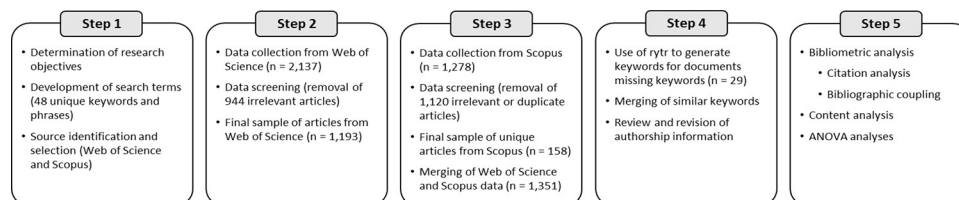
The initial WoS search yielded 2,137 articles. Articles were then screened using predefined inclusion criteria to ensure consistency. Titles and abstracts were reviewed to ensure relevance to interorganizational exchange contexts involving relationship-level disruptions. Articles were excluded if they did not involve a disruption perpetrated by an exchange partner (e.g. natural disasters) or when the study did not examine B2B exchanges (e.g. business-to-customer failures). In total, 944 irrelevant articles were removed during the screening process.

A subsequent search in Scopus using the same procedures yielded 1,278 articles. After removing irrelevant articles, we verified and removed duplicate records by matching titles, journals and authors, resulting in 158 unique Scopus articles. We then merged the data sets by modifying the Scopus formatting to align with WoS, ensuring that all information was contained in the appropriate columns. The final data set contains 1,351 unique articles published between 1984 and October 31, 2025. A flowchart illustrating the data collection and cleaning process is shown in Figure 2.

Data cleaning

The data set underwent rigorous cleaning to ensure accuracy, completeness and consistency (Lim *et al.*, 2024). Twenty-five articles missing publication dates were manually updated after consulting Google Scholar. Missing keywords were added by referring to the original articles where possible. Approximately 1.3% of the articles ($n = 16$) did not include keywords. For these articles, Rytr AI (rytr.me) was used to extract keywords from titles and abstracts. For example, the article titled “Opportunistic behavior in marketing research organizations” (Kelley *et al.*, 1989) yielded keywords such as “ethics,”

Figure 2 Data collection, cleaning and analysis procedures



Source: Authors' own work

“opportunism” and “b2b relationship.” Next, two of the authors manually reviewed and cross-validated all AI-generated keywords against the existing keyword taxonomy to ensure conceptual alignment. Terms inconsistent with established exchange or disruption constructs were removed or revised. In addition, keywords with similar meaning, such as “business-to-business,” “BtB” and “B2B,” were consolidated to enhance the accuracy of keyword analyses.

Data analysis

The analysis first examined overall contributions of publications, journals, and authors using ANOVA in SPSS and descriptive metrics in R. These metrics include the number of single-author versus multi-author publications, average citations per year, and the proportion of cited works. Because citation counts accumulate over time, average citations per year were used to account for publication age when comparing older and more recent contributions. We then analyzed relational structures using science mapping techniques in VOSviewer and R’s bibliometric analysis package (van Eck and Waltman, 2020).

Keyword analyses provide additional insights into the content and conceptual structures of the literature (Mustak *et al.*, 2021). For this study, only keywords appearing at least five times were included, allowing us to evaluate cumulative knowledge and identify thematic clusters over time. Co-occurrence analysis identifies trends and shifts in research content, which helps to inform future research (Donthu *et al.*, 2021a).

Results

Publication and citation trends by year

Publication and citation trends for B2B exchange disruption literature over the past 42 years illustrate a gradual

development of the field (see Figure 3 and Table 2). We divided the literature into four roughly 10-year periods, which allowed us to identify conceptual changes, theoretical development, and emerging concepts over time.

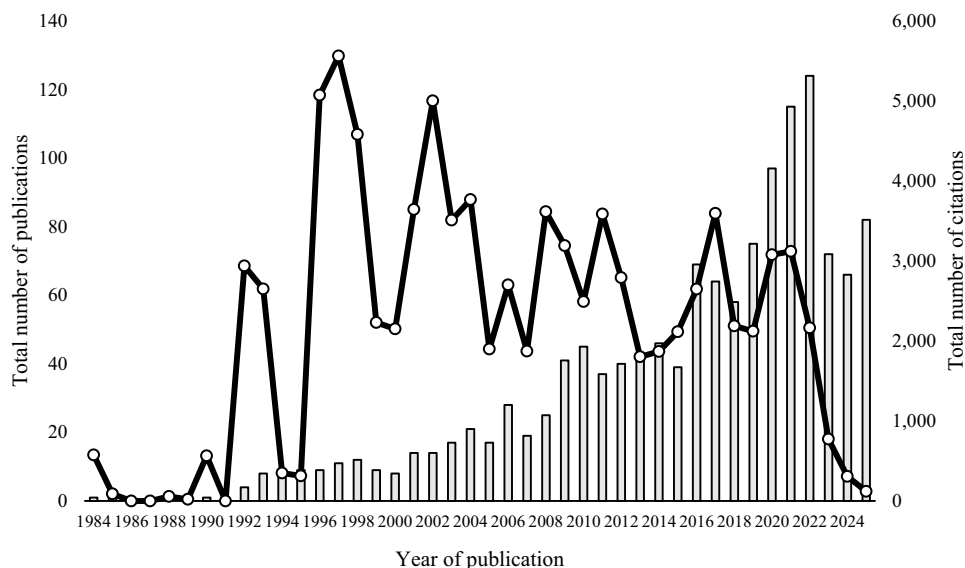
On average, 32.2 articles were published annually between 1984 and 2025. During the initial decade (1984–1994), only 26 papers were published, with more than half (16) occurring between 1993 and 1994. While growth remained moderate over the following decade, research output increased beginning in 2009, culminating in a peak of 124 publications in 2022. These trends highlight the increased scholarly attention that B2B relationship disruptions have received in recent years.

In contrast, citation patterns reflect the impact of early influential B2B research. The 1,351 articles have been cited a total of 91,120 times, averaging 67.4 citations per article and 7.8 citations per publication per year. In the early years, citations were relatively sparse due to limited research availability. Citations increased substantially in the following decade, peaking at 5,562 in 1997, reflecting the influence of foundational works. However, citation activity has gradually declined since then, coinciding with the proliferation of new research. Notably, this decline should not be interpreted as reduced scholarly relevance, but rather due to the expansion of the field, shorter citation windows for recent publications and increased competition for scholarly attention.

To further examine the evolution of the field, publication and citation trends were analyzed across four distinct time periods. The total number of publications has consistently increased, reflecting growing scholarly interest and activity in the field.

Citation trends reveal a notable peak during the 1995–2004 period, followed by a gradual decline in subsequent decades. Papers from the second decade (1995–2004) averaged 3,583.4 citations (SD = 1,624.9), which is significantly more than the

Figure 3 Publications and citations per year



Note(s): Solid lines indicate the total number of citations per year while bars indicate the total number of publications per year

Source: Authors’ own work

Table 2 Publication and citation trends by year

Year	Citable years	Total publications	Total cited publications	Total citations	Average citations per pub	Average citations per pub per year
1984	41	1	1	575	575.0	14.0
1985	40	2	2	89	44.5	1.1
1986	39	–	–	–	–	–
1987	38	–	–	–	–	–
1988	37	1	1	57	57.0	1.5
1989	36	1	1	20	20.0	0.6
1990	35	1	1	563	563.0	16.1
1991	34	–	–	–	–	–
1992	33	4	4	2,937	734.3	22.3
1993	32	8	8	2,650	331.3	10.4
1994	31	8	8	349	43.6	1.4
<i>1984–1994</i>	–	<i>26</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>7,240</i>	<i>278.5</i>	<i>8.4</i>
1995	30	9	8	314	34.9	1.2
1996	29	9	9	5,073	563.7	19.4
1997	28	11	11	5,562	505.6	18.1
1998	27	12	12	4,582	381.8	14.1
1999	26	9	9	2,230	247.8	9.5
2000	25	8	8	2,150	268.8	10.8
2001	24	14	14	3,644	260.3	10.8
2002	23	14	14	5,002	357.3	15.5
2003	22	17	17	3,510	206.5	9.4
2004	21	21	21	3,767	179.4	8.5
<i>1995–2004</i>	–	<i>124</i>	<i>123</i>	<i>35,834</i>	<i>289.0</i>	<i>11.7</i>
2005	20	17	17	1,898	111.6	5.6
2006	19	28	28	2,701	96.5	5.1
2007	18	19	19	1,873	98.6	5.5
2008	17	25	25	3,616	144.6	8.5
2009	16	41	41	3,192	77.9	4.9
2010	15	45	45	2,493	55.4	3.7
2011	14	37	37	3,586	96.9	6.9
2012	13	40	39	2,792	69.8	5.4
2013	12	42	42	1,803	42.9	3.6
2014	11	46	45	1,867	40.6	3.7
<i>2005–2014</i>	–	<i>342</i>	<i>340</i>	<i>25,821</i>	<i>75.9</i>	<i>5.3</i>
2015	10	39	39	2,115	54.2	5.4
2016	9	69	69	2,649	38.4	4.3
2017	8	64	63	3,594	56.2	7.0
2018	7	58	57	2,188	37.7	5.4
2019	6	75	75	2,121	28.3	4.7
2020	5	97	95	3,077	31.7	6.3
2021	4	115	113	3,120	27.1	6.8
2022	3	124	122	2,163	17.4	5.8
2023	2	72	66	773	10.7	5.4
2024	1	66	50	306	4.6	4.6
2025	0	82	44	119	1.5	–
<i>2015–2025</i>	–	<i>861</i>	<i>793</i>	<i>22,225</i>	<i>25.8</i>	<i>5.6</i>
<i>1984–2025</i>	–	<i>1,351</i>	<i>1,280</i>	<i>91,120</i>	<i>67.4</i>	<i>7.8</i>

Note(s): Average citations per pub per year accounts for citable years; Italics signify period totals. Very last row is the grand total for all years

Source(s): Authors' own work

first decade [$M=658.2$, $SD=1,080.0$; $t(19)=4.90$, $p<0.001$]. Average citations declined significantly from the second decade to the third [$M=2,582.1$ citations, $SD=715.2$; $t(19)=4.76$, $p<0.001$], and while not statistically significant, have steadily declined to an average of 1,763 citations ($SD=692.8$) during the most recent period (2015–2025). These findings underscore both the historical impact of earlier work in the field and the enduring relevance of research output over time, despite a recent downward trend in citation counts. This pattern is consistent with maturation effects observed in expanding research domains, where foundational works accumulate disproportionate citation influence.

Trends shift significantly when accounting for the number of publications. Early research received high citations per publication, but this declined as the field matured. The average citations per article for the first decade ($M=278.5$, $SD=467.5$) and second decade ($M=289.0$, $SD=533.0$) significantly exceeded those of the third decade [$M=76.0$, $SD=117.5$; $t(364)=5.96$, $p<0.001$; $t(462)=6.93$, $p<0.001$] and fourth decade [$M=25.8$, $SD=44.7$; $t(885)=14.09$, $p<0.001$; $t(983)=14.19$, $p<0.001$]. In addition, publications from the third time period received significantly more average citations per article than those from the fourth time period [$t(1199)=10.7$, $p<0.001$]. This decline suggests that foundational works remain highly influential, but newer contributions face challenges in achieving comparable citation impact amid increased competition in an expanding field. Moreover, the shorter citation window for recent publications (particularly 2015–2025) partially explains the lower average citation counts. The shift also reflects evolving scholarly priorities, with interdisciplinary topics such as digitization, globalization and sustainability expected to gain influence over time.

Authorship trends

Authorship-related metrics reveal noteworthy trends regarding the relationship between the number of authors and citation impact. Over 2,000 authors have published within the domain of B2B disruption. Most articles were co-authored ($n=1,176$), while only 175 (13%) were single-authored. In addition, the average number of authors per publication has increased over time. Authorship team size grew from 1.7 authors per publication during the 1984–1994 period to 2.9 during the 2015–2025 period. This upward trend mirrors broader patterns of increasing collaboration and methodological complexity in business research.

Next, we assessed citations based on the number of authors. Results of an ANOVA indicated a significant relationship between total citations and number of authors [$F(3, 1347)=7.33$, $p<0.001$]. Single-author articles ($M=71.8$, $SD=165.3$) received significantly more citations than papers written by three authors [$M=44.7$, $SD=88.3$; $t(642)=2.67$, $p<0.001$] or four or more authors [$M=46.5$, $SD=98.6$; $t(370)=1.81$, $p=0.006$]. Similarly, articles written by two authors ($M=103.5$, $SD=317.5$) received more frequent citations than those written by three authors [$M=44.7$, $SD=88.3$; $t(889)=3.85$, $p<0.001$] or four or more authors [$M=46.5$, $SD=98.6$; $t(617)=2.46$, $p=0.007$]. While not statistically significant, two-author papers also received more

citations than single-author articles [$M=71.8$, $SD=165.3$; $t(595)=1.25$, $p=0.211$].

These findings should be interpreted cautiously. Earlier publications were often single- or dual-authored and benefited from longer citation windows, which may partially explain the higher citation counts. Rather than suggesting that smaller authorship teams inherently produce more impactful research, these results highlight how temporal effects and field maturation shape citation patterns. Accordingly, authorship trends primarily illustrate the collaborative evolution of the field rather than recommendations regarding team size.

Top journals based on publication trends

B2B exchange disruption research has been disseminated across a wide range of journals (see Table 3). Among these, *Industrial Marketing Management* leads with 158 publications, followed by the *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* (120 publications) and the *Journal of Business Research* (79 publications). Interestingly, citation patterns differ from publication counts. Journals such as the *Journal of Marketing* (10,589 citations), *Organization Science* (8,569 citations), *Industrial Marketing Management* (8,062 citations), and *Strategic Management Journal* (7,745 citations) lead in total citations. Moreover, the *Journal of Marketing* outperforms others in average citations per article with 352.97 citations per publication.

These findings highlight the distinct roles that different journals play in advancing the field. Some disseminate a high volume of research while others exert greater influence through highly impactful articles. The difference between volume and impact also highlights the importance of cross-disciplinary dissemination. Foundational conceptual and theory-oriented research tends to appear in high-impact management and marketing journals, whereas more recent applied and domain-specific disruption research is increasingly visible in industrial marketing, operations and supply chain outlets. While marketing and management journals lead in citation influence over the full period under review, operations and supply chain journals are making increasing contributions in the domain, offering critical insights into risk, resilience and technological advancements to combat disruptions.

Most influential articles

To identify the most influential research, we examined the top 20 articles based on citation count (Table 4). Over half of these articles have exceeded 1,000 citations, reflecting their enduring impact. Doney and Cannon (1997), which focuses on trust in buyer–seller relationships, tops the list. With 3,695 citations, this article's high average citation rate (132.0 per year) highlights its long-term relevance and continuous impact. Poppo and Zenger (2002), with 2,683 citations, explore contracts and relational governance, another key area of focus within the domain.

The most recent articles appearing among the top 20 (Jüttner and Maklan, 2011; Villena et al., 2011) were published over a decade ago. While it takes time to accumulate citations, the absence of more recent contributions among the highest-impact works suggests that foundational governance and trust frameworks continue to dominate the intellectual core of the field. At the same time, emerging themes such as digital

Table 3 Top 20 journals based on number of publications

Journals	Publications	TC	AC	ABDC ranking	Field (ABDC list)
<i>Industrial Marketing Management</i>	158	8,062	51.03	A*	Marketing/tourism/logistics
<i>Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing</i>	120	2,000	16.67	A	Marketing/tourism/logistics
<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	79	2,807	35.53	A	Marketing/tourism/logistics
<i>Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing</i>	39	543	13.92	B	Marketing/tourism/logistics
<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	30	10,589	352.97	A*	Marketing/tourism/logistics
<i>International Journal of Operations & Production Management</i>	28	1,357	48.46	A	Strategy, management and organizational behavior
<i>Organization Science</i>	25	8,569	342.76	A*	Strategy, management and organizational behavior
<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	25	7,745	309.80	A*	Strategy, management and organizational behavior
<i>Journal of Operations Management</i>	23	4,242	184.43	A*	Strategy, management and organizational behavior
<i>Supply Chain Management – An International Journal</i>	20	2,533	126.65	A	Marketing/tourism/logistics
<i>Journal of Supply Chain Management</i>	19	874	46.00	A*	Marketing/tourism/logistics
<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	16	483	30.19	A*	Marketing/tourism/logistics
<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	15	3,699	246.60	A*	Marketing/tourism/logistics
<i>Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management</i>	15	274	18.27	A	Marketing/tourism/logistics
<i>Journal of International Business Studies</i>	14	1,989	142.07	A*	Strategy, management and organizational behavior
<i>Journal of International Marketing</i>	14	795	56.79	A	Marketing/tourism/logistics
<i>International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management</i>	13	284	21.85	A	Strategy, management and organizational behavior
<i>Organization Studies</i>	11	2,218	201.64	A*	Strategy, management and organizational behavior
<i>British Journal of Management</i>	10	738	73.80	A*	Strategy, management and organizational behavior
<i>Decision Sciences</i>	10	531	53.10	A*	Marketing/tourism/logistics

Note(s): Results are based on an assessment of 1,351 articles published between 1984 and 10/31/2025. TC = total number of citations; AC = average number of citations. ABDC ranking is based on the 2025 ABDC Journal Quality List; the * next to the A signifies the ranking of the journal. Journals are ranked as A*, A, B, or C-level

Source(s): Authors' own work

transformation, platform ecosystems, global supply chain volatility and post-pandemic relational adaptation may require additional time to establish comparable citation influence.

Keyword assessment

Author-provided keywords allow insight into the type of content published related to B2B exchange disruptions across multiple domains. A total of 1,753 keywords were identified. The most frequent keywords were B2B relationship (467 occurrences), opportunism (369), supply chain (227), trust (188) and contracts (182). These keywords reflect the major topics in B2B exchange disruption research.

While keyword frequencies offer a preliminary overview, they also reveal disciplinary emphasis. Relationship marketing constructs such as *trust* and *commitment* are prominent;

however, keywords such as *supply chain*, *contracts*, *governance* and *performance* reveal integration with operations and management literature, reinforcing the interdisciplinary nature of the domain and the need for cross-functional insights. We further analyze the conceptual structure across keywords in the following sections.

Conceptual structure

In bibliometric analysis, conceptual structure maps the relationships between key concepts (Krey *et al.*, 2022). Specifically, a keyword co-occurrence analysis identifies core content, or “hotspots,” by examining the frequency and proximity of keywords (Mustak *et al.*, 2021). Keywords are represented by a colored node in the resulting network (Figure 4). Thicker links indicate a stronger co-occurrence,

Table 4 Twenty most influential articles by citation ranking

TC	Title	Authors	Journal	Year	CPY
3,695	An examination of the nature of trust in buyer–seller relationships	Doney, P.M.; Cannon, J.P.	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	1997	131.96
2,683	Do formal contracts and relational governance function as substitutes or complements?	Poppo, L.; Zenger, T.	<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	2002	116.65
2,330	Between trust and control: developing confidence in partner cooperation in alliances	Das, T.K.; Teng, B.S.	<i>Academy of Management Review</i>	1998	86.30
1,686	What firms do? Coordination, identity and learning	Kogut, B.; Zander, U.	<i>Organization Science</i>	1996	58.14
1,536	A resource-based theory of the firm: knowledge versus opportunism	Conner, K.R.; Prahalad, C.K.	<i>Organization Science</i>	1996	52.97
1,526	Strategic alliance structuring – a game theoretic and transaction cost examination of interfirm cooperation	Parkhe, A.	<i>Academy of Management Review</i>	1993	47.69
1,461	Structuring cooperative relationships between organizations	Ring, P.S.; Van De Ven, A.H.	<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	1992	44.27
1,443	Trust, control and risk in strategic alliances: an integrated framework	Das, T.K.; Teng, B.S.	<i>Organization Studies</i>	2001	60.13
1,426	Do norms matter in marketing relationships?	Heide, J.B.; John, G.	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	1992	43.21
1,321	Networking and innovation: a systematic review of the evidence	Pittaway, L.; Robertson, M.; Munir, K.; Denyer, D.; Neely, A.	<i>International Journal of Management Reviews</i>	2004	62.90
1,113	Opportunism in interfirm relationships: forms, outcomes and solutions	Wathne, K.H.; Heide, J.B.	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	2000	44.52
1,046	The role of trustworthiness in reducing transaction costs and improving performance: empirical evidence from the United States, Japan and Korea	Dyer, J.H.; Chu, W.J.	<i>Organization Science</i>	2003	47.55
1,007	Effective interfirm collaboration: How firms minimize transaction costs and maximize transaction value?	Dyer, J.H.	<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	1997	35.96
951	Supply chain resilience in the global financial crisis: an empirical study	Juttner, U.; Maklan, S.	<i>Supply Chain Management - An International Journal</i>	2011	67.93
804	The dark side of buyer–supplier relationships: a social capital perspective	Villena, V.H.; Revilla, E.; Choi, T.Y.	<i>Journal of Operations Management</i>	2011	57.43
752	The impact of power and relationship commitment on the integration between manufacturers and customers in a supply chain	Zhao, X.; Huo, B.; Flynn, B.B.; Yeung, J.H.Y.	<i>Journal of Operations Management</i>	2008	44.24
744	The interorganizational learning dilemma: collective knowledge development in strategic alliances	Larsson, R.; Bengtsson, L.; Henriksson, K.; Sparks, J.	<i>Organization Science</i>	1998	27.56
717	The role of trust and relationship structure in improving supply chain responsiveness	Handfield, R.B.; Bechtel, C.	<i>Industrial Marketing Management</i>	2002	31.17
690	Consumer perceptions of price (Un)fairness	Bolton, L.E.; Warlop, L.; Alba, J.W.	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	2003	31.36
676	Governing buyer–supplier relationships through transactional and relational mechanisms: evidence from China	Liu, Y.; Luo, Y.; Lui, T.	<i>Journal of Operations Management</i>	2008	39.76

Note(s): Results are based on an assessment of 1,351 articles published between 1984 and 10/31/2025. TC = total citations; CPY = average citations per year

Source(s): Authors' own work

Overall, this cluster connects marketing and operational perspectives by illustrating how governance structures, alliance structures and innovation networks collectively (re)shape value creation and firm performance under conditions of change.

Cluster 2: Opportunism. The green cluster focuses on opportunism and its containment tactics, which are mainly based on TCE. Opportunistic behavior, or even the threat of such behaviors, creates higher transaction costs as resources are allocated toward monitoring and safeguarding, particularly during times of uncertainty (Wathne and Heide, 2000). Early research explored the origins of opportunism (John, 1984), contrasted theoretical frameworks such as agency theory and TCE (Masten, 1988), discussed how it affected performance (Hill, 1990; Hodgson, 2004), and examined ways to reduce it (Heide and John, 1992).

Subsequent research has extended this work by examining market and cultural factors that shape opportunism and influence the effectiveness of formal and informal governance mechanisms (Luo, 2006). In addition to contractual safeguards, relational norms have been identified as informal governance mechanisms that constrain opportunistic behavior by shaping expectations regarding acceptable conduct and reciprocity, particularly when contracts are incomplete (Heide *et al.*, 2007; Wathne and Heide, 2000). Research has also differentiated between active and passive forms of opportunism (Wathne and Heide, 2000) and explored a range of strategies to mitigate its disruptive effects (Heide *et al.*, 2007).

Performance links opportunism-focused research (Cluster 2) to adjacent streams on relationship (re)structuring (Cluster 1) and relationship management (Cluster 3). The centrality of performance in Figure 4 is unsurprising. While much research focuses on disruptive events and ways to prevent them, performance outcomes continue to be a key indicator of the impact of disruption across relational contexts.

This cluster reflects contributions from marketing, management and economics and integrates multiple economic and behavioral theories to show how opportunism affects contract implementation, relationship uncertainty and long-term performance.

Cluster 3: Relationship management. The blue cluster focuses on fundamental relational constructs such as trust, commitment, conflict and relationship marketing. The largest node in the entire network is “B2B relationship,” which reflects the core focus of this review.

Trust – defined as confidence in another partner’s kindness or dependability (Moorman *et al.*, 1993; Morgan and Hunt, 1994) – is a central concept in this cluster. Extensive research has explored how trust is cultivated (Doney and Cannon, 1997), its role in reducing exchange risks (Chiles and McMackin, 1996; Nooteboom, 1996; Ring and Van de Ven, 1992), and the repercussions of trust violations (Eckerd *et al.*, 2022). Often examined in conjunction with trust, commitment shows a desire to sustain the relationship over time (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Research has examined commitment both as an outcome of disruptions (Hibbard *et al.*, 2001; Kingshott, 2006) and as a risk factor when asymmetries threaten relationship longevity (Achrol and Gundlach, 1999; Gundlach *et al.*, 1995).

Conflict occurs when one party’s goals or performance are hindered by another (Gaski, 1984). It is often triggered by

power imbalances, communication breakdowns and cultural distance (Pettersen and Rokkan, 2006; Solberg, 2008). Unmanaged conflict erodes relationships, but functional conflict, if managed appropriately, can improve mutual understanding and long-term value (Luo *et al.*, 2009; Skarmeas, 2006).

Although rooted in relationship marketing, this cluster also draws on organizational behavior and intercultural management perspectives. Collectively, it underscores the role of relational processes and implicit social mechanisms – such as trust-based expectations and shared norms – in sustaining B2B relationships and countering disruptions.

Cluster 4: Supply chain and risk. The yellow cluster centers on risk, risk management and supply chain disruption, with a particular emphasis on operational and environmental sources of uncertainty. Within interorganizational research, risk has been examined in relation to exchange governance structures (Ring and Van de Ven, 1992), the mitigating role of partner trust (Das and Teng, 2001), and risk assessment methods (Hsieh *et al.*, 2010). In the supply chain and logistics literature, key themes include transport uncertainty (Sanchez-Rodriguez *et al.*, 2010), environmental risks such as political, legal and regulatory instability (Durach and Wiengarten, 2017) and supply replenishment lead-times (Chang and Lin, 2019).

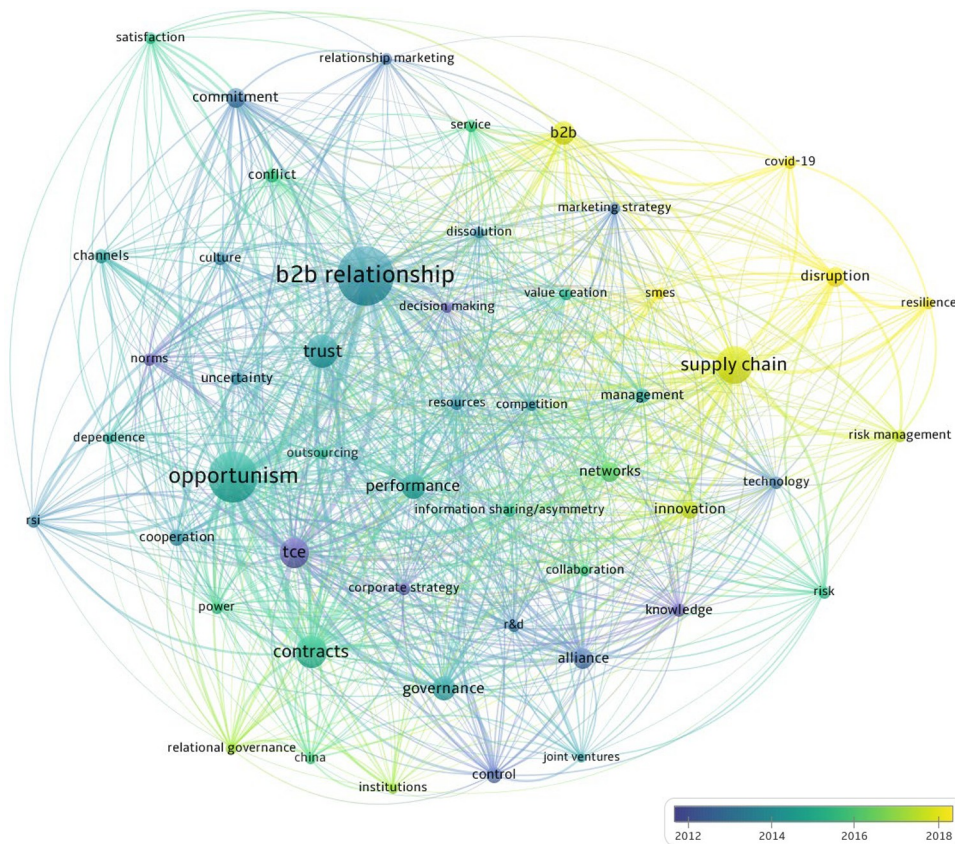
Risk management strategies include network-based risk-sharing (Pittaway *et al.*, 2004), strategic alliances (Rice *et al.*, 2012), adaptable operational systems (Talluri *et al.*, 2013) and fostering social connections within supply networks (Cruz and Liu, 2011). Collectively, these mechanisms reflect a growing emphasis on supply chain resilience – the ability of interorganizational systems to prepare for unexpected events, absorb disruptions, adapt to changing conditions and recover without severe relational breakdowns (Ponomarov and Holcomb, 2009; Tukamuhabwa *et al.*, 2015). Technological tools and information systems play a supporting role in these efforts by enhancing visibility, coordination and forecasting accuracy, thereby enabling more responsive risk management (Ho *et al.*, 2015).

Although this review focuses on partner-driven disruptions (rather than uncontrollable events), COVID-19 is a notable node, as the stress the pandemic put on B2B exchanges resulted in relational disruptions as well. Recent literature highlights challenges caused by the pandemic regarding salesperson–customer communication (Rangarajan *et al.*, 2021), forecasting difficulties (Nikolopoulos *et al.*, 2021) and shifts in buyer behaviors (Bonney *et al.*, 2022).

Overall, this cluster integrates research on supply chain resilience, operational agility and relational governance. It reflects how disruptions originating in logistics and fulfillment systems can cascade into relational domains, contributing to trust erosion and relationship instability.

Collectively, these four clusters define the intellectual boundaries of the B2B exchange disruption literature. Importantly, our analysis indicates that relationship stability is not exclusive to any single cluster; it emerges from the functional alignment among them. Clusters 1 and 2 establish the structural and behavioral conditions of exchange (i.e. governance, alliances, opportunism), while Cluster 3 encompasses relationship management factors (i.e. trust, commitment, conflict). Cluster 4 indicates that operational

Figure 6 Temporal mapping of top 50 keywords



Note(s): Node size reflects the frequency of keywords and color indicates average publication year, with older research topics appearing in blue and more recent ones in yellow

Source: VOSviewer

Figure 7). The size and color of the nodes in the map represent the frequency and relative importance of each theme within that decade. *Niche* themes, which are well-established but more ancillary, are represented in the upper-left quadrant. *Motor* themes – topics that are central and rapidly evolving throughout the time period – are identified in the upper-right quadrant. The lower-left quadrant includes themes that are either *emerging* or *declining*, indicating either a lack of scholarly attention or nascent interest. *Basic* themes, which constitute the conceptual foundation of the field but receive less active attention at any given time, are found in the lower-right quadrant. This mapping reveals how the field has expanded from foundational governance constructs to include more dynamic and interdisciplinary concerns such as innovation ecosystems, digital trust and supply chain resilience.

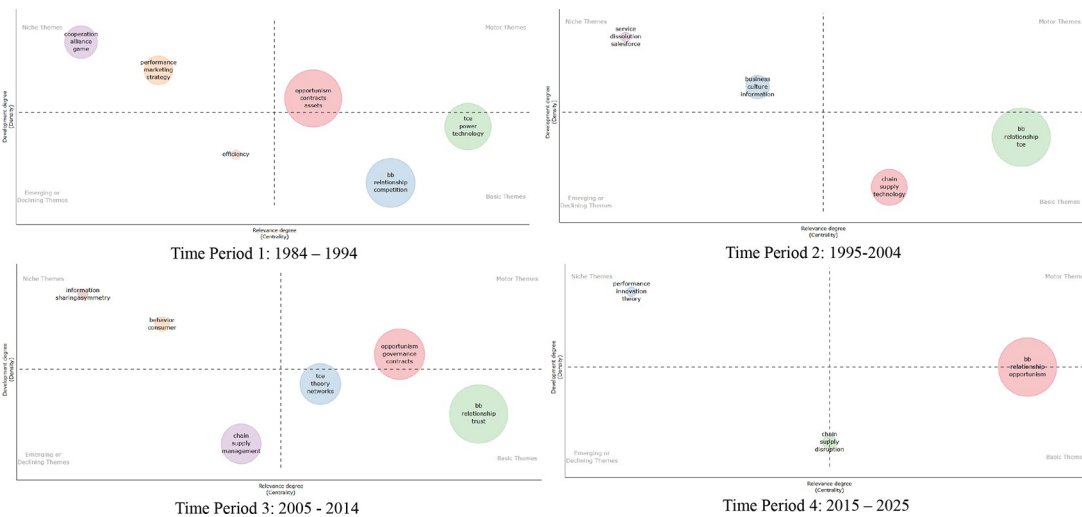
Time period 1 (1984–1994). The first time period indicates an emphasis on foundational relational concepts and performance-oriented outcomes. Basic themes such as opportunism, TCE and B2B relationships dominate, forming the conceptual core of the literature. Their prominence reflects an early focus on economic hazards, governance structures and efficiency concerns in interorganizational exchanges. Foundational research in this domain is heavily influenced by institutional economics and transaction cost theory, which

considers how different mechanisms can be used to organize exchanges. Seminal work examines how contracts help structure relationships to minimize risk and highlights the opportunistic nature of exchange agents (Heide and John, 1988; Williamson, 1985). Over time, alternative governance strategies to combat opportunism emerged, including trust and cooperation (Hill, 1990; Ring and Van de Ven, 1992) and relational norms (Heide and John, 1992; Macneil, 1980, 1985).

Performance, power and efficiency appear as motor themes, indicating efforts to link governance mechanisms to measurable outcomes. Niche themes – including cooperation, alliances and game theory – are well developed but remain peripheral. Emerging themes such as competition and dependence show low density but importance, suggesting nascent areas of inquiry that have yet to merge into established research streams.

Overall, time period 1 reflects a theory-building phase, anchored in transaction cost logic and focused on explaining performance outcomes, with relational and strategic complexity still largely underdeveloped. Notably, “B2B relationship” is identified as a popular theme across all four time periods, underscoring the impact of the foundational studies in laying the groundwork for relational governance frameworks that dominate subsequent periods. This decade

Figure 7 Temporal assessment of time periods



Note(s): The size and color of nodes represent the frequency and significance of themes. Niche (upper left): well-established themes with limited research activity; not central to the field. Motor (upper right): high-growth research areas that are driving research. Emerging or declining (bottom left): emerging themes with initial interest or declining relevance. Basic (bottom right): foundational themes, providing background for future research, though not highly active

Source: Biblioshiny

also marks the beginning of interdisciplinary attention in the domain, with marketing and management scholars jointly exploring how relational and contractual mechanisms could be implemented to structure exchanges, influence performance and gain competitive advantage.

Time period 2 (1995–2004). The second period reflects a broadening of focus beyond efficiency-based explanations while remaining connected to the field's foundational theoretical core. The literature increasingly incorporates relational, normative and knowledge-based perspectives, signaling growing conceptual complexity. Basic themes remain centered on B2B relationships, TCE and opportunism, while motor themes shift notably, with channels, norms and uncertainty emerging as central and well-developed topics. Seminal work from this time period examines relational perspectives as alternatives or complements to contractual governance (Poppo and Zenger, 2002), and considers norms (Heide and John, 1992) and trust (Chiles and McMackin, 1996; Das and Teng, 1998, 2001; Doney and Cannon, 1997) as fundamental building blocks of strong interfirm relationships, as well as potential deterrents of opportunism (Wathne and Heide, 2000).

Knowledge, collaboration and innovation appear near the center, straddling the line between emerging and basic themes. Their positioning reflects early efforts to link interorganizational relationships with learning and innovation outcomes, suggesting a shift toward value creation and knowledge exchange. Knowledge and learning perspectives emphasize how firms can leverage interorganizational relationships for competitive advantage (Kogut and Zander, 1996; Larsson et al., 1998), and innovation plays a particularly important role in this period as information technology is

increasingly relied upon to facilitate exchanges (Leek et al., 2003; Perry et al., 2002). Among the niche themes to emerge, service stands out, reflecting the adoption of business-to-consumer (B2C) service perspectives into the domain to account for the importance and impact of the service within exchanges (Lam et al., 2004; Parasuraman, 1998).

Overall, Time period 2 represents a relational and normative turn, in which governance remains central, but is increasingly complemented by attention to norms, uncertainty and emerging knowledge-based dynamics.

Time period 3 (2005–2014). With three times as many publications as the previous decade, this period saw a significant increase in scholarly output. The literature has adopted a more integrated view of B2B relationships, blending formal contractual mechanisms with relational and behavioral constructs. Basic themes continue to center on buyer-supplier relationships, trust and TCE, whose prominence underscores their role as the field's conceptual infrastructure. The coupling of trust with TCE suggests a shift toward hybrid governance frameworks that incorporate both calculative and relational elements. Major themes highlight commitment, B2B contexts and conflict as central and actively developed topics. This indicates growing attention to the dynamics and tensions within ongoing relationships – how commitment forms, how conflicts emerge and how they are managed over time. In the niche themes quadrant, opportunism, contracts and performance form a cohesive cluster, signaling a more specialized examination of how contractual governance mitigates opportunism and influences performance outcomes. Perhaps the most notable shift in time period 3 is the initial appearance of supply chain management, along with outsourcing, in the niche quadrant, reflecting the extension of

relational and contractual theories into operational and structural domains. Although still nascent at this point, several seminal papers in the areas of supply chain and operations management were published during this period, focusing on topics such as the use of relational mechanisms to structure and maintain exchanges (Liu *et al.*, 2009; Zhao *et al.*, 2008), the conceptualization of supply chain resilience and its integration with risk management perspectives (Jüttner and Maklan, 2011), and how cultivating social capital within exchange relationships can both promote and detract from exchange performance (Villena *et al.*, 2011).

Overall, time period 3 represents a phase of theoretical synthesis, where economic, relational and behavioral perspectives are used to explain governance, commitment and conflict in B2B relationships.

Time period 4 (2015–2025). Basic themes for the fourth time period are B2B, supply chain and disruption. Although these topics exhibit high relevance across the literature, their low density indicates that they remain under studied and underdeveloped. This pattern reflects growing scholarly attention to disruption and supply chain issues, but suggests that the field has not yet consolidated these conversations into established frameworks. Notably, the motor themes quadrant is empty, signaling the absence of topics that are both central and well-developed during this period. This gap suggests a transitional phase marked by fragmented research rather than a dominant research agenda. Similarly, the emerging or declining themes quadrant is empty, indicating the absence of novel breakthroughs but also suggesting that established topics are not declining. In contrast, the niche themes quadrant is anchored by B2B relationships, opportunism and contracts. This well-developed but specialized stream reflects sustained interest in governance mechanisms and safeguarding behavior in B2B exchanges. However, its peripheral positioning suggests that these topics are somewhat isolated from the broader research core.

Taken together, this period reflects a scattered landscape in B2B research. Governance-focused work is well developed but has become more specialized. However, broader issues like disruption and supply chains are becoming more influential, likely stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and other sociopolitical events that have put a strain on global supply chains.

Discussion

A variety of models, including stage-based, learning-based and cyclical frameworks, have been proposed by academics to explain how exchange relationships evolve. Differences notwithstanding, these models recognize that both positive and negative forces influence the emergence, development and dissolution of relationships. Yet questions remain regarding what triggers relationships to transition between stages or shift from positive relational trajectories to negative ones (Shamsollahi *et al.*, 2021). Because exchange relationships are often governed by various mechanisms (e.g. contracts, norms, RSIs), it is challenging to examine relationship disruptions without also considering forms of governance. Based on data from thousands of studies spanning multiple disciplines, our study identifies factors that strengthen exchange relationships,

along with those that threaten them. From these insights, we develop a composite model (see Figure 8) that integrates key theoretical perspectives on relationship dynamics and clarifies how governance, relational processes and disruptive forces interact over time.

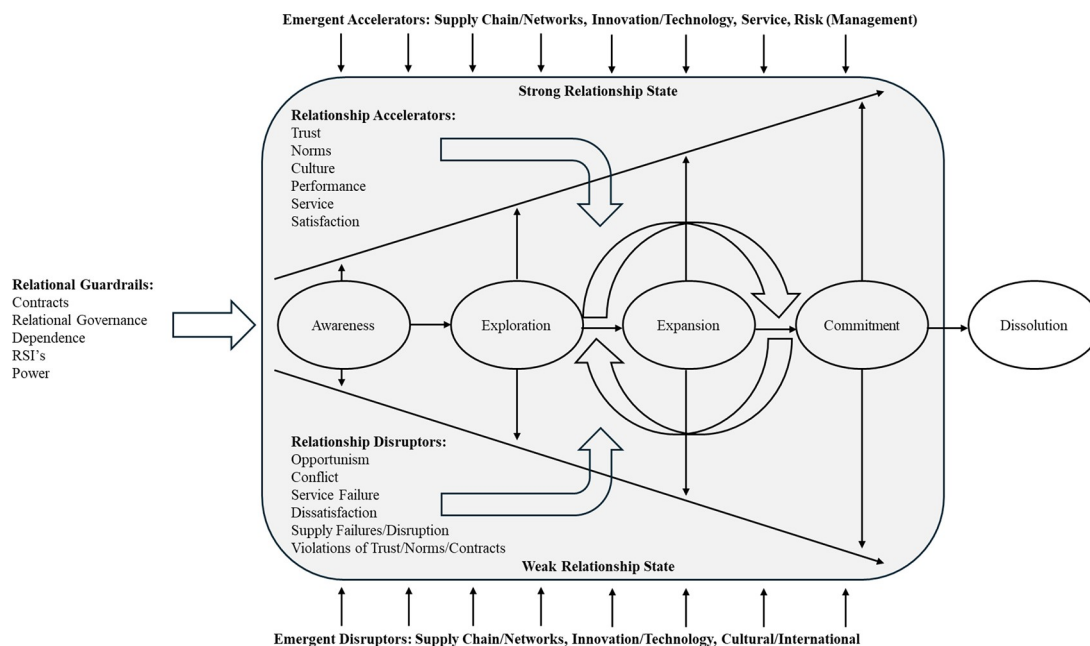
The foundation of our composite model is based on the stages model (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Frazier, 1983). The stages model is a five-step progression of awareness, exploration, expansion, commitment and dissolution. Growing levels of trust and the depth of the relationship are reflected in each stage (Shamsollahi *et al.*, 2021). Despite being widely used, this linear framework makes it difficult to explain the non-sequential and occasionally volatile nature of real-world exchanges that may regress, stall, or accelerate unexpectedly.

Our framework enhances existing models by shifting the focus from relational “stages” to relational “mechanics.” By identifying and clarifying the roles of guardrails, accelerators and disruptors, we provide a framework that explains why some relationships recover following a disruption while others dissolve. Importantly, our framework suggests that B2B relationship trajectories are based on the balance of guardrails, accelerators and disruptors that exist at the time of a disruptive event, a nuance that linear stage models lack.

To account for this complexity, we incorporate several additional theoretical perspectives into our model, including trajectories, reversibility and cycling and fluctuations. The trajectories perspective (Palmatier *et al.*, 2013) suggests that relationships advance through stages at different rates (e.g. trajectories) depending on contextual and relational factors. According to cyclical models (Jap and Anderson, 2007; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994) relationships cycle through periods of advancement and decline, rather than progressing in a fixed manner. Critical events, whether positive (like value co-creation) or negative (like opportunism), are highlighted by fluctuations that reroute a relationship’s trajectory (Grewal *et al.*, 2007). These dynamic elements, which show the multidirectional, nonlinear nature of B2B relationships, are depicted in our framework.

Three categories emerged from our synthesis to explain the dynamic nature of exchange relationships. The first are “relational guardrails,” which are formal and informal governing mechanisms that establish relationship boundaries and influence how parties respond to positive and negative forces. The second category consists of “relationship accelerators” like trust and satisfaction, which help propel exchange relationships forward. Third are “relationship disruptors” like opportunism and conflict that can erode the quality of the relationship. Together, these categories provide a multidimensional perspective for understanding the evolution of B2B relationships in both stable and disruptive environments.

Importantly, our model integrates insights from marketing, management, operations and supply chain disciplines. For example, while trust and commitment (relationship accelerators) are central constructs to marketing theory, risk management (emergent accelerator) is core to operations and supply chain research, and transaction costs (relationship disruptor) and governance structures (relational guardrail) are studied across each of the disciplines. By combining these perspectives, the model offers a more holistic understanding of

Figure 8 Composite model of relationship dynamics

Note(s): Relational guardrails are governing mechanisms that influence how parties respond to positive and negative forces. Relationship accelerators help propel exchange relationships forward. Relationship disruptors erode the quality of the relationship. These categories provide a multidimensional perspective for understanding the evolution of B2B relationships

Source: Authors' own work

how relationships evolve, stabilize or deteriorate in complex B2B environments.

Relational guardrails

As indicated by several of the top 50 co-occurring keywords in our analysis (see Figure 4), governance mechanisms are often employed by exchange partners to safeguard against disruptions. While such mechanisms can deter a variety of threats, their main objective is to prevent opportunism, which represents the second largest node in the overall keyword cluster. Most other nodes within this cluster are represented by terms related to mitigating opportunistic behavior, such as contracts – which represent the most prominent form of deterrence researched in the literature – as well as power, dependence, RSIs and relational governance.

Despite ongoing discussion about their relative merits, formal and informal governance mechanisms are generally agreed to be complementary (Cao and Lumineau, 2015; Poppo and Zenger, 2002). Over time, their influence changes. For instance, relational governance, which is based on norms and trust, has greater influence as relationships grow, whereas contractual governance is most effective in early-stage relationships (Huang and Chiu, 2018). When used in tandem, these mechanisms function as “relational guardrails” to help shape a positive trajectory.

In practice, relational guardrails can take the form of digital monitoring systems (Brintrup *et al.*, 2023), performance dashboards (Maestrini *et al.*, 2018) or shared service-level

agreements (SLAs) that blend formal contracts with informal expectations (Wang *et al.*, 2015). These tools are especially relevant in supply chain and operations contexts, where real-time coordination and transparency are critical.

Relationship accelerators

“Relationship accelerators” are factors that help relationships grow and strengthen them over time. Examples of relationship accelerators in practice include joint innovation initiatives (Yeniyurt *et al.*, 2014), shared forecasting platforms (Zheng *et al.*, 2025) and cross-functional integration teams (van den Adel *et al.*, 2023). These mechanisms not only build trust but also enhance adaptability and responsiveness – key capabilities in volatile B2B environments.

Most relationship accelerators fall under Cluster 3 (Relationship Management) and include terms like *trust*, *norms*, *social exchange* and *satisfaction*. Among these, trust is noteworthy because of its prominence in the literature and importance to successful exchange relationships. Trust has repeatedly been associated with stronger relational states (Zhang *et al.*, 2016), smoother progression through relationship stages (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994) and increased relationship commitment (Geyskens *et al.*, 1998; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). In addition, trust improves firm performance, which in turn strengthens and maintains relationships (Cao and Lumineau, 2015; Poppo and Zenger, 2002). Notably, performance is situated at the intersection of several clusters,

which highlights its function as both an outcome of relational accelerators and a stabilizing factor in ongoing exchanges.

Relationship disruptors

One goal of this review is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the various “relationship disruptors” that threaten B2B exchanges and the threats they pose to relationships. Interestingly, a large portion of the literature has concentrated less on the disruptors themselves and more on governance mechanisms that protect relationships. In many cases, the literature considers the absence or violation of governance mechanisms (e.g. contractual or relational governance) to be a disruption. For example, although contracts (Cluster 2 – Opportunism) are frequently employed to safeguard against disruptions, contract violations continue to be among the most frequent and harmful types of disruptions (Zhang *et al.*, 2006).

Similar risks arise from violations of relational governance, particularly relational norms (Cluster 3 – Relationship Management). Beyond formal agreements, these standards represent shared expectations between exchange partners (Macneil, 1980). These violations, which some academics call breaches of psychological contracts – unwritten but strongly held expectations about obligations of exchange partners – have been included in the study of opportunism over time (Mir *et al.*, 2017; Rousseau, 1989). Such violations can be particularly damaging because they can trigger negative emotional responses (Mir *et al.*, 2017) and erode trust (Cao and Lumineau, 2015).

Although breaches of contracts, norms and trust are acknowledged to cause harm, their relational effects, particularly how they change over time, have not received enough attention in the literature. Research has generally emphasized how relationships can be nurtured to grow and advance rather than exploring how disruptive forces can cause relational regression (e.g. Dirks *et al.*, 2009; Grewal *et al.*, 2007; Johnson and Sohi, 2016). Notable exceptions include Ring and Van de Ven's (1994) concept of cyclical relationship evolution and Zhang *et al.* (2016), who demonstrate how neglect or betrayal can weaken a relationship. However, there is still much to learn about how relationships deteriorate, making this a promising area for future research.

Future studies could explore how different types of disruptions – such as data breaches, AI-driven decision failures, or environmental, social and governance (ESG) violations – effect relationship trajectories across industries. Such work would help managers anticipate and mitigate emerging risks in increasingly digital and interdependent B2B ecosystems.

Boundary conditions of the framework

The proposed composite model is broadly applicable across B2B contexts; however, its applicability is strongest in ongoing exchange relationships characterized by moderate to high levels of interdependence. In such settings, relational guardrails, accelerators and disruptors meaningfully shape relationship trajectories because partners are embedded in repeated interactions and mutual dependence structures. In contrast, purely transactional exchanges or those with fewer relational dynamics may have limited trajectory shifts, cyclical reversals, or

relational acceleration mechanisms, likely making our model less applicable.

In addition, power asymmetry and digital mediation may alter how the framework components operate. In highly asymmetric relationships, dominant partners may impose governance structures that redefine the balance between guardrails and disruptors. Similarly, digitally mediated exchanges and platform-based ecosystems may amplify both accelerators (e.g. transparency, coordination technologies) and disruptors (e.g. data dependence). Accordingly, the framework is likely more robust in interdependent exchange environments where relational processes influence continuity, performance and long-term stability.

Implications

The present research advances the field in several meaningful ways. First, our framework diverges from descriptive, stage-based models by advancing a “trajectory-based” logic. Rather than viewing disruptions as static setbacks, we categorize relational forces into guardrails, accelerators and disruptors. By doing so, we provide an explanation for *why* some relationships experience growth following disruption while others experience dissolution.

Second, our model demonstrates the functional interdependence of formal and informal governance. Prior studies often examine guardrails (e.g. contracts, monitoring) and accelerators (e.g. trust, norms) in isolation; however, we show that “relational guardrails” provide the necessary stability for “relationship accelerators” to function effectively. This shifts the theoretical focus from simply preventing failure to effectively managing momentum.

Finally, our multidisciplinary scope bridges the “intent-based” view of relationship marketing with the “capabilities-based” view of supply chain management. By identifying technology as both an emergent accelerant and disruptor, we highlight a governance lag in the literature where technological guardrails are advancing, but the relational accelerators required to sustain them remain grounded in foundational human trust.

This research also has several important implications for practitioners seeking to protect and develop their B2B exchange relationships, particularly in highly complex, digital and global environments (Gustafson *et al.*, 2024; Koponen and Julkunen, 2022). First, managers should proactively incorporate governance mechanisms that blend formal and informal safeguards. These “relational guardrails” should be implemented early in the relationship lifecycle (Cao and Lumineau, 2015; Poppo and Zenger, 2002). Formal contracts can discourage opportunism in the exploration stage (Huang and Chiu, 2018), and as the relationship matures and firms recognize that partners' normative behaviors differ, relational mechanisms such as trust-inducing norms, information transparency and RSIs become increasingly important (Anderson and Narus, 1990; Rokkan *et al.*, 2003). For example, firms might pair SLAs with shared dashboards or joint planning sessions to reinforce both contractual clarity and relational trust.

Second, governance should be tailored to context-related risks. Given that B2B relationships are increasing in frequency and sensitivity across cultural, institutional and technological

boundaries, managers must adapt their governance to the local context. This is particularly essential in global supply chains or developing markets, where there is an abundance of risks associated with institutional voids and cultural differences (Scheer *et al.*, 2015). Managers should consider hybrid governance models that combine legal contracts with culturally sensitive relational norms – for instance, using informal consensus-building in collectivist cultures alongside formal performance clauses.

Third, disruptions are inevitable in interfirm exchanges (Hibbard *et al.*, 2001; Pulles and Loohuis, 2020), so firms must be proactive in identifying indicators of “relationship disruptors” such as opportunism, norm violations or communication breakdowns (Crosno and Dahlstrom, 2008; Wathne and Heide, 2000). Our framework suggests that when a disruption occurs, the main priority should be a “relational guardrail audit” (checking contracts and monitoring systems), to lessen immediate relational damage. However, a critical second step is “accelerator priming” [(re-)investing in trust-building or joint innovation] to ensure that relationships do not end up in a state of low-value maintenance but instead progress once again toward a growth trajectory.

Fourth, firms should invest in “relationship accelerators” such as joint training programs, co-branded initiatives and transparent performance scorecards – all of which reinforce mutual commitment and reduce ambiguity. These practices are commonly used by leaders in the automotive (Honda, Toyota), retail (Walmart) and aerospace (Boeing) industries. Trust, satisfaction and shared norms propel relationships and act as buffers from disruptions (Geyskens *et al.*, 1998; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Ring and Van de Ven, 1992). Therefore, managers should encourage relationship-accelerating factors through open communication, alignment of goals and fair, reciprocal exchange (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Emphasizing transparent performance-related metrics can further strengthen commitment and mitigate risks (Poppo and Zenger, 2002; Zhang *et al.*, 2016).

Finally, firms should use technology strategically. Technologies such as AI, blockchain and big data have resulted in rapid and vast changes within interfirm collaboration. Managers must consider these technologies not merely to increase efficiency but also to improve governance and transparency (Bamberger *et al.*, 2025; Gligor *et al.*, 2021). For instance, blockchain can ensure contract integrity, while AI can flag anomalies in partner behavior. However, overreliance on automation may erode interpersonal trust, so human oversight remains essential (Ahearne *et al.*, 2022).

In sum, B2B relationship resilience goes beyond risk mitigation; it also depends on nurturing conditions that safeguard these relationships against unavoidable disruptions (Shamsollahi *et al.*, 2021). Managers who invest in good governance systems, build trust and satisfaction, watch for early signs of disruption and use technology wisely will be in the best position to construct and maintain high-performing exchange relationships in increasingly complex business ecosystems.

Future research

Another main objective of this review is to identify subdomains that will guide future B2B exchange disruption research. To

achieve this objective, we analyzed the “future research” sections (Kumar *et al.*, 2020) of articles published in the top 20 journals (from Table 3) over the past decade. Of the 452 articles that were reviewed, 416 contained specific recommendations for future studies and were included in our assessment. Future-focused keywords were generated using Ryr’s keyword extraction tool. To enhance transparency and replicability, the extracted keywords were manually reviewed by the authors to ensure conceptual relevance and remove redundancies. Generic terms or those that offered little academic insight (e.g. “future research”, “research avenues”, or “variable”) were removed. Following previous procedures, we then conducted a co-occurrence analysis to identify thematic connections (Mustak *et al.*, 2021).

Many of the terms generated (see Table 5) correspond with established “relationship management” (e.g. *B2B relationships, performance, governance, trust*) and “opportunism” constructs (e.g. *opportunism, contracts, power*). These findings validate the continued relevance of foundational concepts, especially as B2B exchanges become increasingly complex, technology-driven and global (Borah *et al.*, 2022). They also reinforce the importance of revisiting classic theories like SET and TCE in light of digital transformation, platform ecosystems and AI-enabled governance. Beyond these areas, our analysis revealed several future research opportunities that align directly with the three components of our proposed composite model – relational guardrails, relationship accelerators and relationship disruptors.

Evolving relational guardrails

To manage uncertainty and promote cooperation, governance mechanisms (e.g. *contracts, norms, information sharing*) are still crucial (Cao and Lumineau, 2015; Poppo and Zenger, 2002). However, our findings suggest that governance is a dynamic, rather than static, mechanism, particularly in digitally mediated and ecosystem-based exchanges. The need for research investigating governance in fluid ecosystems, particularly when systemic shocks are present, is growing (Shishodia *et al.*, 2023). Future studies could also examine how these guardrails change across decentralized structures and digital transformations (Dolgui *et al.*, 2018; Gilgor *et al.*, 2021). For example, blockchain-based smart contracts and AI-driven compliance tools may redefine how formal governance operates in real time.

International and cross-cultural contexts (e.g. *international/global, China, culture, sourcing*) also offer opportunities and challenges for improving these mechanisms, especially in *emerging economies* (Mukherjee *et al.*, 2023). Comparative studies of governance effectiveness across institutional environments (e.g. Guanxi-based norms vs Western contractual safeguards) could yield valuable insights. In addition, longitudinal and multilevel designs may be particularly useful in understanding how guardrails evolve across stages and trajectories of relationship development.

Evolving relationship accelerators

Another emerging area is the B2B service ecosystem. As B2B relationships evolve from dyadic exchanges to intricate, multiactor networks, concepts such as *services* and *value* reflect the criticality of service-dominant logic (S-D Logic) and value

Table 5 Most frequent keywords from future research directions (2015–2025)

Keyword	Occurrences	Keyword	Occurrences
B2B relationship	204	innovation	37
supplier(s)/seller(s)	145	management	35
opportunism	138	risk	35
performance	99	channels	33
buyer(s)	95	cooperation	33
governance	81	alliances	32
supply chain	79	manufacturing	31
culture	74	collaboration	29
contracts	69	disruptions	27
trust	63	norms	27
B2B	62	knowledge	25
networks	62	capabilities	24
international/global	60	resources	24
institutions/institutional	57	information sharing/asymmetry	23
China	48	sourcing	23
power	48	distribution/distributor	22
value creation	45	guanxi	22
strategy/strategic	44	legal	22
(inter)dependence	42	relational governance	22
competition	42	SMEs	21
partnerships	42	TCE	21
technology	42	coopetition	20
uncertainty	41	conflict	19
emerging economies	40	control	19
services	40	dark side	19

Note(s): Table includes the top 50 most cited keywords extracted from the future research directions of the top 20 journals listed in Table 4 since 2015

Source(s): Authors' own work

co-creation perspectives within B2B ecosystems (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Our composite model suggests that relationship accelerators may operate differently in networked ecosystems compared with traditional dyadic exchanges, warranting further theoretical refinement. By making adaptive, responsive relationship management possible, advancements in AI, big data and personalization technologies can serve as accelerators (Borah et al., 2022; Gligor et al., 2021). Future research should explore how digital accelerators interact with governance mechanisms to buffer against disruptions. For instance, can predictive analytics flag relational strain before trust erosion occurs? Can personalization tools enhance commitment in multipartner ecosystems?

Evolving relationship disruptors

Perceived injustice, power imbalances and opportunism continue to be major dangers (Samaha et al., 2011; Scheer et al., 2015; Williamson, 1985). Disruptions brought about by technology are expected to present new moral dilemmas for governance systems (Gligor et al., 2021). In addition, relational expectations are complicated by stressors associated with globalization, such as Guanxi or cultural differences (Mukherjee et al., 2023).

Risk management must also be better understood, considering that B2B service failures and risks across networked ecosystems are ever-present threats (Dolgui et al., 2018; Shishodia et al., 2023). Emerging disruptors – such as algorithmic bias, data breaches and ESG violations – require new conceptual tools to assess their relational impact. Future research should examine

whether various disruptors trigger distinct relational trajectories (e.g. rapid dissolution versus gradual erosion), as suggested in our composite framework.

Finally, the *dark side* of B2B exchange relationships, inclusive of problems, challenges and/or difficulties in relationships that affect outcomes such as performance and satisfaction (Abosag et al., 2016), warrants more attention. Dark side effects differ from many of the disruptive events discussed in this manuscript (e.g. opportunistic behavior, contract violations, service failures, etc.) in that they do not constitute discrete events occurring at a specific point in time. Instead, dark side effects are better understood as persistent, underlying tensions that accompany – and often coexist with – the positive outcomes of exchange relationships. Future research can pay specific attention to how new technologies (artificial intelligence, blockchain, big data analytics etc.) can both promote and combat dark side effects (Gligor et al., 2021).

This future research agenda combines both established and new approaches, offering a roadmap for advancing B2B theory and practice. Research questions based on the three components of our composite to guide conceptual development and empirical investigation are shown in Table 6.

Conclusion

This research provides a comprehensive examination of the multidisciplinary literature on disruptions within B2B exchange relationships. Utilizing co-citation and co-occurrence

Table 6 Potential future research topics on relational mechanisms in B2B exchanges

Area	Exemplar questions
Relational guardrails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do formal governance mechanisms (e.g. contracts, monitoring systems) and relational governance mechanisms (e.g. trust, norms) interact to influence relationship performance and conflict resolution in multicultural and digitally mediated B2B exchanges? Under what conditions does cooperation between B2B partners enhance innovation outcomes (e.g. joint product development, knowledge sharing) while minimizing relational risks such as opportunism or conflict? How do functional and dysfunctional conflicts evolve over time in interfirm relationships, and what are their long-term effects on relationship quality, trust, commitment and joint performance?
Relationship accelerators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent does supplier service orientation influence buyers' perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty, and how do relationship quality and communication effectiveness mediate these effects in B2B exchanges? How do digital collaboration technologies (e.g. shared platforms, AI-enabled systems, data-sharing tools) facilitate or constrain value co-creation processes between buyers and suppliers in B2B exchanges? What organizational, technological and relational factors (e.g. perceived usefulness, trust in technology, partner commitment, integration capability) drive or hinder the adoption of emerging technologies such as AI and blockchain in B2B markets?
Relationship disruptors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which contractual, relational and emerging technological governance strategies are most effective in deterring opportunistic behaviors in global B2B exchanges characterized by limited face-to-face interaction? How can AI-driven analytics, blockchain verification and digital monitoring tools be used to detect and prevent opportunism, and what impact do these technologies have on trust and relationship governance between firms? How do firms operate in culturally diverse B2B markets balance relationship-based practices such as Guanxi with formal contract enforcement, and how does this balance affect trust and long-term exchange performance?

Source(s): Authors' own work

analyses, we draw on 42-years of scholarship (1984–2025) to uncover the intellectual structure of the B2B exchange disruptions literature. Unlike earlier reviews that provide a narrow view of the domain by focusing on specific types of disruptions (see Table 1), our work adopts a holistic approach by combining insights from multiple disciplines to offer a unified understanding of how disruptions affect relationships and governance mechanisms (i.e. contracts, relationships, norms, alliances, information sharing) that are designed to protect them.

First, our review bridges disparate research streams from the marketing, management operations and supply chain literature by providing a comprehensive, cross-disciplinary synthesis of relational disruptions research within the B2B domain. In doing so, we advance a unified framework that addresses calls for more holistic and interdisciplinary inquiry (Markovic *et al.*, 2021; Markovic and Jaakkola, 2024; Möller and Halinen, 2022).

Second, by highlighting the most influential journals, articles and keyword trends within the domain, our bibliometric analysis serves as a strategic resource for researchers looking for foundational work and publication guidance. By identifying conceptual connections between fields, our research also promotes the cross-pollination of ideas across disciplines.

Third, our co-word and temporal analysis identifies four fundamental subdomains that characterize the literature: relationship (re)structuring, opportunism, relationship management and supply chain and risk. These themes have evolved with the field, from an early focus on contracts, governance and opportunism to a growing interest in trust, e-commerce, joint ventures, the “dark side” of relationships, and more recently, digital and global complexity. In today's rapidly changing B2B environment, the importance of re-testing has grown. Therefore, the temporal analysis also provides valuable insights by identifying seminal topics and variables that may warrant re-evaluation.

Fourth, our analysis of research agendas from 416 articles indicates there is growing interest in B2B service ecosystems, cultural dynamics and digital innovation, in addition to continuity around fundamental themes such as governance, trust and performance. These developments offer a wealth of theoretical and methodological opportunities to better understand how contemporary B2B relationships are established, maintained and disrupted.

Finally, based on 42 years of B2B exchange research, we provide an expanded framework that combines relational precursors, governance mechanisms and disruption triggers into a unified model. By integrating multiple perspectives (i.e. stage-based, cyclical and trajectory), our composite framework extends simple linear models of relationship development to capture the multidirectional and dynamic nature of B2B exchanges. In addition to incorporating emergent concepts such as risk and innovation, this framework expands upon popular theories such as SET, RET and TCE. It also integrates dynamic perspectives such as trajectories, reversibility and relational cycling, offering a more realistic depiction of how B2B relationships evolve and unravel. In doing so, we provide a synthesis of past research along with a theoretically grounded roadmap for examining relationship resilience, regression and repair in complex B2B ecosystems.

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Appendix. Words and phrases used for literature search

Search Term(s)

- 1 B2B Disrupt*
- 2 “Relation* Disrupt*”
- 3 “Exchange Disrupt*”
- 4 Interfirm Disrupt*
- 5 “B2B” AND “Service Failure*”
- 6 “Business-to-business” AND “service fail*”
- 7 “B2B” AND “Service recover*”
- 8 b2b relation* failure*
- 9 B2B exchange failure*
- 10 B2B exchange relationship failure*
- 11 Interfirm Exchange Failure*
- 12 B2B Disrupt* Event*
- 13 Disrupt* Event* AND Exchange Relationship
- 14 Disrupt* Event* AND Interfirm
- 15 “Relationship Dissolution*” AND “Exchange”
- 16 “Relationship Dissolution*” AND “B2B”
- 17 “Relationship Dissolution*” AND “business”
- 18 “Relationship Dissolution*” AND “interfirm”

- 19 “Opportunism” OR “Opportunistic behav*” AND “B2B”
- 20 “Opportunism” OR “Opportunistic behav*” AND “buyer”
- 21 “opportunism” or “opportunistic behav*” and “seller”
- 22 “opportunism” or “opportunistic behav*” AND “inter firm”
- 23 “opportunism” or “opportunistic behav*” AND “interfirm”
- 24 “opportunism” or “opportunistic behav*” AND “inter organization*”
- 25 “opportunism” or “opportunistic behav*” AND “interorganization*”
- 26 “opportunism” or “opportunistic behav*” AND “supplier*”
- 27 “relation* conflict” AND “interfirm”
- 28 “relation* conflict” and “b2b”
- 29 “relation* conflict” and “buyer”
- 30 “supply chain disrupt*”
- 31 “supply chain failure*”
- 32 “Relation* violation*”

- 33 “destructive act*”
- 34 “perc* unfair*”
- 35 “interfirm” AND “failure”
- 36 “Business-to-business” AND “disrupt*”
- 37 “b2b” AND neglect
- 38 “logistic* disrupt*”
- 39 “dissolution” AND “buyer”
- 40 “dissolution” AND “seller”
- 41 “dissolution” AND “supplier”
- 42 “b2b” AND “dissolution”
- 43 “business” AND “dissolution”
- 44 relationship termination AND “b2b”
- 45 relationship termination AND “business to business”
- 46 relationship termination AND “interfirm”
- 47 “crisis” and “b2b”
- 48 “crisis” and “business to business”

Corresponding author

Vincent Jeseo can be contacted at: jeseo@rowan.edu

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