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Exploring the mediating role of marketing planning in enterprise marketing capabilities

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Abstract: In a constant changing market, firms must develop their ability to adapt developing strategies and marketing actions that capture the attention of potential consumers and meet their needs. Reputation management becomes a key resource that, through a structured marketing planning, captures a purpose of interaction of the companies' marketing capabilities, getting them to develop conscious actions in line with the market preferences. Thus, it is intended to understand the role of planning in marketing capabilities, exploring the direct and indirect effects of the several variables presented and the mediating effect of planning between brands' reputation and their marketing capabilities. The conceptual model was tested using PLS-SEM and survey data from 180 SMEs. The results concerning the direct effects and the mediating effect of planning in the marketing capabilities complement the existing research.

Keywords: marketing planning; marketing capabilities; partial least squares; PLS; brand reputation; B2B.

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1 Introduction

The recognition of the social context where organisations are located is an important factor in the perception of their existence, as well as a driver for the success of their objectives. The attempt to achieve competitive advantages, aligning the organisational values to the values supported by customers, has led to strategic changes in organisations (Dias et al., 2021). For the transmission of due value and prestige, the brands' reputation has become a fundamental resource, capable of improving and preserving the competitive position of a company in the market (Baldarelli and Gigli, 2014). The conscious management of reputation holds positive effects on the marketing performance, since it presents a purpose of interaction of the different marketing capabilities of organisations (Hamşioğlu, 2018).

The present study aims to explore the direct and indirect effect of a brand's reputation on the performance of the several marketing capabilities of an organisation through a careful and structured marketing planning, demystifying the rigid aspect of planning regarding the constant change of opinions exposed by the different stakeholders. This study also aims to explore the direct relationship to identify the leveraging effect considered in the indirect relationships. In this context, the article focuses on the contribution to the empirical development of studies in the area, capturing the progressive change of business environments and the companies' ability to adapt when developing marketing actions capable of satisfying the market, addressing the existing gap in the

literature regarding the mediating effect of marketing planning between a brand's reputation and its marketing capabilities.

Thus, an orientation towards reputation encourages organisations to manifest a conscious management of their marketing planning, to value above all the market perspective (Hamşioğlu, 2018). The marketing planning also presupposes the definition of a strategic orientation, capable of aligning the resources and capabilities of a company to the existing opportunities (Slotegraaf and Dickson, 2004), allowing them to take advantage of their best skills for the creation of sustainable competitive advantage (Dias and Pereira, 2017; Dias et al., 2022).

The research hypotheses were empirically tested through a quantitative study, through the development of a questionnaire with variables validated and previously measured by experienced authors in the area. It was then tested in 180 SMEs the different direct effects pointed out in the conceptual model, as well as the contribution of the brand reputation through the mediating effect of the marketing planning in the four marketing capabilities presented, with a data analysis based on the partial least squares (PLS) regression method.

Consequently, our findings recognise the existence of the direct effects pointed out, as well as the presence of the mediating effect of planning in the marketing capabilities. The existing literature proposes the direct relationships explored in the conceptual model created, although the mediation relationships analysed are not recognised at the level of the subject studied. Thus, the project also presents its contribution to the development of studies related to the mediating effect of planning in marketing capabilities, more precisely the mediating effect of marketing planning between a brand reputation and the four explored marketing capabilities. As a contribution, a unique conceptual model was also developed, which may contribute to future research in the area.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Planning and operational marketing capabilities

Planning comprises the anticipation of an articulated set of decisions, so that there can be a level of consistency in the activities performed, since it allows for a better perception of the available resources, as well as the best way to manage them. It consists of making clear and objective decisions, so that often controllable objectives can be established (Lendrevie et al., 2015). According to Slotegraaf and Dickson (2004), one of the marketing planning objectives is to determine a strategic direction, capable of aligning the resources and actions of an organisation to the market opportunities.

In other words, marketing planning is considered an effective tool, capable of dealing with uncertainty in constantly changing environments (Pyper et al., 2020), since companies that can achieve adequate planning have a different perception of change, being able to identify potential problems and improvement prospects over time. According to Slotegraaf and Dickson (2004), organisations with marketing planning skills can achieve alternatives to respond adequately to environmental changes by devoting resources to implement planned actions. However, the planning is also mentioned for its rigid aspect, capable of reducing the firm's ability to adapt in certain situations, allowing the loss of several opportunities (Lendrevie et al., 2015).

A company with marketing planning capabilities encompasses strategic forecasting capabilities of interconnecting its resources and the market (Pyper et al., 2020). B2B marketing specialist are engaged in the search for tools to create marketing plans to help them get more advantageous and measurable answers that enable companies to achieve strategic goals (Gagnon, 2016). Despite this, the marketing planning also relies on the strategic fit, getting companies to direct their resources and align their skills to market opportunities (Slotegraaf and Dickson, 2004).

Therefore, marketing planning contributes to the competitive perception of an organisation, resulting in a better coordination of activities and a comfortable preparation for eventual changes (McDonald et al., 2011). According to Meredith (2016), the progressive complexity of business networks has also increasingly raised the need to create multiple marketing plans for various stakeholders (Marom and Lussier, 2021). Different stakeholders gradually demonstrate their significant impact on the marketing plans and strategies of a company, becoming equally important the creation of marketing plans directed to the external environment, no longer existing only the care of transmission of positive attributes related to the brand or products to direct customers. With this, the assessment of the existing compatibility between the various marketing plans becomes essential, so that one can ensure the coherence and uniformity of the company.

The capabilities are combinations of knowledge and skills present in the organisational processes, in which the marketing capabilities are also included. According to Mohammed et al. (2017), the marketing capabilities include the skills that each organisation must take advantage of its resources, performing marketing actions that meet the market needs. Thus, companies should ensure the implementation of these capabilities strategically, allowing them to take advantage of their best skills to create sustainable competitive advantage (Dias and Pereira, 2017).

In other words, marketing capabilities integrate processes aimed at recognising and applying knowledge to add value in the market, interacting with each other to select appropriate marketing activities. According to Yuan et al. (2016), these correctly outlined and implemented marketing efforts can correctly redirect the market. According to Vorhies and Harker (2000), superior marketing capabilities lead to organisations being able to offer high value to their customers, creating touch points that make employees more confident at the moment of interaction (Cruz-Ros et al., 2010).

In addition, with the increasing complexity of the markets, it is necessary that companies pay attention to the development of their marketing capabilities. Day (2011) states that companies are becoming increasingly vigilant, creating adapted marketing capabilities that make organisations more dynamic. This dynamism allows organisations not only to build new competencies, but also to achieve a changing resource base, constituting an increment for organisational learning.

The power of marketing capabilities for the operation of any company is thus recognised, being the marketing function crucial in the interconnection of customers with the various processes of the company (Dias and Pereira, 2017). According to Day (2011), the marketing capabilities thus provide organisations with the means to adapt to market changes. Thus, and according to the resource-based view (RBV), companies tend to apply their capabilities and resources strategically, to make the best use of their distinctive skills to create competitive advantage (DeSarbo et al., 2006).

2.1.1 Pricing

The price is a decisive factor of any purchase process since it directly affects the customer. It refers to the amount charged for the purchase of products and/or services, so it becomes essential the adoption of a sound pricing strategy in the market, which directly impacts the profitability, the brand image and the sales volume of the company (Umashankar et al., 2017).

According to Vorhies and Morgan (2005), *pricing* capacity is thus the ability of each company to obtain the best revenue from its customers. The *pricing* ability reflects the knowledge that organisations hold in the definition of a suitable price for the transmission of a good's value. A price based on value leads to superior performance in organisations, since companies without pricing processes may be unable to set prices that reflect consumer needs. *Pricing* capability may refer not only to the ability to set prices within a firm, by identifying competing prices and defining new strategies, but also to the ability to set prices in the market, influencing customers and convincing them of the logic of price modification (Dutta et al., 2003).

The classical economic theory points out that a high price causes an impression of monetary sacrifice, thus decreasing the likelihood of purchase, however, in many services a high price also causes a feeling of quality, causing the purchase prospect to increase (Umashankar et al., 2017). Thus, it is proven that customers' perception of price is too subjective, depending mostly on contextual influences. However, this type of association is not usually common in B2B markets, since this type of buyers evaluate more objectively the *performance* of the products to be purchased and seek prices fairly-based (Lendrevie et al., 2015).

In the B2B market, the price tends to respect the value perceived by the customer, since increasingly this type of buyers demands a quantified value proposition, where it is presented a unique value suggestion with specific benefits (Hinterhuber and Liozu, 2018). Nevertheless, with the existing global competition at the digital marketing level, suppliers are also forced to consider the competition for the formation of a balanced pricing policy, given the high growth of substitute products (Baltes, 2016).

Finally, as B2B customers are more informed and have a better perception of price, they usually attach importance to its evolution in the long-term. Given their high purchasing power, they are also able to negotiate more advantageous prices, so that suppliers take this aspect into consideration when pricing their goods.

2.1.2 Product development

A product is equivalent to anything that is made available in the market for purchase, use or consumption, which satisfies consumers' needs and desires. According to Lendrevie et al. (2015), there are different categories of products in B2B markets:

- Raw materials and energy: Generally commonplace products, distinguished at the time of purchase decision by their price and security of supply.
- Capital goods: Durable products, normally linked to the provision of services.
- Components: Products that enter into the final composition of others.
- Consumables: Products that are used for the proper functioning of businesses.
- Consumer goods: Direct products, used immediately to satisfy needs.

- **Services:** Activities which do not take material form, but which also satisfy needs.

It is considered that the evolution of the digital world has been completely changing the product policy, with the integration of new digital items, where the concept of packaging is completely removed. Traditional marketing saw the product only because of a production process (Baltes, 2016). Currently, it is considered that the product is more than its characteristics, being an integrated set of intangible elements that can meet customer expectations (Pina and Dias, 2021). Thus, companies should seek to evolve their product development capabilities, making the processes by which they develop and manage their offerings (Vorhies and Morgan, 2005) meet the market expectations.

In a B2B context, the product development cycle should consider that customers value above all the creation of value (Hinterhuber and Liozu, 2018), generating basic market offers, flexible and with possible additions. Thus, the online environment has also allowed many companies to quickly identify consumer needs, for the constant development of new products, capable of satisfying them. According to He et al. (2019), the ability to develop new products plays a significant role in innovation.

According to Boyle (2007), the development of a new product must thus ensure unique and valuable benefits to the customer, which may result from unique product attributes, superior needs fulfilment, level of perceived quality and features that clearly differentiate it from competing products. With this, the control of competitors' product development activities also becomes indispensable in companies, given the competitive and constantly evolving market they face.

2.1.3 Marketing communication

Marketing communication is a process by which a customer understands an offer, a product, a service or even a company (Finne and Gronroos, 2017). It is the ability of a company to manage and shape customers' perceptions of value (Vorhies and Morgan, 2005).

Rėklaitis and Pilelienė (2019) mentioned that communication is used in disseminating selected information to customers to engage and attract them. Thus, the marketing communication strategy of any company should be customer-oriented, making the interaction with the market more effective (Gato et al., 2022). According to Batra and Keller (2016), it is both important to use traditional media, as well as digital media, thus emerging the concept of integrated communication, where companies are encouraged to use different types of communication until the consumer makes the final purchase decision. It is argued that even with the current digital media, the power of traditional tools remains high. The synergies created between these types of media are the key to the optimisation and effectiveness of any marketing plan, since they help in the formation of a clear and consistent message in the consumers' minds (Batra and Keller, 2016).

Regarding the ability of marketing communication, it enables organisations to use appropriate marketing communications to control the perceptions of market value. According to Murray et al. (2011) and Santos et al. (2022) companies with marketing communication skills have persuasion skills, causing consumers to hold a positive perception of the entity and its goods and/or services, building a differentiated idea.

In the B2B market, the customer tends to use rational criteria at the time of purchase decision, so it is necessary that communications have an appropriate tone for the message that is intended to convey. Companies should implement a marketing strategy that can

accompany consumers in the different stages of the purchase decision process, also choosing the appropriate communication for each of the stages, since B2B customers are properly informed and prepared for a final decision (Habibi et al., 2015). The choice of the communication strategy should also allow the transmission of a clear and consistent message, so that it is possible to turn potential customers into customers (Rėklaitis and Pilelienė, 2019).

That said, companies focus mainly on the rationality of products and their functionalities, since B2B customers tend to look for alternative solutions in the competition. The communication used in this context must therefore be purely consultative, to generate beneficial images of a company on the market and present a personalised contact to customers, to build their loyalty. This is not a *mass media* communication, but a specialised communication (Rėklaitis and Pilelienė, 2019).

2.1.4 Channel management

Gundlach et al. (2006) discussed distribution channels as being independent groups that make a product or service accessible to customers' use or consumption. Organisations should choose appropriate channels, creating new methods for progressive delivery of value to the consumer (Polat and Akgün, 2015). Vorhies and Morgan (2005) presented the channel management as the ability that companies demonstrate in maintaining and asserting distribution channels that effectively deliver added value to their customers. The channel management capability enables organisations to develop beneficial relationships with suitably qualified partners who solve any market knowledge gaps. This capability supports integration by developing networks that absorb all levels. Thus, building quality relationships depends on the channel management capability that each company holds (Fayos-Gardó et al., 2017).

According to Polat and Akgün (2015), in recent years, it has been observed an increase in the number of distribution channels, with different points of contact with B2B customers. These channels may have different shapes, lengths and widths, characteristics that must be evaluated together with other factors that affect the formation of a marketing channel.

The company's competitive strategy also influences the way of design and management of the distribution channels. According to Arbache et al. (2011), in an increasingly competitive context new distribution channels focused on the final customer are emerging. Through the choice of adapted distribution channels, companies can begin to ensure the availability of products in real time, since the marketing reaches market information that establish an increasingly accurate demand forecast.

That said, direct selling is regularly used in B2B markets, given the normal existence of a small number of customers, representing an important part of the turnover of companies. Direct selling thus enables the development of personal relationships with progressive perception and adaptation to customer needs, increasing companies' prospects of obtaining long-lasting customers. With this, the role of B2B companies in the training of their internal sales force is essential to obtain important information about the constant evolution of the market (Lendrevie et al., 2015).

2.2 *Development of hypotheses*

To discuss the mediating effect of marketing planning on the four main marketing capabilities: *pricing*, product development, marketing communication and channel management, the direct effect of brand reputation on marketing planning was explored, the direct effect of marketing planning on marketing capabilities was analysed and the mediating role of marketing planning was proposed.

2.2.1 *Brand reputation and marketing planning*

The marketing planning aggregates a set of actions and purposes specifically dated and detailed to be periodically controlled, while the marketing strategy consists only of a set of actions used to achieve certain objectives. However, both contribute to the achievement of competitive advantage in companies and are often used interchangeably to denominate the same concept (Lendrevie et al., 2015).

According to Priporas and Kamenidou (2011), the creation of a strong brand essentially contributes to the formation of the companies' marketing strategy, since the brand is recognised as a valuable asset, able to capture the attention of potential customers and to highlight an organisation from competitors. In addition, a brand is also able to represent a set of values that convey a perception of quality and prestige to the market.

The brand reputation thus motivates companies to choose appropriate marketing strategies, using and improving their capabilities over time, since they consider important to maintain a positive performance in its path. Reputation orientation leads organisations to have a conscious management throughout their marketing strategy and planning process, valuing mainly the customers' and other stakeholders' perspectives (Hamşioğlu, 2018).

Thus, the relationship between brand reputation and marketing planning led to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

H1 Brand reputation is positively related to marketing planning.

2.2.2 *The mediating effect of marketing planning on marketing capabilities*

2.2.2.1 *Pricing capacity*

Price is a strategic variable, which often defines the image and positioning of a product at the time of its launch (Lendrevie et al., 2015). The price decision at the initial stage of products' life thus becomes decisive, not only for its future implications in all subsequent pricing strategies, but also for its impact on how a customer view and responds to a given product.

Properly planned and achieved pricing strategies are conducive to competitors also developing their pricing skills, making it essential to plan marketing and production decision-making in these highly competitive environments (Sadjadi et al., 2005). However, a competitive cost structure also allows planning a very competitive pricing policy, capable of eliminating competition by simply confronting prices.

According to Sadjadi et al. (2005), constant efforts are applied to achieve profitability through pricing strategies, which also facilitate the increase of the companies' market share and the maximisation of their customers' satisfaction. To this end, marketing

experts rely on the creation of tools that contribute to the creation of effective marketing plans, capable of achieving the defined strategic objectives (Gagnon, 2016). Thus, the following study hypothesis was formulated:

H2 Marketing planning is positively related to pricing capability.

In addition, recurrent strategic and price planning decisions are based on the customers' perceived quality, given the regular possibility of analysis of their behaviours and preferences (Polat and Akgün, 2015). In this sense, and as a way of building prestigious levels of trust, companies pay more and more attention to the construction of solid brands, capable of influencing the market purchasing decisions (Sequeira et al., 2015). Thus, it was proposed the following mediating hypothesis:

H3 Marketing planning significantly mediates the relationship between brand reputation and pricing capability.

2.2.2.2 *Product development capacity*

According to Rădulescu and Cruceru (2012), a consistent strategic marketing planning tends to offer organisations a superior market competitive advantage. The constant adaptation to market changes should be one of the main concerns of companies to maintain a relevant competitive position, developing a market-oriented planning, capable of constantly satisfying customers.

One of the important steps performed in the marketing planning meets the product review policy, since the *performance* of each product is simply conditioned by different market factors (Dias and Lages, 2021). It is used a set of qualitative and quantitative methods, so that the performance of a product is estimated, so that it can be effectively determined which products should or should not be kept on the market, and the possibility of introducing new items, with market strategies capable of achieving the desired objectives for both choices consistently planned (Rădulescu and Cruceru, 2012).

The marketing planning directed to the product thus refers to a set of practices necessary for the development of a marketing strategy for each product, capable of assessing the consistency between the objectives of a product and the organisation market objectives (Lendrevie et al., 2015). Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H4 Marketing planning is positively related to product development capability.

Companies must also meet their customers through the creation of superior value, with the development of products and services that differentiate them from their competitors (Hinterhuber and Liozu, 2018). To this end, the continuous management of a brand's reputation, through its dynamic and recurring research, allows not only companies to carefully plan the transmission of messages for the development of innovative products to the market (Pinheiro et al., 2021), but also their successful marketing, simply because a brand can convey its sense of credibility and security within its population (Arazm, 2014). Thus, the following mediating hypothesis was enunciated:

H5 Marketing planning significantly mediates the relationship between brand reputation and product development capability.

2.2.2.3 Marketing communication skills

Marketing communication provides decisive information to the market, which helps in the purchase decision of each customer. The result of a well-planned communication campaign can lead an organisation to increase its sales volume, market share and consequently profitability. According to Siphon (2016), many studies have focused on the economic impact of communication on sales and the relationship between spending and meeting marketing communication objectives in companies. However, there are still few studies on the planning of marketing communication strategies for the design of marketing communication objectives of organisations.

According to Batra and Keller (2016), in integrated marketing communication many companies are encouraged in the use of different media to create relationships with customers and other stakeholders. However, this concept is also supported by their marketing communication planning enabled for added value with the use of a comprehensive plan that can effectively assess the strategic role of each form of communication (Chen et al., 2015). Having said this, the following hypothesis was developed:

H6 Marketing planning is positively related to marketing communication skills.

In addition, the maintenance and reputation management of a strong brand in the market require a careful planning of its communication elements, to enable a direct and timely engagement with the final customer. The adaptive management of each brand involves its responsiveness to consumer needs, so many organisations increasingly apply small-scale communication plans, thus being able to respond more effectively to market opportunities and threats (Polat and Akgün, 2015). Thus, the following mediating hypothesis was developed:

H7 Marketing planning significantly mediates the relationship between brand reputation and marketing communication skills.

2.2.2.4 Channel management capability

A distribution channel represents the route taken by a product, from the moment of its production until its consumption. The search for greater economic efficiency in distribution channels and the struggle for their control, demonstrated a greater concern with the creation and planning of distribution networks (Lendrevie et al., 2015). Thus, many companies began to use distribution planning systems to minimise investment risks and identify growth opportunities in the distribution network, to optimise channels for product delivery and measure performance according to market potential (Peterson, 2003).

The distribution function and its planning depend on the objectives and marketing strategies of a product, the characteristics of end customers and the characteristics of products (Lendrevie et al., 2015). According to Neves et al. (2001), distribution enables the creation of a stable competitive advantage since marketing channels are created in the long-term by the need for consistent and planned structures. The planning of a distribution channel should thus consider the careful description of the distribution chain and channels of an organisation, followed by a demanding analysis of the individual distribution chain of each product. Thus, the following study hypothesis was enunciated:

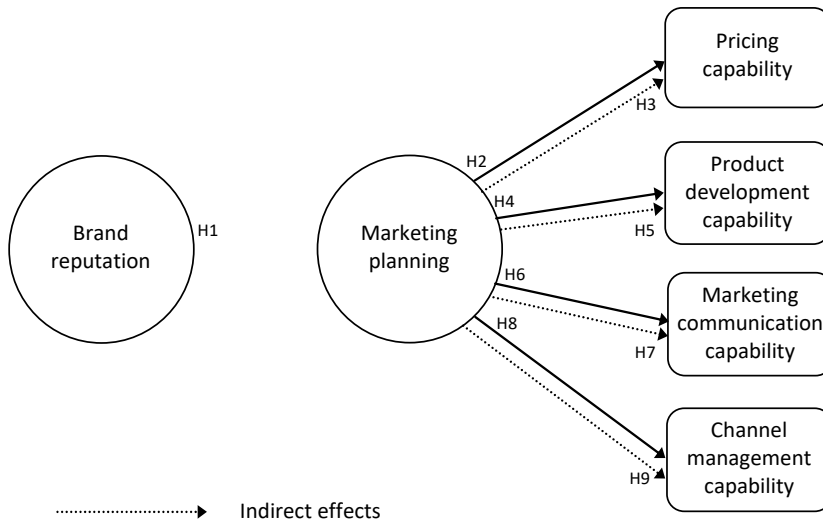
H8 Marketing planning is positively related to channel management capability.

Moreover, for the development and conservation of the set of ideas and opinions that the market retains of an organisation (Jakab and Happ, 2017), it becomes essential to create and plan new methods of reaching the market through distribution channels to enable the delivery of superior value to each customer (Polat and Akgün, 2015), so the following mediating hypothesis was proposed:

H9 Marketing planning significantly mediates the relationship between brand reputation and channel management capability.

The described hypotheses are depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Conceptual model



3 Methodology

3.1 Data collection and sampling

It was adopted a quantitative approach based on survey data, based on a questionnaire based on scales existing in the literature as described in the following section, by which it was constituted a sample of 180 Portuguese SMEs, corresponding to a response rate of 15%. Since the total universe of Portuguese SMEs was too high, it was adopted a non-purposive sampling method, meaning that the sampling selection add not purpose in mind, so no specific group of SMEs was selected. The number of responses is threefold the recommended minimum sample of ten responses for each variable used in the model (Hair et al., 2017). Data collection was carried out over the internet between January 20 and April 27, 2021, with the sending of the questionnaire by email to the different SMEs existing in a database.

Initially, the questionnaire was pre-tested with seven respondents linked to the marketing area, who were encouraged to comment and highlight elements they

considered controversial. Their opinion was used to improve and refine the questionnaire that was subsequently sent to the remaining companies. It should be noted that these seven questionnaires were not included in the final sample, having served only as an experiment.

When sending the questionnaire, it was suggested that the respondent had a global view of the company, so it was added a mandatory response field where the respondent could point out his/her current position. It was thus noted that most of the questionnaires were submitted by individuals with senior positions, such as executive directors, marketing directors and financial directors. That said, the questionnaire began by conveying the objectives of the study carried out, as well as the confidential nature of the treatment of the information provided by each company, comprising then an initial set of questions for obtaining a brief description of the participating organisations, through the type of sector, size and years of activity. In the second part of the questionnaire, questions with themes related to brand reputation, marketing planning and the various marketing capabilities of the study were then included.

After analysing the results, it was found that 50% of the Portuguese SMEs taking part in the research belonged to the services sector, 32% to the trade sector and the remaining 18% to the industry sector. As for the size, considering for this purpose the number of employees, 26% of the enterprises had less than nine employees, 27% between 10 and 49 employees, 32% between 49 and 99 employees and only 15% comprised more than 100 employees. Finally, 25% of the surveyed companies had been in business for less than three years, 28% had been in business between 3 and 5 years, 27% between 6 and 10 years and the remaining 20% claimed to have been in business for over 11 years.

3.2 Variables

This study adopted existing scales for the measurement of all variables. Brand reputation was measured through a five-point *Likert* scale, adapted from Avlonitis et al. (2001), Lievens and Moenaert (2000) and Van Riel et al. (2004). Through several statements respondents evaluated their company from 1 (worse than competitors) to 5 (better than competitors), compared to their main competitors.

A five-point *Likert* scale, adapted from Vorhies and Morgan (2005), was used to measure the marketing planning variable whereby respondents rated various statements from 1 (worse than competitors) to 5 (better than competitors).

Finally, and for the assessment of the different marketing capabilities studied (*pricing* capability, product development capability, marketing communication capability and channel management capability), the five-point *Likert* scale adapted from Vorhies and Morgan (2005) was also used. Respondents thus rated their company's current skills and knowledge compared to their competitors, using a scale from 1 (worse than competitors) to 5 (better than competitors).

4 Result

4.1 Data analysis

To test the conceptual model previously presented, the PLS regression method was applied using the SmartPLS 3 *software* (Ringle et al., 2015). Subsequently, the analysis

and understanding of the results focused on the assessment of model reliability and validity, followed by the evaluation of the structural model results. The assessment of model quality was tested using individual indicators of reliability, convergent validity, internal consistency reliability and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2017).

The reliability of the individual indicator was proven, as the results showed that the standardised factor loadings of any elements were above 0.6 (showing a minimum value of 0.79), all being significant when $p < 0.001$ (Hair et al., 2017).

Next, it was observed that Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) and composite reliability (CR) showed values higher than the threshold value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017), thus confirming the reliability of the internal consistency (Table 1).

Table 1 Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α), CR and average variance extracted (AVE)

<i>Variables</i>	α	CR	AVE
1 Brand reputation	0.920	0.939	0.754
2 Channel management capacity	0.950	0.962	0.834
3 Marketing communication skills	0.912	0.934	0.740
4 Marketing planning	0.963	0.971	0.870
5 Pricing capacity	0.901	0.931	0.771
6 Product development capacity	0.923	0.942	0.763

Convergent validity was also validated, given that all items presented positive and significant loadings, CR values were higher than 0.7 and all variables presented mean variance extracted (MVA) values above 0.5 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988), as shown in Table 1.

Table 2 Correlations and support for discriminant validity

<i>Variables</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>
1 Brand reputation	<i>0.868</i>	0.418	0.533	0.440	0.441	0.469
2 Channel management capacity	0.406	<i>0.913</i>	0.624	0.579	0.580	0.547
3 Marketing communication skills	0.506	0.579	<i>0.860</i>	0.843	0.757	0.695
4 Marketing planning	0.437	0.555	0.814	<i>0.933</i>	0.740	0.582
5 Pricing capacity	0.418	0.538	0.685	0.690	<i>0.878</i>	0.573
6 Product development capacity	0.449	0.516	0.637	0.552	0.526	<i>0.873</i>

Notes: The diagonal numbers presented in italic are the square roots of AVE. Below the diagonal are the correlations between variables. Above the diagonal are the HTMT values.

Subsequently, and to assess discriminant validity, two distinct approaches were used. First, it was used a criterion proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981), which determines that the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE), presented in italic in Table 2, should be higher than the highest value of the correlation between the variables, and as can be seen, this principle is met (Table 2). Next, the *heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio* was applied (Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2015), which states that all HTMT values should be lower than 0.85, and as can be seen in Table 2, this criterion is also confirmed, so there is evidence of discriminant validity.

The collinearity of the model was then assessed through the variance inflation factor (VIF). Based on the results obtained, with a minimum VIF of 1.00 and maximum of 1.24,

both lower than the critical value of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2017), it can be concluded that there is no collinearity.

Finally, the structural model was then analysed for the magnitude and significance of its structural coefficients, with the assessment of predictive accuracy through R^2 values and the appreciation of predictive relevance through Q^2 values (Hair et al., 2017). The R^2 records of the dependent variables of the model: marketing planning, *pricing* capability, product development capability, marketing communication capability and channel management capability were 19%, 49%, 36%, 69% and 34%, respectively. These values are higher than 10% (Falk and Miller, 1992), so the predictive accuracy of the model can be confirmed. As regards the Q^2 values for the same variables, they were 0.161, 0.365, 0.239, 0.495 and 0.272, respectively, indicating the predictive relevance of the model since they are values above zero. In addition, it is worth mentioning the use of *bootstrapping* with 5,000 repetitions, a non-parametric procedure that allowed us to assess the significance of the estimates of these parameters.

4.2 Direct effects

The results of Table 3 show that the variables with the highest correlation between them are the marketing planning and the marketing communication ability ($\beta = 0.733$). As for the brand reputation and the marketing planning it is observed the opposite, since they are the variables that present a lower correlation ($\beta = 0.437$).

Table 3 Evaluation of the structural model

<i>Direct effects</i>	<i>Path coefficient</i>	<i>Standard errors</i>	<i>t statistics</i>	<i>p values</i>
Brand reputation --> marketing planning	0.437	0.121	3.601	0.000
Marketing planning --> channel management skills	0.466	0.151	3.082	0.002
Marketing planning --> marketing communication skills	0.733	0.070	10.470	0.000
Marketing planning --> <i>pricing</i> ability	0.628	0.133	4.730	0.000
Marketing planning --> product development capability	0.440	0.151	2.903	0.004

Regarding the direct effects between the variables, brand reputation has a significantly positive effect on marketing planning ($\beta = 0.437$, $p < 0.001$), which supports H1.

Marketing planning has a significantly positive effect on channel management capability ($\beta = 0.466$, $p < 0.01$) and product development capability ($\beta = 0.440$, $p < 0.01$), which supports H8 and H4, respectively. In addition, marketing planning is highly correlated with marketing communication capability ($\beta = 0.733$, $p < 0.001$) and *pricing* capability ($\beta = 0.628$, $p < 0.001$), and these results support H6 and H2, respectively.

4.3 Mediating effects

The mediating hypotheses were tested according to the recommendations of Hair et al. (2017, p.232). Thus, a *bootstrapping* procedure was used to test the significance of the indirect effects through the mediators (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). Table 4 thus presents the results of the mediator effects.

Table 4 Result of specific mediating effects

<i>Mediating effects</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Standard errors</i>	<i>t statistics</i>	<i>p values</i>
Brand reputation --> marketing planning --> channel management capability	0.204	0.076	2.678	0.008
Brand reputation --> marketing planning --> marketing communication skills	0.320	0.087	3.661	0.000
Brand reputation --> marketing planning --> <i>pricing</i> ability	0.274	0.077	3.554	0.000
Brand reputation --> marketing planning --> product development capability	0.192	0.073	2.641	0.009

The indirect effect of brand reputation on channel management capability through the mediating effect of marketing planning is significant ($\beta = 0.204$, $p < 0.01$), which supports H9.

In addition, the indirect effect of brand reputation on marketing communication ability through the mediating effect of marketing planning is also significant ($\beta = 0.320$, $p < 0.001$), being a supporting result for H7.

In support of H3, the indirect effect of brand reputation on *pricing* ability through the mediating effect of marketing planning was found to be a significant effect ($\beta = 0.274$, $p < 0.001$).

Finally, the indirect effect of brand reputation on product development capability through the mediating effect of marketing planning is also significant ($\beta = 0.192$, $p < 0.01$), which supports H5.

In short, it is understood from this that marketing planning mediates the relationship between brand reputation and the various marketing capabilities studied.

5 Discussion

As a result of constantly changing business environments, B2B companies are increasingly considering building solid brands in the marketplace, capable of transmitting levels of trust and professionalism that influence consumer choices. The creation of a consistent brand reputation thus guarantees a set of benefits seen as a source of competitive advantage, which ensure that companies apply their skills to make the most of the market. With this, it was understood how brand reputation affects the marketing capabilities of a company, through a careful marketing planning.

5.1 Direct effects

According to the study carried out, the brand reputation has a positive effect on the marketing planning, which is consistent with previous research (Priporas and Kamenidou, 2011). The creation of a solid brand reputation motivates companies to plan a set of strategies capable of valuing especially the perspective of their customers, given the importance of maintaining a positive and balanced performance of their path in the market (Hamşioğlu, 2018) and increasingly arouse the attention of their current and potential consumers.

The tested model also ensured consistency with the literature regarding the positive effect that the marketing planning presents on the four marketing capabilities studied. Firstly, the application of pricing capabilities becomes fundamental in defining the image and positioning of products (Lendrevie et al., 2015), however, in highly competitive environments, where more and more competitors also develop this type of pricing capabilities, it is necessary a strategic planning of a cost structure, able to overcome the market competition (Sadjadi et al., 2005) and positively influence consumers (Dutta et al., 2003).

Subsequently, the positive effect of the marketing planning in the product development capability supported the exposed in the literature (Rădulescu and Cruceru, 2012; Pereira et al., 2021). There is a need for consistent planning of the product review policy present in organisations, to achieve the strategic objectives previously defined, meeting the expectations and market preferences. As the performance of each product is subject to several market factors, it is always necessary to estimate it to better understand and plan strategies to introduce new products, review strategies of current ones or even strategies to discontinue others already in decline.

Next, the positive effect revealed of the marketing planning on the marketing communication skills is in accordance with Chen et al. (2015). The planning of the different communication skills favours the coherent use of available communication resources, facilitating not only the interaction of an organisation with its market (Batra and Keller, 2016), but also the positive influence on customers' value perceptions.

Finally, the direct relationship between marketing planning and channel management capability also reveals a positive effect, in line with the theoretically addressed literature. To maximise the existing resources and optimise the products delivery channels, Peterson (2003) stated that companies increasingly use planning systems for the distribution channels management. The channel management capability creates a competitive advantage by creating consistent channels and structures, capable of getting the products and/or services to the final customer in the best circumstances (Neves et al., 2001).

5.2 Mediating effects

Based on the results obtained, the marketing planning presents a mediating effect between the brand reputation and the several marketing capabilities studied, however, these mediation relationships are still poorly developed not only from the theoretical point of view, but also from the practical point of view, since none of the authors demonstrate them concretely. Thus, the study presents its contribution to the development of research related to the mediating effect of the marketing planning in the marketing capabilities.

According to Baldarelli and Gigli (2014), responsible brand reputation management has become a key resource in a company's competitive position, supporting the presentation of a purpose of existing interaction between different marketing capabilities (Hamşioğlu, 2018) through the constant conjunction of organisational values and customer-supported values that planning capabilities held in organisations can achieve, to better respond to changes in the market.

Strategic pricing decisions are based on customers' perceived quality (Polat and Akgün, 2015), so companies pay more and more attention to the creation of strong brands to create high levels of trust, capable of influencing the value transmitted and perceived by the market. In this way, the marketing planning will encompass strategic capabilities

of interconnection of the value perceived by customers, through the perception created by a strong brand, with the skills that a company must enjoy more competitive pricing strategies.

With continuous reputation management, companies play an active role of research to somehow understand the quality perceived by their audience (Arazm, 2014). Through this dynamic research, they can understand the needs and preferences of consumers, best planning the integrated use of skills that make the best use of their product development resources, thereby satisfying customers. With this, organisations increase the probability of developing reference products and services that can stand out in the market.

When it comes to marketing communication capacity, companies increasingly use their resources and skills to maintain a careful response to opportunities and threats from the outside (Polat and Akgün, 2015). With this, a strong brand requires a consistent marketing communication planning, to enable an objective engagement with customers and the transmission of values and ideals in line with the principles strengthened in the market, creating selected and consumer-oriented messages.

Finally, and to conserve and increase the opinion that the market retains of an organisation, it is essential to create a strategic marketing planning that aggregates a path of distribution channels, capable of reaching the public effectively and with added value offered through the service provided or product sold.

6 Conclusions

6.1 *Theoretical contributions*

This research used a quantitative approach to achieve the proposed objectives and achieve the necessary type of companies. It aimed to understand the direct relationships between the variables of the proposed conceptual model, as well as the indirect link existing between a brand reputation and the studied marketing capabilities, through the marketing planning.

After testing the conceptual model created and evaluating the direct and mediating effects between the various variables, it was concluded that there is a mediating effect of marketing planning between brand reputation and *pricing ability*, product development ability, marketing communication ability and channel management ability. Thus, the study proved to be a contribution to the development of the literature.

First, a previously untested conceptual model was developed, which contributed to the empirical research in this area. It was also concluded that brand reputation has a direct effect on marketing planning, just as marketing planning has a direct relationship with the four marketing capabilities presented. Thus, the results also ensured that the marketing planning variable, which has a direct effect with all the other variables, plays a mediating role between brand reputation and marketing capabilities.

6.2 *Implications for business management*

From a business point of view, it is crucial to adopt a consistent marketing planning that anticipates a structured set of decisions, to ensure strategic forecasting capabilities for a better interconnection of a company's capabilities and resources with the market. Nevertheless, the investment in a strong brand becomes an asset, since it can motivate a

company to plan in the best way a set of strategies and marketing actions able to capture the public's attention, taking advantage and increasingly improving its capabilities over time.

Thus, the study concluded that marketing planning mediates the influence of brand reputation on marketing capabilities: *pricing* capability, product development capability, marketing communication capability and channel management capability. Consequently, and to develop a company's marketing capabilities, one should invest in a brand's reputation, since it shapes, in a certain way, a company's ability to act, thus contributing to the formation of marketing strategies that are strongly based on its recognition in the market.

6.3 Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

Throughout this study, some relevant limitations emerged, which may create opportunities for improvement for potential future investigations and research. Firstly, the questionnaire was sent only to SMEs located in Portugal and listed in a database, so the sample was too limited, and the results cannot be extrapolated to different realities. In future research, it would be interesting to test the conceptual model created in other types of countries, with a different degree of development from Portugal.

Furthermore, the size of the surveyed organisations also presented limitations to the study, since only SMEs were selected. In other studies, it might make sense to understand the mediating effect of planning in another type of company, such as micro or large companies.

Another limitation of this work was the low number of responses to the questionnaire sent by e-mail, so it could also be interesting to use another form of contact with the companies. Finally, this study could also be extended in other directions. Future research may focus on other marketing capabilities, since the present study only focused on the mediating effect of marketing planning on *pricing capability*, product development capability, marketing communication capability and channel management capability. Thus, it may be interesting to focus on other capabilities to broaden the results obtained.

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