# The role of corporate brand image for B2B relationships of logistics service providers in China

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the strategic significance of B2B corporate brand image of global logistics corporate brand providers in China offering international express parcel/postage delivery services. Drawing on dual-process theory the study revealed the processing of industrial corporate brand image by managers corresponds to System 1 processing (immediate, effortless and non-conscious), and the conceptualization of corporate brand attributes equates to System 2 processing (considered, deliberate and cerebral). However, in selecting an industrial corporate brand managers accorded greater importance to industrial corporate brand image and to System 1 processing. The study also found that a positive industrial corporate brand image of logistics brands has a favorable impact apropos premium pricing and brand retention. As such, the research reveals how the selection of an industrial corporate brand by managers is materially shaped by corporate brand image and, moreover, the process of selection is more nuanced and complicated that has hitherto been realized.

## 1. Introduction

To date, most research on brand image focuses on the image of products and services and comparatively few studies focus on the image of companies (corporate brand image). Moreover, there is a paucity of research on corporate image in the business-to-business (B2B) sector and which we, in this article, give the designation industrial corporate brand image. Furthermore, empirical research on the value of industrial corporate brand image of logistics companies operating in rapidly emerging/transitional economies markets is insubstantial. Mindful of these research gaps, our study explores industrial corporate brand image from the perspective of organizational buyers in Dalian, a major Chinese logistic hub, who utilize international express parcel/postage delivery services. More particularly, this empirical study scrutinizes B2B logistics brands of global, as well as local, brands operating in and out of mainland China.

The research is distinctive in that our study on industrial corporate brand image is informed by nostrums of dual process theory (System 1 and System 2 processing) which, although having its roots in cognitive psychology, has also advanced marketing theory (Dhar & Gorlin, 2013; Evans, 1984; Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Graf & Landwehr, 2015; Kahneman & Frederick, 2002; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Stanovich & West, 2000). However, dual process theory has not been utilized in

relation to brand image, corporate brand image and corporate image research, nor, more generally, employed in industrial marketing/B2B contexts. This study, with its focus on industrial corporate brand image, conjoins industrial marking with the corporate brand image notion. Therefore, utilizing dual process theory, this empirical study explores the notion that the processing of industrial corporate brand image by managers represents System 1 processing (immediate, effortless and non-conscious), and that service attribute evaluation by managers can be conceptualized as System 2 processing (considered, deliberate and cerebral). Mindful of existent brand image research, this empirical study also examines whether a positive industrial corporate brand image of logistics brands has a favorable impact apropos premium pricing and customer retention. In relation to both dual process theory and the positive effects on industrial corporate brand image on premium pricing, their corroboration, following on from Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson, and Lowe (2008), would mean that both perspectives could, in theoretical terms, be characterized as a *research reflection(s)*. A research reflection is where a research insight in one domain (apropos corporate brand image in consumer contexts) is found to be applicable to a new context (in relation to industrial corporate brand image apropos organizational buyers) and, therefore, can be considered as a meaningful theoretical contribution.

Industrial corporate brand image represents a logical development

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of the nascent corporate brand image construct as the literature attests (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012; Alwi & Kitchen, 2014; Bravo, Montaner, & Pina, 2010; Hawabhay, Abratt, & Peters, 2009; Rindell & Strandvik, 2010; Srivastava & Sharma, 2013; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). Consequently, industrial corporate brand image is a specific genus of corporate brand image which has a specific applicability to industrial, rather than to consumer-orientated, corporate brands. To date, only a few studies have a tangential focus on industrial corporate brand image (Blombäck & Axelsson, 2007; Flax, Bick, & Abratt, 2016; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). Ostensibly, none of the above has been undertaken in the B2B logistics sector.

Mindful of the early definition of corporate image by Gray and Balmer (1998) and the precepts of dual processing theory, it can be advanced that there are tripartite explanations of how brand images, corporate brand images and corporate images are constituted. First, an image is formed on the basis of immediate, effortless, non-conscious, rapid and automatic mental attributions of individuals (System 1 processing); second, where an individual has the requisite abilities and motivational needs, an image is formed on the basis of significant cognitive deliberations of an individual's working memory which results in a more-considered mental attribution (System 2 processing). This study primarily focuses on System 1 and System 2 processing. However, it is also conceivable that individuals form images by marshalling both System 1 and System 2 approaches as part of an iterative processes (in effect a System 3 approach). Following Becker, Bryman, and Ferguson (2012), in identifying modes of theoretical contribution, the findings of this empirical study aim to make distinctive middle-range theoretical contribution.

This research is timely owing to its focus on China: a country which has the fastest-growing logistics market in global terms. Furthermore, the study is important since China is the largest, and unquestionably the most important, of all transitional economies. Significantly, too, it is the world's second largest economy, and is predicted to be the world's biggest in due course (Balmer & Chen, 2015, 2017). As marketing scholars have observed, industrial marketing managers are attracted by the growth potential in transitional economies such as China (Dawar & Chattopadhyay, 2002; Douglas, Craig, & Nijssen, 2001). This being noted, the progression of transitional economies is, in part, reliant on organizations having recourse to effective distribution partnerships (Rahman, Melewar, & Sharif, 2014). However, the significance of industrial corporate brand image in transitional economies remains unexplored. This research appears to be the first major study to scrutinize industrial corporate brand image in China and the first to examine industrial corporate brand image in China's logistics sector. An added distinction of this inquiry is its focus on indigenous but also foreign, often global, B2B logistics corporate brands offering distinctive *express* parcel/postal services in China. Extant research has found Chinese consumers, as with other developing economies, prefer global brands (Zhan & He, 2012; Ramaswamy, Slden, Steenkamp, & Ramachander 2000). However, in terms of this study, there is a relative dearth of empirical research on industrial corporate brand image industrial marketing management in China, and in particular relation to China's logistics sector.

The article continues with a discussion of international logistic brands in Asia and China and then considers the conceptual background to this study by deliberating on dual process theory, corporate brands, corporate image, brand image, corporate brand image and industrial corporate brand image. This is followed by the development of hypotheses and a discussion of the methodology employed. The article closes with a reflection on the research findings and a discussion on the limitations of this study along with avenues for future research.

## 2. International logistics brands in Asia and China

### 2.1. Logistics brands in Asian transitional economies

Within Asian transitional economies, well-established foreign logistics corporate brands have the expertise, reach, reliability, speed and flexibility required by both domestic and multinational corporations. In Asia, the leading global logistics brands are mainly from the EU and the USA (e.g. UPS, FedEx, and DHL). There are national variations of the aforementioned, and a case in point is Japan. There, Japanese logistics brands such as Yamato, Nippon Express and Kintetsu are prominent, but, while they enjoy pole positions in Japan and are prominent as part of Japanese international networks, they have been slow to expand in Asia's transitional economies (Foster & Armstrong, 2004). Other notable logistics brands in Asia (often serving local or national markets) include South Korea's JSI and CEVA logistics companies; Indonesia's Cardig, Kargo, Kamadjaja, and Puninar logistics firms; Malaysia's Tasco and Jara logistics organizations; and India's House of Patels, Gati, VRL and ABC logistics entities.

Among Asia's most-significant transitional economies, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, Vietnam etc. the considerable growth of the logistics sector corresponds to the dramatic economic development in these countries. Arguably, therefore, organizational buyers in selecting distribution partnerships are likely to be attracted to logistics corporate brands offering express parcel/postal delivery services which have well-established industrial corporate brand images. The above being noted, to date, the literature on industrial logistics corporate brands in transitional economies primarily focuses on success factors of logistics partnerships (Marquardt, Golicic, & Davis, 2011; Rahman et al., 2014) rather than on industrial corporate brand images per se. As such, the findings of this study have the potential to re-address this omission.

### 2.2. International logistics brands in China

Characterized as "the workshop of the world" (an epithet last held by Great Britain in the 19th Century), today, China is resolved to become the world's largest economy. Having progressively disavowed a monolithic and state-controlled economy, a mixed system economy, typified by "capitalistic" and market-orientated features, enjoys a hegemonic status in China (Balmer & Chen, 2017).

The size and strength of the Chinese market means that for both global and local home-grown B2B corporate logistics brands, China is viewed as a highly lucrative - if not "core" - market. Currently, China's highly-competitive logistics sector is dominated by a quintet of industrial corporate brands, of which four are foreign-owned. The five major players are FedEx *(USA),* UPS *(USA),* DHL *(Germany),* TNT *(The Netherlands)* and EMS *(China).* Established global corporate brands are likely to have accorded a more nuanced approach to strategic industrial corporate brand image building than local (Chinese) brands since the latter have typically operated in a closed market. The above being noted, there are also significant, and high-profile, indigenous logistical shipping brands which represent an important arm of China's logistics infrastructure and include China Ocean Shipping, SINOTRANS, Jizhong Energy International Logistics and so on. However, given this study's focus on international express, rather than generic, parcel/postal delivery services, this accounts for the focus on the five major logistics players detailed earlier. It also affords another explanation why this empirical study may be deemed to be distinctive.

## 3. Conceptual background

By means of context, and to re-iterate, in terms of dual process theory as utilized in this study, the research is informed by the perspective that the processing of industrial corporate brand image by organizational buyers represents a System 1 processing of dual process

theory, whereas the logistics service attribute evaluation of industrial corporate brand image by organizational buyers represents a System 2 processing of dual process theory.

### 3.1. Dual process perspective on cognition, attribution and decision-making

According to Colman (2015), the dual process model in psychology can be traced back to the late 19th Century with the work of US psychologist William James in his *Principles of Psychology* (James, 1890). According to this psychological approach, information processing and decision-making of social information is underpinned by two qualitatively different mechanisms of social information (Colman, 2015). In dual process theory, these mechanisms of social information processing are divided into two general systems: System 1 and System 2 (Aydinli, Bertini, & Lambrecht, 2014; Colman, 2015; Dhar & Gorlin, 2013; Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Graf & Landwehr, 2015; Kahneman, 2003, 2011). System 1 processing is *affective* in character and involves the unconscious, rapid and automatic processing of information which is characterized by *effort-saving heuristics*. System 2 processing is *cognitive* in character and entails a conscious, slow and deliberative processing of information based on *time-consuming reasoning*. The key distinguishing feature between the two systems of processing is the engagement of working memory (Aydinli et al., 2014; Colman, 2015; Dhar & Gorlin, 2013; Kahneman, 2003, 2011). System 1 makes only minimal demands on working memory: they are effortless and therefore primed by default. In contrast, System 2 loads heavily on working memory: it consumes scarce processing resources and therefore tends to play a secondary, more corrective role that is activated judiciously by factors in the environment that cue the motivation to exert mental effort (Evans & Stanovich, 2013). System 2 is activated when people have both the motivation and the ability to engage in meaningful processing (Smith & DeCoster, 2000). The default-interventionist perspective believes that most judgments and choices are made intuitively, using System 1 processing (Kahneman & Frederick, 2002). This is because people, by default, look at the gestalt of the object rather than the details, and the rational processing of System 2 is activated only to confirm, or modify, the decision, by evaluating each of the important service attributes (Evans, 2006; Kahneman & Frederick, 2002).

In this study, we conceptualize that the processing of corporate brand image is a System 1 processing, whereas the logistics service attribute evaluation is a System 2 processing. Mindful of the definition of corporate image by Gray and Balmer (1998), and drawing on the key precepts of System 1 and System 2 theories elaborated above, the authors propose the definitions of corporate brand image.

"System 1 corporate brand image is a spontaneous affective response by an individual upon hearing the corporate brand name or in seeing a corporate brand name or logo. Consequently, the resultant attribution of a corporate brand identity by an individual is emotive, unconscious and effortless".

"System 2 corporate brand image is a reflective cognitive response by an individual upon hearing the corporate brand name or in seeing a corporate brand name or logo. Consequently, the resultant attribution of a corporate brand identity by an individual is cerebral, considered and arduous".

### 3.2. Corporate brands

Today, corporate brands are accorded considerable importance within the marketing canon as the recent literature attests (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2009; Balmer, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Gyrd-Jones, Merrilees, & Miller, 2013; Liu, Foscht, Eisingerich, & Tsai, 2018; Mohan, Voss, Jiménez, & Gammoh, 2018; Sevel, Abratt, & Kleyn, 2018; Silva, Gerwe, & Becerra, 2017; Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018; Tuškej & Podnar, 2018; Essamri, McKechnie, & Winklhofer, 2019; Greyser & Urde, 2019; Iglesias, Markovic, Singh, & Sierraet, 2019). Formally introduced by Balmer (1995), much of the groundwork

in delineating the nature and strategic significance of corporate brands took place in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Burt & Sparks, 2002; Ind, 1997, 1998; Kapferer, 2012). As such, in articulating the nature of a corporate brand, it was argued that it was derived from an organization's corporate identity; required organizational-wide commitment; necessitated a stakeholder focus; was multidisciplinary in scope, and warranted on-going responsibility from the CEO and the senior management board owing to its normative and strategic significance (Balmer, 1995, 2010, 2012a).

Ind (1997), stressing its instrumental importance, noted that a corporate brand is more than a name or logo but is concerned with an organization's corporate values, while Hatch & Schultz (2001, 2013) asserted that it is fundamentally concerned with mission, culture and image but did not engage with the notion of the corporate brand promise/covenant. A corporate brand represents a powerful covenant (an informal contract) between a firm and its stakeholders (Balmer, 2001a; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Balmer & Greyser, 2003). Moreover, it is a mark of assurance and is dependent on an organization's corporate identity (what a corporation makes, what it does and how it behaves) delivering the brand promise (Balmer, 2012a, 2012b). The real value of a corporate brand is derived from its emotional ownership on the part of customers and other stakeholders, in contrast to legal ownership, which is vested in the corporation (Balmer, 2012a, 2012b).

Scholars have also noted the saliency of corporate brands in B2B sectors. As such, industrial corporate brands are strategic assets (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2011; Webster, 2000) and are important in both transitional and mature economies (Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). Extant studies have explicated how, in strategic terms, global brands differ from local brands. Research reveals strategic differences in local versus international brands (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004). In terms of multinational corporate brands (MNB), it has been shown they face particular challenges, particularly in relationship to environmental contexts, which, typically, are not experienced by domestic brands (Khojastehpour, Ferdous, & Polonsky, 2015). However, in business-to-consumer (B2C) contexts, international corporate brands are invariably perceived as having a quality aura which is strategically advantageous (Batra et al., 2000). Regarding this study's focus on China, scholars have found corporate brands to be important in both emerging and in transitional economies (Dawar & Chattopadhyay, 2002; Douglas et al., 2001; Meyer & Estrin, 2001; Xie & Boggs, 2006; Low, 2007). In such markets, established corporate brands have an advantage in terms of successful market entry (Low, 2007; Meyer & Estrin, 2001) and are powerful vehicles for growth and profitability. Adopting a corporate marketing perspective, it has also been argued that Urde (1994), brand orientation notion can be broadened so that is apposite for corporate brands and this resulted in the formal introduction of the corporate brand orientation notion (Balmer, 2013), whereby the corporate brand provides a guiding philosophy and culture for an organization.

### 3.3. Corporate image

The corporate image concept came to the fore in the 1950s/early 1960s, with notable contributions being made by Boulding (1956), Martineau (1958a, 1958b), Bolger (1959), Bristol (1960), Boorstin (1961), Crespi (1961), and Spector (1961), and several authors began to explore the relationship between the corporate image and the brand (Swanson, 1957; Tyler, 1957). Arguably, the work of Boulding (1956) and Martineau (1958b) were the most influential of the above, with Boulding (1956) explaining the critical importance of image to the human psyche, and, furthermore, noting that there was a priori link between a person's image of an organization and their resultant behavior toward the entity. For his part, Martineau (1958b) commented that customers having favorable corporate images of an organization meant a firm was imbued with a competitive advantage. This perspective has been reflected in subsequent work on the territory (Abratt, 1989; Bristol, 1960; Bernstein, 1984; Dichter, 1985; Dowling, 1986, 1993;

Garbett, 1988; Barich & Kotler, 1991; Worcester, 1997; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Nguyen & Leblanc, 2001; Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006; Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson, & Beatty, 2009; Tran, Nguyen, Melewar, & Bodoh, 2015). While corporate marketing scholars, arguably, have been most conspicuous in their research and scholarship on corporate image, important contributions have been made by others including Alvesson (1990) and Morgan (1986).

According to Gray and Balmer (1998), a corporate image relates to the mental picture held of an organization by an individual and is what comes to mind when a person sees or hears the company logo and/or corporate name. It represents the totality of impressions and/or perceptions held of an organization (Kennedy, 1977; Bromley, 1993; Davies, Chun, DaSilva, & Roper, 2003). A corporate image is constituted of functional and emotional meanings (Kennedy, 1977). Emotional feelings are psychological in character and have their sources in the individual experiences of an organization and the processing of knowledge relating to a firm's characteristics (Nguyen & Leblanc, 2001).

Whereas, the default explanation apropos corporate image today is that it is understood to relate to an individual's conceptualization of an organization (Gray & Balmer, 1998; Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2010), the concept has a number of variants (Balmer, 1998, 2001b; Balmer & Greyser, 2003). As such, the corporate image has been viewed primarily from a corporate image management perspective in terms of the controlling, or fashioning, of a corporate image or can sometimes be understood as a broad, single stereotype image where commonly-held perceptions of a firm are shared, even across stakeholder groups (Balmer & Greyser, 2003). The latter perspective was popularized by Martineau (1958b) in his celebrated *Harvard Business Review* article. As such, a somewhat nuanced, and broader, definition has been proffered whereby a corporate image is viewed as the immediate mental perception held of an organization by an individual, while recognizing that it may have an applicability to a group, groups or networks (Balmer, 2011b).

To date, most studies have focused on the corporate image concept while comparatively few studies have focused on corporate brand image. Consequently, corporate brand image research and scholarship draws on the corporate image canon. Corporate marketing scholarship has long stressed the strategic requisite of having a strong and favorable corporate image.

This empirical study, by marshalling dual process theory, has the potential to expand the general comprehension of corporate image and corporate brand image. This is because, while System 1 of dual process theory is broadly analogous to the notion that corporate image represents the immediate mental picture an individual has of an organization or corporate brand (Gray & Balmer, 1998), System 2 of this theory allows for an individual to form an image of an organization or corporate brand only after considerable cognitive engagement.

### 3.4. Brand image

The construction and maintenance of brand image is a pre-requisite of brand management (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986) and brand image and brand awareness are the bases for brand equity (Keller, 1993). It has also been observed that not all brand characteristics are of similar utility in shaping brand image (Park et al., 1986). There are often strategic differences between local and global brands (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004). The benefits of a positive corporate image are broad and can translate into superior financial performance (Fill & Dimopoulou, 1999; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997; Greyser, 1999); engender customer retention (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998; Barich & Kotler, 1991; Greyser, 1999; Walsh & Wiedmann, 2004); can shed light on a firm's corporate ability and social responsibility (Brown & Dacin, 1997); and suggest that a firm has met customers' wants and needs (Nguyen & Leblanc, 2001). Corporate image is particularly important for service firms because of the lack of

tangibility and their greater reliance on perception (Walsh et al., 2009). Customers often perceive the global nature of multinational corporate brands in favorable terms and the aforementioned can engender consumer loyalty (Swoboda & Hirschmann, 2016). Corporate image has also been accorded importance in industrial marketing contexts (Brown, Dacin, & Pitt, 2010; Cretu & Brodie, 2007; De Roeck, Maon, & Lejeune, 2013; Dowling, 1986; Flax et al., 2016; Panitz, 1988; Sims, 1979; Spyropoulou, Skarmeas, & Katsikeas, 2010). In the main, such research has focused on mature rather than on emerging markets, although there are exceptions (Flax et al., 2016; Lin & He, 2017). Importantly, too, is the signaling quality of a corporate brand's image in terms of trustworthiness, along with strategic market commitment in the value chain as noted by Normann and Ramirez (1993). In relation to this, consumers in developing nations have a more positive image of brands from developed nations (Batra et al., 2000) and, in China, international luxury brands have a superior image in contrast to indigenous brands (Zhan & He, 2012). This being said, to date, extant research has not explored the above in B2B contexts and, specifically, in relation to China.

### 3.5. Corporate brand image and industrial corporate brand image

Brand image has been a distinctive leitmotif within the product and services brand management canon and it has an important role in brand-positioning strategies (Park et al., 1986). However, corporate brand image can be characterized as an emergent concept, while the industrial corporate brand image is as entirely new concept which we refer to in our study. Corporate marketing scholars have emphasized how the acquisition of a favorable corporate brand image is the ultimate goal of the corporate brand management process (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012; Hawabhay et al., 2009). Other researchers have reflected on its dynamism (Rindell & Strandvik, 2010); its importance to customer satisfaction (Martenson, 2007; Srivastava & Sharma, 2013); its significance in burnishing product brand image (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2009) and its role in engendering behavioral responses (Alwi & Kitchen, 2014). Corporate brand image has been discussed in relation to the retail sector (Da Silva & Alwi, 2006) and on-line corporate brand image (Da Silva & Alwi, 2007). Its relationship with corporate communications (Hawabhay et al., 2009) and its importance to financial services has also been enumerated (Bravo et al., 2010). Its development and validation apropos corporate brand heritage (Rindell, Santos, & Pinto de Lima, 2015) and its co-creation (Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018) has also been discussed.

In contrast, scholarship on what we call industrial corporate brand image is scant (Bendixen, Bukasa, & Abratt, 2004; Blombäck & Axelsson, 2007; Flax et al., 2016; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). However, extant studies which refer to the area have shown that it can have a material impact on brand equity (Bendixen et al., 2004; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007); and can have a noticeable effect on the selection and engagement of new B2B subcontractors in the supply of components (Blombäck & Axelsson, 2007).

The review of the literature confirmed the absence of an empirical study on industrial corporate brand image in the logistics sector and, to date, there is only one study on corporate brand image within greater China focused and this focused on the Starbucks corporate brand in Taiwan (Tu, Wang, & Chang, 2012).

## 4. Hypothesis development

### 4.1. Effects of corporate brand image evaluation on retention and price premium

Informed by dual process theory, the processing of corporate brand image represents a typical System 1 processing, because making holistic associations is a characteristic of intuiting (Dane & Pratt, 2007). Corporate brand image is the 'gestalt' of the corporate brand (Stern,

Zinkhan, & Jaju, 2001). It is the global total impression, or holistic associations about the corporation (Alwi & Kitchen, 2014). Furthermore, it is an immediate impression retrieved from an individual's memory (Stuart, 1999). Most of our ordinary everyday issues are handled effectively based on our intuition (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). In complex and highly-demanding situations, trained professionals may still use intuition to make effective judgments and decisions (Dane & Pratt, 2007). Therefore, despite the differences between individual consumers and organization buyers (Seyedghorban, Matanda, & LaPlaca, 2016), the holistic processing of corporate brand image may have the same impact on decision-making in both consumer and B2B markets. We can expect that industrial corporate brand image has a significant role in organization buyer decision-making in terms of contract renewal and premium pricing.

Previous empirical evidence has indicated that customers' perceptions of corporate brand image influence consumers' attitudes towards the brand and, therefore, shape corporate brand value (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Keller, 1993; Persson, 2010). When brand equity is high, customers are predisposed to pay a price premium (Bendixen et al., 2004). Leading industrial corporate brands can command a price premium of 6.8% in relation to typical industrial brands and 14% over new and/or unknown industrial corporate brands (Bendixen et al., 2004). Corporate brand equity - the propensity for business customers to repurchase and pay a premium price for a corporate brand - is equally applicable in B2B contexts (Bendixen et al., 2004; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). However, Cretu and Brodie (2007) did not find evidence to support the contention that brand image had an impact on customer loyalty (measured by customer willingness to increase spending and to recommend the company). Thus, prior empirical findings on the effect of brand image on buyer decisions are inconclusive, and further empirical testing is warranted, especially in the context of corporate brand image in China as a rapidly-developing market. As such, the following hypothesis was put forward for empirical testing:

H1(a): Industrial corporate brand image positively relates to retention.

H1(b): Industrial corporate brand image positively relates to price premium.

### 4.2. Effects of logistics service attribute evaluation on retention and price premium

There are two divergent views regarding the relations between the System 1 and System 2 processing in dual process theory: one is the 'parallel-competitive' perspective and the other is the 'default-interventionist' perspective (Graf & Landwehr, 2015). The former posits that both systems of processing are activated in parallel in response to a situation and compete to reach a judgement (Evans & Stanovich, 2013), while the latter believes that most judgements and choices are made intuitively, using System 1 processing (Kahneman & Frederick, 2002). People by default look at the gestalt of the object rather than the details, and the rational processing of System 2 is activated only to confirm, or modify, the decision, by evaluating each of important service attributes (Evans, 2006; Kahneman & Frederick, 2002). Following this perspective, we can therefore deduce that organization buyers make an initial decision regarding retention and price premium, followed by an evaluation of key logistics service attributes.

In contrast to corporate brand image processing (System 1), attribute evaluation may involve a highly-complex cost and benefit weighting decision process, as shown in the Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) models and particularly supplier selection studies in operational research (Ho, Xu, & Dey, 2010; Luoma, 2016). Most studies of organizational buying behavior assume a rational, means-end decision-making logic. However, the generally accepted linear approach has been questioned (Makkonen, Olkkonen, & Halinen, 2012). Decision-makers assess a subset of important attributes to simplify choice. Cost-

benefit analyses are utilized as a part of the supplier selection decision to maximize the utility for the firm (Makkonen et al., 2012). Corporate brand attributes of supplier brands should analyze via the lens of expected value (Glynn, 2012). The logistics service provider selection literature is often based on this rational model of decision-making but some scholars have concluded the decision-making process can be fuzzy (Ding, Liang, Yeh, & Yeh, 2005). The literature (Ding et al., 2005; Jharkharia & Shankar, 2007; Lin & Lee, 2009; Park, Choi, & Zhang, 2009; Voss, Page, Keller, & Ozment, 2006) has variously identified key logistics service attributes including delivery, reliability, response, flexibility, coverage, professionalism, tracking, variety, complaint handling and price. For example, Ding et al. (2005) organize different attributes into six criteria to examine shippers' selection of courier service providers in Taiwan; and Voss et al. (2006) group different attributes into nine criteria to examine carrier choice by logistics managers in the USA. As such, the following hypothesis was put forward for empirical testing:

H2(a): Industrial corporate brand attribute evaluation positively relates to retention.

H2(b): Industrial corporate brand attribute evaluation positively relates to price premium.

### 4.3. Relationships between corporate brand image and attribute evaluation

Corporate brand image and attribute evaluation can be linked through their respective processing at different levels of the same entity, the corporate brand. Corporate brand image may be viewed as the general or holistic processing of the corporate brand (Alwi & Kitchen, 2014), while the multi-attribute evaluation is the specific or piecemeal processing of the corporate brand. Sonnier and Ainslie (2011) propose that an overall, holistic brand image can be formed through customers' experience of specific attributes of a product or service. Similarly, Aydin and Özer (2005) suggest that corporate brand image is the result of a process such as the direct experience of the firm and/or information obtained from different sources such as advertisements and word-of-mouth. In addition to corporate communications, the corporate brand image is shaped by what the customer experiences and the manner in which the corporate brand is delivered (Grönroos, 1984; Nguyen & Leblanc, 2001). As such, the following hypothesis was put forward for empirical testing:

H3: Logistic service attribute evaluation positively relates to industrial corporate brand image.

Given that logistics service attribute evaluation has a positive effect on industrial corporate brand image (H3), and that industrial corporate brand in turn influences (a) retention and (b) price premium (H1), according to Baron & Kenny (1986), industrial corporate brand could potentially perform a mediation role between attribute evaluation and the decision outcomes of retention and price premium. Thus:

H4: Industrial corporate brand image partially mediates the relationships between logistic service attribute evaluation and: (a) retention, and (b) price premium in China.

Fig. 1 summarizes the research model.

## 5. Methods

### 5.1. Sampling and data collection

This research used a web-based survey hosted by a commercial survey tool website (www.diaochapai.com). Data from respondents were extracted from a database of B2B customers of four global and one local global logistics service providers operating out of China: FedEx
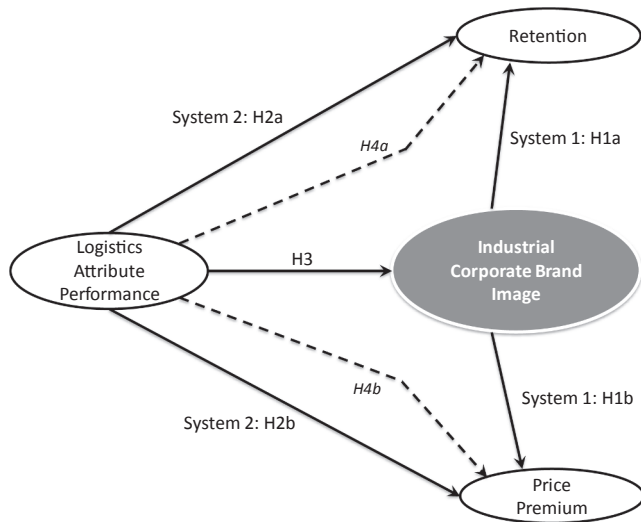
**Fig. 1.** Research model of industrial corporate brand image vis-à-vis B2B customer retention and price premium.

(*USA*), UPS (*USA*), DHL (*Germany*), TNT (*The Netherlands*) and EMS (*China*) offering international express delivery services: see Table 1. The table details the countries of origin of the five major logistical corporate brands; the year they were established; their respective positions in Forbes' ranking of the world's most valuable brands; their revenue streams; additional company details; and the dates of their first operations in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and mainland China. The latter dates have been included because they might be meaningful in terms of their latent industrial corporate brand image and therefore consequential in their resultant industrial corporate brand image within China.

The researchers had access to a database provided by a logistics service agency based in the city of Dalian: one of China's foremost logistics centers. The original purpose of the database is for Customer Relationship Management, which is a record of all the customers that use the agency's service to access to the international logistics services providers. The database was used as a sampling frame to identify individuals responsible for international express parcel and postal delivery in their organizations. One thousand contacts were randomly selected and approached by telephone. Subsequently, they received a follow-up email and a letter. These reiterated the objectives of the research and provided a link to the web-based survey. The investigators sent two further follow-up emails to remind contacts who did not respond to maximize the response rate. In total, 276 valid responses were received, representing a response rate of 27.6%. Table 2 below shows

the profile of the respondents and the companies.

### 5.2. Measures

Each respondent was instructed to answer the survey by thinking of a major Logistical Service Provider (LSP) corporate brand (industrial corporate brand) they had used for their international express parcel/postal delivery in the current contract year. The attribute importance and performance rating, industrial corporate brand image, retention and price premium were then all based on the evaluation of this focal LSP brand.

The researchers adopted three global items measuring industrial corporate brand image, adapted from Bravo et al. (2010): this LSP brand fulfils its promises (Item 1), inspires confidence (Item 2), and makes a good impression on me (Item 3). The two items measuring retention were adapted from Wallenburg and Lukassen (2011); and two items measuring price premium adapted from Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996). Given that brand image at attribute level is context-specific (Lemmink, Schuijf, & Streukens, 2003), the researchers followed the process of item generation as suggested by Oh (2001) for the development of items measuring the specific attributes of industrial logistics corporate brands examined in this study.

As a point of departure, an initial list of items was drawn up for review by an expert panel based on the literature on LSP selection criteria to evaluate attribute-specific industrial corporate brand performance. The expert panel helped with item number reduction and refinement, and ensured face/content validity. Table 3 lists the 10 items selected for this study. The attributes include: the core logistics service elements, i.e. on-time and accurate delivery (A1), reliability of delivery (A2), quick response (A3), flexibility (A4), and geographical spread (A5); employee professionalism (A6), and supporting services such as tracking and information sharing (A7); the variety of ancillary services (A8) and complaint handling (A9); and finally, more general factors such as price (A10).

Given that the construct of attribute performance is conceptualized to be 'formed' through customer experience, it was deemed appropriate to measure attribute performance formatively. This is because each attribute is considered to influence the construct (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001).

### 5.3. Measurement validity and reliability

Partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the model. The software used in this study is SmartPLS 3. The commonly adopted guidelines as set by Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2011) were followed, using a two-step procedure to assess the adequacy of the model. To test the significance of model estimates, the t-

**Table 1**
Major global logistics industrial corporate brands operating in China.

| Logistics service providers | FedEx | UPS | DHL | TNT | EMS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Country of Origin | USA | USA | Germany | Netherlands | China |
| Year established | 1971 | 1907 | 1969 | 1946 | 1980 |
| Forbes World's Most Valuable Brands Ranking 2015 | #80 | #40 | #195 | #1566 | |
| Revenue (in billions) | $47.5 (2015) | $58.36 (2015) | €56.63 (2014) | €6.68 (2014) | |
| Year established in Hong Kong | 1984 | 1988 | 1972 | 1978 | |
| Year established in Taiwan | 1984 | 1988 | 1973 | 1988 | |
| Year established in Singapore | 1984 | 1988 | 1972 | 1974 | |
| Year established in mainland China | 1984 | 1988 | 1981 | 1988 | 1980 |
| Profile of Chinese operations in China | National Coverage Major International Gateways Employees: 9500 + employees | National Coverage Major International Gateways Employees: 6476 employees | National Coverage Major International Gateways Employees: 6000 + employees | Partial Coverage Moderate International Gateways Employees: 3000 employees | National Coverage Major International Gateways Employees: nearly 100,000 employees |

**Table 2**
Respondent and company profile.

| | Total count | Total percentage | EMS | Fedex | UPS | TNT | DHL | Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Respondent age** | | | | | | | | |
| 18–22 | 24 | 8.7 | 17 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 23–29 | 90 | 32.7 | 39 | 19 | 10 | 4 | 14 | 4 |
| 30–39 | 80 | 29.1 | 31 | 22 | 9 | 2 | 16 | 0 |
| 40–49 | 57 | 20.7 | 27 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 11 | 0 |
| 50–59 | 21 | 7.6 | 7 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| 60 and above | 3 | 1.1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| **Respondent gender** | | | | | | | | |
| Male | 161 | 58.5 | 70 | 38 | 17 | 4 | 29 | 3 |
| Female | 114 | 41.5 | 52 | 19 | 15 | 7 | 19 | 2 |
| **Company's industry** | | | | | | | | |
| Textile & garment | 65 | 23.6 | 38 | 14 | 4 | 0 | 9 | 0 |
| Chemical, rubber & plastics | 45 | 16.4 | 15 | 13 | 10 | 2 | 5 | 0 |
| Metal & machinery | 58 | 21.1 | 25 | 9 | 4 | 2 | 15 | 3 |
| Electronic, optical & electrical | 94 | 34.2 | 40 | 20 | 8 | 7 | 17 | 2 |
| Others | 13 | 4.7 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| **Company size*** | | | | | | | | |
| Micro | 39 | 14.2 | 11 | 8 | 8 | 4 | 7 | 1 |
| Small | 100 | 36.4 | 36 | 26 | 15 | 4 | 17 | 2 |
| Medium | 87 | 31.6 | 46 | 18 | 5 | 0 | 17 | 1 |

Note: According to the China National Statistics Bureau published document (http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjbz/201801/t20180103_1569357.html), every industry has it specific criteria to classify firm size. For example, in the manufacturing industry, using the number of employees (X), we classify a company as: Large if X ≥ 1000; Medium if 300 ≤ X < 1000; Small if 20 ≤ X < 300; and Micro if X < 20.

statistics were computed using 5000 bootstrap re-samples (Hair et al., 2011).

The formative construct was evaluated by examining multi-collinearity among the attributes and each attributes weight (relative importance) and loading (absolute importance). As shown in Table 4, all attributes' variance inflation factors (VIFs) were lower than five: thus, multicollinearity was not an issue of concern (Hair et al., 2011). Results for item weight and loading indicated that not all the item weights were significant, but all the factor loadings were: therefore, all items were retained for further analysis. The reflective constructs were then evaluated by examining item loading, composite reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity (also shown in Table 4). All the item loadings were significant and were above the recommended value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2011). The composite reliability (CR) exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.7, and the average variance extracted (AVE) values are well above the recommended minimal threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2011).

Results in Table 5 indicate that the square roots of the AVE (where applicable) exceed the correlations between every pair of latent variables. Thus, the discriminant validity can be established. The overall measurement model can be confirmed to be valid and reliable.

To test if there is the potential common method bias in our data, we conducted a full collinearity assessment, the latest commonly used common method test in PLS-SEM, proposed by Kock (2015). The results of the test (Table 6 below) show that most of our inter-construct variance inflation factors (VIFs) are smaller than 3.3, the lowest threshold level to be considered as having a common method bias (Kock, 2015). Thus, common method bias is not an issue of concern in the measurement model.

*5.4. Structural model results*

The evaluation of the structural model shows that the coefficients of determination of the endogenous latent variables ($R^2$) are acceptable: 0.31 (corporate brand image), 0.48 (retention) and 0.45 (price premium: Fig. 2). Using the blindfolding procedure, it was found that the Stone-Geisser $Q^2$ values for all the endogenous latent variables are larger than zero, suggesting the predictive relevance of the explanatory variables. The path coefficients and t-values indicate that industrial corporate brand image has positive relationships with retention and price premium, supporting H1a and H1b. Support was also found for H2a and H2b, which suggest the positive impact of attribute performance on retention and price premium. Attribute performance was found to be positively related to industrial corporate brand image, supporting H3.

To test the mediation hypotheses of H4a and H4b, we followed Hair,

**Table 3**
Key logistics service attributes.

| Attributes | | Description and academic sources |
|---|---|---|
| A1 | Delivery | On-time and accurate delivery (Ding et al., 2005; Park et al., 2009) |
| A2 | Reliability | Reliability of delivery (Voss et al., 2006); transit time consistency (Ding et al., 2005) and dependability |
| A3 | Response | Quick response to customer requests (Lin & Lee, 2009) |
| A4 | Flexibility | Service flexibility (Lin & Lee, 2009), flexibility in operations and delivery (Jharkharia & Shankar, 2007), and capability of emergency processing (Ding et al., 2005) |
| A5 | Coverage | Geographical spread (Jharkharia & Shankar, 2007) |
| A6 | Professionalism | Staff courtesy and quality (Lin & Lee, 2009); understanding shippers' needs, quality of salesmanship, the attitude of personnel (Ding et al., 2005) |
| A7 | Tracking | Tracking facilities (Lin & Lee, 2009), shipment tracking and information services (Ding et al., 2005), and information sharing (Jharkharia & Shankar, 2007) |
| A8 | Variety | The range of ancillary services (Jharkharia & Shankar, 2007), diversity and completeness of service (Ding et al., 2005), and diversified services (Lin & Lee, 2009) |
| A9 | Complaint handling | Complaint processing (Ding et al., 2005) and follow-up (Voss et al., 2006) |
| A10 | Price | Reasonableness of freight rate and clarity of tariff (Ding et al., 2005), cost of service (Jharkharia & Shankar, 2007), and freight loss (Lin & Lee, 2009) |

**Table 4**
Scale items and convergent validity.

| Constructs/Items | | Weights | VIF | Loading |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Logistics attribute performance | | | | |
| A1 | Delivery | 0.18 | 3.42 | 0.85 |
| A2 | Reliability | 0.17 | 3.47 | 0.86 |
| A3 | Response | 0.09 | 3.31 | 0.82 |
| A4 | Flexibility | −0.05 | 3.79 | 0.80 |
| A5 | Coverage | 0.03 | 2.24 | 0.71 |
| A6 | Professionalism | 0.09 | 2.45 | 0.77 |
| A7 | Tracking | 0.20 | 3.76 | 0.84 |
| A8 | Variety | 0.24 | 3.08 | 0.85 |
| A9 | Complaint handling | 0.01 | 2.37 | 0.72 |
| A10 | Price | 0.28 | 1.59 | 0.71 |
| Corporate brand image CR = 0.94, AVE = 0.83 | | | | |
| CBI1 | This LSP always fulfils its promises | | | 0.87 |
| CBI2 | This LSP inspires confidence | | | 0.92 |
| CBI3 | This LSP makes a good impression on me | | | 0.94 |
| Retention CR = 0.94, AVE = 0.88 | | | | |
| RE1 | We will continue using this LSP in the future | | | 0.94 |
| RE2 | We intend to extend existing contracts with this LSP when they expire. | | | 0.94 |
| Price premium CR = 0.92, AVE = 0.85 | | | | |
| PP1 | We will continue using this LSP if its price increases somewhat. | | | 0.93 |
| PP2 | We are willing to pay a higher price for this LSP than other providers | | | 0.91 |

*Notes*: CR = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

**Table 5**
Latent variable correlations and square roots of AVE.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 CBI | **0.91** | | | |
| 2 LAP | 0.56 | NA | | |
| 3 Price Premium | 0.61 | 0.54 | **0.92** | |
| 4 Retention | 0.67 | 0.53 | 0.70 | **0.94** |

*Notes:* Boldface numbers on the diagonal are the square root of the average variance extracted; CBI = corporate brand image; LAP = Logistics Attribute Performance.

**Table 6**
Inter-construct variance inflation factors (common method variance test).

| | LAP | CBI | Price Premium | Retention |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| LAP | – | 1.52 | 1.489 | 1.636 |
| CBI | 2.425 | – | 2.446 | 2.228 |
| Price Premium | 3.304 | 3.296 | – | 2.188 |
| Retention | 3.836 | 3.286 | 2.42 | – |



**Fig. 2.** Structural model results (t-values in parentheses).

Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2016) recommendation by using the bootstrapping procedure. The results indicate the indirect effect of logistic service attribute evaluation on retention through industrial corporate brand image is significant (indirect effect = 0.302, t-value = 7.975, 97.5% confidence interval = [0.227, 0.375]). The indirect effect of logistic service attribute evaluation on price premium through industrial corporate brand image is also significant (indirect effect = 0.251, t-value = 6.911, 97.5% confidence interval = [0.181, 0.321]). Given that there are significant direct effects from industrial corporate brand image and the two outcome variables, the mediation effects are considered as partial. Thus, H4a and H4b were supported. The hypothesis testing results were summarized in Table 7.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. Theoretical implications

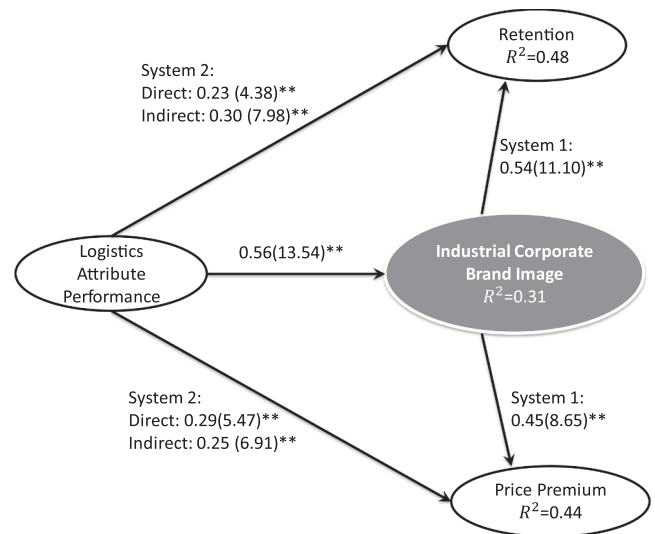This study advances the general comprehension of corporate brand image by confirming how the industrial corporate brand images held by individual organizational buyers conform to the psychological norms of dual process theory: both System 1 and System 2 were shown to be meaningful.

In this study, the processing of industrial corporate brand image by organizational buyers was found to correspond to System 1 of dual process theory. According to System 1 theory, organizational buyers engage in effort -conserving heuristics which entail a rapid assessment of information and, overall, their response is affective in character. As such, a System 1 designation of corporate brand image/industrial corporate brand image corresponds to the default definition of corporate image, which explains how corporate image represents an immediate mental picture individuals hold of an organization, or of a corporate brand, (Gray & Balmer, 1998). In contrast, the processing of logistics service attribution evaluation of organizational buyers was consistent with System 2 processing. In accordance with System 2 theory, organizational buyers undertake a vastly more-considered, systematic and lengthier and systematic appraisal of information pertaining to the attributes of an industrial corporate brand. Unlike System 1 theory, there is greater deliberation and the psychological engagement of System 2 theory is cognitive rather than affective in nature. The consideration of a corporate brand's attributes corresponds to the view that an organization's corporate identity (a company's distinctive and defining attributes) are highly germane for corporate brand management since they, in effect, deliver the corporate brand promise (Balmer, 2012a). As such, the importance of both System 1 and System 2 in terms of the reasoning of industrial corporate brand image highlights the complexity of brand image formation which, hitherto, has not be explained. It also confirms the saliency of dual process theory in comprehending industrial corporate image formation. Following on from the modes of theoretical contribution outlined by Easterby-Smith et al. (2008), the theoretical advance represented in this empirical study can be characterized as a *research reflection*. This theoretical contribution - a research reflection - is where an existing theory (dual process theory) is shown to have an applicability to another field: in this case apropos corporate brand image and, moreover, in relation to industrial corporate brand image. Furthermore, in the context of this study, it has revealed a similarity between the psychological processes of individuals in developed countries (where dual process theory originated) and in China.

Furthermore, this research advances, broadens and corroborates the findings of Blombäck and Axelsson (2007), in terms of the important role of corporate brand image in supplier assessment in industrial marketing management contexts. This may also be regarded as another research reflection insight. This is because this study's focus on Chinese

**Table 7**
Hypothesis test results.

| Hypotheses | β(t)p | Results |
|---|---|---|
| H1a. In China, Industrial corporate brand image positively relates to retention. | 0.23(4.38)** | supported |
| H1b. In China, Industrial corporate brand image positively relates to price premium. | 0.29(5.47)** | supported |
| H2a. In China, Industrial logistic service attribute evaluation positively relates to retention. | 0.54(11.10)** | supported |
| H2b. In China, Industrial logistic service attribute evaluation positively relates to price premium. | 0.45(8.65)** | supported |
| H3. In China, Logistic service attribute evaluation positively relates to industrial corporate brand image. | 0.56(13.54)** | supported |
| H4a. Industrial corporate brand image partially mediates the relationships between logistic service attribute evaluation retention in China. | 0.30(7.98)** | supported |
| H4b. Industrial corporate brand image partially mediates the relationships between logistic service attribute evaluation and price premium in China. | 0.25(6.91)** | supported |

organizational buyers' images of express local and foreign logistics corporate brands operating in and out of Dalian revealed how their images exerted a material impact regarding (a) price premium, and (b) retention. Analogous insights have been found in developed countries (Blombäck & Axelsson, 2007). Seemingly, therefore, this study - the first of its kind that has taken place within China - has revealed how industrial corporate brand image is equally important to Chinese organizational buyers as it is to their western counterparts. In this study, it was also found that industrial corporate brand image and attribute performance evaluation influence buyers' decisions to renew the contract or accept a price premium (based on the significant direct effect from both constructs, i.e. H1 & H2). To reiterate, mindful of the insights from dual process theory, the findings showed that both System 1 and System 2 are in operation in organization buyer decision-making in terms of retention and price premium.

Although the study revealed the saliency of System 1 and System 2 theory it was also found that Chinese organizational buyers, in making purchase decisions, rely more on industrial corporate brand image than attribute perception (by comparing their effect sizes 0.54 & 0.45 versus 0.23 & 0.29). This implies that System 1 processing has a stronger effect than System 2 processing in organization buyer decision-making. This in part can be explained System 2 entails decision making that is more involved and, as such, makes considerable cognitive demands in relation to an holistic processing of industrial corporate brand image (Aydinli et al., 2014; Dhar & Gorlin, 2013; Kahneman, 2003, 2011). As such, the findings suggest that organization buyers ascribe greater importance to intuition in forming an image of an industrial corporate brand image. Similarly, there is a similitude regarding decision-making which corresponds to consumers in BtoC contexts even though there are clear task differences (Dane & Pratt, 2007).

Third, the partial mediation of brand image suggests that some of the effects from attribute performance cannot directly transfer to buyers' decision to renew or pay a premium, but can do so indirectly through the effect of industrial corporate brand image. In other words, the attribute performance influences corporate image perception, for example, a swift delivery exceeding customer expectation contributes to the formation of a industrial corporate brand image. Thus, when the time comes for a decision, a positive industrial corporate brand image has an impact of the organizational buyer's decision-making in terms of contract renewal or in paying a price premium. This is consistent with the second point discussed above. The findings support the default-intervention perspective of the dual-process theory (Kahneman & Frederick, 2002) that human minds adopt the principle of "least effort" to optimize the consumption of mental resources. As such, this study corroborates the utility of extending the theory's applicability in a B2B context and in addition to the logistics industry in a developing nation such as China.

### 6.2. Managerial implications

Given, the findings showed that organizational buyers utilize both System 1 and System 2 processes in the selection of industrial corporate brand partners, considerable introspection is required on the part of managers to take account of, and accommodate, these research insights.

As such, a bipartite approach is required. Consequently, managers should accord importance not only to industrial corporate brand image but also to the attributes which underpin and inform an industrial corporate brand.

Since, the attributes of a corporate brand are assessed by organizational buyers are undertaken in a reasoned, systematized and protracted manner managers should match such cognitive deliberations by ensuring that the traits which underpin a corporate brand are clearly communicated in detail to organizational buyers. In addition, managers should ensure they are fully appraised of the distinguishing and defining traits that inform a corporate brand and which ensure the corporate brand promise is delivered. This corresponds to the view that a corporate brand promise is realized via an organization's corporate identity where corporate identity equates to the distinguishing features of an entity (Balmer, 2012a). As such, this requires not only on-going management of both the corporate identity and corporate brand but also entails mindfulness in terms of alignment and coordination between the above along with corporate brand identity, communications, culture, corporate brand promise etc and which is informed by an explicit corporate marketing logic (Balmer, 2012a, 2012b). In terms of identifying key service attributes/attributes which require improvement, senior marketing managers could conduct a simple importance-performance analysis (IPA).

However, the study also showed that organizational buyers accord priority, in terms of decision making and image formation, to System 1 reasoning. As such, corporate brand image (which was shaped by System 1 thinking) was of greater importance and consequence than System 2 reasoning which focussed on corporate brand attributes. Given that with System 1 theory, organizational buyers engage in effortless heuristics, necessitating a speedy appraisal of information with a response that is affective in character managers should give priority to industrial corporate brand image. As such, it behoves managers to ensure that their industrial corporate brand not only have has a clear visual identity (corporate brand marque) and verbal identifier (corporate brand name) but also a clear, and memorable, corporate brand promise. Therefore, a credible, attractive and meaningful corporate brand covenant needs to be developed and on-going corporate brand communications strategies should be in place to ensure awareness of the corporate brand name, logo and, moreover, corporate brand promise.

The importance of the above management approaches was testified in the findings of this study which revealed that a positive industrial corporate brand image engenders loyalty among industrial customers and, moreover, is equated with a willingness to pay a price premium for an industrial corporate brand having a highly positive corporate image. Given the above, it is apparent that the acquisition and maintenance of a positive corporate brand image by logistics firms accords significant strategic advantage to industrial corporate logistics brands operating in a major transitional economy such as China. Consequently, building a favorable industrial corporate brand image should be an indelible part of logistics firms' strategic planning and management.

## 6.3. Limitations and future research

While the research insights of this study represent a meaningful advance in our comprehension of the significance of industrial corporate brand image in China, the world's foremost developing country, there are some research limitations to this study. One limitation is that the extant literature on which this study is grounded is primarily based on insights from developed western economies rather than from developing nations, or more particularly, on China. Furthermore, the researchers have utilized measures from scales developed in western B2C contexts. In terms of future research, there is utility in generating measures that are derived from Chinese economic and cultural contexts. Finally, this study has a specific focus on industrial corporate brand images of logistics brands operating in China offering express parcel/ postage services: it does not claim to provide insights for similar, albeit non-express, logistic corporate brands.

In terms of further research, additional studies could ascertain the applicability of the research findings reported here to other transitional economies in Asia (e.g. India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam etc.) and, more generally, with the global logistics sector. Additional avenues for research could entail exploring the salience of an industrial corporate brand image by contemplating alternative outcome variables. These could include the cross-buying of new service innovations (extension) offered by the same industrial corporate brand and the effects of positive word-of-mouth, including comments posted on on-line social media for instance. Finally, as suggested in the cognitive psychology literature in terms of dual process theory (Dhar & Gorlin, 2013; Evans, 1984; Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Graf & Landwehr, 2015; Kahneman & Frederick, 2002; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Stanovich & West, 2000), the relative strength of the two systems of processing, and their interactions can be influenced by various personal (e.g., skilfulness, tiredness) and situational (e.g., time pressure, demandingness of task, availability of information) factors. As such, we argue that the above also merit scrutiny within marketing and more specifically within a B2B setting. Such research insights could enhance the research insights detailed in this study.

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