

RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR B2B MARKETING RESEARCHERS

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INTRODUCTION

The discipline of business-to-business marketing has a long history (HADJIKHANI and LAPLACA, 2013) and for almost as long researchers have sought to understand and explain how business-to-business markets operate (HUNT, 2013; MÖLLER, 2013; SHETH, et al. 1988; CONNOR, 1991). However, for the greater part of the twentieth century, the bulk of academic research in the field of marketing has focused on consumer markets (LAPLACA and KATRICHIS, 2009) rather than business markets. Beginning in 1971 with the introduction of *Industrial Marketing Management*, the first journal dedicated to business-to-business markets, academic researchers have had an increasing number of publication outlets avail-

able to them. IMM was followed by the *Journal of Business Research* (1973), *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* (1985), *Advances in Business Marketing and Purchasing* (1986), *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing* (1992) and the *IMP Journal* (2006). As these journals were launched, they gradually grew in impact to the field of marketing. At the same time the number of marketing researchers focusing on B2B markets was undergoing significant growth. While the academic field of marketing is dominated by those researching consumer markets, this does not reflect the significance of B2B markets in the United States economy or in economies around the world.

The latest data on sales transactions in the United States shows the following comparison:

2011			2010	
Sales in Millions of USD			Sales in Millions of USD	
Sector	Total	E-Commerce	Total	E-Commerce
Business	11,967,721	4,274,436	10,672,209	3,777,578
Consumer	15,671,497	539,964	14,999,035	473,023
Total Sales	27,639,218	4,814,400	25,671,244	4,250,601
Percent of total sales			Percent of total sales	
Business	43.30%	88.78%	41.57%	88.87%
Consumer	56.70%	11.22%	58.43%	11.13%

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According to the analyst at the US Census Bureau who supplied the data, several simplifying assumptions are made that under-report actual B2B sales. Specifically, ALL services are counted as B2C. For example, ALL electrical transmissions are counted as B2C (while we know that a significant portion goes to industrial and commercial sectors). Likewise, ALL transportation services and ALL data processing services are counted as B2C. Therefore, it is highly likely that B2B sales exceed fifty percent of total US sales dollars and over ninety percent of all e-commerce sales. Businesses have long recognized the power of internet-based e-commerce as a value-added driver to achieve competitive advantage (WALTERS, 2008).

Indeed the number of B2B researchers has grown far faster than the publication outlets have grown, and it has become increasingly more difficult for researchers to have papers accepted at these journals. While there are many reasons that submitted papers are rejected by journal reviewers and editors, by far the most common reason is lack of significant contribution to the development of the field. Lack of contribution can stem from several sources:

- Poorly designed research design
- Poorly implemented research procedures
- Weak or insufficient language (particularly when submitting research papers to journals published in a language different from the authors' native language(s))
- Research focused on topics or areas that are not of interest or not consistent with journal objectives.

This paper focuses on the last of these sources of limited contribution to the field.

Of course it is quite understandable that researchers want to conduct their research on subjects that are near and dear to their hearts. Faculty who teach sales management tend to conduct their research in the area of selling and sales management; those teaching channels of distribution likewise focus their research in the

area of distribution. To help marketing researchers undertake research projects that are likely to be published, it would be useful to researchers to know which areas of research are seen as most necessary. To determine the importance of research topics, I undertook four approaches:

1. Review the research priorities issued by the Marketing Science Institute
2. Review the research priorities issues by the Institute for the Study of Business Markets
3. Calls for papers for special issues of B2B journals
4. Survey of IMM reviewers

MARKETING SCIENCE INSTITUTE

The Marketing Science Institute (MSI) published its research priorities every two years. The last one was in 2012 and covers the period 2012 – 2014 (MSI, 2012). While most of the research priorities discussed by MSI are concerned with marketing to consumers, some specific research priorities do focus on industrial markets.

MSI suggests that we need research that integrates our knowledge of consumer experience marketing in the services and retail sectors and apply that to products in other industries. For example, can ordering experiences for industrial goods and services be improved by applying lessons from ordering experiences at consumer companies such as LL Bean, American Girl, Diesel, Panera Bread, Starbucks, Sub Zero or Viking Range.

Another MSI research priority is for a better understanding how mobile marketing platforms impact market operations. As stated by MSI (2012): “The first is a call for business-to-business applications. We are interested in studies of their use in firm-client relationships, and in sales force management, both for communication and for transaction. Will mobile



platforms make value chains more efficient, and will elements within the value chain be dis-intermediated?"

The explosive growth of data needs better scrutiny. The growth of e-commerce and its ability to collect huge amounts of data has implications for how managers can make better decisions. MSI is looking for research proposals that will help understand how managers can better utilize big data. Given that the great bulk of e-commerce is B2B, it seems that B2B researchers can successfully explore this research area.

Marketing organizations are continuously pressured to adapt to changing customer landscapes. Customers have access to more and more information on an almost instantaneous basis. How can B2B marketing organizations change to better serve new and improved business customers? How do new forms of marketing organization impact the company's market strength and financial performance?

ISBM RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The Institute for the Study of Business Markets (at Pennsylvania State University) is the leading B2B research center that is guided by the needs of its business members. In a recently published article, Fred WIERSEMA (2013), chairman of ISBM's B2B Leadership Board, reports on the current state of B2B marketing based on a survey of 72 B2B executives and 30 leading B2B researchers. This study was key to ISBM's development of its priorities for funding B2B research. The broad categories are:

- Product Policy
- Marketing Strategies and Operations
- Buying Strategies and Operations
- Customer Value
- Business Relationships
- Market Channels
- Exchange Design and Analysis
- Market Communications

- Business Marketing Information Systems and Electronic Markets
- Business Market Research
- Marketing Engineering

These broad categories contain dozens of specific research topics that would provide useful knowledge to further advance the field of B2B marketing. As such, well designed and implemented research focused on these topics would be welcomed by leading B2B journals. The link to the ISBM research priorities web site is provided in the references.

CALLS FOR PAPERS

When journal editors issue a call for papers for a specific topic, it is a directive for researchers to focus their research on specific areas of high interest. Calls for papers can usually be found on individual journal web sites or on the postings section of the ELMAR (ELeCtronic MARketing) site (<http://ama-academics.communityzero.com/elmar> then click on Postings and Calls: Issues). The calls for papers contain detailed information about the types of papers sought for the special issue along with suggested topics, submission procedures and deadlines. CFPs may be issued as much as a year prior to submission deadline so there is ample opportunity to design and implement a sound research project.

Below I have listed specific calls for papers for industrial marketing journals whose submission deadlines have not yet occurred:

Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing

- Contemporary Purchasing Practices
- B2B Research and Relevance
- Digital Communications in Industrial Marketing



Industrial Marketing Management

- Corporate Industrial Brands in, from, and to Emerging Markets
- Innovation and Emerging Economies
- Co-Management of Purchasing and Marketing
- Power in Business, Customer, and Market Relationships
- Accounting and Marketing Perspectives of Value Creation in Inter-firm Collaboration in Industrial Markets
- From Strategy Frameworks to Value-in-use: Implementing Strategies and Theories of B2B Marketing and Sales Management

Journal of Selling and Major Account Management

- Value Creation and the Sales Force

Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management

- Ethics in sales and sales management

SURVEY OF IMM REVIEWERS

Because of the broad, global set of 402 IMM reviewers, it was appropriate to survey these experienced B2B researchers¹. One half of the reviewers (every other reviewer in an alphabetical list) was sent an e-mail asking that they name the 3-5 top needs for B2B research. Within three weeks 107 reviewers had responded. The research needs identified by these respondents could be classified into the following categories:

- Selling and sales management
- Global marketing
- Branding
- B2B use of social media
- Innovation
- Sustainability
- Business networks
- B2B services
- Marketing organizations
- Distribution and channel management
- B2B marketing theory

These will be discussed below. It will be apparent that there is significant overlap in many of these topics and the specific research focus could be investigated by teams of researchers, each with a slightly different research background, to bring a multifaceted approach to the study. Research studies that focus on more than one of these broad research categories will have a better fit across journals and therefore have a greater likelihood of acceptance.

Selling and Sales Management

Since so many IMM reviewers conduct research into sales activities, it is not surprising that more specific research topics were identified in sales management and selling. While we have been researching industrial sales for many decades, it is clear that changing times and changing environments have necessitated continuing research efforts to maintain our understanding of traditional selling activities and to gain a better understanding of new situations that industrial sales people must face every day (see for example: TERHO, *et al* 2012; SINGH and KOSHY 2011; AVLONITIS and PANAGOPOULOS 2010; DAVIES *et al* 2010; GUESALAGA and JOHNSTON 2010; MADHAVARAM and McDONALD 2010; and KAUPPILA *et al* 2010).

¹ It is a requirement to become an IMM reviewer that one has published in a leading B2B or general marketing journal.



Over fifty IMM reviewers gave suggestions for priority research needs in selling and sales management including these specific topics below:

1. Sales department interaction with marketing, operations, finance/accounting, R&D/innovation
2. Role of senior sales executives at the Board level (If we have CMOs why not CSOs?)
3. Update the seven step selling process
4. Sales use of social media, especially B2B
5. Behavioral issues on the use of sales technologies (PDAs, tablets, smart phones, etc.)
6. Interface between pricing and selling
7. The role of the sales force in value creation
8. Consultative/solutions selling
9. Effectiveness of alternative sales force structures
10. How sellers and buyers perceive/utilize sales presentation tools (e.g. Power-Point, videos, sales brochures, etc.)
11. Salesperson health and wellness
12. Realizing when transactional selling is more appropriate than relationship selling
13. The sales force and channel conflict
14. The selling role of facilitators within channels of distribution
15. Preferred metrics for sales force evaluation within a channel system
16. Heavily incentivized vs. low incentivized sales compensation systems
17. Linking sales compensation to strategic objectives rather than sales volume
18. The use of technology to manage and evaluate sales efforts within a channel.
19. How economic crises and recessions influence and alter sales management practices
20. Transitioning to a key account (global account) perspective across the sales force
21. Sales ethics and national cultures
22. Sales training models across cultures
23. How sales personnel impact B2B branding using social media

Global Marketing

The second most mentioned area for B2B research is in global markets. While the globalization of consumer markets garners considerable press in business periodicals, business markets have been considered as global markets for several decades. But while our experience in global marketing is long, there are many gaps in our knowledge (especially predictive knowledge) of how and why some strategies work and others fail. Global B2B marketing research has focused on strategy (ELG *et al* 2012; LISBOA *et al* 2011), influence of the global supply and distribution chains (GIANNAKIS *et al* 2012; SKARMEAS *et al* 2008), and global e-commerce (SAMIEE 2008) among other topics. The IMM reviewers indicated numerous specific research topics that are of keen interest.

- Emerging Markets
 - In the relationship paradigm, the stability/changeability of relationships in the developing countries or developing industries requires further study.
 - B2B studies of emerging markets such as BRICS, Latin America, etc.
 - Industrial distribution channels in India and China
 - Greater cultural understanding in business markets to leverage performance particularly in emerging economies
 - Building B2B networks in emerging countries
 - Innovation with B2B partners in emerging economies vs. developed economies
 - The role of business to business in Bottom of the Pyramid Markets



- Culture
 - The role and importance of foreign language competence in establishing and maintaining cross-cultural B2B relationships
 - Trust and commitment in B2B business relationships including cultural differences
 - The effect of cultural context of parties concerned, on B2B relationships: the establishment and maintenance of business networks “high context” as compared with “low” context cultures. What happens when both sides are h/c, or both are l/c, or when there is a mixture?
- Ethical relationships among businesses especially international transactions.
- International trade/transactions among U.S. and European, Chinese, or Latin America partners.
- International joint ventures and global supply chains
- International Brand Management by B2B Suppliers & Export Performance
- Sales management in a global context
- Globalized marketing and production, regulatory compliance, and B2B relationships
- Global marketing of B2B services
- Cross-national differences in B2B relationship management (e.g., how to curb opportunism, how to use favors/sweet-heart deals)
- Business Performance Metrics across global markets and cultures

Emerging markets are clearly a priority area for investigations. Generally greater rates of market growth than developed markets, lack of entrenched market leaders, limited experience in these markets, divergent cultures and greater risk all require study to help marketers effectively enter these markets and achieve desired success.

Branding

In the past five years *Industrial Marketing Management* has published 42 research articles on B2B branding (including a special issue in 2011). Research has focused on the value of brands in B2B markets (LEEK and CHRISTODOULIDES 2012; BROWN *et al* 2012; HERBST *et al* 2012), how to build B2B brands (BACKHAUS *et al* 2011; VALLASTER and LINDGREEN 2011; HERBST and MERZ 2011) and the role of business brands in the purchase decision (VELOUTSOU and TAYLOR 2012). LEEK and CHRISTODOULIDES (2011) provide an excellent overview of B2B brand research needs. Specific research topics mentioned by IMM reviewers include:

- The effects of branding, personal selling and advertising on B2B marketing
- The impact of culture on global B2B brands
- The interaction of sales-efforts and branding expenditure of an organization (does branding lead to reduced sales efforts?)
- Differential impact of B2B branding across industries
- International Brand Management by B2B Suppliers & Export Performance
- Differences between product and service branding in business markets

B2B use of social media

Social media research has been mainly concerned with consumer markets (see TRAINOR *et al* 2013 and KIETZMANN *et al* 2011), but there is a growing interest in the use of social media in business markets. (See for example MICHAELIDOU *et al* 2011). Some of the specific topics for future research suggested by the reviewers are:

- Social media in B2B contexts - including crowdsourcing and open innovation contests



- Social media and e marketing in terms of their effect on business markets
- Integrating and budgeting social media in B2B communications
- Use and misuse of social media in personal selling
- Social media as a tool for prospecting
- Social media - particularly related to social media monitoring - dashboards - and C-Suite use of that real time information
- Using social media effectively in B2B marketing strategies
- Return of investment for businesses using social media
- Digital marketing and social media (e.g. professional networks and business social media) as a foreseeable evolution of social networks
- How information technology, currently social and mobile media, are changing B2B marketing practices (selling, buying, relationships etc.)

Research into B2B social media should not only look at the mechanisms of how this consumer marketing tool can be applied to business markets, but also at the top and bottom line impacts of the media for business marketers.

Innovation

Innovation is the life blood for continued success in both business and consumer markets. While numerous business, engineering and science journals serve as outlets for research into innovation theory and practice, the *Journal of Product Innovation Management* and *Industrial Marketing Management* are prime targets for researchers looking into innovation in business markets. JPIM is the clear leader in having published almost 1000 articles since 2000; over the same period IMM has published 100 articles on innovation. JPIM pub-

lishes articles on all aspects of product and service innovation across all market sectors while IMM focuses on innovation in B2B markets. While IMM reviewers suggested numerous specific topics for B2B innovation research, most focused on partnering with customers and suppliers for innovation (See: CORSARO *et al* 2012; MUNKSGAARD *et al* 2012; THOMAS 2013; SPRING and ARAUJO 2013; ELLIS *et al* 2012; SISODIYA *et al* 2013), how to successfully commercialize innovative products and services (SIMMONS *et al* 2013 and BOEHM and HOGAN 2013), global innovation (see CHANG *et al* 2012); green innovation (see SHARMA and Iyer 2012) and effective strategies for disruptive and radical innovations (see OBAL 2013). CORBETT *et al* (2013) have an excellent analysis of current innovation research as well as an agenda of future research needs.

Business networks

Business networks can range from supply chains, to buying cooperatives or distribution networks; they are a common fact of life in B2B markets. Since the 1980s the IMP Group has championed research focused on networks and many of the IMM reviewers reinforced this perspective.

Network research in B2B markets is very varied. Some examples of current research are service networks (LAI and CHEN 2013; KOHTAMÄKI *et al* 2013), network development (MCGRATH and O'TOOLE 2013; SEPULVEDA and GABRIELSSON 2013), innovation in networks (MATTHYSSENS *et al* 2013; VON RAESFELD *et al* 2012) and network dynamics (GUERCINI and RUNFOLA 2012; LOWE *et al* 2012). Among the many specific research topics mentioned by the reviewers, these were the most prevalent:

- Ethics in business relationships and networks
- Negotiations within and between networks



- “Networking” and business networks (as opposed to rigorous social network analysis)
- Research focused on conflict and conflict resolution processes within a context of a relational mindset. The extant conflict literature is largely nested in the power-conflict paradigm of the 1970s and needs to be recast within the contemporary B2B context of more domesticated, strategic alliance and networked minded industrial reality.
- Identification and measurement of network synergies
- Ethical issues of exchange in business networks
- Building B2B networks in emerging countries
- How we can integrate the concept of meta-organizations (organizations of organizations) in BtB marketing
- What are the antecedents of formation of successful (versus unsuccessful) horizontal and vertical networks? Requires paired comparisons.
- How does network structure (broadly defined in terms of centrality, betweenness, etc., and also the relationship quality within the network) differ across horizontal and vertical networks? Does purpose matter (e.g., for entering new markets, for developing radical new products, for developing services, for supply, for commercialization, etc.)?
- In terms of networks, some have held the view that networks are unique, and that you cannot talk of ‘different kinds’ of networks; however, there is an evolving perspective that we can categorize networks in some meaningful way. Social Network Analysis may become an insightful tool to help understand different network types.
- The impact of digital technology on network development and efficiency.
- Network relationships according to a cross-cultural perspective (considering in particular emerging markets)

- Imbalance in networks; how do small and medium enterprises can do business with very large companies (i.e. Wal-Mart) without taking too much risks and being satisfied (is it possible?)

Research on global networks presents an opportunity to develop global networks of researchers to collect and analyze data and case studies. This looks to be essential for long-term studies of network development and evolution.

Sustainability

Sustainability, green marketing or environmental marketing has increased significantly, albeit at different rates, around the world. Many IMM reviewers expressed interest in more B2B research in these areas. Some specific research topics include: innovation and sustainability (MARIADOSS *et al* 2011), logistics and sustainability (LEE and LAM 2012) and the impact of the supply chain on environmental effectiveness (CHAN *et al* 2012).

B2B services

The service sector continues to grow, both for consumer and business markets, but research into B2B services has not kept pace with our knowledge of consumer services. Examples of recent B2B services research focus on services in networks (KOHTAMÄKI *et al* 2013; PALO and TÄHTINEN 2013), project-based services (OJANSIVU *et al* 2013), service innovation (O’CASS and SOK 2013) and knowledge-intensive business services (ZAEFARIAN *et al* 2013).

The IMM reviewers surveyed suggested several interesting research needs in this area:

- Understanding service infusion in product-based companies beyond the showcases such as IBM, Rolls Royce, Xerox etc.



- Customer Service Representative issues in relation to B2B markets
- Selling B2B services and mixed offerings
- Branding of business services
- Product differentiation through service innovation
- The value of service support in business marketing
- Should service follow product or vice versa?
- How can global business services be better managed?
- What are the best practices in B2B services?

Marketing organizations

Marketing functions in B2B firms are extremely varied and of widely divergent effectiveness and efficiency. Faced with dynamic market conditions, marketing organizations are constantly evolving and adapting to marketplace realities. Of course we are always interested in how organizations develop marketing strategies (NEILL *et al* 2007). IMM reviewers suggested the following research topics:

- How are marketing decisions actually made in B2B organizations?
- How can interaction between marketing and R&D be made more effective?
- What is the role of marketing or sales in top management?
- Sales and marketing alignment in B2B firms
- How can improved integration between sales and purchasing improve the firm's marketing effectiveness?

Distribution and channel management

The great majority of B2B firms reach their customers through various channels of distribution; these channels are constantly evolving

(OLSON *et al* 2013). Independent channel member performance is impacted by trust among channel members (NEVINS and MONEY 2008; ROSE *et al* 2007). IMM reviewers indicated numerous research topics in the area of distribution and channel management:

- Coordination of distribution channels across cultures
- Developing distribution channels in emerging markets (especially China and India)
- Distributors as service implementers
- Channel management and marketing interaction
- Collaboration in joint marketing and distribution - e.g., when a product is advertised and delivered by two or more parties.
- Ethics in channel management
- Conflict resolution among channel members
- How should B2B marketing managers deal with downstream customers? The fact that demand for their products is derived from the demand for their customers' products is probably the most distinctive characteristic of B2B marketing, but surprisingly little academic attention is given to that in B2B marketing literature.
- Selection of channel partners: How and what criteria are and should be used to select channel partners in B2B markets. Virtually no recent research on this very important issue.
- Motivation of channel partners: How do manufacturers motivate distributors to do a better job of selling their products and provide better service to customers. This is an old and pervasive issue but still highly relevant today. Surprisingly very little research on this topic.
- Evaluation of channel member performance: How is channel member performance evaluated? How should it be evaluated? What metrics should be used etc.?



- Trust between channel members in their social networks
- Multiple channels, the internet and B2B channel management
- How do small distributors interact with large customers and vice versa?

B2B marketing theory

The foundation of all research is solid theory. B2B marketing theory may have had its beginning in HOWARD and SHETH (1969), but despite twenty-five years of research, we are still a long way from fully understanding how business markets function. Hunt's article (2013) compares several theoretical foundations to B2B marketing theory, but as our IMM reviewers indicated, there is ample room for additional research.

- Macro level frameworks - including institutional theory, resource dependence, network analysis and political theory - and how they apply to contemporary formulation of business marketing strategy.
- Theoretical reflection of B2B marketing: sorting the underlying theories and discussion of future developments.
- B2B for SMEs: much of theory relates to B2B between large corporations but there is a counter trend towards fragmentation of organizations and growth of SMEs for which existing theory is not appropriate
- How practitioners can implement B2B marketing theory, since without demonstrable value why should companies give us access?
- Micro-foundations of B2B marketing. Companies and markets do not innovate, implement market strategies, etc. – individuals do. Nevertheless, in our research we frequently attach labels to companies (“more innovative”) as if companies were able to act on their own. If thus seems a fruitful research avenue to examine the

micro-foundations of industrial marketing strategy, i.e. the antecedents to individual actor propensity to innovate, to conceive of and implement radical innovation, etc. Also, an extension to the meso-area (examining how teams of individuals) craft and implement B2B marketing strategies seems warranted.

- Behavioral aspects of B2B marketing. LEVINTHAL (2011) asks the question “A behavioral approach to strategy – what’s the alternative?” Recent developments in finance, organization theory and marketing have moved behavioral aspects of decision making solidly within mainstream research. The majority of research in this area has been conducted in consumer markets – in many instances with student samples – leaving implications for industrial marketing largely unexplored. Understanding phenomena such as biases in decision making, cognitive fallacies, preference construction, encoding/storing/decoding of information by actors in industrial markets is largely an underexplored, but interesting, research field.
- Institutional theory in business marketing

Other topics

The research topics discussed above represent about two-thirds of the specific topics mentioned by the IMM reviewers. OBAL and LANCIONI (2013) present needed research in buyer-seller relationships; research papers along the lines they discuss would also be welcome. Some of the topics which I, as editor, would find quite interesting are listed here:

- We probably know a lot about the creation of new markets by consumer good companies, e.g. Starbucks, Apple, etc. The same cannot be said about industrial companies, probably because the general public (and or reviewers/researchers) are less interest-



ed in the process of new market creation by electronic component suppliers, specialty chemical companies or industrial service providers. Nevertheless, market creation is a pervasive phenomenon also in industrial companies: Monsanto (nearly single-handedly) created the market for genetically modified seeds, Bayer created the market for a new type of treatment in agrochemicals, etc. Understanding the antecedents of new market creation in B2B is of interest.

- Companies and markets do not innovate, implement market strategies, etc. – individuals do. Nevertheless, in our research we frequently attach labels to companies (“more innovative”) as if companies were able to act on their own. If thus seems a fruitful research avenue to examine the micro-foundations of industrial marketing strategy, i.e. the antecedents to individual actor propensity to innovate, to conceive of and implement radical innovation, etc. Also, an extension to the meso-area (examining how teams of individuals) craft and implement B2B marketing strategies seems warranted.
- We do not know enough about how the DMU makes decisions – this goes back to Sheth’s original 1973 observation that all joint decisions are political ones. But just how does this work – this takes us into the realm of group decision making.
- Multidisciplinary perspectives on firm performance. While B2B has studied economic and behavioral factors in managerial decisions and firm operations, we need more studies that link B2B activities to firm performance measures, especially financial performance
- Systems/solutions selling, deployment, and post-deployment. Much research on servitization/service infusion in manufacturing has emerged the last 10 years but a key challenge for most of these firms is to successfully integrate goods and services

and provide systems for their business customers. The concept goes back to LARS-GUNNAR MATTSSON (1973) and HANNAFORD (1976) but with the IT revolution and the explosion of new service opportunities (remote control, cloud services, etc.) and the demand for new outcome-based revenue models these issues become critical once again, albeit different than in the 1970s.

- Research related to platforms whether they are product, technology, digital or product-service platforms is on the rise. This is because of success of such b-to-c services like amazon.com and Apple iTunes, not to mention mobile ecosystems. Platform business models are becoming more relevant in B-to-B context because firms will have to make choices whether they are complementors, owners/orchestrator, or end users in which platforms. Locking-in a certain platform creates resource dependencies and new possibilities to study inter-firm networks born in platforms.

Research Methods

In order to be accepted for publication, any research paper must utilize acceptable research methodologies. The IMM reviewers indicated several methodological topics which could be published in leading B2B journals. See PETERS *et al* (2013) for an excellent discussion of alternative research methodologies. Some of the specific methodological topics that IMM reviewers would like to see include:

- Longitudinal studies in real-life behavior in B2B contexts
- Real-life decision processes (not 5-point and 7-point scales)
- More emphasis on publishing qualitative studies in B2B marketing. In quantitative studies, more emphasis should be given on



longitudinal studies especially in studies related to buyer-seller relationships, and buying and selling cycles, and purchase decisions

- Longitudinal studies tracking how B2B marketing has evolved within companies and the implications for company performance
- More of an effort to generate objective data and improved use of hard-to-obtain secondary data
- Multilevel research designs; the unintended consequences of b2b studied phenomena
- Better handle on the temporal effects of our models with longitudinal research designs
- Multi-method research. Many studies are either based on case studies or surveys but there are many benefits of being able to combine qualitative and quantitative methods in innovative ways

Conclusion

The field of B2B marketing is rapidly growing as a research focus and academic researchers have ample opportunity to conduct research with a high likelihood of publication if they focus on research topics of importance and interest and they follow accepted research methodologies. This paper has presented numerous research topics that practitioners, editors, reviewers and other researchers have identified and being of high interest and importance.

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