

Some Reflections on the State of Business-to-Business Marketing Research

By

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Opening Quotes

"You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus"

"Whenever you find that you are on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect"

"If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything"

all by *Mark Twain*

Abstract

Purpose - This interlude mirrors some of the issues raised in Tanner (2021) on the areas of the contribution, made to the field: a review of several inflection points that led the evolution of Business-to-Business (B-to-B) marketing research, the lack of relevance of B-to-B marketing research, and the challenge of little B-to-B research reaching mainstream journals. Acknowledged is that the issues addressed are timely and relevant to an inquiry into the current state of B-to-B research. Agreed that B-to-B research is still under-represented in marketing literature and that B-to-B marketing research should be of value that is more practical. However, it is also argued that a more thoughtful discussion on the journals that publish B-to-B marketing studies is needed. There is a rising trend in the number and impact of *Journal of Business to Business Marketing* (JBBM) publications per year, not fully captured in Tanner (2021) study. This commentary complements that paper by reflecting on some of the issues raised and discusses implications that beneficial for our organizational marketing researchers.

Design/methodology/approach – This is both an assessment of historical data, literature review, and a contemporary analysis of business marketing. It is based on the author’ interpretation of the case of relevance in B-to-B marketing research and the relative importance of JBBM within the field of B-to-B marketing.

Findings – A strong case is made for the relevance gap in B-to-B marketing providing insights on what does managerial relevance involve, why there is a gap between academics and practitioners, and how the gap can be bridged. Academics and practitioners agree that academic research should be of more practical value. However, their priorities differ. For academics publishing in refereed journals is the first priority and influencing practice is of much lower priority, while practitioners are not interested in the methodological and theoretical advances of marketing research; their priority is to satisfy day-to-day practical needs. In addition, the paper corrects the record on the relative importance of B-to-B journals in the contribution of studies of B-to-B marketing. JBBM’s growth in quality and influence to the field is documented.

Practical implications –The study provides academics with guidance concerning how B-to-B marketing research can have a greater effect on the practice of marketing.

Originality/value – The paper contributes to the research base by identifying and discussing critical aspects of the academic/practitioner gap. The study also offers insights into how managerial relevance in marketing research can, practically, be improved. Also, the paper reveals the impact that JBBM fosters the evolution of business marketing is achieving.

Keywords: business-to-business marketing, academic journals, managerial relevance, marketing theory, academic research

1. Introduction

Tanner (2021) provides a partial overview of the current state of Business-to-Business (B-to-B) Marketing, with both a retrospective and directions for the future. Tanner (2021) starts by noting difference in business-to-business marketing to business-to-consumer marketing. In next, the important issues, a point of inflection point that led to the advancement of B-to-B marketing theory over the years yet, at the same time, led to some divergence from practice. Related to this, Tanner (2021) notes too little B-to-B research reaching journals, having both a mainstream and practitioner appeal, despite the fact that the state of business-to-business marketing research is healthy. Tanner (2021) undoubtedly provides a general sense of where B-to-B marketing comes from and where we may be heading, revealing, and the relevance gap as the main challenge in B-to-B marketing research nowadays. As academics in the field of B-to-B, Tanner (2021) shows how the research topics in B-to-B marketing have evolved and expanded throughout the years, vis-a-vis the evolution of the business environment, which reveals further evidence that the state of B-to-B marketing research is healthy in terms of depth and breadth.

In this interlude, acknowledged is that the issues addressed are relevant to an inquiry into the current state of B-to-B research. B-to-B research is still under-represented in marketing literature and that B-to-B marketing research should be of value that is more practical. However, it is also argued that an even more thoughtful discussion on the journals that publish B-to-B marketing studies is warranted. There is a rising trend in the number and impact of *Journal of Business to Business Marketing* (JBBM) publications per year, which is not captured in Tanner (2021). In addition, while the theme of relevance gap in B-to-B marketing remains timely, and will probably persist in the following years, the paper would have benefited from a more thorough discussion on the nature of relevance of B-to-B academic research, the reasons for the gap between academics and practitioners and the ways to bridge the gap. In this epilogue, initially this particular issue will be discussed – the concern of managerial relevance in B-to-B marketing research. Then a few remarks will be made concerning the nature and the set of academic journals relevant to B-to-B marketing articles. Finally, an agenda is proposed on how B-to-B

academics can reach out to practitioners and discuss implications that could inspire further research in the field of managerial relevance in B-to-B markets.

2. Relevance gap in B-to-B marketing

Tanner (2021) observes that B-to-B marketing research has become of limited practical value to practitioners and that the relevance gap and the topic areas that B-to-B researchers choose to study. Following this argumentation, he posits that marketers need encouragement to study areas in high demand among mainstream marketers and practitioners such as technology. While academic research in the field of B-to-B marketing should be of more practical value, the reasons of this relevance gap are deeper, broader, and are not limited to whether the topic area of a study is ‘mainstream’ or not. A more thorough discussion is required to further understanding why the research conducted within the B-to-B marketing field, even though is often of high quality and magnitude, does not reach managers largely.

The issue of a “relevance gap” in marketing research has usually been raised in the form of the “rigour vs. relevance” debate (Jaworski 2011; Dziubaniuk et al. 2021; Lee and Greenley 2010; Ankers and Brennan 2002). Some academics view managerial relevance as the primary aim of academic research (Piercy 2002). On the other hand, others argue for a more balanced view, suggesting that practitioners may not be the main stakeholders in academic research (Grey 2001). Regardless of whether managerial relevance should be the primary objective of academic research or not, B-to-B marketing is an applied business discipline and, hence, marketing academics need to create knowledge that is useful for theory and practice (Lilien 2016). B-to-B marketing is not simply a field of inquiry but a perspective that helps legitimately align the academic world to the business world and ensures relevance and rigor in everything people do as marketing academics (Lichtenthal et al 2006). However, studies have shown that B-to-B marketing, although often of high quality, is becoming increasingly irrelevant to practice (Cortez and Johnston 2017; Lilien 2016; Möller and Halinen 2022; Åge and Cederlund 2014; Brennan & Turnbull, 2002; Baines et al., 2009; Brennan, Tzempelikos, and Wilson 2014; Sheth and Sharma 2006). Although practitioners are “the ultimate audience for B-to-B academic research”, (Lilien 2016; p. 553) they seem not to care much for the academic research created by B-to-B researchers (Cortez and Johnston 2017).

2.1. Why there is a gap?

The research done by marketing academics is typically not read and appreciated by practitioners regardless of how relevant to practice this research is (Lee and Greenley 2010). This brings the discussion to the following question: why does academic marketing research have little to say to actual managerial needs and is shunned by practitioners¹. A first important reason is scholars' academic writing style, which is usually sophisticated and specialized, making the content of articles hard to digest for managers (Dziubaniuk et al. 2021; Ankers and Brennan 2002). Scholarly work should not be needlessly difficult. While academics should always write with an intended audience in mind, they should also ensure that they communicate their message in as elegant and concise a way as possible, a balance that many academics fail to achieve (Lee and Greenley 2010).

A second reason for the gap between researchers and practitioners is the fact that practitioners' needs are characterized by a complexity that research has not been able to keep up with (c.f. Åge and Cederlund 2014; Möller and Halinen 2022). Top academic marketing journals are argued to be too focused on quantitative modelling and that this prevents practitioners from adopting ideas from academic research (Reibstein, Day, and Wind 2009; Gummesson 2006).

From a more pragmatic viewpoint, academic research in B-to-B marketing is argued to be too general and slow (Baines et al. 2009). Even if a journal article aims to address a real-life managerial issue the time required for the submission of a manuscript to a journal, the review process and the publication of the paper is so excessive that the problem under investigation becomes practically outdated (Brennan, Tzempelikos, and Wilson 2014).

Another reason behind the academic/practitioner gap relates to the role of education, Gummesson (in Lee and Greenley 2010) posits that education has been built upon a deductive approach that aims to explain reality through preconceived theory and does not allow practical experiences to inform education (an inductive approach). As a result, education tends to be dominated by 'textbook knowledge', much of which is out-dated. Most recent textbooks report findings from the 1990s or 2000s

¹ The point of the discussion is that tools R & D (Research and Development), not often known, and managerial relevance can be derived, mindful of limitations, the relevant "limitations" that are not, per se foibles.

and tend to address business phenomena with a delay (e.g. only recently has there been systematic analysis of social media in B-to-B marketing literature even though B-to-B firms have been embracing social media for around ten years now). What has happened since? Is this knowledge helpful to practitioners in addressing current real-life problems? Gummesson (in Lee and Greenley 2010) argues that the marketing landscape changes but much of the scholarly work fails to keep up with the pace of evolving business needs and thereby is largely irrelevant to practitioners. *Reality runs faster than textbooks*. The logic behind education and the way business courses are structured may also lead to the limited scope and impact of scholarly work (Lichtenthal 2007; Lichtenthal et al. 2006; Kriz et al. 2021). Academics tend to limit themselves to formulating problems and *'producing' knowledge without being able to sufficiently transfer it to application*.

Cortez and Johnston (2017) and Gummesson (2014) posit that academics have probably failed in the dissemination of academic research beyond the academic community because academics and practitioners have different goals. Academics who aim for promotion are expected to produce a large number of publications and citations from other researchers; this adds up in their impact factor. On the other hand, practitioners who aim for promotion are expected to generate a contribution to profits, which is a very different kind of 'impact' (Gummesson 2014; Baker 2015; Lee and Greenley 2010).

To this end, it must be noted that the responsibility for the academic-practitioner relationship is on the academics (Lilien 2016). As Lee and Greenley (2010, p. 17) put it: "we have only ourselves to blame for this". The default condition is for managers not to be engaged with academics.

2.2. How the gap can be bridged?

Even though there is *no perfect or easy way to narrow the gap between academics and practitioners*, there are pragmatic ways of making academics and practitioners benefit from each other. Researchers see changes in how academic publications work as a way to narrow the relevance gap (Reibstein, Day, and Wind 2009; McKenzie et al. 2002; Brennan, Tzempelikos, and Wilson 2014). The primary target audience of refereed journals is academics. Even the writing style, structure, citations etc. reflect this orientation. The question that arises therefore is, are practitioners reading our

publications or are we just talking to ourselves? (McKenzie et al. 2002). In order to address this issue Reibstein, Day, and Wind (2009) call for more conceptual papers. They suggest that leading academic journals should publish papers that insightfully address practical managerial issues even if they do not introduce complicated theories or advanced methodologies. Currently there seems to be limited interest among the leading journals in thoughtful, rigorous conceptual articles that suggest new research directions (Reibstein, Day, and Wind 2009; MacInnis 2011; Baker 2015). Moreover, conceptual articles could make at least as great a contribution to marketing practice as empirical articles (Yadav 2010). Perhaps inviting practitioners to review for these journals, along with academics, would be particularly useful in ensuring the managerial relevance of papers (Brennan, Tzempelikos, and Wilson 2014). In line with this there are calls for the writing style to be simpler (not simplistic) and more accessible to practitioners (Dziubaniuk et al. 2021; Brennan and Ankers 2004; Kuusela et al. 2014). Academic writing is often not actionable for practitioners.

In this context, leading scholars such as Reibstein, Day, and Wind (2009), Roberts, Kayande, and Stremersch (2014b) and Lilien (2011) have raised the issue of taking our discipline further from its connections to practice, what is called the ‘self-inflicted loss of relevance’ (Roberts, Kayande, and Stremersch 2014b). Rigour has become an almost exclusive criterion for accepting/rejecting papers. Reviewers care more about the perfection of an answer to a question than about the relevance of the question (Roberts, Kayande, and Stremersch 2014b). One of the reasons for this is that many new marketing faculty members are entering the field, particularly from economics, who know little about marketing institutions or the practice of marketing (Winer 2014). Academic standards should be met yet have to consider if damage is being caused to our ability to influence practice by focusing solely on rigour. Practitioners, especially senior level managers, often deal with big questions that need useful, even if imperfect, answers. Thus, by favouring perfection over relevance, there is the risk of what is considered to be an important criterion for contribution becoming less relevant in terms of overall business impact, leading to the practice of marketing becoming even less influential in firms than it is already (Roberts, Kayande, and Stremersch 2014b).

In line with the previous points, academics should invite practitioners into our research activities (e.g. conferences, membership of journal advisory boards) and establish contact forums between researchers and managers (Holmlund, Kowalkowski, and Biggemann 2016). Nenonen et al. (2017) and Kohli (2017) propose that practitioners should be involved in research processes as active, reflective and empowered participants. The role of practitioners is not just to ‘consume’ knowledge but it is also possible to create rigorous knowledge in collaboration with practitioners (Nenonen et al. 2017) or, even, build theories from practice (Schultz and Hatch 2005). This entails shifting from a logic of influencing marketing practice from theory to one of building theory from practice.

Reibstein, Day, and Wind (2009) also recommend that institutes should take initiatives towards bridging the academic/practitioner gap. In particular, it is widely known that most promotion and salary decisions in academia largely depend on publication in highly ranked refereed journals. In addition, publishing in practice-based magazines (e.g. trade magazines) is generally viewed by universities as ‘nice to have’ but definitely not a compulsory requirement in the progression of an academic’s career. The main assumption is that that part of the purpose of business schools is to advance the practice of business, then contributions to the advancement of marketing practice should be taken into consideration when making decisions about promotion, tenure and salary increases (Reibstein, Day, and Wind 2009; Calder and Tybout 1999).

Researchers may also need to reconsider the nature of the methodological approach they follow. Many researchers have pointed out that managers’ realities are characterized by an immense complexity that research has not been able to keep up with (Gummesson 2014; Gustavsson and Åge 2014; Guette, Matthyssens, and Vandenbempt 2014). The relevance of B-to-B marketing research will increase if it manages to embrace complexity largely (Åge and Cederlund 2014). Gummesson (2014) and Gustavsson and Åge (2014) argue for the need for broader, more abstract conceptualizations to grasp this complexity. In this way, complexity turns into a simplification that leads to applied, actionable mid-range theory that will eventually enhance relevance for managers. Gummesson (2014) supports the use of case study research as a suitable methodological approach for capturing the complexity of B-to-B marketing and contributing better real-world-based theory. There is a consensus that B-to-B marketing

will become more relevant if practice and academia are brought together. Some initiatives towards this have been taken (e.g. ISBM annual member meetings, where many B-to-B marketing stakeholders, not just academics, participate), however there is more that could (and should) be done so that academics can actually obtain a good feel for the practitioner's perspective and be able to provide concrete solutions to real-life problems that practitioners face.

3. Presence of B-to-B marketing research in the marketing literature

Many academics have acknowledged that, despite the prevalence of business-to-business (B-to-B) activities in the marketplace, there is not enough B-to-B research in journals or B-to-B discussion in classrooms (Cortez 2019; Sheth and Sharma 2006; Danneels and Lilien 1998; LaPlaca and Katrichis 2009). In line with this stream of research, Tanner (2021) argues that while the field of B-to-B marketing is healthy and a significant body of scholars is studying B-to-B marketing, B-to-B marketing research does not enjoy the broad appeal of consumer research and fails to reach mainstream marketing journals such as *Journal of Marketing*. Tanner (2021) notes accurately B-to-B research is still under-represented in marketing literature.

Tanner (2021) repeatedly mentions *Industrial Marketing Management* (IMM) and *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* (JBIM) as the only journals that one needs to review to realize the large volume of studies of B-to-B marketing. IMM and JBIM are the first two B-to-B journals (started on 1972 and 1986, respectively) and, without doubt, have contributed a significant body of B-to-B research over the years. Tanner (2021) omits mention *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing* (JBBM), also premium journal focusing on B-to-B marketing since 1995. JBBM is an academic journal published by Taylor and Francis LLC, which provides higher quality articles benefiting academic and professional groups (Lichtenthal 2008). This omission prevents a full and accurate picture of the landscape of B-to-B research outlets.

JBBM published its first edition in 1992. During the past three decades, under Dave Wilson's (1992-1995) and, mainly, David Lichtenthal's (1995-present) editorship, JBBM has grown in both size and stature. Physically JBBM began publication in 1992 as a quarterly journal and now publishes seven

issues a year. The number of articles has also increased over the years. From 1997 onward, JBBM did not fall below the two-digit values in publication numbers even achieving 26 articles in 2007. From 2018 onwards, JBBM has increased the number of publications to over 20 per annum. Of note that a very large book review section was captured in the first fifteen years of the journal. The distribution of publications is shown in Table 1 for the 1992–2022 period.

Most importantly, JBBM has grown in quality and influence since inception. Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS, UK) Academic Journal Guide, Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) Journal Quality List, and Scopus rank the journal, among others, and the impact factor of the journal has steadily climbed and has now reached 2.293. Data presented in Table 1 show that the citations of JBBM have constantly increased throughout the years. Overall, 4,171 citations generated up to the year 2022. Interesting to note that although papers usually require time to be cited in future publications, the JBBM publications have not started to decrease the last few years. On the contrary, they have increased. This highlights the increasing impact of JBBM on the field.

Table 1: Evolution of JBBM's publications and citations

Year	Total Publications*	Total Citations
1992	4	0
1993	9	0
1994	8	3
1995	8	8
1996	6	12
1997	10	14
1998	25	20
1999	15	26
2000	14	35
2001	12	24
2002	18	36
2003	10	38
2004	16	39
2005	13	63
2006	13	80
2007	26	108

2008	19	119
2009	12	129
2010	14	166
2011	12	186
2012	13	209
2013	13	200
2014	13	260
2015	20	244
2016	18	259
2017	16	288
2018	20	311
2019	23	308
2020	23	404
2021	24	488
2022**	3	94
Total	450	4,171

Source: Own elaboration based on Scopus data

Note: JBBM was not adequately indexed until 2005 hence the first 8 years JBBM was not being followed. In later years Taylor & Francis sustains these efforts to ensure the content contained in JBBM's publications is adequately abstracted/indexed in all major databases. The current state can be seen here:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=wbbm20>

*Publications include articles, reviews, editorials/ commentaries and book chapters

**the analysis limits to February 2022.

A recent bibliometric analysis of JBBM content also found that the citations of JBBM have increased throughout the years (Valenzuela-Fernandez et al. 2019). Valenzuela-Fernandez et al. (2019) showed that, as a general overview, 71.04% of JBBM publications have been cited at least once, and 25% more than 10 times. Overall, the citations provided an average citation per paper of 9.62 and an h-index of 25, which reveals, that there are at least 25 papers that have at least 25 citations, whereas 12 papers have more than 50 citations. It is worth noting that although the *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* (JBIM) is an older and “larger” journal than the JBBM and performs better according to Scopus, the citations per paper are quite similar (9.62 JBBM vs 12.14 JBIM). JBBM is now among the highest rated journal focusing exclusively on B-to-B marketing, along with IMM and JBIM.

The top 10 journals that give more citations to JBBM are shown in Table 2. *Industrial Marketing Management* (IMM) is the highest with 465 publications citing JBBM articles, with *Journal of Business*

& *Industrial Marketing* (JBIM) following in second place with 252 articles and the JBBM in the third place with 225 publications. Interesting to note that these three journals combined have 942 articles citing JBBM (73% of the total citations), while the rest of the journals within the top 10 have only have 342 publications all together (27% of the total citations). This provides further evidence that the core of B-to-B marketing is around these three journals (i.e, IMM, JBBM, and JBIM).

Table 2: Citing Articles of JBBM (1992–2022 period)

R	Journal	Total citations
1	Industrial Marketing Management	465
2	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	252
3	Journal of Business to Business Marketing	225
4	Journal of Business Research	114
5	European Journal of Marketing	47
6	Sustainability (Switzerland)	43
7	Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management	41
8	Journal of The Academy of Marketing Science	33
9	International Journal Of Production Economics	32
10	Journal of Marketing	32

Source: Own elaboration based on Scopus data

Note: JBBM was not adequately indexed until 2005.

JBBM has also grown in scope. It has strengthened its international focus, in terms of contributors and reviewers. JBBM has been publishing articles from authors from all over the world yet the United States (222 publications), United Kingdom (37 publications) and Germany (29 publications) obtain the most remarkable results. In addition, the editorial board has grown considerably over the years including around 100 academic members from over 20 countries, 20 states and 5 continents (<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=editorialBoard&journalCode=wbbm20>) (Valenzuela-Fernandez et al. 2019). This reaffirms that JBBM is an international journal on B-to-B marketing and not a journal of B-to-B international marketing (Lichtenthal 2008).

Consistently, JBBM has established strong links with the broader academic community. Specifically, JBBM has published many special issues/ special sections and many book reviews and commentaries/ viewpoints on relevant B-to-B marketing topics, of interest to both academics and practitioners. Finally, it is correct to note that IMM, JBBM and JBIM seem to be evolving into a common niche with similar topics, and contributors to some degree, and the core of B-to-B marketing is around these three journals (Lichtenthal et al. 2006). Backhaus, Lügger, and Koch (2011), in their bibliometric study, argued for IMM, JBBM and JBIM as the main B-to-B research outlets due to their frequent characterization as leading journals in the field and their coverage of both applied and theoretical research.

Interesting to note that, apart from JBBM, there are other journals that have also devoted their content to B-to-B marketing (c.f. LaPlaca and Katrichis 2009), which does Tanner (2021) does not mention: 1. *Journal of Business Market Management*, started in 2007 by the Freie Universität Berlin; and 2. The Industrial Marketing & Purchasing Group (IMP) launched an electronic, open-access, journal (the *IMP Journal*) in 2005 and, since 2008, has merged to become JBIM. 3. *Industrial Marketing & Purchasing* published B-to-B articles from 1986 to 1988. In 1988, it merged with the *International Marketing Review* (IMR) and, ever since, helps account for the high percentage of B-to-B articles appearing in the IMR. 4. *Advances in Business Marketing and Purchasing* (ABMP), an annual serial publication that focuses on B-to-B marketing that has started in 1986.

There are also journals that are technically not belonging within the B-to-B domain; still they focus on B-to-B marketing. More specifically, on how business customers buy, such as *Journal of Customer Behaviour*, the prestigious *Journal of Retailing* and other retailing journals such as the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* and *The International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* (Dant and Brown 2009).

In his omission of the B-to-B journals other than IMM and JBIM, Tanner (2021) has ignored a rich stream of B-to-B research, which may have led to the underestimation of the role of B-to-B research in the marketing literature. Our objective in this commentary is to correct the record on the relative importance of B-to-B journals, especially JBBM, in the contribution of studies of B-to-B marketing.

IMM and JBIM are, without doubt, journals with high impact on the field but JBBM is a premium B-to-B journal too.

4. Advisories

Tanner (2021) and Cortez (2019) notes that the B-to-B world appears to be detached, in general, from academic research. The discussion reported above offers grounds for both pessimism and optimism. On the one hand, pessimistically, academic researchers see refereed journal articles as the primary metric determining their career progression, while marketing practitioners have little awareness of these journals and do not consider them a useful source of professional information. On the other hand, both groups believe, first, that there should be more collaboration between academics and practitioners and, second, that academic research should be of value that is more practical. However, their priorities differ. For academics, publishing in refereed journals is the first priority and influencing practice is of much lower priority, while practitioners are often not interested in the methodological and theoretical advances of marketing research; their priority is to satisfy day-to-day practical needs. Our discussion aims at stimulating debate within the marketing academic community on how academics can have a greater impact on marketing practice without ignoring their principal role of advancing knowledge. Three topics that, in our understanding, deserve more attention from researchers in the future are the methodology adopted, how stakeholders can (and should) be involved in the further development of managerial relevance, and how practitioners can be involved as active participants in the research process.

First, although academics need to reconsider the methodology adopted for their studies to reach practitioners it is necessary begin by identifying exactly how this needs to be done, the alternative methodological options and the suitability of each of them. Previous studies have called for stronger theoretical underpinnings and more flexible, interpretive research approaches to tap the richness of real-life business settings (Baker 2015). Regardless of the actual methodology chosen (quantitative, case study, grounded theory, to name but a few), as each has its own pros and cons, closing the relevance gaps in the field of B-to-B marketing cannot be done with quick-fix recipes (Guette, Matthyssens, and

Vandenbempt 2014); a change of mind-set is needed in favour of applied action research (Gummesson 2014).

Second, research is needed to explore the role that key areas such as academic managers, professional bodies, publications and PhD programmes play in order to bridge the academic/practitioner gap. Practitioners need to know whether they can utilize the knowledge created within the broader academic world, via either PhD theses or journal articles, to address their practical day-to-day needs. Obviously, addressing these issues also relates to institutional actions that are beyond individual academics' control, at least to some extent. For example, institutes are entitled to add 'impact' to the promotion process. However, academics, as individuals, can try to improve things and push for institutional changes.

Third, research is needed to better understand the role of practitioners as active participants in the research process. Contrary to the traditional view that academics 'produce' knowledge (theories, models) and the audience (academic and/or managerial) 'consumes' it, there have been calls to involve practitioners in research processes as active, reflective and empowered participants (Nenonen et al. 2017; Roberts, Kayande, and Stremersch 2014a; Lee and Greenley 2010). New knowledge is developed, often but not always, by marketing academics (Roberts, Kayande, and Stremersch 2014a). The involvement of practitioners seems to be a viable way of not only generating relevant knowledge but also socializing it (Fendt, Kaminska-Labbé, and Sachs 2008). This could take the form of participation in knowledge generation (e.g. co-creation of research) or even participation in the publication process (e.g. invited to be reviewers or members of editorial boards of journals). As Tanner (2021) puts it 'the challenge is now finding that common ground', an objective of this commentary too.

Tanner (2021) certifies on the importance of B-to-B research to focus more on technology-related work to reach mainstream marketers and practitioners. Organisations are undergoing deep transformation pertaining to, financialization, globalization and digitalisation. B-to-B research needs to capture the evolution of the business environment to remain relevant. However, this forward thinking approach should not be limited to the research area only (e.g. new systems, innovation, social media adoption, omni-channels, etc) but should also include suggestions on how B-to-B researchers can

embrace technology and new communication channels in order to disseminate the research findings into a broader, more mainstream audience.

No matter what can be done to make academic research more relevant and to bring it more widely to the attention of managers nothing is likely going to persuade those managers to consume information in the form of a complex 8,000 word article containing both relevance (what was found out that makes a difference to practice) and irrelevance (such as the details of the research methods and the scholarly literature review) (Brennan, Tzempelikos, and Wilson, 2014). Some journals have already made advances in this direction; for example, the *Journal of Consumer Research* (JCR) publicizes research through its RSS feed, and you can follow JCR on Twitter or on Facebook. The JCR website provides a wide range of links to popular and business media outlets, such as The Huffington Post, The Chicago Tribune, The Daily Mail, Forbes, and TIME Business that have published articles based on JCR research (see <https://consumerresearcher.com/>). While publicizing research is no guarantee of relevance, it is an important step in the right direction. Marketing academics wishing to promote their research to a wider audience, perhaps including practitioners, policy makers and the general public, should certainly consider blogging about their research, perhaps using ‘Brand New Worlds’, the blog of Robert Kozinets (York University, Canada) as a model (see <http://kozinets.net/>). For example, in the world of B-to-B marketing, after a cursory look, found many B-to-B Marketing groups can be found on LinkedIn with thousands of members, mostly marketing practitioners, in December 2021 (e.g. ‘BtoB Marketing’. ‘B-to-B Technology Marketing Community’, ‘Salesforce.com’, ‘B-to-B Sales, Marketing, Social Media & Lead Generation’, and others). Many active discussions are live at any one time, often sparked by blog posts.

5. Kaleidoscope

Tanner (2021) has undertaken a large amount of work to review the main research areas that have emerged throughout the evolution of B-to-B theory (c.f. Lichtenthal, Mummalaneni, and Wilson, 2008; Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013; Cortez and Johnston 2017). B-to-B research is under-represented in marketing literature and should be encouraged research that will have broader mainstream appeal and practical value. Yet, there is a need to take note of in the Tanner’s (2021) study, which relates to the B-

to-B research outlets. In particular, addressed is the assertion of Tanner's (2021) that one only needs to review the publication record of *Industrial Marketing Management* (IMM) and the *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* (JBIM) to realize the health of the B-to-B marketing research. Clearly, the *Journal of Business to Business Marketing* (JBBM) is an important supplier of B-to-B research as well. By dismissing JBBM from their list of B-to-B journals, Tanner (2021) may have underestimated the contribution of B-to-B research to marketing knowledge and the depth and breadth of B-to-B marketing research as a discipline within marketing literature. Our objective is to relay JBBM achievements a la other B-to-B titles, revealing the impact that JBBM provides through fostering the evolution of business marketing is realized. In this context, important to note that many of its authors got their first publication with JBBM or board membership, and that more seemingly controversial papers found their way to JBBM pages. As reported by Lichtenthal, Tzempelikos and Tellefsen (2018), the mere proliferation of journals since 1978 is astounding albeit largely unknown by most individual scholars. There were just under 200 titles from 1978 to 1983, by 2010 the number of journals reached to around 3500. By 2019, that number grew to over 12,000! (see Figure 1).

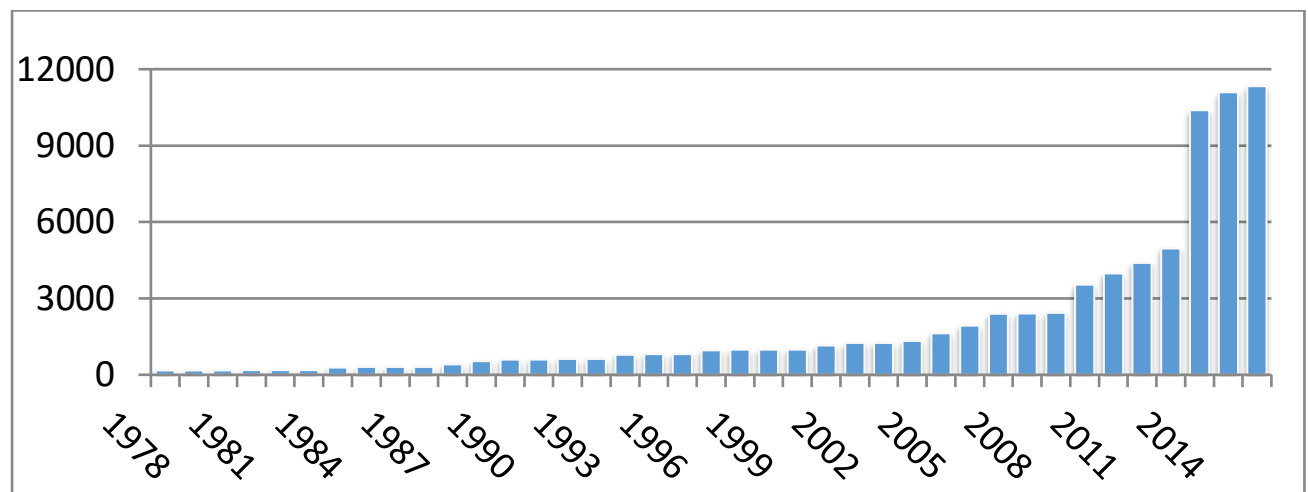


Figure 1. Total Number of Journals Published.

Source: Lichtenthal, J . David, N. Tzempelikos, and T. Tellefsen. 2018. Journal positioning meta-issues as evolving contexts: Organizational marketing at the crossroads. *Industrial Marketing Management* 69:40–52

In parallel manner, the same can be said for proliferation of business journals. The number of business journals climbed from just under 160 titles from 1978 to over 3500 by 2018 (see Figure 2)! For Marketing, more specifically, the total number of journal titles grows from 22 to 663 spanning over this 40-year period 1978–2016 (see Figure 3). The JBBMs and other title success and relative importance within the B-to-B marketing arena must be seen through the sea of change that has yet to subside (Valenzuela-Fernandez et al. 2019; Möller and Halinen 2022).

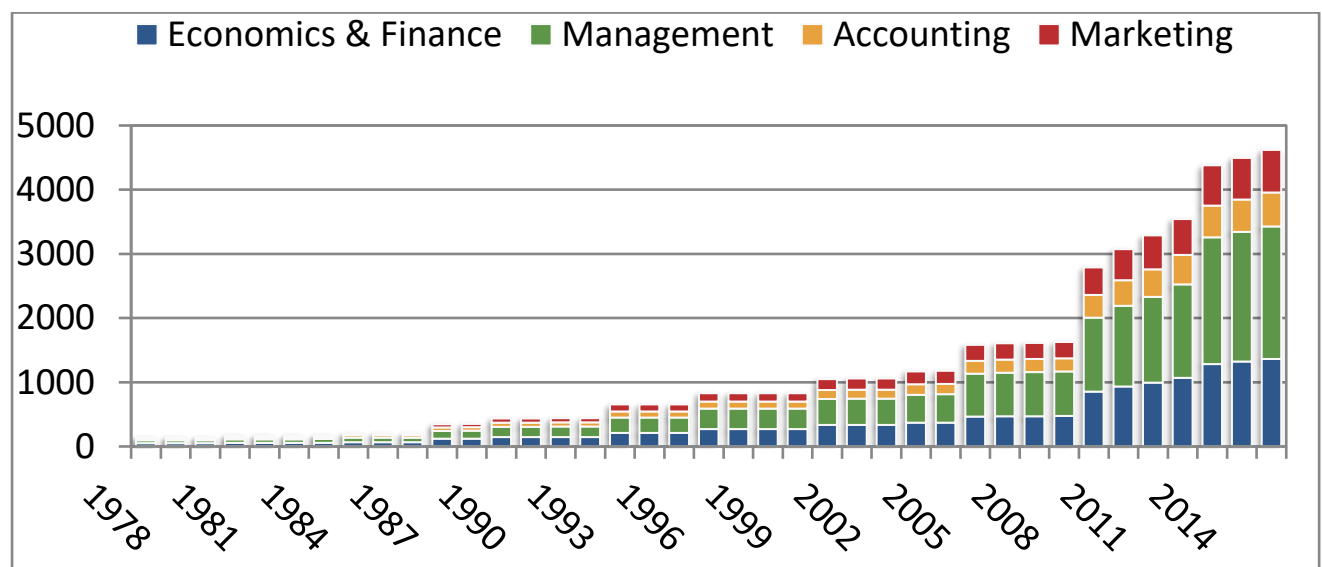


Figure 2. Total Number of Business Journals.

Source: Lichtenthal, J. David, N. Tzempelikos, and T. Tellefsen. 2018. Journal positioning meta-issues as evolving contexts: Organizational marketing at the crossroads. *Industrial Marketing Management* 69:40–52

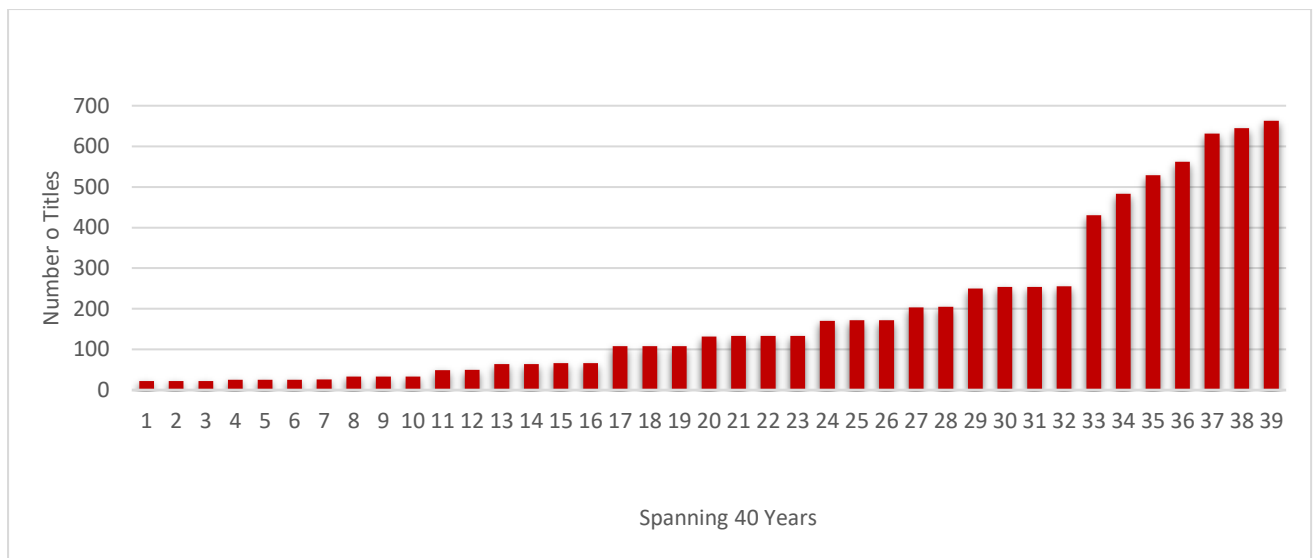


Figure 3. Number of Marketing Journals.

Source: Lichtenthal, J . David, N. Tzempelikos, and T. Tellefsen. 2018. Journal positioning meta-issues as evolving contexts: Organizational marketing at the crossroads. *Industrial Marketing Management* 69:40–52

In addition, opposed to Tanner’s (2021) assumption that the main challenge for B-to-B researchers is to identify topics of mainstream acceptance should they want to increase the relevance of their work, *this paper argues that managerial relevance is not just about studying the ‘right’ topic*. This argument leaves the picture incomplete. The topic of managerial relevance in B-to-B research is complex and broad as it touches upon various areas such as methodological approaches, education, and the review process. Clearly, one is unable to cover the full breadth and depth of the problem within a single paper. This paper aims to provide food for thought for marketing scholars on how practice and academia might be brought together. Whilst the marketing literature has generally agreed that academics should not only create knowledge but also translate and transfer this knowledge to practitioners, academic research in B-to-B marketing has been of limited practical value to practitioners (Brennan and Ankers 2004), a conclusion that seems to be still true (Dziubaniuk et al. 2021; Åge and Cederlund 2014). Having said that, it is not being suggest that marketing research should focus solely on managerial impact neglecting its academic nature. That would be myopic. Advancing knowledge should remain a priority for academics. “the genesis of B-to-B marketing theory needs to be rooted in real practitioner problems while applying the rigor of academic research” (Cortez and Johnston 2017, p. 91) is timely. This should come along with a change in mind-set: marketing academics should shift

away from viewing the advancement of marketing theory as the centrepiece of scholarship; marketing research can (and should) be relevant to practice as well.

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