B2B marketing renaissance in business schools

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the elevation of the business-to-business (B2B) marketing field at the business school level.

Design/methodology/approach – The study follows a Delphi method. The authors conducted two rounds of discovery to answer: why do you think universities do not highly appreciate publications in *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* or *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*? What would you suggest for improving the impact of such journals not only in the USA but around the world?

Findings – Through the analysis of the coding transcript, four categories were found to elevate the B2B marketing field at the business school level: B2B as uncommon ground, B2B researcher practices, marketing science underpinnings and B2B marketing journals management.

Originality/value – The value of current research is based on its explorative nature and application of grounded theory to provide a framework to analyze how to elevate the B2B marketing field at the business school level.

Keywords Industrial marketing, Business school, B2B marketing theory, Marketing science

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Business-to-business (B2B) transactions account for a significant share of reported revenues in most developed and emerging countries. For example, almost 50 per cent of US revenues is generated by B2B commercial interactions (Lilien, 2016). Both service and manufacturing industries are heavily represented by B2B transactions in China, Canada, Germany, Japan and UK (Kleinaltenkamp, 2018). Despite of the economic relevance of B2B commercial interactions, the marketing field has not kept the pace in developing adequate academic interest (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017; Reid and Plank, 2000; Wiersema, 2013). Neither in the USA or Europe, B2B marketing journals reach the highest level of evaluation (e.g. FT50, AJG ranking [previously known as ABS ranking]). This is partially explained by the lack of domain knowledge by researchers (Lilien, 2016). Marketing students and later marketing scholars do not possess the necessary understanding of B2B markets and thus cannot see and comprehend "the beauty of this multifaceted, interesting and inspiring field" (Kleinaltenkamp, 2018, p. 125). Marketing academicians, as individuals, have personal experience in choosing consumer products and services. They can understand what functions and benefits an offering can do for them. However, in a B2B setting a researcher would commonly need much more specific knowledge such as a grounding in accounting, chemistry, geology, law, physics, biology or engineering (Lilien, 2016; Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017). Marketing students are then exposed to academicians who are not prepared in B2B marketing and would commonly use examples "originating from the colorful and shiny world of consumer brands" (Kleinaltenkamp, 2018, p. 125).

Work experience within a B2B firm is acknowledged as desirable before undertaking an endeavor in B2B marketing academia (Lilien, 2016). The trend towards increased methodological and statistical requirements for journal publications has created:

> The temptation [...] to design programs to develop highly competent technicians in an ever-narrower area of expertise – scholars who are less likely to make creative or theoretical leaps forward because of minimal exposure to diverse literatures and less opportunity and encouragement for deep thought (Scheer, 2019, p. 1).

This can generate a problematic atmosphere for, otherwise, qualified doctoral prospects; as they are concerned with the current escalating program length and more emphasis on statistical/econometric coursework (Scheer, 2019). Then, the desirable experience also becomes a detriment in the path for the potential PhD marketing student.

The complexity of data gathering in B2B marketing research, due to firm representatives having no time or willingness to share their knowledge and critical information, enhances the value of prior B2B working experience (Kleinaltenkamp, 2018). Collaboration with firms is an expedite form to respond to this challenge. Also, this allows the potential researcher to exploit the value of immersion into the world of managers (Jaworski, 2011), contributing to better positioning the purpose of research (Cederlund, 2014). While investing in gathering domain knowledge and focusing on real problems are indicating one type of researcher profile, the required breadth in knowledge of methodological approaches is pointing toward the opposite direction in a realistic assessment of candidates to become full-time B2B marketing doctoral students. The right B2B marketing doctoral student seems to be the perfect marketing doctoral student.

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A small number of institutions, such as Harvard University (US) and IMD (Switzerland), has developed strong ties with industry[1]. The efforts of faculty and marketing departments to build relationships with firms are still weak, limiting the scope of PhD students, incentivizing the approach of PhD. students to business-to-consumer (B2C) settings. Thus, PhD B2B marketing students during the program can be lacking the adequate learning experience as they would tend to work in silos, missing the needed interaction with peers – inherent to human nature. These difficulties make it troublesome for a graduating doctoral student focused on B2B marketing to achieve a premier level journal publication while in the program (Scheer, 2019). In consequence, B2B marketing graduates would enjoy lower level placement, eroding their motivation to stay in the academic domain. Moreover, in Europe many PhD students are aiming to pursue a career in practice (Kleinaltenkamp, 2018). This situation drains out intellectual capital from academia but favors collaboration. If the academic system is not able to create and sustain knowledgeable marketing scholars that are skilled to conduct B2B marketing research, there is less likelihood of a junior academician pursuing his/her personal strategic intent, diminishing the chances to generate savvy B2B professors. This produces a perverse cycle against developing B2B marketing knowledge centers or think-tanks. For example, the only formally established research institutions on B2B in the US are the *Institute for the Study of Business Markets* (ISBM) at Penn State University and the *Center for Business and Industrial Marketing* (CBIM) at Georgia State University. In Europe, B2B efforts are concentrated through the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP; Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017; Wiersema, 2013), trying to attract researchers from several schools – a difficult task in the past few years. More institutional initiatives are needed.

B2B marketing is still underrepresented in the top marketing journals (Kleinaltenkamp, 2018; Lilien, 2016). In the past two decades, a few B2B articles have been published in the *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research and Marketing Science* and none in the *Journal of Consumer Research* (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017; LaPlaca and Katrichis, 2009). Particularly, only 5 to 10 per cent of the papers in the leading general marketing journals deal with B2B themes (Kleinaltenkamp, 2018). Overall, the current B2B marketing status is calling for a renaissance of the field in business schools. Therefore, we aim to answer: why B2B marketing has a weak positioning in business schools (i.e. deans and chairs perceptions)? How can B2B marketing researchers and journals reverse this situation? These questions are connected due to most of research on B2B submitted to journals comes from academic staff based on business schools. However, there are research centers no related to business schools and many universities do not have properly business schools and are organized by other units such as faculties. The fact that there is less interest on B2B from Deans/Heads of schools' perspective maybe just due to teaching purposes (and students' demands), while the second question may be influenced by strictly research interest. Marketing science needs to clarify what is really happening.

Formally, we contribute to the B2B marketing field by provoking critical thought into a hidden but latent problem in this domain (i.e. lack of perceived academic relevance). This work is an important step in determining the reasons why our field has unsubstantial consideration in the scholarly world. Also, we provide guidelines to overcoming the underappreciation of B2B marketing in business schools. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. We inspect three key components of the B2B marketing field history in Section 2. In Section 3, we explain the Delphi approach used to answer our research questions. We present our main discoveries in the findings section in Section 4. Finally, we offer closing remarks in the conclusions and further research section in Section 5.

2. Background

2.1 Business-to-business marketing theory

The field of marketing as an established academic stream began in the early 1900s. However, comprehensive research in B2B marketing has been conducted for only about 35 years (Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013). The initial theoretical underpinnings were related to the transaction-economics till 1980s and evolved toward a behavioral theory dominance since then (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017). The economic theory prevailing at the beginning of the field development was focused on terms such as costs, profits and margins. The main idea behind generating an industrial purchasing order was driven by obtaining the lowest price with acceptable quality and delivery (Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013). This view drove a short-term perspective of market management. Marketing-based competitive advantage was continuously evolving, noting that during the 1950s and 1960s, firms in manufacturing-dominated economies used tangible product qualities to gain competitive advantage (Palmer, 2010, p. 197). These tangible aspects were transitioning from the dichotomous acceptable versus non-acceptable quality to a more profound and wider understanding of the term, opening the door for concepts such as preferences (Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013). Along this period, the foundations of modern B2B marketing and organizational buying behavior were established (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017), as industrialization kept growing beyond advanced economies.

As development of tangible aspects for differentiation reached a plateau at the 1970s, the focus for differentiation moved to services. Manufacturing firms started to be concerned about service elements such as finance, warranties and insurance, and were *used to differentiate increasingly generic tangible offerings* (Palmer, 2010, p. 197). Services as an intangible component of value propositions increased the complexity of B2B interactions. This updated view of industrial businesses led to the first steps for understanding behavioral concepts such as social interactions, emotions, loyalty, satisfaction and desires of customers (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017). Moving forward in time, services became generic, leading to the development of relationship marketing strategies. From the 1980s, the quality of ongoing relationships became a new differentiator (Palmer, 2010, p. 197). The IMP view played a key role in this transformation by disseminating the *interaction approach* to understand the dynamics of mutually beneficial exchange relationships (Håkansson, 1982). But what happens if relationships themselves become generic, and all companies operating in a product area and targeting similar groups of customers have similar patterns of relationship development activity? (Palmer, 2010, p. 197). Then, another view was crafted. The past 20-25 years have been dominated by an experiential-networked view of business interaction (Meyer and Schwager, 2007; Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017). Part of this trend is also attributed to servitization concept (Vandermerwe and Rada, 1988) that influenced several B2B marketing research (Ruiz-Alba *et al.*, 2019).

The interaction approach led to the industrial network approach, introduced by IMP researchers beginning in the early 1990s (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). The network approach propose that firm behavior or dyadic business relationships cannot be comprehended without taking into account the firms' positions and history in a more extensive network of relationships (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Möller and Halinen, 2018). Experience – in the context of networks – is becoming a differentiator in markets where relationships have declined their influence on competitive advantage (Palmer, 2010). The worldview of network studies emphasizes contextuality and time (Möller and Halinen, 2018), increasing the relevance of research at the more granular level. Specific events or actor relationships cannot be understood without knowledge of the linked relationships and how these relationships have emerged (Håkansson and Ford, 2002; Möller and Halinen, 2018). The novelty and creative power of the experiential network perspective took hold and inspired B2B marketing researchers since then (Möller and Halinen, 2018; Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017; Palmer, 2010). Overall, B2B marketing theory is moving away from one analytical unit (i.e. firm) to all members involved in the production and sales of offerings or business ecosystems (i.e. multiple actors in the value chain; Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013).

2.2 Business-to-business marketing practice

The practice of B2B marketers is led by the key marketing capabilities required to achieve a firm's desired economic performance. At the firm level of analysis, capabilities are broadly viewed as the processes and routines by which a firm transforms its resources into valuable outputs. Marketing capabilities represent a firm ability to understand, anticipate, and respond to customer needs, which requires adapting the offerings and organizational processes to market conditions (Morgan and Slotegraaf, 2012). In summary, the theoretical literature indicates that:

- marketing capabilities are inherently hierarchical in nature;
- the extent to which they become embedded in the firm can elevate their value to the firm; and
- the dynamic nature of marketing capabilities is essential to understanding firm performance over time in the face of changing market environments (Morgan and Slotegraaf, 2012, p. 92).

Without capabilities, activities cannot be executed properly. As capabilities are internalized over time, they become embedded in the firm. To sustain a competitive advantage in dynamic market environments, a firm's resources and capabilities should be continually changed, cultivated and enhanced (Krasnikov and Jayachandran, 2008).

The market setting (e.g. country) provides a relevant force for shaping marketing capabilities (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2018). Capabilities are context dependent and market economic maturity (i.e. developing, emerging or developed) serves as an operational boundary condition for firms. The evolution of marketing capabilities is considered to move from the periphery to the core (Sheth, 2011). In this vein, the core is established by marketing capabilities in developed countries (e.g. the USA). Prior literature has investigated the major trends in B2B marketing capabilities. Mora Cortez and Johnston (2018) compared a developed economy (USA) with emerging economies (Chile, Mexico and Peru) major B2B marketing capabilities, finding three converging B2B marketing capabilities for firms in all the countries:

1 customer relationship management;
2 new offering development; and
3 marketing channels and value chain.

Companies belonging to a specific context develop unique capabilities, but, at the same time, need to associate more traditional capabilities to their core competences (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2018, p. 605).

Marketing capabilities can be managed necessarily by articulating a supportive marketing budget. McDonald (2016) indicates that the B2B marketing budget is not an unambiguous concept, as it should include all direct and indirect costs. Marketing budget should be strategically linked to a firm's capabilities that need to be leveraged. However, in many B2B firms the marketing budget is just the budget for advertising and promotion (McDonald, 2016). Mora Cortez and Johnston (2019) identified that three different paradigms reigned over developed, emerging and developing firms, respectively:

1 marketing as an investment and engine of innovation;
2 marketing as a support function to sales and relationship developer; and
3 marketing as a productivity catalyst and image builder.

However, even at the most sophisticated level, marketing does not drive the answer to the most important market-based decisions. The key challenge for B2B firms is, then, to position marketers at the epicenter of strategy setting in boardrooms (McDonald, 2016).

2.3 Theory-practice gap

The theory-practice gap has been discussed in prior literature (Jaworski, 2011) and guidelines for academicians are provided. For example, Lilien (2011, p. 205) states six recommendations for academics:

1 *add "impact" to the promotion and tenure process, at least for promotion to full professor;*
2 *encourage leaves and sabbaticals in practice, especially with intermediaries;*
3 *add internships to doctoral programs;*
4 *require at least one nonacademic letter in promotion and tenure dossiers;*
5 *consult for access to data and real-life problems (rather than only for money); and*

6 *give serious consideration to making the marketing curriculum more rigorous and research focused.*

Jaworski (2011) proposes that an important challenge when writing manuscripts, and thinking of managerial implications, is the concept of "role-relevance research." This idea posits that a key to making managerial impact is to *thoroughly understand a particular* role *in the organization and select a specific route to impact for that particular executive* (p. 212). Cederlund (2014), in a more directive manner, calls for using managerial relevance as a main argument to forward theory, which is *different from "coming up with" managerial implications at the end of the research process* (p. 643). In this line, Brennan *et al.* (2014) suggest that a good research approach for B2B marketing scholars is to have a managerial problem as starting point and to design the methodology of the study based on that problem.

The scholarly thought world needs to accept that industrial firms have been successful without the academic input (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017). Gummesson (2014) acknowledges that the Swedish economy grew because of the ability of technical managers to sell industrial offerings to the world, not due to the use of available marketing theory. The construction of useful knowledge requires a balanced ecosystem, where multiple stakeholders play an active role. *Academic knowledge creation and publishing ecosystem consists of the following interlinked elements: research communities, institutions such as universities and publishers, and publication outlets* (Möller and Halinen, 2018, p. 19). In addition, Gummesson (2014) argues that an important role is of intermediaries (i.e. consultants). Consultants are relevant to provide insight into practice, and this knowledge should be integrated into both the research and educational process of academicians (Lilien, 2011). However, there is a long road to go, as B2B marketing consultants rarely are involved in academic projects (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017). Even though the theory-practice gap is also evident in the B2C context, this issue is exacerbated in the B2B context, serving as a catalyst of the weak positioning of the domain in business schools.

3. Method

3.1 Delphi approach

The Delphi methodological approach is an iterative and structured process to generate, collect and aggregate substantiated opinions and judgements in a collective decision setting (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017; Sambhara *et al.*, 2017). The Delphi approach is adequate to close gaps when there is incomplete knowledge about a phenomenon or no rigid answers are expected (Skulmoski *et al.*, 2007). The general idea is to build consensus amongst a group of experts. The validity of the Delphi approach is based on the rigorous selection of experts whose applied experience and conceptual knowledge manifest complete understanding of the domain under analysis (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017; Sambhara *et al.*, 2017).

The size of experts' group is another element that have an impact on the validity of the method. On the one hand, larger groups can enhance the coverage of the generated topics and depth of knowledge. On the other hand, smaller groups can reduce the risk associated to conflicts, time consumption and excessive use of monetary resources. While there is no formal agreement on the number of panel experts, the general suggestion is using between five to 20 experts (Skulmoski *et al.*, 2007). The aggregation of knowledge is susceptible to the number of structured rounds used in the Delphi approach application. Commonly two or three rounds are recommended (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017). The end goal is to stop the process when the research questions are answered (Skulmoski *et al.*, 2007).

3.2 Panel of experts and data collection

We selected a panel of experts and conducted synchronized rounds with them. We initiated the process by identifying the target population of the potential knowledgeable and experienced participants. We agreed that current and prior editors and special issue editors of the top 3 academic B2B marketing journals (i.e. *Industrial Marketing Management* [IMM], *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* [JBIM], *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing* [JBBM]; based on impact-factor) are the adequate baseline population[2]. We generated a list of 80 academicians. We organized editors (and prior editors) by number of years in their positions and timeframe, and special issue editors by the number of special issues edited and timeframe. The sampling followed a theoretical procedure to engage participants that can provide in-depth explanation of their beliefs and thoughts (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2019), while covering the maximum number of years in a balanced manner. The recruitment of the experts was done via email. We contacted an initial sample of 15 people, receiving a positive and direct answer from ten of them. The email included the reason why he/she was selected and a short explanation of the research goal. We were pleased to observe an enthusiastic response from the experts and willingness to provide detailed information about their thoughts.

We focused our questions on the general idea positioning this manuscript (i.e. the low appreciation of B2B marketing journals in business schools). We phrased the questions in a non-directive manner and allowed the experts to provide any kind of supportive material to their answers. The Delphi approach was based on the following questions in the first round: Why do you think universities (especially in the USA) do not highly appreciate publications in *IMM*, *JBIM* or *JBBM*? What would you suggest for improving the impact (on deans and department chairs perceptions) of such journals not only in the USA but around the world? In the second round, experts sent us back their full feedback. Any additional information from the experts' feedback was thoroughly considered and included in the data analysis.

3.3 Data analysis

In our aim to contribute theoretically robust guidance for B2B researchers and journal editors, we applied coding tools suggested by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) to analyze the panel responses. We transcribed the informants verbatim from the first and second round into 20 pages of single-space transcript. We followed the scheme of open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Morse *et al.*, 2016). Prior B2B marketing studies have implemented this approach satisfactorily in recent years (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017).

First, open coding was conducted in a systematic line-by-line analysis. The general idea of open coding is the identification of concepts and ideas, using labels. We particularly considered in-vivo codes (experts' terms) to reduce deviations in interpreting the meaning of the extracted ideas (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2015). *In vivo* codes enhance the sensitivity of the coding process, allowing the researcher to keep attached to the experts' perspectives. Second, we conducted axial coding to group similarly coded ideas. The aggregation of concepts relates categories to subcategories of information, creating a more abstract conceptualization. Finally, we conducted selective coding. At this stage, we integrated all the categories identified in the previous axial coding. This integration allows the generation of a unifying framework, identifying the most representative strategies to improve the impact of B2B marketing research. The coding process was supported by the Nvivo software (version 11.0).

To ensure the trustworthiness of our results (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), we applied suggestions for data and researcher triangulation. For data triangulation, we checked that most of our final categories were transferable across respondents' timeframes and compared the field data with associated research topics (e.g. literature on rigor and relevance in B2B marketing and the state of the field). For researcher triangulation, we contacted an independent judge (unfamiliar with the research) to code the raw data of the ten experts, reaching a succesfull inter-rater reliability of 0.78 (Rust and Cooil, 1994). We contacted two additional experts (not in the panel) from our original list to review the process. Moreover, we presented our results in an academic workshop in Europe. Overall, the external coder and other academic experts highly supported the proposed ideas.

4. Findings

In this section, we discuss the paths enabling the elevation of the B2B marketing field relevance. These findings are presented by a procedural combination of empirical data and extant B2B and general marketing literature. Direct verbatim quotes or illustrations from the panel experts are used to support the coding and development of the grounded-theory categories. Table I displays the resulting conceptual framework to improve the positioning of the B2B marketing domain in business schools. We focus on:

- B2B as uncommon ground;
- B2B researcher practices;
- marketing science underpinnings; and
- B2B marketing journals management.

Moreover, we integrate the axial coding categories to propose a general strategy to elevate the B2B marketing field, as one expert noted: "Before we can elevate the journals, we have to elevate the field."

4.1 Business-to-business as uncommon ground

The B2B world is not directly in tune with the marketing academician. First, traditional candidates to be PhD marketing students lack industry experience. This phenomenon is less recurrent in Europe and Asia, but the people with industry experience come back to industry in a fashionable manner (Kleinaltenkamp, 2018). Thus, those without practical experience will stay at academia and be susceptible to personal and external biases. Having no industry experience enhances the chances to investigate themes or ideas in main stream settings, which tends to be non-B2B. As one panel expert stated:

> Most faculty did not have real jobs in industry before going to academia. They will go with the marketing flow, which is commonly in the B2C domain. [editor]

Second, related to our prior argument, inexperienced scholars can resonate better with the B2C world due to an intrinsic, personal characteristic. As human beings we want to feel competent in what we do. All people have experience as

Table I Coding scheme

Open-coding categories	Axial-coding categories	Selective-coding category
Marketing academicians generally do not have industry experience (−)	B2B as uncommon ground	Elevating the B2B marketing field
B2C world appeals to the researcher as consumer (−)		
B2C world is more glamorous and media related (−)		
Bring the industry to the classroom (+)	B2B researcher practices	
Demonstrate B2B value from real-life economic relevance (+)		
Motivate marketing students to initiate conversations about differences in B2B and B2C (+)		
Keep fighting at school meetings (+)		
Develop mix methods skills (+)		
Drive more work on philosophy of science (+)	Marketing science underpinnings	
Debate about the reason why the theory/practice gap is growing (+)		
Reinforce the understanding of selling as marketing (+)		
Do not accept inappropriate samples (+)		
Propose a different approach to impact factors (+)	B2B marketing journals management	
Foster a different perspective on managerial implications (+)		
Support scholarships for new B2B marketing PhD students (+)		
Focus on complementary areas in parallel (+)		

consumers, as we go to supermarkets, city halls, stadiums, concerts, cinemas, laundry, school, etc. Remembering such experiences can generate ideas for further research and then more interconnected projects can raise from it. Thus, as academicians we do not have experience as industrial buyers, creating a psychological distance with the B2B marketing field:

> The fundamental problem is that there are more professors that only have experience with chewing gum and beer than those that understand companies and B2B research. [editor]

Third, the B2C world is more glamorous and highly covered by media. Conversely, the B2B world is hidden and rarely visible to the common citizen. When walking through an average city, a person faces grocery stores, banks and drug stores; and in this setting, commerce also invests in advertising appealing to emotional and day-to-day perceptions. The B2C advertising shows a perfect world and generally stores are nicely organized to seduce the consumer. As researchers, we also get seduced. In addition, this positive externality about B2C glamour affects media. It is very common that newspapers and TV shows focus on topics related to the consumer world, as everyone is a consumer, but only a few are industrial customers. The obvious higher number of consumers motivates B2C firms to heavily invest in more promotion; hence, the average person is exposed to more than 1,000 messages per day (Shah, 2016). This conquers our memory in a step-by-step manner, being primed to the B2C world (to the detriment of the B2B world. As one expert noted:

> [...] How a child or teenager would be in contact with the B2B domain, if the only thing she or he sees every day is consumer promotion. Then, people go to college already familiarized with B2C firms. [special issue editor]

4.2 Business-to-business researcher practices

There are actions and activities that the B2B researcher can execute. First, an idea mentioned by most experts is bringing more industrial marketing practitioners to campus. The B2B researcher is required to make an effort to engage students in this non-traditional marketing setting. A panel expert explained the activity in detail:

> [...] Yes, students will more likely flock to hear the Chief Marketing Officer of Coke or Home Depot, but it is critical that they also are exposed to marketers from steel companies, commercial building maintenance firms, logistics companies, ship builders, aircraft companies [...] and also bring purchasing managers into class. One time I arranged for a former student who worked at X selling health products to nursing homes to actually do a sales presentation to the general manager of a chain of 20 nursing homes in my industrial marketing class [...] within a month had closed a $500,000 deal! [...] the students told all of their different classmates about this. [editor]

The effort can be seen as little impact. However, when the researcher continues this practice and asks students to share their thoughts with other students and other faculty, especially deans and department heads, it does make an impact.

Second, B2B researchers need to demonstrate the power of industrial interactions to colleagues and students. Kleinaltenkamp (2018) provides a table comparing the share of B2B/B2C transactions of manufacturing and services industries for OECD countries in 2017. The results clearly show that B2B transactions represent on average 50 per cent of the total economic value. In addition, Lilien (2016) shows that nearly 90 per cent of e-commerce in the US during 2010 was B2B, accounting for $3.7tn. Surprisingly, a special issue of *Marketing Science* focusing on the impact of impact of the Internet included no articles of B2B e-commerce (p. 544). The same author concludes that it appears to be a misallocation of academic resources on B2C versus B2B (Lilien, 2016). Appreciation can be earned through economic justification. As the following excerpt reveals:

> [...] B2C gets the attention is my school, despite of the money, international scope, and e-commerce relevance of B2B marketing. Showing proof of such monetary impact is suggested. Young professors are commonly astonished with the data. [editor]

Third, marketing students need to understand the differences between B2B and B2C settings. B2B researchers should encourage discussions among students comparing the B2B characteristics with B2C characteristics. Many particularities of B2B markets are good initiators of such discussion. Lilien (2016), for example, indicates that B2B markets foster a more technical value proposition while B2C markets foster a more perceptual value proposition. In addition, the concept of value differs. For B2B, value is co-created from value-in-use perspective in a quantifiable manner. For B2C, value is co-created in the brand relationship. The more students analyze the differences, the more they comprehend the differences in both settings. Then, they can better screen their skills and competences to evaluate a career in each setting. This clarity potentially allows the B2B researcher to be more valuable for students and by consequence to the business school. As stated by an expert:

> If student really understand the essence of B2B marketing, they will ask for more expertise in the scholarly body and then the B2B researcher will get more appreciation. [special issue editor]

Fourth, the B2B researcher is called to keep promoting the relevance of B2B marketing. Faculty has several encounters with deans and department chairs. These meetings need to be considered opportunities to argue about the value of B2B marketing at the school and that outlets for such knowledge require a fair treatment. Appreciation can be earned through argumentation using academic information. In this sense, a panel expert expressed:

> You need to fight the battle. A bias can be observed when many colleagues in my school voted for journal quality rankings. B2C researchers want their journal ranked higher. For example, the Journal of Consumer Behaviour (impact-factor: 1.659) got a better positioning than IMM (impact-factor: 3.678). I need to raise my voice time to time. [editor]

Fifth, the B2B researcher needs to be able to be skillful in both qualitative and quantitative methods. This can enhance a balanced combination of rigor and relevance. Quantitative methods have won the perception of adequate rigor in general marketing journals, leading to a more statistical view of PhD. marketing programs (Scheer, 2019). Many B2B marketing researchers conduct qualitative case-based studies, but there are several challenges in the methodological approaches that have not been implemented satisfactorily. B2B marketing qualitative studies may suffer from poor research design, selection of cases, coding procedures, inter-rater reliability and presentation of results (Kleinaltenkamp, 2018). However, qualitative research in many cases can be superior to quantitative research:

> As it allows in much more detail and with a better understanding of the practical arrangements to uncover causal relationships, which otherwise are 'only' statistically estimated but often not really proven (Kleinaltenkamp, 2018, p. 126).

The training of an integral B2B marketing researcher is key for a better valuation of B2B marketing. As a panel expert noted:

> B2B marketing researchers should be wise in the crafting of mixture method papers, meaning the use of (1) qualitative, (2) quantitative, and/or (3) conceptual sources of information. This provides evidence to school top management that research designs are really discussed and are not just a way to overcome a potential lack of knowledge in quantitative approaches. [special issue editor]

4.3 Marketing science underpinnings

The current structure of the marketing field also can take a different direction. First, marketing science should drive more work on the philosophical aspects of the domain. PhD programs and top-tier publications rarely discuss about ontological approaches to marketing science. This has led to a more positivistic approach in the USA and a more constructivist and critical realist approaches in Europe, limiting the research practice. Positivistic studies argue for role of the researcher as limited to data collection and interpretation in an objective way. Thus, the researcher is independent from the study and generalizable propositions for testing can be made. Constructivists *contend that the only way to understand reality is as a social construction, articulated as the result of human sense making, and is thus interpretative in nature* (Peters *et al.*, 2013, p. 338). Critical realists acknowledge that multiple levels and modes of engagement exist between the researcher and the analyzed phenomenon. As for constructivism, critical realism sees context as an active player in the nature of the world. However, the hierarchical perspective of critical realists argues for an inherent order of things (Peters *et al.*, 2013). A better understanding of philosophy of science in the marketing domain serves a highway for elevating the B2B marketing field. As one panel expert stated:

> Philosophical approaches to marketing science are important. Traditionally, there is an unstated rivalry between Europe and the US due to the divergence generated by a critical realist view versus a positivistic view. Open discussions about this gap would be very useful for the repositioning of B2B marketing. [special issue editor]

Second, for elevating the B2B marketing field is required to debate about the reason why the theory/practice gap is growing in the development of marketing science. The contextual nature of B2B markets calls for a more integrative view of practitioners and academicians. Researchers' goal is to improve the managerial skills of practitioners. However, the theory/practice gap is present (Lilien, 2011) and growing in the general marketing domain. B2B marketing is more collaborative in nature, as access to data generally implies working directly with managers. However, more efforts are needed. As the following excerpt explains:

> A central idea for the survival and blooming of B2B marketing in business schools is the reunion of practitioners with academicians. Getting academia and practice together will make more visible the B2B setting. [special issue editor]

Third, selling is an important part of marketing an offering. Marketing science should acknowledge that B2B academicians are important for business. Sales is a critical element of the overall commercialization. The act of B2C selling is relatively simple from a timeframe view, while B2B selling is very complex[3]. However, a broader perspective of selling has been proposed. A service ecosystems perspective increases the range of activities and the number of actors involved in selling. Hartmann *et al.* (2018, p. 9) define selling *as the interaction between actors aimed at creating and maintaining thin crossing points – the locations at which service can be efficiently exchanged for service – through the ongoing alignment of institutional arrangements and the optimization of relationships*. A better understanding of the complexity of selling from a marketing perspective, drives the elevation of the B2B marketing field. Marketing scholars can no longer underestimate the value of selling. A panel expert explained the selling neglection in the marketing field:

> [...] Since marketing is more than 'just' selling, most marketing professors relegate selling courses as too pedantic to be important to the discipline. I will bet that most marketing professors would starve if they had to make a living selling. [editor]

Fourth, marketing science has accepted questionable samples to study consumer phenomena. The lack of access to data is a detriment for the appreciation of the B2B marketing domain. B2C settings are more diverse and atomized in nature than B2B settings. In consequence, tools as Mechanical Turk or the use of student samples are a temptation for B2C marketing scholars. Once researchers see the benefits, many pretend to look away from the weaknesses. B2B marketing data is much more complicated to be obtained. Availability of 'consumers' everywhere should not be accepted as a rigorous statement for sample selection. Research *should contain an explicit statement justifying the theoretical relevance of the subjects employed to test the specific research questions for the population of interest* (Peterson and Merunka, 2014, p. 1040). Several marketing studies have shown the inappropriate use of 'convenience' samples. If marketing science is more rigorous in the selection of samples, B2B marketing sampling can be better understood and through understanding, academicians will have higher respect for the effort conducted by the B2B researcher. A recurrent example of 'convenience' sample in B2C is the use of students. As one of the panel experts mentioned:

> [...] We should not allow student samples unless the student qualify as representative of the market. Just because college students drink beer does not make them an appropriate sample for a consumer study on beer. [editor]

4.4 Business-to-business marketing journals management

There are challenges for the journal editorships as well. First, B2B marketing journals editors should propose a different approach to account for the impact of a journal. Managers' value papers and journals in general that are simply useful for them. They do not care about the scholar ratings of some universities or the ISI factor ranking score. Managers value meaningful ideas, models or concepts that can serve to shape their practice. The nature of B2B markets generates a higher appealing to marketing from B2B practitioners. However, business schools are still limited to old fashion journals valuation. A broader approach would favor the elevation of the B2B marketing field. As the following excerpt explains:

> There should be more emphasis put on other 'impact' factors rather than just journal's perceived quality by panel rating and ISI factor ranking score. Number of downloads; number of times the research gets attention by media, government, etc.; usage in doctoral seminars [...] are more representative of an integral view of impact. [editor]

Second, B2B marketing journal editors should foster a different perspective on managerial implications. Cederlund (2014) suggests expanding the view of the epistemologies behind

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research design. Traditionally research is epistemologically directed toward prediction or description. However, the construction of possible explanations for the understanding of an event itself it is left to the theoretical development, which is commonly established only as context for the empirical results. Practitioners require more actionable understanding of the mechanism proposed to describe the interdependence among variables. The causality trend, which in necessary in nature, also has transformed the phenomenon of explanation in a statistical challenge more than anything else. However, the world is not about the *p-value* and statistical refinement, it is about pieces of knowledge and generation of insight for understanding behavior. We, as researchers, generally get lost in the process of being rigorous, and sometime rigor just means overcomplication. In marketing, the more complex the modeling, the more appreciation a potential publication receives. The essence of the paper – the actionable 'meat' – is disregarded to space limited sections (e.g. implications). Marketing, as any area in a firm, is moving toward a multifunctional and interconnected operation of business (Cederlund, 2014). Then, to avoid referring to everyone in a firm – which at the end means nobody, a more precise direction of the communication is needed (Jaworski, 2011). If B2B marketing journals emphasize a *paper writing approach* in rigorous but simple style, clearly defining a particular target manager since the origin of the paper, there are high chances to engage practitioners and consequently elevate the B2B marketing field in business schools. As one panel expert noted:

> You need to speak to practitioners directly. Demonstrating that you are focusing in a particular role. So, the manager feel represented by your study and while reads the manuscript inherently starts to reflect on the ideas proposed. This will create a remark not easy to forget and her/his opinion about academia and B2B marketing will be very positive. [special issue editor]

Third, B2B marketing journals, through their publishers, can support scholarships for new B2B marketing students. This initiative is simple but strong enough to show a sign about the real interest in publishing B2B marketing knowledge. The weak positioning of the B2B marketing domain in business schools affects the budgeting design, which can create an even worse state for the field. B2B marketing professors need resources to recruit and work with a PhD student. If the trend continues, there will be less junior faculty and consequently no professors in this domain. Thus, who would publish in B2B marketing journals? There is a risk in the declining perceptual value that practitioners accounts for marketing in general. Hence, a proactive investment from B2B journals can contribute to not only sustain the lifetime of the field, but also increment its relevance for business schools. As the following excerpt explains:

> [...] Academia is getting budget cuts from everywhere, anywhere. B2B marketing journals should be concern about their knowledge sources. Less and less B2B marketing researchers go to the market [...] the editorship boards could convince publishers to anticipate this debacle [...] channeling resources [...] money [...] obviously will get the attention of the dean office. This would have a huge impact on the positioning of the field. [special issue editor]

Fourth, B2B marketing journals management can focus their publications on complementary areas. Having more specific topics for knowledge development on granular topics can attract people from different fields, increasing the scope of the journals. For example, a common path to increase the rigor of publications is the invitation of methodological papers. This is a double-edge sword. On the one hand, rigor as a central aspect of marketing science drives more potentially valid and reliable results from published studies. This rigor can leverage the evaluation of academicians regarding the demands of publication, rising the perceived attractiveness of the journals. On the other hand, an additional focus on rigor can increase the gap between relevance and rigor. Thus, negatively affecting the perception of the practitioners. Again, as prior literature have acknowledged: "are practitioners part of our audience or are we just talking to ourselves?" (Brennan *et al.*, 2014). Another idea is to pursue a more integral perspective to increase B2B marketing journals attention in business schools. Considering the traditional ISI impact-factor, the *Journal of Marketing* 2017 index is 7.338 while the *Journal of Marketing Research* 2017 index is 3.854, implying that a broader concern on theory construction and managerial implications is valued by academicians (at least while writing a paper). A multi-focus journal orientation or some degree of specialization can help to the elevation of the B2B marketing field. As a panel expert stated:

> You cannot only focus a journal on B2B marketing. It is possible to go to other areas such as methodology. However, that can harm the likelihood to produce significant 'managerial implications' in academicians research. For example, the *Journal of Consumer Research* does not even care about implications for business. The one article I published there had implications and the editor made me take it out. [editor]

Another expert said:

> [...] Journal management can choose topics to grow the current state of the art selectively, having in mind making a positive impact on business schools perceptions. Also, some journals can declare a specific aim for the next years. For example, the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* defined as a strategic endeavor the publication of reviews. [special issue editor]

The four elements regarding B2B marketing journals management are needed, in synthesis, to better positioning the B2B marketing journals in the common rankings around the world. While no B2B marketing journal is positioned at the highest level in the USA and Europe, it is understandable that marketing researchers will not be motivated to publish in such outlets.

5. Conclusions and further research

We contend that the business schools are not perceiving adequately the value contributed by B2B marketing researchers and journals. Also, the problems of the marketing field in general are, to certain degree, transferable to the B2B marketing domain. The practitioners' perception of the marketing field as irrelevant and the lack of awareness of the value of the B2B domain have created a sense of urgency to elevate the B2B marketing field.

Through a Delphi approach, we found that:

- B2B as an uncommon ground;
- B2B researcher practices;
- marketing science underpinnings; and
- B2B marketing journals management can influence the future state of the marketing field at the business school level.

B2B researchers and the leading outlets of B2B marketing papers are struggling to find a place of honor in the current and turbulent scholarly scenario. The field as traditional social science has built upon existing knowledge, generating incremental advances for the understanding of a continuously dynamic industrial market environment. To elevate the B2B marketing field from the business school perspective, both relevance and rigor need to be leveraged by researchers. The ignorance of general marketing researchers about the richness of the B2B marketing field plays a negative role in the appreciation of top management at business schools. B2B researchers have the challenge to bring the industry to the classroom, demonstrate the value of B2B marketing from its real-life economic relevance, motivate marketing students to initiate conversations about differences in B2B and B2C settings, keep fighting at school meetings for the deserved attention and develop mix methods skills to positively influence the elevation of the B2B marketing field.

Marketing science foundations should be updated. Truly novel ideas or radical changes are difficult to grasp. For B2B marketing to be more relevant at the business school level, marketing science is required to drive more work on philosophy of science, debate about the reason why the theory/practice gap is growing, reinforce the understanding of selling as marketing, and do not accept inappropriate samples in consumer studies. All these factors, whether managed properly, can positively influence the elevation of the B2B marketing field in business schools. The perpetual demand to reinvent or innovate the way the marketplace is studied by firms calls for a more integrative marketing theory on a higher level of abstraction and targeting. While ideation is an abstract process, the managerial perspective should be as concrete as possible throughout a manuscript development. The B2B firm is in the continuous path to adapt in a profitable manner. The extant market turbulence is generating a need for marketing models that better handle change, interconnectivity and real-life's interdisciplinarity (Cederlund, 2014).

B2B marketing journals management can also provide an input for the development of the field appreciation in business schools. It is discussed that impact factor can be conceptualized beyond the traditional ISI factor ranking score. Although citations deriving from an article are a measure of the innovativeness of a piece (Griffith *et al.*, 2008), this do not implicitly relate to the practical use of such research. In addition, fostering a different perspective on managerial implications, supporting scholarships for new B2B marketing PhD students, and focusing on complementary areas in parallel are positively related to the elevation of the B2B marketing field at the business school level. B2B marketing journals management are warned about the potential trade-off between increasing ranking classification and practical relevance. To overcome this dilemma, a different path is proposed. B2B marketing journals would benefit from being able to reframe existing theory through the integration of marketing stances with other fields knowledge (Cederlund, 2014; Lilien, 2011). This will require a proactive action to engage in collaboration with journals in management (e.g. *Academy of Management Journal*, Strategic Management Journal), international business, (e.g. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *International Business Review*), and/or information systems (e.g. *MIS Quarterly*, *Information Systems Research*).

The utilization of a Delphi approach with current and prior editors and special issue editors in *IMM*, *JBIM* and *JBBM* poses some limitations. First, although the Delphi approach generates themes based on consensus, the thought frames are limited to the expertise of the selected panel. These very experienced and knowledgeable academicians are representing the view from the B2B marketing journals editorship. Further research may wish to use a broader expert base when examining the B2B marketing renaissance in business Schools. Also, future studies can simultaneously use multiple perspective and contrast them with the current guidelines. For example, two additional sets of participants can be included:

1 B2B marketing researchers; and
2 deans and marketing department chairs.

This would allow to reconcile different perspectives on the phenomenon under analysis. Moreover, as general marketing journals have a higher recognition (than B2B marketing) in the academic setting, editors from such sources can contribute with an extra layer of ideas for elevating the B2B marketing field. Beyond the opportunities for further research, the present study provides robust and actionable implications for several agents to face a relevant challenge in the expected growing and appreciation of the B2B marketing field. With the continued questioning of the relevance of the marketing domain in general and the B2B marketing field in specific, we believe that this study offers an initial step to cultivate a conversation about the future of the B2B marketing and its relevance for multiple stakeholders.

Notes

1 We acknowledge that other universities or business schools are also tightly tied to industry. The examples are just referential.

2 Information about the development of IMM and JBIM can be found in Di Benedetto and Lindgreen (2018) and LaPlaca and Johnston (2006), respectively.

3 B2B selling cycle takes months or years, while B2C selling cycle is much shorter.

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