
Editorial

IMP Forum editorial

This first issue of IMP Forum marks an important metamorphosis of IMP journal merging into *JBIM*. For the past 12 years, the IMP journal has been a stage for research on interdependencies and interactivity in B2B markets, on purchasing, marketing, innovation and several other issues in these contexts. The metamorphosis is important. *JBIM* has been an outlet for research on novel approaches to business and industrial marketing in its broadest sense. Introducing the IMP Forum in this setting represents a broadening of both the empirical phenomena under study and approaches and methodologies to research these.

Most of us would agree that, in tandem with the rapid evolution of the marketing context, the practice of marketing is changing. The marketing discipline trails this change, but a simple incremental linear development of the discipline is not enough to stay abreast of the phenomena emerging in markets, in general, and business markets, in particular. New phenomena impact the dynamics of markets and require new responses from business management. In a viewpoint paper on this issue, “What remains to be discovered?”, three members of the editorial team of the IMP Forum comment on the trends in the business landscape and directions for future research on the implications for business management.

The context of B2B marketing is becoming more and more multifaceted and complex. Businesses are becoming increasingly interrelated and interdependent. Deeper understanding of how current trends in the B2B market affect management is needed to support managers in coping with the challenges the interrelated and interdependent world brings about. Part of the challenge is to broaden the traditional marketing perspective, which is largely producer grounded and unilateral. Marketing is not only about understanding customers but also about the processes that govern customer relationships and the impact relationships have on both the supplier and customer side. Interdependences in contemporary business markets apparently stretch beyond the traditional forms of business. We see the growing importance of sustainability issues, of globalization, digitalization and public procurement, just to mention a few facets of the business world. The emerging, interconnected and interdependent business landscape not only affects businesses and their managers but also has societal impacts and implications for policymakers. The significant role of the rapidly evolving business landscape needs to be researched, pictured and interpreted. We need pictures of what is going on in this landscape, and we need to

make sense of it. That is a tall task for a marketing discipline. Our ambition with the IMP Forum is to contribute to a better understanding of the emerging business landscape; to serve as a platform for exploring avenues of research and framing what is going on and to encourage “unconventional” perspectives on marketing.

The four papers in this first issue of the IMP Forum illustrate the different facets of researching and making sense of the contemporary business landscape. In the first paper, “What remains to be discovered? Manifesto for researching the interactive business world,” Alexandra Waluszewski, Ivan Snehota and Antonella La Rocca, argue that we need richer pictures (better and more relevant data on the phenomena in process) and better understanding (conceptualization, explanations and theories) that can inform our acting within and on such a business world. Revisiting the findings of the IMP research in recent decades, which has evidenced the interactivity in the business landscape, the authors argue that we have just started to understand some of its facets, dynamics and implications. Understanding these dynamics implies a shift from a single-point perspective to a multi-point perspective on marketing processes, which implies taking a “meso” perspective if we are to capture the critical forces shaping the B2B marketing process and impacting businesses that are part of this process. Without the buyer and third-party perspective and without acknowledging the interrelatedness we cannot grasp the interaction processes leading to the relationships and network structures that characterize the business landscape of B2B companies. More fine-grained pictures and conceptualizations of the emergent business landscape are needed to improve our understanding of it and to inform our actions within it.

The three papers that follow offer an illustration of the three sorts of focus that research on the interactive business landscape can take – dyads, triads and networks.

The second paper titled “Conflict Handling in Small Firms’ Foreign Business Relationships,” by Milena Ratajczak-Mrozek, Krzysztof Fonfara and Aleksandra Hauke-Lopes, analyses dyadic supplier customer relationships. Based on in-depth interviews conducted with six small Poland-based firms, the authors investigate how conflicts arise in business relationships with foreign customers and identify the sources and outcomes of the conflicts. They identify two categories of conflict, namely, day-to-day problems and severe conflicts, and find that the outcomes of these differ even for two actors linked by the same relationship. In line with earlier studies, they observe that conflicts can lead to both negative and positive outcomes for the companies involved, but the authors focus on the specific outcomes for small companies. They find that one group of conflict sources is the same for both day-to-day problems and severe conflicts in the foreign business relationships of small firms, namely, product or service quality problems and cultural differences. The other group of conflict sources (such as a competitor’s actions or serious financial matters) usually leads only to severe conflicts. In either case, the outcomes can be negative (e.g. financial consequences) or positive (e.g. gaining new experience), depending on how the conflict is handled. While there is no one “optimal” approach to handling conflict related to local and specific circumstances, the authors find that positive conflict handling often constitutes a significant challenge for small firms, but

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available on Emerald Insight at: www.emeraldinsight.com/0885-8624.htm



Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing
34/1 (2019) 230–231
© Emerald Publishing Limited [ISSN 0885-8624]
[DOI 10.1108/JBIM-02-2019-400]

that it can lead to positive outcomes in terms of learning and developing competence.

In the third paper titled “The Transport Service Triad: a key unit of analysis,” Dan Andersson, Anna Dubois, Victor Eriksson, Anne-Maria Holma and Kajsa Hulthén examine a case of freight transport services in the context of transport systems, which are expected to be subject to massive change in the coming decades following the current trends in pursuit of, among others, sustainability and efficiency exploiting the ongoing development of digitalization. The issue in focus is the development and adoption of new freight transport solutions by a provider of such services to suppliers and customers in the construction industry, where taking the supply network perspective, improving the efficiency in use of transport resources is likely to become increasingly salient with the increasing demands for sustainable transport solutions. The authors find that the services provided by transport service providers have often been treated as commodities, where direct costs (price) should be minimized, and that such practices do not promote the joint development of, and adjustment to, new solutions that can offer greatly enhanced resource efficiency in transport services. However, such new solutions bring in new technologies (e.g. electric distribution vehicles), which entails adjustments in infrastructures and in activity coordination and interaction among the actors within the transport service triads. The authors examine the triad supplier-customer-logistics provider and argue that the triad is the minimal unit of analysis for logistics research. Analyzing the triad, they find that the relationships between triad actors and the solutions developed are affected by relationships that the three parties have with other businesses and conclude that the emergent solutions tend to be unique, the result of interplay at the triad level. Based on their findings, the authors argue, therefore, that the “triadic perspective” helps us understand the dynamics of change in transport systems. They conclude that insights and

understanding regarding triadic interdependences can be used in two ways: as a ground for developing new value-creating solutions for any members of the triad and as a ground to better understand the reactions of partners to the introduction of new solutions.

Finally, in the last paper of this issue “The Joys and Sorrows of a Start-up’s Interactions with the Public Sphere: A Case from Medical Technology,” Sofia Wagrell and Enrico Baraldi, draw attention to the specific challenges a start-up directed at users in the public sphere faces. Pointing to the organizational complexity of the “public” sphere in health care, with its multiple actors and networks, the authors identify three specific functional roles of the public partner from the perspective of an innovative start-up: as a development partner, as a financier and as a customer.

Based on a larger empirical study of a med tech start-up company and its various counterparts in the public sphere, the paper reveals that although all these roles represent considerable challenges, the role of a public partner as a customer is the most problematic for a start-up. The “organizational architecture” of the public sphere creates numerous barriers that hinder the embedding process of the new venture and developing relationships with new customers. The authors also discuss the implications of their findings not only for management in start-ups and in health organizations but also for public policy, and argue that these are far-reaching. The main conclusion of their study is that the financing role is the least problematic, while the customer role is the most problematic. From the policy perspective, measures to support innovation in the health-care sector need to stretch beyond funding and financing. Rather, supporting innovation in a complex public network requires, above all, coordinated and stable efforts involving both developers and users.

**Antonella La Rocca, Ivan Snehota and
Alexandra Waluszewski**