Guest editorial

Research on business and industrial marketing and networks – taking stock, looking ahead

At its Annual Conference in Groningen in 2017, the European Marketing Academy (EMAC) introduced four special interest groups (SIG) to provide marketing researchers and scholars with specialized forums as a means to coalesce around common areas of interest. One of these earliest SIGs, the Business-to-Business Marketing Special Interest Group (B2B|SIG), was established with the mission of:

[...] providing a platform for academics and scholars with interests in the fields of business-to-business and industrial marketing, business services, interfirm relationships, and channels of distribution to connect, network, and collaborate in advancing the creation and dissemination of knowledge related to these fields.

The B2B|SIG, consistent with its stated platform, organized a special session titled “Where Do We Go from Here? – The Future of B2B Marketing Research and Ph.D. Education” at the 47th EMAC Annual Conference in Glasgow in 2018. Featuring three experienced and knowledgeable B2B marketing scholars – Thomas Ritter of Copenhagen Business School, Denmark, Lisa Scheer of the University of Missouri-Columbia, USA, and Kenneth H. Wathne of the University of Stavanger, Norway – the session generated significant interest and resonated with the audience for its focus on discussions to ensure the continued relevance and impact of B2B research in marketing.

In an effort to capture the rich insights generated in that special session and make it available to the general B2B marketing research community, the B2B|SIG has collaborated with the *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* (JBIM) to create this special section comprising three essays by the session’s speakers. Thomas Ritter, in his essay titled “Engaging in engaged B2B scholarship,” applies Van de Ven’s engaged-scholarship diamond model to highlight how problem formulation, research design, theory building and problem-solving interact in creating relevant and interesting research in the realm of B2B marketing. In “Three challenging trends for marketing strategy – and B2B – Doctoral Education,” Lisa Scheer provides valuable insights on how and why increased methodological and statistical requirements for journal publication, greater scrutiny of the return on investment of doctoral programs in public universities, and the importance of collaborating with a partner company have a great impact on current B2B research projects. In the third essay of the topics discussed in the

special session, “Where do we go from here? The future of B2B governance research,” Kenneth Wathne and Oystein Fjeldstad shed additional light on the fact that different value systems (value chains, value shops and value networks) create a need for respective governance approaches that open up opportunities as well as challenges for future research in business and industrial marketing.

The B2B|SIG solicited additional commentaries on these essays from three prominent experts in the field so as to provide further depth and context to the topics discussed in the special session. In the first of these commentaries, “Why is business marketing so interesting?”, Eric Boyd uses the “interestingness” perspective to provide B2B marketing academics with recommendations for future action and research. In the second commentary titled “Vesting B2B research with relevance and rigor through appropriate research questions and methods,” Spirios Gounaris emphasizes that the roadmap outlined in the various contributions secures valuable future B2B marketing research initiatives on the one hand, but that their success needs to be ensured, on the other hand, through the application of sophisticated research methods. Finally, Gary Lillien provides his perspectives on future B2B marketing research in his commentary titled “Comments on the future of B2B marketing research and PhD education” by highlighting innovation, buying processes and behavior as well as the application of modern analytics tools as trend-setting topics.

As chairs of the B2B|SIG at EMAC, we deem these insights to be highly pertinent to the issues of our time, and it has been our intention to disseminate the viewpoints of these scholars broadly through the forum provided by the special section. General discussions regarding the relevance and impact of B2B research and the future of doctoral programs should be of interest to all of us who actively work in this space. We hope that this special section provides a launching pad, both for the readers of JBIM and B2B marketing research community at large, for stimulating additional debate and discussion on how research and doctoral education in the area of B2B marketing can and should develop in the future, thereby cementing its position as one of the key academically and managerially relevant areas of the marketing discipline in general.

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