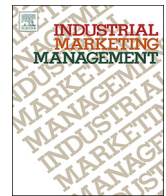




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Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Industrial Marketing Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/indmarman

Continuous improvement at *Industrial Marketing Management*: Suggestions from the Editorial Review Board

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We are very proud of the development of *Industrial Marketing Management*. As we have written in recent issues (see, for example, Di Benedetto & Lindgreen, 2018), the journal is widely recognized as the premier academic journal in business-to-business marketing, and its citation rankings and submissions continue to grow annually. But we are always searching for ways to improve our product, which we offer to our readers, as well as the process of providing timely review and publication of the best new articles in business-to-business marketing.

In November 2017, we published an editorial on the future of *Industrial Marketing Management* (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2017). In the spirit of continuous improvement of both product and process, we then contacted the members of the *Industrial Marketing Management* Editorial Review Board in early 2018 for their reactions to the article, and their thoughts and comments on the direction of the journal and their suggestion for further improvement.

The Editorial Review Board is a dedicated group of academics with many years of dedication to our journal, and a vested interest in maintaining and improving its status and relevance. It is no surprise, then, that we were pleased and even overwhelmed with the thoughtful comments we received from the Editorial Review Board membership. We have highlighted the comments we received, and added a few thoughts from the present and past Editors-in-Chief (Peter LaPlaca included), in this editorial. We welcome your thoughts and any additional insights.

We have organized the suggestions and comments from the Editorial Review Board into three categories: Administrative Issues, Development Issues, and Future Research Directions.

Administrative issues

In this section, we review suggestions regarding the administration of *Industrial Marketing Management*, and the effects on both journal content and the review process as experienced by authors.

Many of the suggestions put forth in the editorial (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2017) were met with approval from the Editorial Review Board, who also suggested areas of improvement. Firstly, for *Industrial Marketing Management* to increase its global presence and usefulness across a broad base of academics, it must continue its efforts toward theoretical and methodological pluralism. A wide range of

methodologies must be representative, and while *Industrial Marketing Management* has come a long way from the descriptive case studies and surveys of the past, there is still room for improvement. For example, fuzzy set/qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) is rarely applied in management studies, but is an emerging methodology in related fields, and combines qualitative and quantitative research. This can be a useful methodology for the study of business-to-business marketing and knowledge management, and it might even merit attention as a Special Issue topic. Other methodological or analytical techniques are either quite new, or rarely used in *Industrial Marketing Management*. Such techniques include simulations, ethnography, interpretive studies, action-based research, and the like. These methodological or analytical techniques can be explicitly encouraged, so that authors working in these areas know they potentially have an outlet in *Industrial Marketing Management*. This focus also would indicate the potential usefulness of these techniques to academics early in their careers, and may even result in greater uptake of these techniques in the marketing literature.

In a similar vein, *Industrial Marketing Management* submissions have grown in recent years meaning that there is an opportunity to focus on improving article quality across the board. The journal has quite simply more articles to choose from every year, which means the review process can be increasingly selective. It is far better to publish a smaller number of quality articles than to boost quantity of publications. The quality versus quantity focus has a real long-term benefit to the journal in that a greater ratio of highly relevant articles boosts the journal's impact factor. As a simple example, *Industrial Marketing Management* may want to increase the number of case study articles per year to rectify an imbalance of methodologies. But this does not mean that a weak case study with little theoretical contribution should be preferred just because a case methodology was used. Good case study research is very valuable in theory development, but is usually marked by (1) studying multiple companies, (2) including multiple levels of management within each company, and/or (3) collecting longitudinal data. Without one of these elements, the contribution to theory will be questionable at best. An editorial clearly specifying what methodologies and techniques the journal is looking would provide useful guidance to prospective authors.

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2018.04.017>

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We received several thoughtful suggestions on how to improve the review experience for prospective authors. *Industrial Marketing Management* receives articles from a wide variety of academic areas, including purchasing, supply chain management, and innovation among others. *Industrial Marketing Management* currently does not use an associate editor system (all regular-submission papers are assigned directly to one of the Editors-in-Chief who then select reviewers). Having topical associate editors might ensure that the most expert reviewers would be selected. While the Editors-in-Chief do their best to match papers to reviewers, an associate editor system would add a level of protection to avoid incorrect reviewer assignments. Topical associate editors might also be able to provide finer tuning within a topical area: for example, an associate editor with expertise in innovation would be able to better match a paper to a reviewer based on method. The Editors-in-Chief are able to find available reviewers in innovation; but the associate editor could make more precise recommendations regarding which reviewers are expert in a specific topic (cross-functional integration) or method (case-based versus survey).

Related to this, an associate editor system might help avoid problems in the revise and resubmit process. An associate editor can decide whether a paper that has been through one or two rounds of revision should be reviewed again, or (depending on the extent of revisions) may make the final decision without another round of review. This would speed up the decision process where warranted, and would also reduce the workload of the Editors-in-Chief.

In short, an associate editor system might add balance to the decision process and even result in improved feedback to authors. In the long run, this may increase the perception of the quality of *Industrial Marketing Management's* review process and, ultimately, the perception of *Industrial Marketing Management's* overall quality.

Here is a brief list of some of the other Editorial Review Board suggestions pertaining to administrative issues:

- Improve media coverage of articles, especially those with interesting managerial or public-policy implications.
- Institute a best-reviewer award to stimulate even higher-quality reviews
- Encourage greater readership and paper submissions from all parts of the globe, including underrepresented constituencies in parts of Asia and South America. This might be accomplished by introducing local champions to represent and promote *Industrial Marketing Management* on a local basis.
- Strive to get the journal on more A-level journal lists. While it is the premier business-to-business marketing academic journal, it is often viewed as being a specialty journal such as *Journal of Product Innovation Management* or *Journal of Retailing*. Nevertheless, some of these specialty journals are recognized as being high-quality and high-impact journals, deserving of a place on the A-level journal lists.
- Speed up the review process and provide quality reviews at a quicker pace to authors. This ultimately will shorten cycle time from research inception to publication.

Development issues

In this section, we highlight specific activities that could be undertaken to improve the review process and more fully meet the needs of all our constituent reader groups, especially the business-to-business managers for whom every issue of *Industrial Marketing Management* should offer at least a few key take-aways.

A constant challenge at *Industrial Marketing Management* is the search for qualified reviewers, and as the number of annual submissions increases, this issue will not go away soon. *Industrial Marketing Management* can implement a trainee reviewer program like that used by *Journal of Consumer Research*. Reviewers can nominate assistant professors or doctoral students with little or no experience in reviewing. These trainees' reviews are not used by the editor; but once the editorial

decision is made, the trainee receives a copy of the decision letter, as well as all reviews from the actual reviewers. This training program would provide valuable information to help young academics calibrate their reviews, and ensures a greater pool of experienced reviewers in the future.

A related program, which could be readily implemented, requests authors to submit review histories of recently published articles. *Journal of Consumer Research* also occasionally asks authors to share the review history of a recent acceptance (that is, all revisions of the manuscript, reviewer comments, and author replies to reviewers). These review histories are a rare glimpse inside the reviewing black box, and should provide young academics with guidance in reviewing as well as writing their own papers.

Industrial Marketing Management also must not lose its focus on providing useful insights to business-to-business managers. Too often, the “managerial implications” section of theoretical articles consists of a simple rewording of the results section and little else; it appears to be a section bolted on after the fact. To improve this situation, *Industrial Marketing Management* proactively can encourage authors to consider explicitly multiple stakeholders from the outset of the research process. That is, *Industrial Marketing Management* can seek out and encourage research that is of interest to academics, but also clearly is designed to have meaning and importance to the practitioner community. One possibly controversial idea would be even to de-emphasize theory building in some cases. Many research studies, of course, are designed to advance theory, and indeed make significant advances in theory building. But insisting on valid (but narrow and incremental) theoretical contributions, far removed from practical issues and important only to other academics, may take attention away from managerial implications and reduces the value of *Industrial Marketing Management* to its managerial readership. This is the “rigor versus relevance” argument: rigorous articles that provide significant theoretical insight are influential and highly cited, but relevance means a real contribution to both academic and practitioner.

A rough metric could be used to achieve a desired balance between rigor and relevance: one-third to one-half of articles make an ambitious theoretical contribution; one-third addresses an issue of topical or managerial relevance (and a descriptive or exploratory research design may be adequate); and the rest can be review papers, meta-analyses, position papers, the occasional invited paper by a leading academic, and the like. All these types of articles can increase citations; and this balance ensures that *Industrial Marketing Management* provides content relevant to all readers.

Industrial Marketing Management offers a best-paper award, based objectively on downloads. As a result, theoretical papers or literature reviews usually win the award. One suggestion was to initiate a most practice-relevant article award. Instituting and publicizing this award might result in a greater number of top quality articles of practical significance to managers.

There are other directions that can be implemented immediately to increase the relevance of *Industrial Marketing Management* to its managerial constituency. Co-authorship between academics and practitioners is, surprisingly, still uncommon and can be strongly encouraged. *Industrial Marketing Management*, in fact, would be a natural target for articles co-written by marketing managers and academics. A Special Issue even could be dedicated to such collaboration, which certainly would identify several under-researched topics of importance to the practitioner community. Practitioner-focused executive summaries aimed at the business media also can lead to greater visibility of *Industrial Marketing Management* in this community.

Additionally, position articles designed to stimulate debate among academics and practitioners would also be highly visible and influential. Choose the right target topic, and there is likely to be a range of opinions, which can lead to short comment articles and response or rebuttal articles. Many authors will be willing to write short position papers defending their ideas or responding to other articles. These back-

and-forth discussions are very interesting to doctoral students and can be used to stimulate debates in graduate classes.

Some other take-aways for developmental improvement include:

- Use invited tutorials: topic experts are invited to provide insights into conceptual and methodological issues.
- Institute practitioner-focused executive summaries, of some—if not all—articles appearing in *Industrial Marketing Management*.
- Invite practitioners to write articles or commentaries on academically-oriented papers.
- Encourage top PhD/DBA students or junior academics to write summaries of their practical findings.

Future research directions

The Editorial Review Board had plenty of ideas for growing research topics that merit further attention in the pages of *Industrial Marketing Management*. One topic that was mentioned several times was sustainability; other suggestions included data security and protection, food security and safety, block chain and machine learning, big data and data analytics, Internet of Things and ethical implications, other emerging technologies, online privacy, and industrial ecology and symbiosis. Of course, in every case, the focus would be on the implications for business-to-business marketing management and strategy, to ensure fit with the aims and scope of *Industrial Marketing Management*. Some of these topics merit attention as a Special Issue, and we encourage Editorial Review Board members and indeed all readers to consider submitting a worthy idea to *Industrial Marketing Management* for Special Issue consideration. As some of these topics move into the mainstream, they might become more frequently addressed even in the regular *Industrial Marketing Management* issues.

Special Issues have been, and continue to be, an important part of *Industrial Marketing Management's* published output. An effective Special Issue identifies hot, emerging research topics, accumulates the best current research on that topic, and includes the best new research on that topic by new and established academics alike. As such, it is a compendium of what is known so far on that topic, as well as a guide to future research for some time to come. Since the business-to-business marketing field is maturing and growing in so many directions, it might be worthwhile to commission an annual Special Issue on integrative literature reviews. These reviews would be highly influential and widely cited.

Industrial Marketing Management's scope is, of course, business-to-business marketing. Editors-in-Chief desk reject articles with a business-to-consumer focus that have no implications for business-to-business marketing. Nevertheless, there may be less of a gap between business-to-business and business-to-consumer: all academics in these areas are involved in marketing, and one of the goals of *Industrial Marketing Management* might be to break down the barriers between these two communities. For example, business-to-business marketing research has a long history studying the buyer-seller relationship; yet social media has allowed business-to-consumer companies to foster relationships with their customers like never before. Business-to-business researchers may be able to provide expertise in relationship building, which can guide business-to-consumer research. Similarly, branding and related topics such as brand loyalty is extensively studied in business-to-consumer, and less so in business-to-business, despite evidence of its importance. In the absence of a “brand name” as defined in business-to-consumer, a buyer may use the supplier's company name as reassurance of reliable quality. There is a lot that can be shared across the two groups, and increased dialogue is likely to pay off. *Industrial Marketing Management* can encourage articles on novel ways to adaptor implement business-to-consumer theory or practice to solve business-to-business problems.

An important aspect of the future of *Industrial Marketing Management* is the cross-fertilization of ideas to encourage the very real complexities experienced by marketing and management decision makers. Some

recent Special Issues, such as “Knowledge Management and Innovation in High-Tech Markets,” successfully integrated the growing literature on knowledge management into the scope of *Industrial Marketing Management*. Another promising direction for cross-fertilization is marketing and environmental studies. There is already a modest literature in *Industrial Marketing Management* on environmental management issues, but the topic of greenwashing (selectively covering positive environmental information and even hiding negative information in order to boost one's perceived green commitment) is a growth topic that would fit clearly within the aims and scope of *Industrial Marketing Management*.

A final thought concerns the definition of the business-to-business marketing community itself. One can ask if business-to-business marketing, perhaps unconsciously, defines itself too narrowly. As this research area has matured, it has expanded to include a wide range of research areas. Nevertheless, it can be argued that research areas of importance in the practice of business-to-business marketing are still wide open for more published research: these would include purchasing, operations, engineering, even business-to-business service). An interesting question to ask is whether business-to-business marketing is “underselling” itself and the potential contribution it can make to related research areas. As a starting point here, *Industrial Marketing Management* can identify the most pressing under-researched areas, and call for cross-disciplinary literature reviews to further explore these areas and prioritize research topics.

There were so many suggestions for research/special issue topics that we could not possibly include all of them here. But, in addition to what has been mentioned above, some of the more promising topics include:

- New technology and business-to-business marketing
- Emergent research techniques (e.g., fsQCA)
- The use of company intranets in supporting business-to-business marketing
- Supply chain partners (e.g., using surveys to gather information from partners)
- Risk management and risk analysis methodologies
- Corporate intelligence and competitive intelligence
- Corporate responsibility as it applies to sustainability
- Stakeholder view of business-to-business marketing issues
- Failure case studies
- Actionable, high-impact reviews of key business-to-business marketing topics

Conclusions and acknowledgments

Our editorial on the future of *Industrial Marketing Management* (Lindgreen and Di Benedetto, 2017) laid out the aim and scope of the journal; outlined topics of interest to theory and practice in business-to-business marketing; discussed the journal's editorial process and the role of reviewers, as well as topic editors and the continued role of Special Issues. The editorial also introduced the idea of target papers, position papers, letters to the editors, and articles from practitioners. Finally, as a means to develop and stimulate the journal's role in the academic debate, we launched the *Industrial Marketing Management Summit*.

The Co-Editors-in-Chief would like to thank the following members of *Industrial Marketing Management's* Editorial Review Board for responding to our request for suggestions, and for their comments on our editorial and on what needs to be done so that the journal becomes even better in the future. From this base of comments and suggestions, we were able to organize and present the recommendations as provided in this editorial. In particular, we thank Sönke Albers, Maja Arslanagic-Kalajdzic, Kevin Bao, Cova Bernard, Maurizio Catulli, Gregorio Martin de Castro, Joel R. Evans, Tony Fang, Larry Giunipero, Francesca Golfetto, Nathan Hartmann, Jeff Jia, Thomas Johnsen, Yang-Im Lee, Babu John Mariadoss, Rob Morgan, Mark Palmer, Petri Parvinen, Piet

Pauwels, Richard Plank, Carolin Plewa, Shaligram Pokharel, Chris Raddats, Diego Rinallo, Peter Trim, Janet Wagner, and Arch G. Woodside.

The next step for us now will be to reflect on all of the above suggestions and comments in order to see how to implement them. We are looking much forward to this job—and to continue working with the Editorial Review Board while doing this job. Thank you.

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