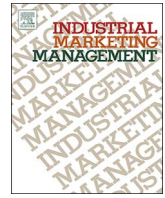




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Peter LaPlaca – The best marketer of industrial and B2B marketing research

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Peter LaPlaca's success as the former editor-in-chief of *Industrial Marketing Management* is tremendous. Starting from 1993, when he handed over the editorship of the *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, which he had founded, to Wes Johnston (LaPlaca & Johnston, 2006), he led the journal to its current position as the top specialized journal in the field of business-to-business (B2B) and industrial marketing. This is reflected in the great reputation of the journal as it is expressed in its high impact factor and its top positions in various journal rankings all over the world.

It is one of the specificities of the history and the current status of the marketing domain that B2B and industrial marketing is still very much underrepresented in the top marketing journals. Constantly over the last years, only 5 to 10% of the papers in the leading general marketing journals dealt with topics from this field (LaPlaca & Katrichis, 2009; Kleinaltenkamp, 2010). This stands in sharp contrast to the practical relevance of B2B markets which represent at least the half and in many cases the by far larger part of the GDP of all developed and many emerging countries. This is shown in the high and sometimes dominating shares that B2B transactions hold in manufacturing as well as in services industries in various countries (see Tables 1 and 2).

There are many reasons for this — from the eyes of a B2B researcher as well as from the perspective of many practitioners — unsatisfying status quo. Foremost, marketing students and later researchers lack the necessary knowledge of the B2B domain and thus cannot see and understand ‘the beauty’ of this multifaceted, interesting and inspiring field. In contrast, when undergraduate students join the university they already have been consumers for their whole, although short life, but they only very seldom get in touch with B2B firms and their marketing practices. Hence, they have a lot of experience of buying and using consumer products and services as well as with consumer marketing. When studying marketing, in the vast majority of cases, they are then confronted with professors who themselves have no expertise in B2B marketing as well and who like to use examples originating from the colourful and shiny world of consumer brands. Again, there is no chance of gaining a look into the fascinating world of B2B markets and marketing. And if one of the students decides to pick an academic career, again there are little incentives to focus on a B2B topic. First, there is a lack of easy data availability. B2B marketing research deals with firms, and their representatives often do not have the time or the willingness to share their—from a business perspective sometimes critical — information with the researchers. In addition to that, the special

meaning of customer relationships, the often smaller number of customers and the specialties of B2B markets and value chain structures are further reasons why traditional methods of data gathering the students have learned to apply, often fail. Second, the problems to be investigated are often complex and in many cases a certain technological proficiency is needed for their understanding, which many researchers lack. Overall, these circumstances typically lead to long project terms that conflict with the duration of many PhD programs. As a consequence, the academic system is not able to create knowledgeable marketing scholars that are able to research B2B marketing phenomena. However, if there are no junior academics working in B2B marketing, where shall the professors come from?

As a result, larger parts of the current top marketing research focuses on topics which only have restricted relevance for greater areas in practice. Hence, it is not astonishing that there is an ongoing debate about the relevance of marketing research (e.g. Reibstein, Day, & Wind, 2009). From my personal impression, this is even more the case in the US compared to Germany and other European countries, as the share of B2B transactions in these countries is higher than in the US (see Tables 1 and 2). Another reason for that might be that many PhD students in Europe are aiming at and have the opportunity to pursue a career in practice, which, as a result of the industry structures, in the majority of cases leads them to work for firms that are active in B2B markets. This may also be one of the reasons for “The End of US-Centrism in Marketing Academia” as it has just recently been propagated by Roland T. Rust (Rust, 2016).

It is one of the great merits of Peter LaPlaca that through his editorship of *Industrial Marketing Management* he had set a counterpoint to the described unbalance between the practical relevance of B2B marketing and its presence in the top marketing journals. Through his tireless work and engagement he not only provided space for this type of research but also encouraged authors to investigate topics that are practically relevant, like net-worked organizations, marketing of emerging technologies and blurring of value chains (Reibstein, Day, & Wind, 2009) or the increasing importance and growth of emerging markets, the changing landscape of B2B buying, the increasing sophistication of sellers, the trend toward solutions and the impact of technology on B2B buying behavior (Lilien, 2016).

Hence, B2B marketing research obviously does not lack relevance. This is even more the case since a majority of the researchers in the field of B2B marketing find their academic determination after having

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Table 1
Share of B2B/B2C transactions of manufacturing industries (2011).
(OECD.Stat (2017), input-output-tables.)

Country	B2B		B2C		Total ^a
	Volume ^a	Share	Volume ^a	Share	
Canada	439,668.40	62.90%	259,337.90	37.10%	699,006.30
China	9,804,186.60	90.28%	1,055,088.60	9.72%	10,859,275.20
France	838,919.70	65.62%	439,542.90	34.38%	1,278,462.60
Germany	994,435.60	68.83%	450,419.10	31.17%	1,444,854.70
Japan	2,542,406.80	73.96%	895,212.40	26.04%	3,437,619.20
Singapore	157,542.10	93.10%	11,681.20	6.90%	169,223.30
Sweden	165,180.40	70.38%	69,517.40	29.62%	234,697.80
UK	609,470.80	62.40%	367,230.30	37.60%	976,701.10
US	134,124.70	39.14%	208,531.20	60.86%	342,655.90

^a US \$, Million.

Table 2
Share of B2B/B2C transactions of services industries (2011).
(OECD.Stat (2017), input-output-tables.)

Country	B2B		B2C		Total ^a
	Volume ^a	Share	Volume ^a	Share	
Canada	836,327.40	44.37%	1,048,554.30	55.63%	1,884,881.70
China	3,707,713.50	62.37%	2,236,602.90	37.63%	5,944,316.40
France	1,568,599.70	48.60%	1,658,731.90	51.40%	3,227,331.60
Germany	1,664,363.30	49.06%	1,728,263.40	50.94%	3,392,626.70
Japan	2,459,821.90	39.19%	3,817,147.80	60.81%	6,276,969.70
Singapore	281,259.10	70.24%	119,146.50	29.76%	400,405.60
Sweden	328,252.80	52.12%	301,517.90	47.88%	629,770.70
UK	1,454,853.40	47.41%	1,613,630.30	52.59%	3,068,483.70
US	6,228,344.00	37.36%	10,440,587.50	62.64%	16,668,931.50

^a US \$, Million.

already had a career in practice. These researchers very much know what B2B and industrial markets and marketing are about. However, sometimes they lack the necessary rigor. Mainly as a result of the described difficulties to get access to large data sets, many B2B marketing researchers conduct qualitative case-based research. I am sorry to say that, from my personal impression as an editor of one of the journals in this field, many of these studies do not refer to the state of art of case study research. Especially in the field of management research, a large number of methodological approaches have been developed in order to make qualitative research not only relevant but also rigorous, from research design and selection of cases to interview techniques, coding procedures, test of inter-coder reliability to data analysis and presentation of results (e. g. Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012; Krippendorff, 2013; Yin, 2014). Marketing scholars in the field of B2B marketing applying qualitative research need to make more use of these insights and methodological approaches, not least since they are also dealing with the behavior of organizations as it is the case in B2B and industrial marketing. Moreover, my feeling is that high-

quality qualitative research in many cases is even 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. Not for nothing, scholars warn to be very cautious in modelling and inferring conditional independence between variables in causal models (Frosini, 2006). On the other hand, this does not serve to think that conducting a “nice case study” is enough to contribute to scientific progress. Again, it is the balanced combination of rigor and relevance that makes good academic research.

Through his long-lasting effort and engagement, Peter LaPlaca has led the way to high quality research in B2B and industrial marketing. And he pursued this aim not only through his work as the editor-in-chief of *Industrial Marketing Management*. With great determination, Peter gave seminars and presentations on B2B and industrial marketing and on how to publish scholarly papers especially in this area. Through his vivid and profound teaching, many mostly young scientists have been given very valuable insights into the field of B2B and industrial marketing and into academic processes and structures that helped and supported them in successfully following their career path. Last but not least, from my many meetings with Peter in meet-the-editor sessions at academic conferences, at my university and also during conference and private dinners, I got the impression that he is a truly honorable man who does the things he does with firm conviction.

We can undoubtedly say that without Peter our discipline would not stand where it does today. Thank you, Peter! For sure, you are the best marketer of industrial and B2B marketing research in the world.

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