Industrial Marketing Management xxx (xxxx) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Industrial Marketing Management

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

Research paper

Business-to-business marketing research: Assessing readability and discussing relevance to practitioners

Olga Dziubaniuk[a,*], Wilhelm Barner-Rasmussen[a], Nikolina Koporcic[b], Maria Ivanova-Gongne[a], Tibor Mandják[c], Stefan Markovic[d]

[a] School of Business and Economics, Åbo Akademi University, Vänrikinkatu 3 B, 20500 Turku, Finland
[b] Marketing Department, Nottingham University Business School, University of Nottingham, Business School North Building, Jubilee Campus, Wollaton Road, NG8 1BB Nottingham, UK
[c] Normandy Business School, EM Normandie, 30 rue de Richelieu 76600 Le Havre, France
[d] Department of Marketing, Copenhagen Business School, Solbjerg Plads 3, 2000 Frederiksberg, Denmark

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Business-to-business marketing
Managerial relevance
Readability
Academic language
Writing style
Reading ease score

ABSTRACT

Business practitioners tend to show little interest in academic journals, raising concerns that research-based knowledge potentially relevant to their managerial practice might evade them. The literature suggests academic writing style as one of the major reasons for this lack of interest. Against this background, we quantitatively examine the readability of 150 business-to-business (B2B) marketing research articles published in five leading journals. Our analysis identifies certain variations across journals and categories of papers, implying that it is possible to improve readability. We discuss the possible role of improved readability in encouraging practitioners to read B2B marketing research, while potentially increasing its relevance.

1. Introduction

The knowledge generated by academic research frequently remains isolated from the business world (e.g. Baraldi, La Rocca, & Perna, 2014; Gummesson, 2014), implying a lack of knowledge transfer from researchers to practitioners (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). Despite the close cooperation between academics and businesspeople in the process of data collection and knowledge co-creation, as well as significant scholarly efforts to codify new knowledge in the form of academic texts, practitioners show little interest in reading these (Brennan & Ankers, 2004). Major constraints on managerial interest in academic knowledge include a tendency by academics to overemphasize knowledge abstractions and concepts (Narasimhan, 2017). Long time lags in finalizing and/or publishing findings, a shallow understanding of business realities, and – importantly for this paper – abstruse language have also been advanced as reasons (see e.g. Baer & Shaw, 2017; Brennan, Tzempelokos, & Wilson, 2014; Farr & Timm, 1994). This lack of managerial relevance has been argued to be especially evident in the sphere of business-to-business (B2B) marketing research (Storbacka, 2014), raising much discussion within the field. Consequently, the 34th Annual IMP Conference 2018 was dedicated to "the pertinence, relevance and impact of research", an issue that arguably links together the interests of scholars, educators, and practitioners.

The managerial lack of interest in academic B2B marketing research raises the question: if academic knowledge is not perceived relevant to the business world, how can academics change this and thereby contribute more to business practice? In addition to business practitioners, whose interests are in the focus of this study, it is important to note that this question is also relevant for consultants, governmental and non-governmental organizations, students, and educators, all of whom have a strong interest in accessing the best possible knowledge. That access is a key argument for the strong role of research in modern business schools. Helping the aforementioned stakeholders access the results of B2B marketing research is thus not only a question of academics' legitimacy, but also arguably a core dimension of their professional duties.

Ottesen and Grønhaug (2004) have suggested that the transfer of academic marketing knowledge to the business community may be hindered or blocked by the language of academic journals, which may be difficult for managers to read. However, the prior research has not specifically addressed readability, leaving an important research gap to fill. Accordingly, the present study focuses on the readability of B2B

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: odziuban@abo.fi (O. Dziubaniuk), wilhelm.barner-rasmussen@abo.fi (W. Barner-Rasmussen), nikolina.koporcic@nottingham.ac.uk (N. Koporcic), mivanova@abo.fi (M. Ivanova-Gongne), tmandjak@em-normandie.fr (T. Mandják), sm.marktg@cbs.dk (S. Markovic).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.01.012
Received 15 January 2019; Received in revised form 14 December 2019; Accepted 28 January 2020

marketing research, and its specific aim is to explore readability as a factor that potentially prevents academic knowledge from reaching practitioners. To this end, we pose the following research questions: Are there differences in readability between different B2B marketing journals and/or different types of B2B marketing research articles? What are the potential implications of differences in readability for practitioner accessibility to B2B marketing research? In order to answer these questions, we first identify and explain variations in readability across different types of article published in five leading journals that publish B2B marketing. Based on these findings, we then discuss how article readability may influence practitioners' access to academic research and possibly also their interest in it.

Our empirical study consists of a quantitative analysis of the readability levels of 150 B2B marketing articles published in Industrial Marketing Management Journal (hereinafter IMM), Scandinavian Journal of Management (SJM), Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing (JBIM), Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP), and Journal of Business Research (JBR). These journals were selected for inclusion in the study based on their track record of publishing prominent B2B and industrial marketing research, high citation rates, and popularity in the academic community. Our main variable of interest is the readability level estimated by the Flesch Reading Ease scores (Flesch, 1951) of each of the articles. These scores are used to determine, quantify, and compare levels of text complexity. We explore whether the readability of the selected articles varies significantly between journals and different categories of article, and between different sections of the same articles.

The contributions of this study to the B2B marketing field are the following. First, and most obviously, we draw academic and editorial attention to the issue of article readability, and explain why academics ought to be mindful also of the interests of non-academic readers. Second, the overall readability of our sample articles is relatively low. Ironically, this is especially true for the sections that practitioners looking for academic advice would probably read first, namely abstracts. In addition, readability is uncorrelated with the number of times an article has been cited, suggesting that academics in the B2B marketing field currently do not attach great value to readability. Bringing this issue to light and openly discussing possible reasons for it is another important contribution of our article. Third, and no less importantly, we empirically identify significant variations in article readability across journals, meaning that practices exist to improve readability in ways that are fully compatible with the requirements of high-quality journal publications. Based on this finding, we provide practical advice for academic writers, publishers and reviewers on how to improve readability without sacrificing academic quality or style. These three contributions form the basis of a concluding overall discussion on how knowledge transfer between B2B marketing scholars and practitioners might be improved in terms of both volume and quality. This discussion addresses and advances core questions of why academic B2B marketing research exists, and whose purposes it serves.

The rest of this article is structured as follows. First, we present the theoretical background of our study, focusing on academic knowledge transfer challenges and readability issues, and develop a set of hypotheses based on this. We then present our research design and methodology, report our findings, and discuss their implications and limitations. In closing, suggestions for future research are presented.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Relevance of B2B marketing research

B2B marketing research is extensive (Di Benedetto & Lindgreen, 2018) and, in principle, vital to managers given today's turbulent business environment (Kuusela, Närvänen, Hannu, & Yrjölä, 2014; Reed, Story, & Saker, 2004; Reibstein, Day, & Wind, 2009). However, its findings do not seem to be implemented frequently in practice by business or public sector managers (Reed et al., 2004). Accordingly, the issue of practitioner relevance has been identified as a key challenge of marketing research, and some journals have dedicated special issues to this topic (e.g., Brennar, 2004; Åge and Cederlund, 2014; Stentoft and Freytag, 2018). These special issues have highlighted the challenges of knowledge transfer from scholars to practitioners, and the extent to which academic research may be seen as detached from the sphere of business.

The finger has been pointed at both the substance of academic research and some common forms of research output as reasons for this apparent disconnect between academic research and business practice. On the substance side, low managerial interest in academic research has been explained by limitations in its relevance and the applicability of its findings to managerial problems. Academics generally do not focus on resolving specific managerial issues, but aim for a broad understanding of phenomena and for results that with due caution can be applied also to other contexts (Farr & Timm, 1994). This implies framing findings in theoretical terms, which managers may regard as irrelevant to solving concrete business challenges.

As for the forms of research output, the academic publication process has been singled out as a possible culprit for their disconnect with practice. The selection of phenomena for academic study is frequently influenced by available publishing opportunities (Narasimhan, 2017), and the pressure to publish drives academics to present their findings in the form of articles in top-level journals, where editors frequently expect the use of abstruse academic language (Brennan & Ankers, 2004). The more densely articles are written, the higher their chances of acceptance for publication in highly ranked journals (Metoyer-Duran, 1993). Thus, advanced academic writing can open the door for researchers to publish in top-tier journals, which is a requirement for a modern academic career but may obviously make articles less accessible to readers outside the academic community.

Why should researchers care about this? The short answer is that practitioners are crucial to research both as participants and audience. Business marketing research can be defined as the study of business relationships between organizations (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2013), and professionals and managers in these organizations are typically the main sources of both quantitative and qualitative empirical data (Ghauri, Grønhaug, & Kristianslund, 1995). Thus, they are the most important source of information for empirical B2B marketing research, and it is therefore essential to a productive research process that they do not consider the research outputs trivial or irrelevant.

Practitioners also constitute a core audience for business marketing research. The imperative to publish does not shelter business academics from the pressures of relevance and impact (see e.g., AACSB International, 2012), meaning that also marketing theory should provide a perspective for practice. This is not inconsistent with the conception of theory as a means of organizing and interpreting an advancing body of knowledge (Alderson, 1957). Indeed, B2B marketing academics generally aspire to produce research that is interesting, valuable and relevant to practitioners, and contributes to management practice (Brennan & Ankers, 2004). However, only practitioners can determine what research fulfils these criteria. Therefore, they must be informed of research results, and exploring their opinions and perceptions is imperative. Particularly top executives who ultimately make the most significant decisions should be involved in assessing research relevance (Kuusela et al., 2014).

Stakeholders other than business practitioners also have an interest in the relevance of academic research. Consultants systematically need to obtain new insights into markets, concepts, processes, and theories. As such, they can play an important role in bridging academic research and practice (Gummesson, 2014), and creating opportunities for further business development and profitability (Ajmal, Nordström, & Helo, 2009) for large multinational companies (Abbott, 2008), as well as smaller companies (Bennett & Smith, 2004). Governmental and non-governmental organizations, which researchers rely upon for project

funding, expect practice-relevant research outcomes in return that can be made accessible to their constituencies and often also to the public at large. University students and teachers constitute another important audience for academic research. Research results often form the base of teaching materials, such as case studies, and students study academic articles to gain knowledge about business processes. However, many faculty members will recognize the complaint – especially from undergraduates – that the relevance of these articles is difficult to ascertain due to challenges in understanding the structure and logic of academic language.

In sum, several important stakeholder groups have an interest in relevant academic research, but approach it from different starting points and with a different skill set than professional academics, and may therefore struggle to extract the relevant knowledge. This underlines the magnitude of the challenges associated with research readability, the concept to which we now turn.

2.2. Academic language and challenges of readability

What characteristics of academic texts may limit their readability in the eyes of non-academics? There is no universally accepted definition of academic language, but it can be conceptualized as a formal language used in academic curricula, scientific discussions, argumentations, propositions, syntheses, and interpretations of research-based information (Snow, 2010; Solomon & Rhodes, 1995) – in short, as a linguistic resource enabling scientific thinking. Text structure is sequential in order to describe the research process in a logical and coherent way. The generalizability of the results is discussed to indicate if and how findings can be applied beyond their specific empirical context. The principles of academic writing include proper sentence structure and good grammar; precise, concise and comprehensive vocabulary; avoiding jargon; and keeping the length of the text appropriate (Sawyer, Laran, & Xu, 2008). Academic texts should be confident in content presentation, but not overconfident, vague, or brash. Top marketing journals value articles written according to Standard English rules, and advise authors to avoid alternative spellings and inconsistent terminology that can lead to confusion (LaPlaca, Lindgreen, & Vanhamme, 2018).

Despite these general guidelines suggesting appropriate levels of readability, academic language has characteristics that may decrease its readability. First, its neutral manner of presentation and impersonal narrative stance frequently diminish readers' interest (Snow & Uccelli, 2009). Neutral presentation implies a distanced tone more reminiscent of technical instructions than a story, while impersonality, although intended to support scientific rigor and help focus on general rather than specific claims (Snow, 2010), may result in an authoritative voice that can confuse non-academic readers. Academic writing is frequently considered difficult to read (Potgieter & Smit, 2009), for example due to detailed ontological and epistemological accounts that are important for scholars but can be perceived as irrelevant by readers lacking interest in research philosophy as such, even if they are interested in how the knowledge has been produced. Academic terminology, which is rarely applied outside the sphere of research (Snow, 2010), can also confuse practitioners (Baer & Shaw, 2017) by deviating significantly from what they are familiar with from their own studies or business experience. Discussion of complex phenomena with difficult words excludes many readers (Badley, 2017).

In sum, the factors discussed above add up to a specialized "professional" language that demands of outsiders an effort to read. From the perspective of non-academics, this may severely limit both the readability of academic articles and interest in their content (Straub & Ang, 2008), inhibiting the transfer to practice even of findings that as such would be relevant. Readability is thus urgently in need of further exploration as a key concern of knowledge transfer from academia to practice.

Leading academic journals pay attention to the style and language of the articles they publish, and as already noted, authors are urged to follow Standard English rules (LaPlaca, Lindgreen, & Vanhamme, 2018). However, journals also tend to follow some policies that may decrease article readability in outsiders' eyes. Of the journals included in our empirical study, SJM (Scandinavian Journal of Management, 2019), IMM and JBR (Journal of Business Research, 2019) advocate the use of "inclusive language" that "acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities" (IMM, 2019). Therefore, using the words "his", "her", "she" or "he" is discouraged. The guidelines of IMP and JBIM (Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing, 2019) explicitly state that "authors should avoid the use of personal pronouns", thereby discouraging the use of the active voice. SJM, IMM and JBR also encourage authors "to conform to correct scientific English", which presumably compels them to use complex language (Brownell, Price, & Steinman, 2013). Of course, not all published B2B marketing research has an impersonal bearing: personalization of the text depends on the type of the research and its context, and editors have some freedom to accept papers that deviate from the above guidelines. Nevertheless, given that transforming passive voice into active is an established way to make texts simpler and more readable (Siddharthan, 2014), it is striking that some guidelines may explicitly encourage the passive voice.

Table 1 summarizes the editorial guidelines of the studied journals. Overall, despite marketing themselves as promoting dialogue between researchers and practitioners and catering to the needs of both marketing scholars and practitioners, the editorial guidelines of many journals may discourage authors from writing in a manner that a wider audience might perceive as more readable. We now proceed to discuss how readability can be measured and subsequently to develop hypotheses for our empirical study.

2.3. Measuring readability

Readability is a characteristic that makes a text comprehensible and easy to understand for a wide variety of audiences (Klare, 1963). Low readability makes a text hard to read for a person without specific training in understanding such texts, for example materials written in academic language. However, the assessment of readability begins with the reader. An individual reader can assess readability based on factors such as word recognition speed, reference of represented ideas to their own interests, and aesthetic evaluation of the text representation style. The assessment of readability is also affected by grammatical structures, and the length of words and sentences (Gilliland, 1972).

Formulas for measuring readability based on an analysis of different aspects of the text are quite common. Readability can be evaluated by a score that estimates the ease of reading a text (Flesch, 1951), but such scores capture the human interest in the text representation style rather than in the subject. Readability formulas are useful in obtaining a numerical estimate of the readability or complexity of a text (Bruce & Rubin, 1988). Despite the existence of numerous ways to measure readability (DuBay, 2004), the Flesch Reading Ease score formula is still the most frequently applied (Crosier, 2004; Flesch, 1951), and accessible even in text-editing software, such as Microsoft Word. The readability score of the Flesch Reading Ease formula builds on the premise that the longer the words and sentences are, the harder they are to read. The reading ease score is calculated according to the following formula:

$$\text{Flesch Readability Ease} = 206.835 - (1.015 \times SL) - (84.6 \times WL)$$

SL = Sentence Length (average number of words per sentence);
WL = Word Length (average number of syllables per word).

The readability score ranges on a scale from 0 (very difficult to read) to 100 (very easy to read for any literate individual), meaning that higher scores indicate better readability. Conventionally, academic research texts score between 0 and 50, where scores of 0-30 indicate very difficult reading (Scientific and Professional), and of 30-50 represent difficult reading (Academic and Scholarly) (Flesch, 1951). Flesch also

Table 1
Editorial guidelines for authors.

	JBIM	IMP	IMM	SJM	JBR
Practical orientation in the aims of the journal	"A valuable source for academics, directors and executives of marketing, providing them with new, fresh insights which are applicable within real life settings."	"Aims to bring out research that explores interactivity and interdependences in business relationships and their implications for marketing management, business development and for society at large."	"Provides theoretical, empirical and case-based research geared to the needs of marketing scholars and practitioners researching and working in industrial and business-to-business markets."	"Promotes dialogue and new thinking around theory and practice, based on conceptual creativity, reasoned reflexivity and contextual awareness [and] constructive dialogue among researchers as well as between researchers and practitioners."	"Is intended to be an outlet for theoretical and empirical research contributions for scholars and practitioners in the business field."
Requirements for language					
Personal pronouns	Not recommended (i.e. authors "should avoid" personal pronouns)		Usage of 'he or she', 'his/her' is recommended instead of 'he' or 'his',		
Scientific language	N/A		Implicitly required		
General language	Grammatically correct and without spelling or typographical errors		• Spell-checked and grammar-checked; • "good" English required (i.e. American or British, not a mixture)		
Requirements for parts of the article					
Title	Not more than 8 words		Concise and informative, no abbreviations		
Abstract	Structured abstract required		Concise and factual; references and abbreviations not recommended		
Introduction	N/A		Objectives and background of the work, no literature review or summary of results		
Results	N/A		Clear and concise		
Highlights or Exec. summary	N/A, but the structured abstracts may include practical and social implications sections (but not obligatory)		Highlights are mandatory and consist of a short collection of bullet points that convey the core findings		N/A

Table 2
Scale of reading ease score (Flesch, 1951).

Reading ease score	Description of style
0-30	Very difficult
30-50	Difficult
50-60	Fairly difficult
60-70	Standard
70-80	Fairly easy
80-90	Easy
90-100	Very easy

estimates that texts with scores of 30-50 are suitable for individuals with a basic college grade, and texts with scores of 0-30 are most probably relevant for college or university graduates. The scale of the Flesch reading ease score is presented in Table 2.

Readability formulas do not consider all factors that influence text comprehension, as they are applied out of the context of the interaction between reader and text. Beyond sentence length and word complexity, there are other challenges related to the context of the text, number of items to remember, motivation for reading, rhetorical structure, complexity of idea, and even the reader's cultural background (Bruce & Rubin, 1988; see also Zamanian & Heydari, 2012). Moreover, readability formulas only provide a superficial analysis of the text (Zamanian & Heydari, 2012). Readability scores represent information mostly concerning writing style, and do not capture the reader's level of comprehension (comprehension assessment; see e.g. Davis, 1944). Comprehension involves knowledge of words and their meaning, the ability to remember words and comprehend their content in logical terms, understanding the purpose of the text, and even the author's mood (Caldwell, 2008). The assessment of comprehension requires greater measurement effort, as it involves the readers themselves in the assessment process. The reader should be able to interpret the text in order to demonstrate comprehension.

The present study does not touch upon comprehension assessment, focusing instead squarely on readability. Reading skills and educational background affect not only the ease of understanding the text, but also the interest in and motivation for reading it (Gilliland, 1972). If a text is abstruse in its way of expressing ideas, and uses rare terminology or difficult grammatical structures, readers unfamiliar with these would perceive its readability as low.

In sum, we make the general case that non-academic readers of B2B marketing research texts tend to face significant readability challenges, limiting the impact of the research in question. We now proceed to an empirical exploration of these challenges, asking whether readability scores vary across different types of academic B2B marketing text, e.g. conceptual/empirical or qualitative/quantitative, and whether there are readability differences between journals. We also explore whether there are links between the readability of an academic text and the extent to which it is cited upon publication. First, we develop a set of hypotheses regarding these questions, based on the theoretical background presented above.

3. Hypotheses

3.1. Readability of conceptual vs. empirical papers

The literature reviewed above suggests that readability is an important factor in drawing non-academics' attention to research findings. Academic language is necessary to express research ideas in a clear and concise manner (Snow, 2010), and may make research look more credible and rigorous in the eyes of academic peers. However, it may also make research understandable primarily to the academic community and less accessible to other types of audience, especially practitioners. That may hinder knowledge transfer to practitioners or other parties (Crosier, 2004).

But is there any type of research more readable than another, and thereby more conducive to knowledge transfer to non-academic audiences (e.g., practitioners)? In general, conceptual papers offer a broader understanding of concepts, frameworks and business fields than do empirical papers (Ottesen & Grønhaug, 2004), and may thus enable a greater degree of knowledge transfer from academia to the business world. The readability of conceptual papers may benefit from their focus on describing key concepts in depth and explaining how these concepts are interrelated from a substantive perspective. By comparison, the readability of empirical papers may suffer from the necessity to report complex empirical results in a concise fashion, which can make the papers less accessible to a wider audience. Moreover, the fact that empirical research is contingent on specific methodologies and data analysis techniques is likely to make it more difficult to read than conceptual research, especially for audiences who are not expert in those methodologies and techniques. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H1. *Conceptual papers will attain higher readability scores than empirical papers.*

3.2. Readability of qualitative vs. quantitative empirical papers

Research suggests that wider audiences, especially practitioners, prefer qualitative to quantitative studies because they are easier to read and understand (Perea & Brady, 2017). Interestingly, research also argues that theoretical advances in B2B marketing are generally a result of empirical research (see Halinen & Törnroos, 2005), often employing qualitative methods, such as case studies (Easton, 2000; Gummesson, 2014). Thus, qualitative research (including case studies) is likely to be both more accessible and more relevant to practitioners than quantitative research (Hietanen, Sihvonen, Tikkanen, & Mattila, 2014). For instance, research outcomes reported through storytelling or similar forms of narration specific to qualitative research, are generally more memorable and able to sustain the interest of readers than are the technical reports of research outcomes that characterize quantitative research. The reason is that readers find it easier to identify with the story or narrative. Moreover, storytelling or similar forms of narration represent a more aesthetic manner of study description that can engage the reader in a set of events that may be impressive, fascinating and/or striking. Readers can follow how events unfolded and in what business context the phenomenon was investigated. Thus, they do not have to rely solely on the conclusions or managerial implications but can create their own understanding of the case(s) in point. Cases are usually described in detail, clearly structured, and comprehensive, boosting their readability.

Whilst definitions of key terms in quantitative research are generally narrow and based strictly on their operationalization, qualitative research tends to describe them more in-depth, making them more understandable and thereby the text more readable. Moreover, compared to quantitative research, the readability of qualitative research may benefit from a relative lack of highly specialized terminology, formulas, and abbreviations related to statistical knowledge, making it easier for non-academics to read than quantitative research. Based on the above line of argument, we postulate that:

H2. *Qualitative papers will attain higher readability scores than quantitative papers.*

3.3. Readability across academic journals

Regardless of the type of academic paper, are there differences in readability across academic journals? Many academic journals market themselves as publishing research findings that are relevant to the business world, and describe their target audience as comprising both practitioners and academics. Thus, in principle, their level of readability may vary depending on their guidelines for authors, as those outline the norms for how articles should be written. However, as we have argued above, these guidelines tend to encourage researchers to write in scientific language, and follow specific academic conventions. Academic language is necessary in research papers to achieve precise expression and impose authority (Snow, 2010), which is why scholars tend to apply sophisticated terminology and complex grammatical structures. Demands for academic legitimacy add to these pressures. A key challenge of academic writing is that young researchers tend to follow the traditions of academic writing established by senior researchers within their field of science. This makes it difficult to find their own approach or "voice" within the academic genre (Potgieter & Smit, 2009), and therefore, articles tend to be written in a style that is accepted within the targeted academic community.

Scholars may not even be interested in making their research attractive to readers outside this circle (Badley, 2017). Instead, their texts are meant for each other, and style and terminology are selected to signal inclusion in the academic community. Moreover, although high-level journals typically demand Standard English and proper grammar (e.g. LaPlaca, Lindgreen, Vanhamme, & Di Benedetto, 2018), they still primarily target readers from the academic community. Thus, stilted language remains an issue for wider audiences (e.g., practitioners) as potential readers, even though publishers are aware of this (Storbacka, 2014).

Although journals could apply requirements to make writing style more accommodating for practitioners, in reality such initiatives remain minor (Brennan et al., 2014), the end result of which is most likely an article that is too complicated for a non-scientific audience. Thus, overall, given (i) the nature of most journals' guidelines for authors, (ii) the demands for academic legitimacy, and (iii) the limited concrete initiatives on the part of publishers to make research more readable to a wider audience, we posit that:

H3. *Readability scores will not differ significantly across academic journals.*

3.4. The relationship between readability and citations

Finally, and now shifting focus from readability as an outcome to readability as a factor that may explain other outcomes, are more readable papers also more cited? Arguments of better readability suggest that more readable research findings are more accessible, and thus more likely to be drawn upon by others. Practitioners do not cite papers, so the number of citations cannot be argued to capture direct effects of research on practice. However, it is plausible to expect more readable academic papers to be more frequently drawn upon as references by other academics, students, NGOs etc. Sawyer et al. (2008) illustrated that articles with high levels of readability are frequently presented among award-winning articles. As the number of citations is often a factor when journals select award-winning articles, this suggests a positive link between readability and high citation scores. In short, the argument is that more readable articles are easier to draw upon as references by academic audiences, making them more likely to become frequently cited. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H4. *Readability scores of papers will be positively related to their citation scores.*

4. Research method

4.1. Sample and data collection

The sample was composed as follows. We selected 150 B2B marketing articles from five academic journals specialized in the field, namely Industrial Marketing Management (IMM), Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP), Journal of Business Research (JBR), the Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing (JBIM), and Scandinavian Journal of Management (SJM). IMM and JBIM have been listed as the highest

Table 3
The sample journals.

Journal	Impact factor (2017)	CiteScore (2017)
Industrial Marketing Management (IMM)	3.678	3.76
Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP)	n/a	n/a
Journal of Business Research (JBR)	2.509	3.31
Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing (JBIM)	1.833	2.12
Scandinavian Journal of Management (SJM)	1.344	1.78

ranked industrial marketing journals (based on the CABS listing, 2015). The IMP journal used to be the journal of the IMP group, whose members are specialized in industrial marketing, before merging with JBIM in 2018. SJM and JBR have a history of publishing notable articles within the industrial marketing field (e.g., Håkansson & Snehota, 1989; Halinen & Törnroos, 1998; Lowe, Ellis, & Purchase, 2008). The selected journals are presented in Table 3. The sampled articles are listed in Appendix A.

In our sampling process, we first focused on the top-cited articles in the aforementioned journals. Citations are indicative of academic value, and thus potentially of practitioner value, in terms of the knowledge that may be obtained from the article. For comparison, we matched our 5 sets of 10 top-cited articles with equally large sets of the least cited articles and articles selected randomly from the same journals.

In sum, our sample comprised 30 articles from each of the five journals presented in Table 3 (150 articles in total), divided into three categories: 10 from within the top-cited articles; 10 randomly selected articles; and, 10 from within the least cited articles. The publication years of the top-cited articles varied between the journals depending on their editorial strategy. Thus, our selection of top-cited articles was based on the articles promoted by the journal itself as top-cited, rather than by a strict time period. The reason for this selection criterion is that when searching for articles within a journal, a non-academic reader is likely to focus on the articles promoted by the journal as top-cited, irrespective of their year of publication. In addition, proportionally greater attention will be drawn to those articles because journals frequently display the list of top-cited articles on the front page of their website, giving those papers the greatest visibility. This selection of articles resulted in the following periods: 2013-2015 for IMM; 2015-2017 for IMP; 1999-2014 for JBIM; 2015-2017 for JBR; and, 2015-2017 for SJM. The least cited articles were selected within the same timeframe from each journal by identifying the 10 articles with the lowest citation score among all other articles within the given time period, according to the citation database used by the journal (Scopus or CrossRef). The randomly selected articles were also selected within the same timeframe, among the articles that had obtained at least 5 citations, meaning they had received at least some level of attention. At least one random article was selected for each year within the timeframe. We observed that already at this stage the number of citations varied considerably across the five journals. We also collected the author's guidelines for all the sampled journals from their web pages, in order to evaluate whether the guidelines were able to affect readability.

4.2. Variables

In order to be able to compare readability within each journal as well as across journals, we took readability samples from four different parts of all the 150 sampled articles. These were: (i) abstracts (both structured, i.e., extended abstracts, and unstructured, i.e. one or a few paragraphs with a restricted number of words); (ii) introductions; (iii) method sections; and, (iv) concluding sections, including managerial implications. The rationale for focusing on these parts was that abstracts, introductions and conclusions are the most likely to be read by both academics and non-academics. Abstracts provide a brief summary of an article and are frequently written with the explicit aim of attracting the interest of potential readers. Introductions lead readers into the research subject, and should make it clear whether the study is relevant to them, and whether they should keep on reading. The abstract and introduction parts indicate contribution strategies. They are a form of rhetorical approach used by authors to communicate the distinctive value of their written work, which aids the reader in deciding whether the research is of interest to them (Nicholson, LaPlaca, Al-Abdin, Breese, & Khan, 2018). Concluding sections summarize the main findings, discuss them in relation to the theory, and/or provide solutions to specific managerial problems. We assume that these are the parts of academic papers that contain the most relevant and/or interesting information for both academics and managers, while simultaneously demonstrating the author's communication skills. Highlights (short clarifying statements about the articles) were not included in our sample, as they did not fulfil the required sentence length for readability sampling according to the Flesch readability formula. Data on the readability of method sections were included to explore the idea that qualitative papers are more readable than quantitative papers.

The readability formula by Flesch (1951) was used to estimate readability scores for each part of each article. We obtained the Flesch scores by copying text from the articles into Microsoft Word, where this score estimation is available. Following the sampling technique suggested by Flesch (1951), 3-5 samples of text were drawn from each article. As the minimum number of words for sampling starts at 100, the text we used from the samples ranged from 300 to 400 words for each part of each article (Bauerly, Johnson, & Singh, 2006; Flesch, 1948). The variables ranged between 0 and 38.80 for abstracts, 0 and 43.70 for introductions, 0 and 44.40 for method sections, and 0 and 52.80 for conclusions, with a mean overall readability score of 16.57. Standardized readability scores were used for the analyses.

Google Scholar (Google Scholar overview, 2019) was for several reasons used as a source for the citation scores needed to test Hypothesis 4. First, Google Scholar CiteScores could be obtained for all the sampled articles, whereas Scopus or CrossRef scores could not. Also, anecdotal evidence indicates that the importance of Google Scholar citations is growing: they are increasingly utilized as a purportedly neutral measure e.g. when comparing candidates for academic positions, and many universities encourage academics to use Google Scholar due to its simplicity, and as an easy way to find their number of citations and who is citing their articles. Finally, compared to Scopus and CrossRef, the Google Scholar index of citations covers more journals and publication types (*Measuring your impact: Impact factor, citation analysis, and other metrics: citation analysis,* 2019), making it better suited to our present purpose. The variable ranged between 0 and 1517 citations. Standardized CiteScores were used for the analyses.

Dummy variables (coded as 1 = yes, 0 = no) were included in the data file to denote all five journals, the type of article (highly cited, randomly selected, or little cited), and whether articles were conceptual, empirical, quantitative, or qualitative.

Having compiled a data file with all the variables listed above, we conducted univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and one regression analysis to test Hypotheses 1-3, and a further regression analysis to test Hypothesis 4. The results of these analyses are provided in the next section. The descriptive statistics of all the studied variables are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4
Descriptive statistics.

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
IMM (1 = yes. 0 = no)	0.00	1.00	0.20	0.40
IMP (1 = yes. 0 = no)	0.00	1.00	0.20	0.40
JBR (1 = yes. 0 = no)	0.00	1.00	0.20	0.40
JBIM (1 = yes. 0 = no)	0.00	1.00	0.20	0.40
SJM (1 = yes. 0 = no)	0.00	1.00	0.20	0.40
Most cited (1 = yes. 0 = no)	0.00	1.00	0.33	0.47
Randomly selected (1 = yes. 0 = no)	0.00	1.00	0.33	0.47
Least cited (1 = yes. 0 = no)	0.00	1.00	0.33	0.47
Qualitative (1 = yes. 0 = no)	0.00	1.00	0.37	0.49
Conceptual (1 = yes. 0 = no)	0.00	1.00	0.31	0.47
Readability score (abstract)	0.00	38.80	12.30	10.07
Standardized readability score (Abstract)	-1.22	2.63	0.00	1.00
Readability score (intro)	0.00	43.70	17.57	9.60
Standardized Readability score (intro)	-1.83	2.72	0.00	1.00
Readability score (method)	0.00	44.40	23.03	9.36
Standardized readability score (Method)	-2.46	2.28	0.00	1.00
Readability score (conclusion)	0.00	52.80	19.63	10.32
Standardized readability score (Conclusion)	-1.90	3.22	0.00	1.00
Readability score (Mean)	1.20	42.70	16.57	8.09
Standardized readability score (Mean)	-1.90	3.23	0.00	1.00
Arithmetic number of article cites in Google Scholar	0.00	1517.00	88.27	214.28
Standardized number of article cites in Google Scholar	-0.41	6.67	0.00	1.00

5. Findings

Hypothesis 1, on the difference between conceptual and empirical papers, was tested by a univariate analysis of variance as reported in Table 5 below. As conceptual papers do not have method sections, these were not included in this analysis. The hypothesis found no support: none of the readability scores are significantly correlated with conceptual papers. This means we find no differences in readability between conceptual and empirical papers.

To test Hypothesis 2, on variations in readability between quantitative and qualitative papers, the sample was restricted to empirical papers only (n = 105), and differences between qualitative and quantitative papers in this category were examined with the help of a dummy variable. The results are shown in Table 6. They provide weak partial support for the hypothesis as far as the overall readability of qualitative papers is concerned. Four relationships of five are in the expected direction, and results are significant at 0.05 for introductions, and below the 0.10 threshold for method sections and conclusions. This indicates tentative support for the notion that qualitative papers are somewhat more readable than quantitative papers. However, and interestingly, this is not due to the method sections themselves. All other sections were on average more readable in qualitative than in quantitative papers, but for method sections the relationship was the inverse.

Table 5
Analysis of variance of readability between conceptual and empirical papers.

	Mean	SD	F
Standardized readability score (abstract)	0.043	1.028	0.595
Standardized readability score (intro)	-0.008	1.019	0.020
Standardized readability score (conclusion)	-0.024	1.055	0.183
Standardized readability score (mean)	0.003	1.052	0.003

*** $p < 0.001$.
** $p < 0.01$.
* $p < 0.05$.

Table 6
Analysis of variance of readability between quantitative and qualitative papers.

	Mean	SD	F
Standardized readability score (abstract)	0.144	0.939	0.916
Standardized readability score (intro)	0.219	0.910	5.469*
Standardized readability score (method)	-0.162	1.110	3.247
Standardized readability score (conclusion)	0.145	0.936	2.866
Standardized readability score (mean)	0.198	0.940	1.222

*** $p < 0.001$.
** $p < 0.01$.
* $p < 0.05$.

Table 7
Analysis of variance of readability across journals.

		Mean	SD	F
Standardized readability score (abstract)	IMM	0.108	0.946	0.648
	IMP	0.143	0.976	
	JBR	-0.225	1.043	
	JBIM	-0.058	1.080	
	SJM	0.033	0.972	
Standardized readability score (intro)	IMM	0.091	0.935	5.452***
	IMP	0.316	0.891	
	JBR	-0.521	0.954	
	JBIM	0.420	1.018	
	SJM	-0.306	0.924	
Standardized readability score (method)	IMM	-0.172	0.900	7.706***
	IMP	0.133	0.923	
	JBR	0.025	1.026	
	JBIM	0.827	0.855	
	SJM	-0.637	0.775	
Standardized readability score (conclusion)	IMM	-0.238	0.871	6.902***
	IMP	0.423	0.865	
	JBR	-0.218	1.024	
	JBIM	0.522	1.060	
	SJM	-0.488	0.798	
Standardized readability score (mean)	IMM	-0.073	0.909	4.896***
	IMP	0.349	0.817	
	JBR	-0.294	1.002	
	JBIM	0.445	1.088	
	SJM	-0.424	0.920	

*** $p < 0.001$.
** $p < 0.01$.
* $p < 0.05$.

Table 7 shows that readability scores differ significantly across the journals in our sample, disconfirming Hypothesis 3. Contrary to what we expected based on the very similar editorial policies of all five sampled journals, differences in readability between them are significant at the 0.001 level for introductions, method sections, conclusions, and mean readability scores. Only abstracts do not exhibit any statistically significant differences in readability between the journals. The analysis further indicates that JBIM has the highest mean readability score.

The analyses presented separately in Tables 5-7, of three possible factors that could influence readability scores, still do not tell us which factor is the most important or if one takes out the other. To shed light on this, we ran a regression (not reported here) where the dummy variables measuring qualitative papers, conceptual papers, and journals were regressed on the standardized mean readability score. This analysis was significant ($F = 4.000^{***}$, $p < 0.001$, $r^2 = 0.379$, adjusted $r^2 = 0.108$), and the statistically most significant explanatory factors were the variables for JBR and SJM, both negatively related to the mean readability score. This means the readability scores of those two

Table 8
Regression results for influence of readability on Google Scholar citations.

Variable		Controls only	Model 1
IMM (1 = yes, 0 = no)		.401***	.420***
IMP (1 = yes, 0 = no)		-.072	-.032
JBR (1 = yes, 0 = no)		.314***	.326**
Qualitative (1 = yes, 0 = no)		-.105	-.091
Standardized readability score (mean)			-.113
Model statistics			
	N	120	120
	R2	.244	.256
	Adjusted R2	.218	.223
	Model F	9.292***	7.826***

Dependent: standardized number of Google Scholar cites for each article
*** $p < 0.001$.
** $p < 0.01$.
* $p < 0.05$.

journals are particularly low. Possible explanations for this are that JBR publishes relatively many quantitative papers, or that SJM has the lowest impact factor of the five sampled journals, perhaps attracting less readable submissions for that reason. In any case, the results allow us to conclude that journal-specific characteristics do influence article readability.

In testing Hypothesis 4, we used the dummy variables for journals and qualitative papers as controls. We treated SJM as the base case, and excluded JBIM altogether because the most cited articles from that journal stem from a considerably longer time period than the others (starting in 1999, whereas the others start in the 2010s), allowing them to accrue more citations and thereby distort a direct comparison. We then regressed the standardized mean readability scores on the standardized Google Scholar CiteScores. The results are provided in Table 8. They show that Hypothesis 4 is not supported, meaning that the readability of papers is not related to their Google Scholar citation score. In other words, we find no evidence that readability matters for citation. However, and interestingly, the same analysis shows that in terms of Google Scholar citations it matters a great deal in what journal the article is published. The highest-ranking journals in our sample, IMM and JBR, also gain their authors higher CiteScores than IMP, which scores higher on readability (see Table 7).

6. Discussion

Our analysis results in several interesting and unexpected findings. First, it shows that conceptual papers do not score higher on readability than empirical papers. This is a counter-intuitive finding, because conceptual papers generally offer broader descriptions of concepts, frameworks and business fields than do empirical papers (Ottesen & Grønhaug, 2004), which in turn are contingent on specific methodologies and data analysis techniques that might make them more difficult to read, especially for non-experts. Our counter-intuitive findings on this issue may indicate that descriptions of concepts, frameworks, and business fields, as well as methodological and data analysis particularities, do not in fact represent significant readability issues.

Our analysis also suggests that qualitative papers are slightly more readable than quantitative papers. This implies it is slightly easier to read research outcomes in the form of stories or narratives, where it is clear how events unfolded and in which business context the phenomenon was investigated, compared to more technical texts containing formulas and statistical abbreviations. In particular, the use of verbatim quotations has been found to improve qualitative research readability (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). The findings also suggest it is slightly easier to read papers where the key terms are described in greater depth, and where the presentation and discussion of the results is generally deeper (qualitative papers), than those where construct definitions are mainly based on their operationalization, and where the presentation and discussion of the results is more technical (quantitative papers). Surprisingly, however, the difference in readability between qualitative and quantitative papers is very slight. This can be due to the difference discussed above between readability and comprehension, as these concepts are not necessarily dependent on each other. Comprehension supposes an understanding of the text, finding logic in the content (Caldwell, 2008), whereas readability embeds writing style or information representation. Another reason could be that authors are pressured to follow journals' standards of academic writing, which, naturally, affect the readability level. Interestingly, the method sections of qualitative papers are weaker in terms of readability than are those of quantitative papers. The explanation might be that method sections of qualitative papers often include accounts of ontological and/or epistemological underpinnings that may contain particularly long and complicated words and sentences, driving down the readability scores of these sections as operationalized here.

Another noteworthy finding is that there are no statistically significant differences in abstract readability across the studied journals, and their abstracts are less readable than any other parts of the articles (mean readability score for all abstracts: 12.3). This contradicts the findings by Dolnicar and Chapple (2015), who using Flesch scores found that abstract readability reflects or indicates similar readability levels of other sections in tourism journals. It could also be that the relatively low readability of abstracts reflects the requirement in most of the B2B journals we have studied for abstracts of 120-150 words maximum, while only JBIM requires structural abstracts at a maximum 250 words. However, in spite of differences in abstract style, readability is still not significantly different across the journals. This represents a structural constraint that can negatively influence readability, as it forces authors to use longer words and sentences that are more complex. Unlike abstracts, the analysed journals' mean readability scores do exhibit statistically significant differences. JBIM and IMP attain higher than average scores, while SJM and JBR attain lower scores than average. This was unexpected given the journals' guidelines for authors, which all encourage researchers to follow specific and similar academic conventions. In addition, demands for academic legitimacy force authors to write in a certain academic manner.

Diving deeper into the differences in readability scores across introductions (overall mean: 17.57), method sections (23.03), and conclusions (19.63), shows that JBIM and IMP consistently score high on readability, while SJM consistently scores low. For JBR and IMM, the picture is less clear, though there is a tendency towards low readability. JBR introductions are the least readable overall, IMM scores lowest on readability of method sections, and both journals score low (though not as low as SJM) on the readability of conclusions. The overall mean readability score of all sections for all journals is 16.57, equivalent to "Very difficult" on the Flesch readability score.

Overall, our findings suggest JBIM is the most reader-friendly journal, with the highest readability scores in the sample for all sections except abstracts. JBIM restricts the usage of personal pronouns, which makes published articles less personalized, but has no other specific restrictions on language use. It also specifically allows for contributions in the form of different types of article, such as viewpoints, and has an editorial policy of attracting practitioner-relevant papers, which arguably makes it more approachable for non-academic readers. JBR and IMM have overall goal statements that emphasize their usefulness for researchers as well as executives, and also claim to be close to business

reality by bridging research-generated theory and business practice. However, these commitments are not matched by readability statistics. JBR and IMM might have stricter review processes selecting quality research in spite of their readability level.

Finally, we find no relationship between readability and citation scores. This counter-intuitive finding, which we are the first to extend to the realm of B2B marketing, adds further weight to the studies of Stremersch, Verniers, and Verhoef (2007) and Dolnicar and Chapple (2015), who also failed to identify strong relationships between article readability and citation impact. Instead, citation scores seem to be closely related to journal prestige. As explained above, this part of our analysis clearly shows that the highest-ranked journals – IMM and JBR – also accrue the highest numbers of citations. This is of course somewhat tautological, as journal impact factors are calculated based on aggregate numbers of citations over time. However, the message for authors is clear: to get cited, publishing in a prestigious outlet matters much more than writing readable articles. Authors interested in maximizing their purely academic impact will thus do well to look closely at journal rankings as well as other relevant indicators of journal quality, for example based on the Academic Journal Guide (AJG) list, which is widely used across business schools. However, as we have argued above, practitioners do not cite papers, so citation scores only provide a highly partial view of overall research impact.

7. Conclusions

The managerial relevance of academic articles is dependent on several factors, among which readability has been argued to be the key (Straub & Ang, 2008). Readability has been discussed in other fields, such as business-to-consumer marketing (Stremersch et al., 2007), tourism (Dolnicar & Chapple, 2015), information science (Hartley, Trueman, & Meadows, 1988), and strategic management (García-Merino & Santos-Alvarez, 2009), but has not been extensively addressed in B2B marketing research. Addressing this issue constitutes an important contribution in and of itself. This article also contributes to the current understanding of readability and research impact, by providing counter-intuitive evidence that conceptual papers are not more readable than empirical papers, and that journal length restrictions on abstracts may be counterproductive in terms of readability. It also shows that the overall readability of B2B marketing research must, unfortunately, be described as low.

Based on our findings, we conclude that B2B marketing research has a long way to go to improve readability, but that this is an important and indeed necessary step towards increased relevance and interest among business practitioners. Accessible language is imperative to prevent academic papers from being difficult to read and too abstract to understand for non-academic audiences. As we have explained above, we strongly believe that if this issue is not addressed, it will damage both the quality and legitimacy of academic B2B marketing research.

The magnitude of this challenge is shown by the low average readability of our sample articles and the fact that readability seems to be unrelated to citation scores, which instead seem to hinge on quite different factors, such as journal quality rankings. This raises the possibility of a vicious circle where less readable papers become the norm, and thus increasingly ‘marketable’ as exemplary contributions on academic journal websites, driving B2B marketing academics even further apart from the small number of practitioners who actually visit these pages looking for information.

However, there is hope for the future of readable B2B marketing research. As part of our study, we empirically identify significant variations in article readability across leading academic journals, demonstrating that it is possible to combine cutting-edge research with readability. This finding draws attention to journals and the role they potentially play as bridges between academics and practitioners.

Moreover, it has been argued that there is mutual mistrust between academics and practitioners (Ottesen & Grønhaug, 2004). Easton (2000) pointedly argued that researchers might know not enough about what marketing practitioners actually do, and therefore are not properly skilled to provide them with concrete decision-relevant advice. Frequently, practitioners do not have very favourable perceptions of academics in terms of their ability to provide relevant, actionable and up-to-date knowledge (Ankers & Brennan, 2002). On occasion, business practitioners collaborate with academics to pursue relevant research-based input and cost savings (Farr & Timm, 1994; Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001), but largely prefer to hire consultants, whose work focuses on solving specific business problems and is delivered within a shorter time period (Armbrüster, 2006; Farr & Timm, 1994; Sturdy, Handley, Clark, & Fincham, 2009).

Against the background of these arguments, we encourage academic journals to stay true to their stated mission – where there is one – of bridging the knowledge of researchers and the business community. For practitioners, academic research results are potentially data to be converted into information through perception and interpretation. This implies that for data (e.g., a research report) to become useful information or knowledge, they should be interpreted and understood, and should be new to the user (Ottesen & Grønhaug, 2004). Facilitation of formal and informal social networks between academics and practitioners will improve access to and the quality of empirical data, which is important for a productive research process and likely to enhance the impact of the produced research in both academia and business (Rosenzweig, Grinstein, & Ofek, 2016). It also attracts practitioners’ attention and thus indirectly helps disseminate academic research results. Therefore, bilateral interaction between researchers and managers should be promoted, not only during empirical fieldwork but also in the form of effective academic knowledge distribution, for instance, through articles that are more readable.

Based on our results, we suggest that editorial boards wishing to make academic research more relevant to practitioners, and attract more managerial attention, should emphasize the importance of readability not only from an academic but also business practitioners’ standpoint. Journals should do marketing for the ‘most cited articles’ on their webpages by working with business practitioners to identify and promote papers that are genuinely helpful for practitioner`s work. Regular surveys concerning readability could be conducted among managers who read academic journals. In turn, scholars should pay attention specifically to the readability of abstracts, introductions, and conclusions, as these parts of academic articles often contain the most valuable information for managers, and thereby should be relatively easy to read even for non-academics.

We will now provide some practical advice on how to improve readability without sacrificing academic quality or style. Our aim is to help writers, publishers and reviewers improve both the volume and quality of knowledge transfer between B2B marketing scholars and practitioners. We are not trying to change the academic practices of article writing in the sphere of B2B marketing, but to highlight the importance of paying more attention to readability and writing style to make articles more accessible to a wider audience.

7.1. Practical implications for researchers and editors

Authors of academic texts could benefit from paying attention to readability studies to reach potential readers outside academia. However, it is important to follow author guidelines or “the house style” of journals in order to produce and publish an academic article. Some editors may not even consider a submission that does not respect those guidelines (Murray, 2011). Nevertheless, article readability can be improved, and therefore as an additional contribution for academics, we introduce some suggestions on how to improve readability

Table 9
Practical suggestions for authors and editors

	Practical suggestions
Academic authors	- Consider and understand the (potential) readers of the paper - Simplify explanations of complex terms - Provide a clear structure to the article and indicate the most important parts of the text for specific audiences - Summarize the key points of the article (e.g., executive summary)
Editors	- Consider the readability of certain parts of submitted articles in the review process e.g. introduction and managerial implications - Implement executive summary sections in guidelines for authors, where it is suitable (e.g., for empirical papers) - Change authors' guidelines concerning academic language, specifically for conclusions and managerial implications, focusing on making the language more accessible.

according to Flesch (1951), Sawyer et al. (2008), and LaPlaca, Lindgreen, Vanhamme, and Di Benedetto (2018). Most importantly, an article's representation style should focus on the reader. It is important to know for whom the text is being produced, which also involves the reader's education, reading habits, occupation, and other relevant background. On the other hand, it is important not to underestimate the reader's skills to grasp information from the text. Significant support can come from understanding the purpose of the writing. Authors can begin by asking themselves what is expected of the reader in terms of acting on outcomes. For instance, should the practitioner-reader take managerial actions after the reading, or use the paper solely for academic references (in the case of academic audiences)? Should the reader study the text or read it casually? It may also be helpful to use short sentences and break for more paragraphs to fit the rhythm and improve the narrative flow. Low readability words can be replaced with more simple ones, except for technical terms or other professional terminology. A clear structure to the academic article can also help the reader focus on the text. It may be useful to indicate for the reader important part(s) of the article to read, or to summarize the key points of the reading.

Publishers can benefit from readability studies not just to identify a reader segment, but also to attract more groups of buyers for their series. Editors should improve authors' guidelines concerning academic language, if they are targeting managers and other non-academics as reading audiences. In particular, they should emphasize the need for more readable and manager-friendly language when it comes to sections such as conclusions and managerial implications (Perea & Brady, 2017). Journals could encourage submission of the research supported by alternative methods of research representation, such as an open-access supplementing summary of the research written in a popular business-journal style. Table 9 presents a short summary of the suggestions.

The presentation of research results can be a crucial factor in the readability of academic articles (Bauerly et al., 2006). Clear managerial implications are important to achieve managerial relevance. Otherwise, the papers tend to be too generic and too complicated in terms of language for the wider audience (Baraldi et al., 2014). Obviously, the managerial implications part of the article bears the most value for managers.

Alternative methods of research representation, such as video or research-summarizing presentations in various media forms, do not seem to be very common among scholars yet, as journal guidelines either do not demand them or actively prevent the utilization of unusual methods for research representation. However, research can be popularized via media services such as Research Gate, Academia or Google Scholar. Although these media services target researchers and students, they enable some free access to the research papers and make the search for relevant information easier. Another alternative solution to bridge academics and practitioners is to post research summaries via social media like Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn. Of course, these methods require additional effort to write article summaries and make them readable for the wider audience. Those academic journals that have been most referred to by popular business magazines or media publish press releases on their website and executive summaries of the articles (Hamet & Maurer, 2017). Although press releases are more common for natural science journals, marketing publications could in that way make theory and applied knowledge valuable to managerial decision-making.

7.2. Limitations and future research suggestions

This study is not without limitations. First, the Flesch reading ease test provides only a rough estimation of readability, since it predicts probable readability for an average reader (Flesch, 1951). Second, readability is only one aspect of reading difficulty and article attractiveness for the reader, and thus other factors (e.g., interest in reading, motivation) may also have an impact. Further research could explore other possible factors that may help increase practitioner interest. This could be conducted by taking into account article sections that are aimed at practitioners, such as highlights for Elsevier, and managerial implications for Emerald. It would be interesting to see to what extent such initiatives are successful in reaching wider audiences. Understanding the various factors that may affect article appeal will aid editorial boards in improving the dissemination of academic knowledge to wider audiences (e.g., practitioners).

We also suggest that the interest of managers and their use of academic research in practice within the sphere of B2B marketing should be investigated empirically, for instance, through interviews of practitioners about their perceptions and understanding of academic articles. This approach would extend the research by Kuusela et al. (2014) on B2B research relevance. Additionally, consulting agency representatives engaged in marketing research should be interviewed in order to understand their attitudes towards academic research and how they are applying it in their professional activities. In addition, qualitative content analysis could be applied as an answer to the call by Crosier (2004) and Perea and Brady (2017) to extend the research on readability challenges through a qualitative analysis of academic texts. The analysis is proposed to be conducted in accordance with several criteria related to the linguistic specifics of the articles, focusing especially on terminology, nouns, and grammatical structure.

Finally, the readability of academic articles can also impact the interest of business students in broadening their knowledge about industrial markets and B2B from academic journals. Students could evaluate their interest in reading top-cited articles vs. the least cited. Flesch's Human Interest formula (Flesch, 1949) can also be applied to identify to what extent text is interesting and appealing to a reader, on a scale from "no human interest" to "full human interest".

Appendix A. Articles sample

Journal	Authors	Articles	Year	Vol/issue
Industrial Marketing Management Journal	Bengtsson, M., & Kock, S.	Coopetition-Quo vadis? Past accomplishments and future challenges	2014	43 (2)
	Vargo, L., Wieland, H., & Melissa A.	Innovation through institutionalization: A service ecosystems perspective	2015	44
	Djelassi, S., & Decoopman, I.	Customers' participation in product development through crowdsourcing: Issues and implications	2013	42 (5)
	Jaakkola, E., & Hakanen, T.	Value co-creation in solution networks	2013	42 (1)
	Fernandez, A.S., Le Roy, F., & Gnyawali, D.R.	Sources and management of tension in co-opetition case evidence from telecommunications satellites manufacturing in Europe	2014	42 (2)
	Maglio, P.P., & Spohrer, J.	A service science perspective on business model innovation	2013	42 (5)
	Raza-Ullah, T., Bengtsson, M., & Kock, S.	The coopetition paradox and tension in coopetition at multiple levels	2014	43 (2)
	Barquet, A., Oliveira, M.G., Amigo, C.R., Cunha, V.P., & Rozenfeld, H.	Employing the business model concept to support the adoption of product-service systems (PSS)	2013	42 (5)
	Gebauer, H., Paiola, M., & Saccani, N.	Characterizing service networks for moving from products to solutions	2013	42(1)
	Kohtamäki, M., Partanen, J., Parida, V., & Wincent, J.	Non-linear relationship between industrial service offering and sales growth: The moderating role of network capabilities	2013	42(8)
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