

Editorial

Business-to-business (B2B) services marketing strategies have evolved at a rapid pace, as have the methodologies used in service marketing research (Keränen and Prior, 2020). However, the pandemic is still having a significant impact on business models around the globe and subsequently on research focus (Cortez & Johnston, 2020; de Jong et al. 2021). Covid-19 has substantially changed consumer habits and in some cases in very unexpected ways such as increasing consumption to an unprecedented level which considerably affected supply chains, in particular B2B service providers worldwide (Rosenbaum and Russell-Bennett, 2020; Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Wengler et al, 2021). This meant that B2B strategies needed to adjust to sudden demand changes and consider their permanent effects on customer expectations.

B2B services marketing has seen an increase in value co-creation strategies (Jouny-Rivier et al., 2017), servitization, digitalization, and gamification, to name just a few of its latest trends (de Jong et al., 2021). With the growth of companies adopting servitization strategies, the lines are blurred once again and what we have seen in industrial marketing is an increase of bundled approaches assisted by digitalization to respond to current market pressures including changing demand and competitor/customer pressures. These trends come as a consequence of increased complexity in service networks and the need for increased collaboration (Jouny-Rivier et al., 2017; Zolkiewski et al. 2017; Keränen and Prior, 2020). The strength of those relationships dictates the success of B2B service providers and is influenced by perceived value, switching costs, and relationship quality (satisfaction, trust, and affective commitment) (Gounaris, 2005; Barry et al, 2008).

Although these are established conclusions, the impact of the current challenges faced in increasingly turbulent times in business markets and the opportunities this has created, have not been fully considered. In this special issue, we address this through the consideration of ten articles carefully selected to reflect different challenges and opportunities in the present and future complex service networks in which firms will be operating. This means increased awareness of risk management and resilience in the approaches adopted and sustained in B2B (Iftikhar et al, 2022). It is common to see research focus on B2C and B2B manufacturing, but this special issue considers articles that reflect the challenges, and that discuss different aspects of emerging B2B marketing strategies following the pandemic.

B2B marketing research is usually focused on manufacturing and if services are considered this is usually looking at highly innovative businesses (e.g., information technology, creative industries, etc.), with less research found on more conservative businesses (e.g., professional services, transport, energy, etc.) (Buratti et al, 2018). The paper by Jochen Wirtz and Christian Kowalkowski *“Putting the “Service” into B2B Marketing: Key Developments in Service Research and Their Relevance for B2B”* addresses this by highlighting the limited attention to services in B2B marketing research. Both authors have decades of research, managerial experience, and teaching in the field. Based on their experience, they identified four broad themes for discussion reflecting on the main challenges and opportunities in this field. First, they mention the implications for capturing value with specialisation in B2B services. Second, the

increasing servitization of B2B offerings and how firms can use productization to enhance their chance of success. Third, they explore the connection of B2B literature to the emerging research stream of cost-effective service excellence. And finally, the fourth aspect mentioned is intelligent automation, service robots, and artificial intelligence.

Aligned with these priorities in marketing research, and focusing particularly on the last one, Dale Wilson and Anna M. Stephens discuss *“The Challenges of B2B Innovation: Using Marketing Analytics to Plan and Implement a Successful Online Catalog Adoption”*. This research uses marketing analytics to identify issues a B2B company faces in the conversion from a hard-copy print catalog to a digital ordering system. This paper provides an approach that can be used by firms that are considering a change to digitize key components of their marketing assets. The research contributes to the B2B marketing literature by demonstrating how marketing analytics can be used to identify potential issues prior to the development of a new marketing approach used by B2B firms.

Specific technological innovations have substantially changed the way companies compete and this is particularly true in terms of service offerings. In their paper *“Implications of Smart Services for the Sales Function in Industrial Firms: Evidence from the Machine Tool Industry”*, Kristina Zabala, Arantza Zubiaurre and Bart Kamp investigate the smart service paradox in the context of machine tool builders. Their findings show that the smart service paradox is a realistic threat to industrial firms. They also found that two types of permission need to be granted (license to operate and license to charge) and the three intermediate steps that need to be undertaken and validated to overcome a smart service paradox are 1) value testing or proofing, 2) value recognition and 3) value sharing.

Francisco Javier Alonso-García, Federico Pablo-Martí, Estela Núñez-Barriopedro and Pedro Cuesta-Valiño further explore the role of technology in their paper entitled: *“Digitalization in B2B Marketing. Omnichannel Management from a PLS-SEM Approach”*. They develop a model for a better understanding of the factors that influence the omnichannel management of an organization in a B2B context through interviews with senior executives of manufacturers and wholesalers from twenty-four countries. Their findings show that optimal multichannel management must involve a customer-centric proposition where customer knowledge at each touch point is essential. Good omnichannel performance is measured by the performance of the industrial buyer. Loyalty and experience are primary measures of this customer’s performance.

This customer-centric performance approach is also reflected in the paper *“Towards a Contextualized Understanding of Inside Sales: The Role of Sales Development in Effective Lead Funnel Management”* by Meri Yrjänä, Harri Terho and Anna Salonen. The authors provide a contextualized understanding of how B2B firms use the sales development function for efficient and effective lead funnel management. They found that sales development processes can be applied in outbound prospect-focused, outbound account-based, inbound prospect-focused, and inbound account-based lead management contexts. The sales development processes of lead research, engagement,

and handover vary depending on the nature of the lead management context. Thus, these processes are supported by the appropriate design of organizational and technological platforms.

All of this points to a major cultural shift not only in the service marketing companies but in research as well. This is further discussed by Björn Ivens, Barbara Niersbach and Nayan Kadam in the paper “*The Cultural Factors in Global Account Management: The Case of Indian Buyers and German Suppliers*”. These authors investigated the cultural factors that influence global account management (GAM) in the context of Indian buyers and German suppliers. Most key account management (KAM) and GAM studies are focused on western contexts. They found that language, communication, the concept of time, conflict avoidance, organizational structure, decision-making, trust, and relationship are the cultural factors that can influence GAM.

Cultural factors naturally raise questions with regards to integration levels which, more than ever affect the overall performance of current service supply chains. The paper “*When Should Firms Integrate Logistics Supply Chains and Marketing Strategy the Emerging Market Context?*” by Kofi Dadzie, Wesley Johnston, Charlene Dadzie and Evelyn Winston, draws on the strategy structure performance framework to model the relative influences of logistics supply chain and marketing mix practices on market share performance in the emerging market business environment. Key findings confirm that firms that integrate logistics and marketing mix activities generate stronger market share performance outcomes than marketing (4As) and logistics supply chain. This research also provides practical implications for managers with empirical evidence of when it is strategically beneficial to integrate the logistics supply chain with marketing mix strategy activities under big versus small emerging market business conditions.

These discussions so far provide clear evidence and support for the great complexity in terms of the actors involved in services marketing which demands the consideration of new theoretical approaches. In their paper, “*Balanced Centricity: An Institutional View of the Service Ecosystem*”, María José Quero and Cristina Mele examine the change of institutional logic in actors’ practices within crowdfunding platforms, seen as collaborative open ecosystems. The main findings are related to balanced centricity as the main institutional logic in crowdfunding platforms and delineates actors’ practices (aims, resources, and behaviours) into four features: the development of an open and collaborative community; the overcoming of resource limitations; the changing actors’ roles; and the co-creation of mutual societal value.

Also looking into the theoretical framing of services marketing as we go forward, Leeya Hendricks and Paul Matthyssens consider “*Co-creation in Platform as a Service Strategy: A Case on Platform Development and Actor Engagement in an Institutionalized B2B Market*”. This study investigates the impact of an institutionalized market context on platform ecosystem development. It studies how platform ecosystems are set up and evolve in the asset management industry and explores the role of the platform leader and selected core network partners in unleashing value innovation, notwithstanding institutional barriers. A problematization lens is used to identify deviations between the management practices in this industry setting and the prescriptions and suggested practices in the extant literature on platform ecosystem development. The main findings show that in this institutionalized market, intensified

interactions between carefully selected strategic market players focusing on platform development, lead to growing value innovation initiatives. Practitioners in institutionalized B2B markets find suggestions on how to overcome institutional barriers to platform ecosystem development and this study shows which levers can be used by core actors of ecosystems to strengthen established business models and simultaneously unleash value innovation initiatives.

The theoretical foundations of services marketing are also discussed in “*Emotional Mechanics of Gamification and Value Co-creation: The Digital Platform Nike+ as a B2B2C Ecosystem*” by Cristina García Magro and María Luz Martín Peña. This study investigates the impact of utilitarian, hedonic and social-emotional mechanics in gamified digital platforms on the components of value co-creation. The social-emotional mechanics of gamification have a positive impact on the value creation components of dialogue, access, transparency, and risk. Utilitarian and hedonic mechanics also exert an impact on the value creation component of access. This study contributes to the value co-creation literature. The findings also reveal the role of customer emotions in embracing gamified platforms in a business-to-business-to-consumer (B2B2C) ecosystem. Practitioners and consumers in B2B2C ecosystems can gain insight into how to interact in digital gamified platforms and how to co-create value.

Conclusion

The main trends in B2B services marketing (e.g. co-creation, servitization, digitalization, gamification) represent interesting opportunities for companies. But there is increasing consideration of resilience under unexpected circumstances and disruptions in what is an increasingly globally connected and interdependent service network. This is not only opening the space for new theories and methods to investigate B2B service marketing, but it is also suggesting the emergence of new roles that can be played by a variety of actors and that new avenues to deliver value in B2B can be created. As a result, new opportunities can be found in this incredibly difficult period which has simultaneously forced companies to see and do things differently. More importantly, it has also raised the bar in research prioritizing real-world impact.

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