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Development of B2B marketing theory

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ABSTRACT

Despite the practice of B2B marketing dating back several thousand years, B2B marketing studies did not exist in significant numbers prior to the last three decades and we are now in the a stage of accelerated theory development. Contributions to B2B theory began at the end of the 1800s and in the early 1900s, but developments in the last decades have inspired this paper to study how the B2B marketing theory has evolved. The transition from an economic foundation to one built on the behavioral sciences and the recent wider applicability of B2B marketing theory towards other marketing fields is viewed in this paper as an exciting journey and is the focus of this paper. A historic development of the contributions reveals new knowledge on B2B research development and its applicability which is beneficial not only for researchers in B2B marketing research and industrial firms, but also other marketing fields.

1. Introduction

Commerce between organizations has been around since organizations were first developed. And of course this means that B2B marketing has also existed for millennia. While the study of Business to Business (B2B) marketing can be traced back to the 1890s, significant contributions to (B2B) marketing theory have only been made during the last three decades. Research of B2B marketing was silent over a long period of time, and our understanding of it was based on implicit, individualized, and experiential based on the behavior of businessmen (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2012); it existed in society but had little scientific identity or inquiry. It took several centuries before business relationships gained a specific focus of scientific inquiry (Carratu, 1987; Sheth, Gardner, & Garrett, 1988). Since then the field has undergone significant development and impressive change. But still, as demonstrated by LaPlaca and Katrichis (2009), was severely underrepresented in scientific marketing research. When reviewing 900 articles published over a twenty-four year period in *Industrial Marketing Management*, LaPlaca (1997) showed that while there has been a significant increase in B2B relationships articles, articles on topics such as segmentation and sales management dominated the published literature in this field. The increasing research attention towards B2B has also been demonstrated by Johnston and Lewin (1997) in their analysis of 10 years of publications in the *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*. Following the development of B2B as a subset of general marketing theory, this paper will look at the development of B2B marketing as it evolved from a primarily economic perspective to one encompassing behavioral theories.

Behavioral science contributions to B2B beginning at the end of the 1800s and in the early 1900s, and more explicitly in the last three decades have transformed how we think of B2B marketing and have enabled us to apply marketing theory to an ever increasing variety of interorganizational buying situations. The development from economic to behavioral science and the recent wider applicability of B2B towards other marketing fields such as service marketing and e-business is conceived in this paper as an exciting journey capturing the focus of this paper. A historic development of the contributions may reveal new knowledge on its applicability which is beneficial not only for industrial firms, but also other marketing fields.

1.1. John Wanamaker; an early pioneer in B2B thinking

Despite the implicit practice of B2B marketing dating back several thousand years, recent research appears to hold the belief that B2B marketing and relationship studies did not exist prior to the last three decades of the twentieth century, and we are in the first stage of development. But if we turn our attention to a century ago, we can find that the initial stage of business and customers relationship was discussed in the 19th century by Wanamaker (1899) (cf. Jones and Richardson, 2007) whose business philosophy transformed both his retail organization and its customers' and suppliers' behavior (Tadajewski, 2008). Before Wanamaker, Ely (1884) led an attack against the orthodox economic theory and proclaimed the succession of the ‘New School’ ‘the German Historical School’, over the classical economic school (see also Jones & Monieson, 1990a,b). Despite these contributions, research into B2B behavior did have a troublesome journey.

Wanamaker (1899), as a very successful businessman in retailing, was one the first founders of a retail business that clearly understood the roles of customers, retailers and producers. As one of the most

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innovative retailing entrepreneurs in the nineteenth century he revolutionized merchandizing and scientific techniques in business (The Washington Post, 1953). Wanamaker's philosophy was diametrically opposed to those who favored maximum profit for sellers and was enunciated in his view that there needed to be "generous and proper balance between buyer and seller" (p.7, cf; Tadajewski, 2008). Rather he emphasized that, in his business system, customers, retailers, and producers must have close contact for the benefit of all (p. 33; Tadajewski, 2008).

Interestingly, Wanamaker stated that most merchants at that time were not interested in satisfying their customers. Instead, he proclaimed that their goal was to reach maximum profit. Repeat purchases, reliability and full fairness were not deemed fully consistent with the profit maximization objective. (Inherent in this philosophy is a short-term orientation; maximize immediate profits.) Against the prevailing economic perspectives of his era, Wanamaker, instead, proclaimed that investments in his organization were to foster repeat purchases, mutuality and reciprocity in the exchange between stores and customers. Clearly Wanamaker was taking a much longer perspective than did his competitors. These seemingly radical views at the time which were extremely important for Wanamaker are well known and have captured the attention of a large number of recent B2B researchers (cf. Bagozzi, 1995).

Wanamaker repetitively stressed that without expectation of mutuality, unless prospective exchange partners willfully fulfill both sides of the bargain, there will not be any relationship. Mutuality, for Wanamaker in this case, as Tadajewski (2008) explains, refers to the idea that merchants, customers and producers should find the resulting exchange both satisfying and profitable (e.g., Appel, 1911: 48). Or the view of trust which lately has attracted a large number of B2B researchers was already denoted by Wanamaker as a way of connecting with the customers. The style of being "honest", "homey" and "folksy" (Gibbon, 1926) in, for example, sales force behavior and advertisements served to reinforce the businessmen as a trusted member of the "local" community.

Fascinatingly, Wanamaker is one the pioneers expounding the economic foundation of marketing and implicitly urged the incorporation of social and behavioral sciences to better understand and explain economic behavior. He and some of his followers recognized the necessity of shifting their views from a transactional to a relational foundation. And he explicitly saw this affecting both the B2C and B2B aspects of his business, i.e., both the supply and demand chains (cf. Gibbon, 1926). But it took more than 80 years before B2B researchers returned to and applied these views and concepts presented in the 1890s. Following Wanamaker the process of development, traced in the last century's contributions, has several different but interconnected paths. Ignoring (or ignorant of) the earlier contribution of Wanamaker in the 1890s, later researchers transitioned from the economic foundation and urged for social and organizational behavior theories. Some of them recognized this development as a paradigm shift from a transaction to a behavioral and relationship focus (cf. Achrol, 1997; Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; LaPlaca, 2009; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995b). Various research camps focused on direct consumer marketing (cf. Fournier, 1998; Hadjikhani & Seyed-Mohammad, 1998) while others were concerned with ideas on industrial and business-to-business exchanges (cf. Corey, 1976; Håkansson, 1982; Hill, 1975).

1.2. Moving forward in B2B research

While the field of marketing as an approved academic endeavor began in the early 1900s and is now 100 years old, comprehensive research in B2B marketing has existed for only about 30 years (LaPlaca, 2009; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995a; Wilkie and Moore, 2003). Despite its underrepresentation within the overall field of marketing, the journey to B2B research is exciting and has undergone significant changes during this period, and today a rich body of marketing literature exists. The development of B2B marketing theory has been structured in different paths. Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995a) identify the three stages of market development as, a) pre-industrial, b) industrial and c) post-industrial eras and connect the development of B2B to these stages of market development; Wilkie and Moore (2003), on the other hand, describe marketing thought as developing along five stages of: a) pre-marketing (before 1900), b) founding the field (1900–1920), c) formalizing the field (1920–1950, d) paradigm shift (1950–1980), and e) intensification of shift (1980–present). In these two types of categorization of B2B development, the foundation of marketing behavior before and during industrialization, the theory of exchange dominated marketing research until the 1980s. During the post-industrial or post-paradigm shift stages, researchers increasingly applied behavioral theories to further B2B marketing theory (Fig. 1).

Undoubtedly B2B marketing research and the development of a comprehensive B2B marketing theory has intensified in B2B research during the past few decades (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2012), we believe that B2B theory development has undergone several changes in its fundamental basis. This development has been influenced by the acceptance or rejection of others' contributions. We can observe that the development forming an overall B2B marketing theory, and even within B2B, has been an evolutionary process, but that it also contains turbulent transitions with emphasis shifting from on one theoretical base to another.

We will look at B2B marketing theory development firstly by contrasting exchange theory (transaction based marketing) and behavioral theory (relationship based marketing). We will then look at recent developments in B2B marketing theory and finally look at some unresolved issues and speculate how researchers might seek answers to these issues.

2. B2B marketing and exchange theory development

2.1. Economic perspectives

Early marketing theory was a direct application of economic theory. With little product differentiation and perceived homogeneity of business markets, rational, economic-based decision making was the perceived norm based on a more rational, i.e., economic, base contrasted with consumer choices perceived by many as irrational or emotional. The basic criterion in industrial buying was the lowest price with acceptable quality and delivery. And while trading parties did establish preferences, the explanation of these decisions was based solely on the low cost supplier getting the sale. This line of reasoning applied equally well to capital goods, ingredients and components, MRO goods and industrial services such as transportation, insurance and other items. The economic man was king and other perspectives, such as those posed by Wanamaker, were ignored. After all it was far easier to quantify costs, profits and margins than concepts such as preferences or even many aspects of quality (other than acceptable or non-acceptable). This fit in nicely with short

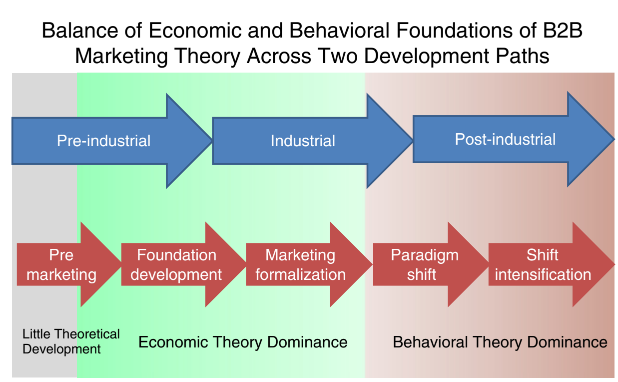

Fig. 1. Balance of economic and behavioral foundations of B2B marketing theory across two development paths.

time horizons; immediate gains evidenced by low prices outweighed longer term life-cycle costs which required a higher purchase price (upfront investment) for potential gains in the future (such as lower operating costs or greater throughput). Many purchasing agents were evaluated on annual savings realized through lower purchase prices.

While economic theory could not explain or predict all B2B purchase decisions, there was little academic interest in trying to understand how or why the exceptions to "rational" decision making seemed to be increasing in number. We think a big part of this lack of inquiry was due to a short-term bias in American business and academia (see Jacobs, 1993). Transactions could be studied in their entirety in a very short time frame, whereas relationships developed over numerous transactions took far longer to develop and to analyze. The great depression and World War II seemed to preclude any advancement in either economic thinking or any real interest in marketing as a science. The very long economic growth following WWII also did little to foster extensive investigation into marketing success factors; GDP growth was so pronounced and success in the marketplace so prevalent that it became less necessary to understand how markets worked to assure success… almost anything worked so why study it!

2.2. Beginning the transition

Business relationships can be seen as a combination of economic and social factors. Indeed one of the most famous business relationships was between Harvey Firestone and Henry Ford (Centennial News, 2000). While perceived by many to be purely an economic relationship between two giant companies, the foundation of the relationship that lasted almost a century was based on the shared vision that Firestone and Ford had to mobilize Americans. The relationship became more interdependent with memberships in social clubs and business organizations and even marriages between the families. The Fords and Firestones were in it for the long haul.

Wanamaker also did not look at his suppliers and customers as separate entities focused on the next transaction, each seeking to maximize their own advantage. He viewed retailing as a system and had a clear antipathy to 'earnings hitherto wasted on middlemen'. Wanamaker strove to bring the customer, retailer and producer into closer contact with each other to achieve more efficient distribution for the benefit of all. As also explained by Elder (1935), Wanamaker placed great emphasis on the business network (primarily the vertical producer–wholesaler–retailer network) developed on social relationships, that he himself also practiced. Wanamaker obtained credit from William Libby, a partner from A.T. Stewart, which was very important for the Wanamaker's enterprise. The New York wholesaler was selected as the chief supplier which often held back demanding payment when Wanamaker was unable to redeem his notes (Tadajewski, 2008). His scientific development, called 'techniques of merchandizing' was always being adapted to achieve increasing effectiveness and efficiency.

This view was in stark contrast to the statements of those in favor of economic theory focusing on the lowest production cost and maximum profit in the exchange. Diametrically opposing to the 'rules of the game' proclaimed by those believing in economic exchange, Wanamaker placed emphasis on customer services and fair prices to encourage customers return for additional purchases (and profits) over and over again. Completely reorienting marketing science and practice at the time, he emphasized customers' and sellers' needs, as fundamental requirements for repurchasing. As stated, Wanamaker's proclamation for views like reciprocity, mutuality and cultivation of trust highlight the closeness to the recent B2B research.

Tracing thoughts concerning business relationships in studies published at the end of 1890s and beginning of the 1900s, we find the initial study of Reilly (1929) which first introduced methods for investigating retail relationships. After a long period of silence concerning B2B markets specifically and the dominance of consumer markets and economic theories, Alderson and Cox (1948) and Alderson (1949) were pioneers in opposing the prevailing economic-based theories of the firm. Instead of utilizing solely economic measures of performance, Alderson viewed firms and customers as organized behavioral systems of heterogeneous markets established to transfer information for the movement of people and goods to resolve discrepancies of assortment, volume, location and time.

Alderson's and Cox's contributions include: a) transitioning from a distribution (macro) orientation to marketing in an individual (micro) level, b) shifting from a dominant reliance on economics to behavioral sciences and, c) moving from an emphasis on description and classification to explanation and theory building (see also Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2012; Shaw, Lazer, & Pirog, 2007). Indeed many researchers identify the transition from economic exchange theory to behavioral theory as being initiated by Alderson and Cox (cf. Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2012; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995a,b).

This may be due to the dominance of exchange theory over behavioral theory that lasted several decades. In its early stages of development, exchange theory was seen as the principle connection between consumers and society. This theoretical frame is based upon a set of assumptions such as complete access to information and rationality, general income, demand elasticity and investments to increase the quantity of supply rather than the variety of supply. In line with this argument, consumers are associated with demand, firms with supply and marketing as the act of connecting the two to each other (Table 1). Bartels (1951) reviewed the most prominent contributors to marketing thoughts in the early years of the 20th century. From the research conducted in Europe and USA, he reveals a strong concentration on U.S. scholars giving evidence on strong roots in a North-American perspective on markets. This perspective, that Sheth et al. (1988) labeled the commodity school of thought, is evident in the early contributions of Parlin (1912), Gardner (1945) and Copeland (1923). Early scholars asserted that marketing practitioners and researchers could benefit by paying attention to the functions required to move the goods from one place to another. They stressed that channel members should focus on specific functions performed by these members and on maximizing overall channel efficiency (Sheth et al., 1988). Also quite removed from later B2B marketing theory thought, the focus of studies like that of Duddy and Revzan (1947) was mainly on economics rather than behavior.

It was Alderson (1949) on factors governing the development of marketing channels that ultimately highlighted the importance of marketing channels and put the ground for development of new marketing theories. But the research in the early years of the 20th century was primarily concerned with consumer markets and the analysis was based on economic theory; researchers focused primarily on consumer markets and research on B2B markets was scarce. The acknowledged

Table 1
Theoretical foundations for B2B and business exchange.

Business exchange based on transactions	Business exchange based on relationships
Economic base	Behavior based
Economic exchange	Economic and social exchanges
Simple resource and information exchanges	Complex resource and information exchange
Rationality — high access to information	Bounded rationality — incomplete information access
Independence	Interdependency
Few numbers of exchanges	Large numbers of exchange relationships
Maximum/high profit for the firm	Mutual benefit for the counterparts
Push strategy — firm decides	Strategy development together
Supremacy of seller	Equal cooperative position
Conflict	Cooperation
Homogeneity (heterogeneous markets segmented for ease of contact and uniformity, limited offerings)	Heterogeneous (individual customer needs identified; multiple channels for contact; wide variety of offerings; customization)
Competition	Cooperation
Low adaptation	High adaptation
Immediate or short time horizon	Medium to long time horizon

pioneer of this new research was Wroe Alderson (1957)with his book *Market Behaviour and Executive Action: A Functionalist Approach to Marketing*. But as Tamilia (2007) notes, the studying of customers by social and economic historians had been going on long before the work of Alderson (cf. Tadajewski, 2008).

2.3. Behavioral approaches begin to dominate marketing thinking

However, there are signs pointing to renewed interest in the behavioral sciences by B2B marketing researchers. The focus of such behavioral-based research in buying decision-making was elaborated with factors like emotions, motivation and irrationality in consumers' behavior. The contributions of researchers like Alderson and Cox (1948), on firms' marketing behavior and Katona (1953) and Lavidge and Steiner (1961) on communication gave rise to conflict with researchers in economic theories. It was also in this period that research on households and grocery shopping was intensified (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2012). In this research stream consumers were treated as consuming units (either as individuals or households). Inspired by psychological, social, and organizational sciences researchers borrowed and adopted concepts like social stratification, social class, reference groups, and diffusion of innovations. From psychology B2B researchers employed views like emotional and social belonging, crossing versus rationality, and personality and group dynamics heterogeneity versus homogeneity, largely taken from exchange theory.

Despite this movement to differentiate B2B from B2C theories, the majority of marketing theoretical development was still focused on the mass market. Instead of further development by borrowing views from behavioral science and advancing the notions developed in 1890s, economic theories in marketing gained further strength. Admittedly, the behavioral perspective enhanced the basic economic explanation of what happened during the exchange of goods for money and may have moved the discussion of “how” these exchanges took place, but it did not fully explain why seemingly “irrational” decision-making occurred; in fact these two perspectives seemed to further separate consumer decision making from business unit decision making common in B2B exchanges. The dichotomy seemed to grow because of differences in two vital areas: one was the inadequacy in elaborating thoughts on non-economic aspects of business firm decision making; the other was caused by the differences between size (and relative power) discrepancies between buyers and sellers in B2C versus B2B transactions.

There are several reasons for the development of these thoughts. One reason resides on the lack of behavioral perspectives (in the economic view) to explain how promotional and sales activities impacted customer response. Another reason was a change in the firms' marketing environment, where competition had become a severe problem. It was late in the 1940s and the early 1950s that a new direction among economic scholars developed. Dean (1951) and Baumol (1951) were among the pioneers who worked with managerial economics. Essentially ignoring B2B marketing and behavioral views, they simply converted theoretical abstractions of economics into principles of business exercises. This new, economics-based theme dominated a large number of researchers specifically during the 1950s and the 1960s.

The business exercise perspective gained additional strength from researchers like Levitt (1960) with concepts like marketing myopia, marketing mix and market segmentation, concepts that were recognized as managerial marketing tools. As Sheth et al. (1988) state, the notion of the marketing mix in marketing management was the most important conceptual breakthrough of that era. Few marketing concepts, as Constantinides (2006) pinpoints, have been so intensively inspiring while at the same time challenging marketing academia to develop optimizing models as the marketing mix theory. The roots of this theory go back to McCarthy's(1964) breakthrough basic marketing textbook where he reduced Borden's (1964) twelve elements to form the base for the widely taught and widely used 4P-model which was further enhanced by Kotler (1967). These theoretical foundations were also applied to the study of industrial firms and distribution channels. Far from the B2B marketing and relationship's theoretical construction, the theoretical foundation was based on views like rationality, full access to information, push strategy, conflict, maximization of profit, and competition.

During this stage of development, a great deal of B2B focused on business decision making and assumed customer rationality. By highlighting the firm's perspective, this line of research endeavored to come closer to what was proclaimed business reality. Theoretical views like business strategy and strategic planning models incorporated customers as passive units, no matter if they are industrial customers or individual consumers. Selecting the appropriate mix from a generous offering of different marketing tools was employed in order to attract the purchasing conducted by consumers and industrial firms. The market is in this theme was viewed as a rational, moldable, demand-side entity, while the supply-side consisted of fierce competition where firms are working hard to find the right mix of marketing tools to gain market shares.

One of the earliest studies using behavioral sciences to investigate buyer behavior (albeit consumer behavior) was the prediction of automobile brand choice (between Ford and Chevrolet: Evans, 1959). For the next decade the focus of academic research in marketing was clearly on consumer behavior and in the development of behavioral models. Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (1968) and Howard and Sheth (1969) were among the first widely accepted theories of buyer behavior based primarily on behavioral rather than economic sciences. A large number of consumer behavior researchers resulted in the founding of the Association for Consumer Research in 1968. While it was a multidisciplinary association, almost all of the sponsoring organizations were orientated in the behavioral sciences.

2.4. Behavioral advances in B2B marketing

While consumer marketing researchers were quick to embrace behavioral sciences as useful tools for understanding and predicting buying behavior, B2B marketing researchers slowly recognized the deficiencies in traditional approaches to studying business customers. And there were regional differences in this attitude; for example, many German marketers still favored an economic approach to marketing theory over the behavioral perspective first adopted in the United States (Kleinaltenkamp & Jacob, 2002). Research in B2B marketing gained a new strength when some researchers highlighted the serious problems in the theoretical foundations in economic exchange theory. Even proponents of the new business tools understood the damage caused by high costs of advertising and other means of market communication yielding far less than the anticipated effects on sales and profit figures (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2012). The view that firms know what they want, can handle their environment, and are able to manipulate customers (both consumer and business) for their short term benefit has raised substantial criticism leading to a push for regulatory remedies. Fortunately there is very limited evidence that this is, in fact, the case, especially in industrial markets, thereby limiting the push for new regulations (Constantinides, 2006).

The criticism against the economic basis on the firm's strategy toward customers and industrial firms opened up the development of B2B marketing and relationship theory. In opposition to rationality in market transactions and profit maximization, the new approach to B2B marketing emphasized bounded rationality, uncertainty and mutual satisfaction. Contrary to the economic science reliance on homogeneity within market segments and short-term transactions, the new B2B marketing perspective puts its confidence in specificity in the relationship between buyer and seller.

Interestingly, although these theoretical views were previously developed in the 1890s and early in the 1900s, it took at least several decades before B2B relationship marketing got a new strength. As pointed out by Wanamaker (1899), behavioral theory casts a negative aura on practicing managers (for not always trying to achieve “rational” profit maximization) and also on researchers for using "soft" numbers (such as scale values) while studying the business firms behavior. As exhibited in Table 1, marketing tools, such as advertising and price which are vital in marketing management theory, loose much of their significance when studied under behavioral methods. While some researchers put the theoretical boundary around B2B and interaction, others rely specifically on business and social networks utilizing concepts such as connectivity and embeddedness.

As Table 1 exhibits, there is wide discrepancy in the theoretical foundations and concepts elevated for the transaction and B2B. Despite the fact that concepts illuminated for the foundation of the B2B and relationship were promoted more than a century ago and also can be traced back to the study of Reilly (1929) on methods for retail relationships, research in B2B had a weak strength. As Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995a), Wilkie and Moore (2003), Hadjikhani and LaPlaca (2012) denote, B2B marketing and relationship development process had a U formation. It was first conceived and used practically several decades ago and then successively diminished and again become successively stronger starting three decades ago. The successive strength was initiated by Alderson and Cox (1948) and Alderson (1949) that opposed the prevailing theories. Instead for economic standing, as Alderson specifies, firms and households are as organized behavior systems, of the principle of heterogeneous markets, transfer of information for the movement of people and goods, of discrepancies of assortment. The contributions evolved along three dimensions: a) from a macro distribution orientation to the individual micro level, b) from a dominant reliance on economics to broader behavioral sciences and, c) from the emphasis on description and classification to explanation and theory building (cf. Shaw et al., 2007).

From these juxtaposed directions, researchers delivered contradictory results. While researchers in the business exchange camp found empirical evidence to verify rationality and purposeful actions of the firms, studies employing behavioral theory contradicted the findings with conclusions on cooperation and dyadic interdependency and adaptation. In one line of thought, researchers argue for the elements of rationality, certainty, logical actions and ability to generalize. The other and opposite line of thought had its emphasis on bounded rationality, partners' mutual gains and long-term relationships. Reflecting Wanamaker's thoughts Alderson (1957) was among those few who contradicted the transaction theory and introduced views on transvections. Transvections represent a linear series of events or transactions. Alderson argued that these seemingly independent transactions were not truly independent, but past events impacted future ones. While a series of independent transactions as such may be limited only to the successive negotiations of exchange agreements, transvections include the complete sequence of exchanges also including various transformations of behavior, outcomes and products (or services).

Similar to Wanamaker, Alderson and Martin (1965) state that the primitive concepts needed for marketing theory are sets of behavior and expectations. Further that the relation of one entity to another is impacted by prior relationships either as individual entities or as an entity being a member of the class of entities. With these concepts Alderson and his followers moved away from economic transaction theory and toward views on interdependencies among parties functioning in a system. Moving towards B2B markets required in the shift of perspective from one analytical unit, i.e. consumer/firm, to all members involved in the production and sale of products, i.e., transvections in a distribution channel. While these theoretical perspectives in distribution channels relied on behavior theory, the earlier studies in distribution channels were based in transaction and economic exchange theory.

3. Behavioral theory and industrial marketing

The earliest text books entirely devoted to the industrial marketing were by J. H. Fredrick (1934), *Industrial Marketing — A Century of Marketing* and R.F. Elder (1935), *Fundamentals of Industrial Marketing.* These earliest books do not overtly define the term industrial marketing — they denote industrial products. As mentioned, the process for the implicit to explicit notions on industrial marketing can be divided into the episodes of, founding the field (1880s–1920), formalizing the field (1920–1950) and paradigm shift (1950–1980) and finally post-1980 when that the shift intensifies (Lichtenthal, 2008). In industrial marketing, behavioral research still has much to accomplish.

Johnston and Lewin (1997) in their review of the published papers state that the topics of marketing management and strategy and sales management are still the dominating topics. From 191 articles there were only 25 articles, and about 13% are relationship marketing. The very relative presence of B2B and relationship marketing is also expressed in the later studies. LaPlaca and Katrichis (2009) state that besides those journals specifically focused on B2B and relationship marketing, papers discussing industrial marketing are relatively rare. For example from its beginning in 1936 to 2006 the Journal of Marketing has only published 6.8% of its articles focused on industrial marketing. However, they confirm a significant increase in industrial marketing articles beginning in the 1980s as journals specifically devoted to B2B came onto the market. The most frequent published research topics are those papers focusing on buying behavior or sales management. This is also confirmed by the study of Wilkie and Moore (2003). According to Sheth et al. (1988), the study of Weld (1917) on marketing of farm products addressed the efficiency of marketing channels and the roles of distributors, themes which had a dominant role in industrial marketing research for decades. This continued with studies like that of Duddy and Revzan (1947) on the environmental sensitivity of organizations. Almost no studies of industrial markets during this era investigated relationships between and benefits for buyers and sellers.

As we have shown, the journey from Wanamaker's relationship focus in 1899 to B2B relationship theory in recent years has not been so easy. Wanamaker stressed that for interdependency, reduced uncertainty and mutuality, all actors are bounded in a system or network. Despite his retail focus on consumer markets, he saw the vital role of B2B management as a need for development of business. Using this framework, later researchers applied system and functional analysis to achieve efficiency and effectiveness through coordination and cooperation among channel members (Alderson, 1957). In this sense behavioral theory was applied to economic analysis to increase the performance of networks of firms.

Research specifically dealing with industrial marketing has had a tough development. After Wanamaker (1899) it took almost forty years until a paper that clearly dealt with industrial marketing was published. While the study of Fredrick (1934) was the first text book in business marketing, the earliest published article in industrial buying behavior was Lewis (1936) in the Harvard Business Review. The following year Moore (1937) published a paper in the same journal studying the impact of various merchandizing techniques on selling for industrial equipment. Moore presented an analysis of alternative methods of measuring the effectiveness of corporate purchasing departments. These few efforts applied to industrial markets focused on selling or buying techniques and incorporated little from behavioral theory.

Despite the first article on marketing networks and relationships appearing in 1940 (Trynin, 1940), research on business-to-business relationships did not undergo significant expansion until the mid-1980s with the start of the IMP Group[1] of research institutions.

While the development of relationship B2B research and theory had been sporadic for most of the twentieth century, it has gained momentum in the last three decades. On the other hand industrial marketing research (excluding behavioral research) started in the 1930s and has been the core of published B2B research focusing on

[1] http://www.impgroup.org/.

such topics as: the marketing mix, pricing, sales analysis and advertising all based on marketing management theory. One research area that has been prolific in marketing journals is the study of organizational buying behavior. Especially as marketing management theories are applied to it. The process and dynamics of buying behavior (Dawes, Dawling, & Patterson, 1993) and views on selling roles and information (Moriarity & Spekman, 1984), multiple search criteria (Kiel & Layton, 1981) or influence models in organizational behavior (Bristol, 1993) are all examples of this focus. Interestingly, these later efforts study the influence of interpersonal ties resulting from purchase-related interactions within the buying member's personal network.

Two early and clearly interesting contributions to behavioral-based marketing theory are Hudson's (1971) study on better integration of partnerships between buyers and sellers and Mattson's (1973) study of system selling (selling of hard and soft ware) from single vendors. In these early efforts researchers began to develop new notions of mutual benefit required to fulfill the needs of both suppliers and customers to maintain and strengthen their interdependent relationships.[2] However, the paradigm shift from industrial marketing transactions to relationships in industrial marketing accelerated in 1980s. One of the contributions that strongly opposed the transaction view and provided a very clear theoretical view was Håkansson (1982) and his colleagues in the IMP group in which he proposes an interaction perspective for studying B2B relationships (cf. Campbell, 1985; Turnbull, Ford, & Cunningham, 1996). In this and also later contributions Håkansson and colleagues specifically opened the content of B2B relationships. Constructed on behavioral theory, relationships are explained in terms of ties bounding the parties to each other for a long time. The three vital elements are explained by, social, technological and economic ties among the dyadic parties. Characteristics of the parties that affect the focal B2B relationship include factors such as parties' organizational structure, technological know-how, financial strength and stability, and operational strategies. Cooperation/conflict, trust and power in relationships are all part of the relationship atmosphere. Traditional marketing tools, such as advertising, promotions and price which are vital in marketing management theory, loose much of their significance relative to social, technological and economic factors.

These theoretical foundations align the interaction view more closely to the ideas of organizational behavior and dynamics, social exchange and system theories. The network interaction perspective is consistent with these theories and extensive network research that has validated the use of these theories to better understand B2B market behavior and develop B2B marketing theory. Plank (1997) presents a review of this research advancing business marketing and purchasing to verify the fundamental aspects like long-term relationship in IMP studies. Following Håkansson (1982), Wilson and Ghingold (1987) reveal that purchasing is undergoing rapid change with the rise of integrated supply management as large buyers go to single sourcing paperless ordering. Woodside (1987), Möller and Laaksonen (1986), and Basligil, Sen, and BaraÇli (2008) provided interesting approaches by explicitly examining the strategy of buyers. Brennan, Turnbull, and Wilson (2003) report extensive adaptation by members of a B2B dyad are employed to strengthen the relationships and increase benefits to both members. Within the tradition of IMP, Bonner and Walker (2004) examine how new product development and introduction of the product can be managed by employing B2B relationships. The introduction of the interaction model and the later IMP studies has caused more and more researchers to question the one-way process view of market transactions. Interdependency between buyer and seller grows gradually as partners' interdependency and trust increases. Ford (1980) developed a theoretical view identifying different stages in relationship development between buyer and seller. In these studies B2B relationships were shown to increase competitive advantage, reduce transaction costs (Whipple, Lynch, & Nyaga, 2010), decrease opportunism (Larson, 1992) and increase efficiency and effectiveness (Petersen, Handfield, & Ragatz, 2005).

[2] This was not really new since it echoed the philosophy enunciated and practiced in the Wanamaker retail empire in the prior century.

4. Moving beyond the dyad; B2B marketing theory and network analysis

Analysis of B2B dyads has shed significant light on how business relations develop, but while the dyadic core, i.e., buyer and supplier, is central to this analysis it was soon apparent that other factors were also involved. Beyond the boundary lies the ‘environment’ of the dyadic B2B relationship. Numerous researchers have investigated a variety of “environmental” factors including Anderson and Narus (1998), Barney (1991), Connor (1991), Prahalad and Hamel (1994), Heimeriks and Duster (2007) and Morgan and Hunt (1994). Studies like Morgan and Hunt (1994) which has captured the attention of a large number of researchers introduced relationship elements of commitment and trust into the interaction perspective. These contributions demonstrate that behavioral components enhance economic and transactional relationships. Network researchers expanded the tripartite treatment of relationships (economic, behavioral and technological) of dyads to include multiple parties.

Some dyadic relationships were comprised of all three components, while others may be based solely on economic and/or technological factors. In addition, social factors can include those that are formal (based on the specific roles within the transaction dyad such as sales person and buying agent) or informal (occurring outside of the transaction dyad, such as family relationships – very common in Asia or the Middle East – or common memberships in clubs, religious groups, universities, etc.)

While some researchers follow the interaction perspective and put the theoretical boundary around the focal dyadic relationships, others employ networks, utilizing concepts such as connectivity and embeddedness in business networks. The interaction perspective also benefited from studies in the social sciences. For example, according to behavioral theory the driving forces of the individual members in the relationships are their individual goals and needs (economic as well as non-economic.) In this model, the behavioral concepts of conflict, cooperation and coordination among channel members had already been elaborated on in the 1960s in organization dynamic research (Mallen, 1967). The behavioral concepts of power, commitment, interdependency and conflict also were already developed by social science researchers like Emerson (1962) and Stern (1969) who incorporated the concepts for studying marketing channels. In further development of the theme, some researchers integrated transaction-cost theory into social exchange (Anderson & Narus, 1994). Additionally, studies by Granovetter (1983) on strength of the weak ties and by Morgan and Hunt (1994) on relationship commitment and trust broadened our understanding of B2B marketing relationships and how they evolved.

4.1. B2B development in depth and width

Before expanding the discussion on recent developments in B2B marketing theory, we should establish some additional parameters. For starters one needs a definition of relationship. While some researchers look at relationships as ends, others implicitly regard relationship as a means to reach an outcome. In the first, B2B marketing is explained by proponents of relationship theory as binding actors in a network context. Existing relationships are enhanced in strength in by seeking new relationships with organizations that benefit the existing network, dissolving relationships with organizations that damage the existing network, and freezing out unpleasant actors such as troublesome customers or competitors out of the network. In the latter, relationships act as a means for members of the network to gain benefits and survive, i.e., firms employ relationships to strengthen their market position. Some of these approaches follow researchers such as Cook and Emerson (1984) and are concerned with using relationships as means to increase an organization's efficiency and effectiveness.

As network and relationship knowledge has grown over the past thirty years, numerous approaches to network and relationship research have developed. Some researchers, for example, focus on harmony and incrementally in relationship development and argue against studies elevating views on strategy and competitions; others discount the incremental and harmonic view and focus their research efforts on issues such as relationship crisis, relationship end or discontinuity (e.g. Grewal, Johnson, & Sarker, 2007; Halinen & Thätinen, 2002; Payan, Obadia, Reardon, & Vida, 2010; Thätinen & Vaaland, 2006). Some researchers limit the network concept solely to industrial businesses (such as suppliers, fabricators, OEMs and distributors), while others expand their studies of networks to include other types of actors (such as financial firms, trade associations and logistics providers) into the business relationships.

To ease our discussion of relationship research in the last two centuries, we can segment the field of study into depth and width. Depth of understanding is concerned with the depth or content of the specific relationships or networks; width is concerned with the applicability of business network theories to non-business environments (government, religious, or sports organizations for example.) Some researchers have further expanded the scope to include consumers/households as being similar to business units. Consumers, similar to traditional business units, do not change their partners (retailers, banks, insurance companies) so easily and develop long-term relationships.

B2B relationship research in service marketing intensified in the 1990s and research findings in B2B services has been consistent with research dealing with products. But there have been voices for and against the width expansion of the B2B specifically towards consumer and non-business actors (Håkansson & Snehota, 1995). For example, LaPlaca and Katrichis (2009) argue that, unlike industrial buying decisions, consumers are more prone to incorporate emotional bases into their buying decisions. Avlonitis and Gounaris (1997), Parasuraman (1983) and Woodside (2003) also show that the context of B2B relationships is different from those involved with B2C. However, Parasuraman and Grewal (2000), Sheth and Gross (1988), Eriksson and Hadjikhani (2000) and Hadjikhani and Bengtson (2006) provide empirical evidence that consumers as purchasing units are similar to industrial or service firms in that they have long-term relationships with their major suppliers. In line with these thoughts Coviello and Brodie (2001) state that the difference between consumer and business firms is superficial. The volume of recent research on topics such as consumers acting as producers of new thoughts in internet technology and cooperating and assisting producers is increasing. Those in favor of B2B-type relationships in consumer markets argue for long-term and mutually interdependent relationships in a consumer business relationship and network. These researchers echo back to the crucial concern of Wanamaker (1899), that all interactive members in the business community are related to each other. Therefore, as Hadjikhani and Bengtson (2006) posit, it may become difficult to state that B2B relationship theory is for industrial markets what marketing management theory is for consumer markets. This paper does not purport to support one view or the other; but rather aims to elaborate discussions on B2B's applications in other fields in recent marketing research. We aim to highlight the relevance of the study of Wanamaker (1899) and Ely (1884) of more than 130 years ago. When studying the market, they realized the interdependency in the whole chain of production from producers and wholesalers and retailers to consumers and politicians. Wanamaker promoted concepts such as mutuality and long-term relationships for all members in the network system. These concepts form the foundation for the works of researchers such as Håkansson (1982) or Morgan and Hunt (1994) which are aimed at B2B relationships among industrial firms.

Business relationship studies are generally based on the presumption that all relationships contain the characteristics of: a) stability in the exchange; b) high frequency in the exchange relationship; c) relationship commitment and trust; d) relationship adaptation (Ford, 1990; Forsgren, 1989; Håkansson, 1982). Following these presumptions researchers have developed notions and provided evidence to verify relationship elements such as mutuality and cooperation (Hadjikhani, Lindh, & Thilenius, 2012; Wathne & Heide, 2000; Yilmaz, Sezen, & Kabadayi, 2004), adaptation (Fang, 2001; Hallén, Johanson, & Seyed-Mohamed, 1991) and relationship development (Hallén, Johanson, & Seyed Mohamed, 1987).

In contrast to this continuity based view, researchers in crisis management (Hadjikhani, 2000; Paraskevas, 2006; Qian, 2008), technological cooperation (Nijssen, Van Reekum, & Hulshoff, 2001), component selling and system selling (Cova, Ghauri, & Salle, 2002), and changes in the market conditions (Coughlan et al., 2003) have focused on interruptions in long-term behavioral relationships (trust) including sporadic short-term exchange (perhaps out of necessity or contractual obligations) revealing discontinuity rather than continuation of harmonic B2B relationship development.

Turning to the depth dimension in B2B relationship theory, we look at research with a strong economic perspective, including transaction costs, or transaction attributes in buyer–seller technological development relationships (Abd Rahman & Bennett, 2009) the perception of the committed buyer–seller relationship (Norris & McNeilly, 1995). In these contributions, similar to studies such as Ellegaard, Johansen, and Drejer (2003) and Dyer (1996), transaction cost theory explains how technological development is used in bounding the partners together. Some later researchers, like Campbell, Papania, Parent, and Cyr (2010), state that B2B relationships can be conceived as large transactions between firms and suppliers.

Other researchers borrow concepts like branding from marketing management theory. Leek and Christodoulides (2012), Herbst and Merz (2011) and Vallester and Lindgreen (2011) are among a large number of other researchers that study the role of branding in B2B relationships. Far from the original idea of relationship interdependency, these researchers infuse concepts from marketing management theories.

Derived from behavioral concepts like trust, researchers implicitly integrate resource based theory into the relationship interdependency. When studying technological development, researchers like Håkansson and Johanson (2001) and Gounaris and Prout (2009), instead of focusing on the core elements in interaction model, elaborate on interdependency in business network. In this vein researchers explain interdependency in terms of technological cooperation within the context of resource interdependency that implicitly is close to relationships founded in resource based theories.

Excluding behavioral concepts such as trust, expectation and satisfaction, the focus of the ARA model (Activity, Resource and Actors) focus on the two elements of actors' activities and their resources. Actors' relationships derived from behavioral factors in the interaction model (see Ford, 1980) remain untouched. The implicit assumption of long-term incremental relationship development associated with technological and resource interdependency (cf. Håkansson, 1982) is the absence of major conflicts or crisis between actors. This assumption raises some concern, as even minor dislocations can hinder relationship development. Apparently, these researchers' thoughts on relationship behavior in terms of content and elements (Ford, 1990; Håkansson, 1987; Håkansson & Johanson, 2001) are targeted towards long-term interdependency, which guarantees continuation of a steady business exchange development between the parties, and which can overcome minor set-backs along the way. The shortcomings in this line of thought lie in the lack of explicit considerations of varieties in business realities. Lack of explicit consideration of the impact of changing uncertainty has caused some researchers to isolate the diversity in various types of relationships and draw attention to the need for research on deeper consideration of issues associated with discontinuous relationships (Easton & Araujo, 1992; Veryzer & Borja de Mozota, 2005).

Recent B2B relationship researchers have focused on issues such as increasing diversity and the degree of radical changes in the business environment, triggering crises (Grewal et al., 2007; Ren and Gray, 2009), or rapid changes in technology or in relationships' environment exposing vulnerability in relationship development (Payan et al., 2010). While one would like to think that all good relationships continue indefinitely, some researchers have studied relationship ending or dissolution (cf. Halinen & Thätinen, 2002; Hallén & Johanson, 2004; Thätinen & Vaaland, 2006; Wang, Kayande, & Jap, 2010). Payan et al. (2010) consider dissolution and opportunistic behavior, and some, like Gounaris and Prout (2009), Ren and Gray (2009) and Thätinen and Vaaland (2006), elaborate a deeper understanding of the connection between relationship ending and renewal. Coughlan et al. (2003) and Easton and Araujo (1992) report that dynamic economic conditions can frequently require extensive relationship adaptation or dissolution may occur.

Lundin and Steinthórsson (2003) look at organizations as inherently dynamic and temporary thereby continually changing the nature of the networks to which they belong. Some researchers incorporate the behavioral concept of trust and turbulence, leading to “sleeping” relationships or discontinuity which may lead to relationship ending (see Hadjikhani, 1996; Hadjikhani et al., 2012). In this notion researchers recognize interdependency beyond the technological or resource exchange. Explicit inclusions of behavioral concepts, such as trust, broaden our understanding that relationship interdependency is more than resource interdependency. Project marketing may necessitate the creation of temporary networks (Hadjikhani et al., 2012; Skaates & Tikkanen, 2003; Turner & Müller, 2003). Thus a firm's behavior in continuous relationships rests on incremental change, in the sense that the relationship elements of trust, commitment, cooperation and adaptation display sequential and progressive effects. This is consistent with Dalsace's (2004) claim that the new age of relationship is based on discontinuity and complexity, a far cry from smooth incremental development. The unspoken assertion in these studies is that there is diversity in the firms' relationship behavior due to a variety of circumstances including political, technological and economic factors as well as the very nature of the exchange.

Once again we have the problem of defining a relationship. In one definition, for example, when resource exchange is terminated the relationship is terminated. In another, ending resource exchange does not mean that the relationship is ended. Relationship, despite the absence of exchange for years, still exists and can be activated as parties utilize past knowledge and experience. Thus the boundary setting in defining a relationship entails a variety of results and marketing behaviors. In one, ending means ending, in another relationship is there and can be activated as when parties need. Behavioral concepts like relationship knowledge, expectation, and trust (also recognized by Wanamaker, 1899) help broaden B2B research to non-industrial applications.

The study of business networks has persisted and grown more diverse. Burdett (1992) looked at increased global competition, accelerating (and increasingly expensive) R&D, and improvements in information technology as significant contributors to the growth of global business networks. Hadjikhani (2000) investigated the role of political entities such as the European Union on the development of international business networks and concluded that actors from the business entities must take a proactive role in network development, especially in situations where the business participants possess technical knowledge both critical to the network and beyond the knowledge available to the political actors.

Rather than competition between companies, researchers began looking at competition between groups of companies or networks (Wilkinson, 2001). Marketing theory moved from trying to explain individual transactions between a buyer and a seller to trying to explain how a series of transactions among groups of companies were decided. Håkansson and Ford (2002) ask a very interesting question “How should companies interact in business networks?” This query developed from the notion that interactions between businesses are more than transactions (economic in nature) and include additional dimensions. They focused on the benefits and constraints of being a business within a network. Clearly traditional marketing research techniques of experimentation or survey are not helpful in finding an answer to their basic question; in-depth, longitudinal case analyses can provide “data”, but new tools or approaches are necessary to extract information from the data. One well researched area of business networks is that of the supply chain. Studies of supply-chain management have focused on structure (cf. Lambert & Cooper, 2000; Williams, Esper, & Ozment, 2000), the impact of culture (cf. Felzensztein & Gimmon, 2007; Giannakis, Doran, & Chen, 2012), strategy (cf. Green, Whitten, & Inman, 2012; Ketchen, Rebarick, Hult, & Meyer, 2008), trust (Handfield & Bechtel, 2002), power within the chain (Kingley, 2005), impact of supply chains on sustainability (Sharma, Iyer, Mehrotra, & Krishnan, 2010), and a variety of other aspects (For an excellent overview of supply chain research see Vallet-Bellmunt, Martínez-Fernández, & Capó-Vicedo, 2011).

Business relationships are not stable, but undergo an evolution as the firms adjust to each other (Wilkinson & Young, 1994). Relationships between firms must also adapt to changes in their environments, especially in times of crisis (Grewal et al., 2007). However, Ritter and Gemünden (2003) point out that the entire study of networks and B2B relationships has been quite fragmented resulting in diverse research findings that are difficult to integrate. Indeed, Araujo and Easton (1996) identified ten different “schools” of researchers investigating business networks using techniques from social science, organization studies, technology, and innovation management, purchasing, and marketing. A sociological approach is exemplified by the markets-as-networks stance typified in IMP research (McLoughlin & Horan, 2002).

More recent research growth in B2B is extensive and progresses from different research fields and schools of thought. In one perspective researchers connect network and social theories and also introduce a new form network explanation which explicitly moves away from reductionism. These contributions have widened our theoretical and empirical understanding of B2B. For example, to gain a better understanding of how businesses learn and improve their marketing strategies, Peters, Gasenheimer, and Johnston (2009) employ structuration theory (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 1979; Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1984) to explore how organizational structures and procedures enhance or hinder organizational learning. While concepts like structuration (taken from the sociological literature, and used extensively in organization science) focus on the depth of relationships in the industrial network, others utilize management concepts such as enacted practice, to study the network. Structuration theory, as Peters, Vanharanta, Pressey, and Johnston (2012) address, focuses on issues dealing with both the structure features of the network and the dynamism of individual and collective action in industrial networks. Peters et al. (2012) have also used structuration theory to enhance our understanding of time in business networks. Structuration theory deals with the creation and maintenance of ideas and structures as well as with change and continuity processes over time (Staber & Sydow, 2002: 730). In particular, structuration theory turns away from the view that the network as the sum of its members (i.e. reductionism). In a similar vein are those whose research into networks focuses on B2B networks as clusters of social capital (Macke, Vallejos, Faccin, & Genari, 2013). The notion of structuring a network is close to the original notion of the sociologist Granovetter (1977; see also Yamagishi, Gillmore, & Cook, 1988) which is addressed in the first studies of industrial network in 1980s. Thus we see that notions such as structuration and clusters open new understandings of networks and embeddedness.

Another example of developments in B2B research approaches is the application of demand chain market structures to the supply chain for improved organizational performance (Erevelles & Stevenson, 2006). In addition, other researchers state that the optimal network configuration is related to the factors affecting the relationships in the network (Piplan & Sarawat, 2012). In this perspective the relationship and network change and renewal is connected to industrial factors (Abdi, 2012; Danese & Vinelli, 2009; Håkansson & Ingemansson, 2013).

B2B marketing researchers have also borrowed concepts from organizational studies. For example, Heusinkveld and Visscer (2012) applied the concept of enacted practice to better understand how organizational change can be made more efficient. Enacted practice distinguishes actor perceptions of their environment from more objective measures of that environment. From a practical perspective this would look at network relationships as they "are" versus as they "should be." This can also be extended to view networks through the social construction and interaction processes of organized actors (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985).

These perspectives highlight that networks are more than the sum of the individual businesses (or individuals) that comprise the network. Indeed, synergy developed by the network helps sustain the network and provides a distinct competitive advantage. Numerous studies looking at centers of excellence within networks have shown that these embedded skills can be crucial to network success (cf. Andersson & Forsgren, 2000; Gilsing, Nooteboom, Vanhaverbeke, Duysters, & van den Oord, 2008; Lin, Fang, Fang, & Tsai, 2009). Network embeddedness is the degree to which firms within a network are connected. High network embeddedness means that firms in the network are tightly connected with each other to the extent that they tend to know each other well through recurring interactions, information exchange and interconnected ties that generate familiarity and trust (Gulati, 1995; Gulati, Nohria, & Zaheer, 2000). On the other hand, low network embeddedness means that the network is characterized by loose, infrequent connections and may not be fully aware of each other's working relationships (cf. Echols & Tsai, 2005).

5. Concluding remarks

Our journey started several thousand years back, paused briefly in the 1890s, and has now arrived at the present. The theoretical views developed in the 1890s and early in the 1900s did not immediately launch the field of B2B marketing, but it was at least several decades before B2B marketing theory gained renewed research interest. This was achieved by shifting from economic theory towards behavioral theory to investigate industrial marketing behavior. The inability of economic theory to fully explain business realities permitted a new group of B2B researchers to flourish. The field gained strength when researchers highlighted the serious problems in the theoretical foundations in economic exchange theory applied to modern B2B realities. At first these researchers borrowed heavily from consumer behaviorist, but when differences between consumer and business markets proved difficult to overcome, these B2B researchers looked for new bases of understanding. While B2B marketing has had a tough development so far, we can honestly *conclude that the B2B journey has just started*.

Marketing management theory has dominated marketing research for decades despite the fact that there is no evidence of the its appropriateness. There are even followers that can bear witness to the damage caused by high costs of like advertising and other means of market communication yielding far less than the anticipated effects on sale figures. Recently we have seen a diminishing role and impact of Chief Marketing Officers (and by default of marketing in general) while at the same time an increasing need for the marketing function to improve its effectiveness and efficiency (Wiersema, in press). We have witnessed the significant costs of marketing tools which are paid by the society, customers and firms with very low specific gains. The view that firms know what they want, can handle their environment, and are able to manipulate consumers for their short term benefit raised substantial criticism from B2B research groups. For the ultimate aim of marketing management thoughts- to come closer to the real business life and marketing managers — there is very limited evidence on the exact contribution of the theories developed in this theme. Rather, the shortcomings in both theoretical foundation and in the fulfillment of the managerial goal are noticeable.

The progress in B2B research is still young and there is much left to discover. As we have discussed, B2B theory has undergone several changes in its fundamental basis. Now we may state that the development forming an overall B2B marketing theory has had an evolutionary process, but that it also contains turbulent transitions with emphasis shifting from on one theoretical base to another. Various theories have been initially welcomed and then viewed askance when unable to satisfactorily explain new or varied B2B experiences. While B2B research in its early stage puts the perceptual boundary around stability or smooth change (a kind of harmony in resources interdependency and exchange), more recent researchers have extended the view in depth, width and time. Depth refers to research studies with deep theoretical foundations imbedded in various behavioral sciences; width extends the study to incorporate actors and relationships beside the primary business relationship under investigation to look at their impact on the primary actors. The time dimension looks at the birth, tenure and dissolution of the relationship. Study of these three dimensions requires new analytical tools and research approaches.

The width conjectures to the recent studies on exploring relationships belonging to a "system." New studies widening the interaction perspective to the network view has led some to extend the industrial network to include other firms and actors into the network. The term "business network" in lieu of "industrial network" takes into the field of study non-primary organizations that facilitate, regulate or otherwise impact how the primary network functions and how it achieves its goals. This broadening has increased the applicability of B2B to other contexts such as sports networks, religious networks or regional governmental networks. Further, deeper reflection on behavioral concepts has led to the development of new research fields that aid better understanding of business realities. It can also be concluded that the research in B2B during the last two decades has taken diversified, heterogeneous but interconnected directions. Clearly no one approach will explain all aspects of B2B marketing nor can one approach predict outcomes of interorganizational interactions. The journey will be more troublesome if researchers adhere solely to their own theoretical foundations and avoid coexistence and matching. Instead of conflicting and disparaging remarks of other views, there is a real need for discussions and views on complementarities.

Naturally, the B2B research theme is limited by the empirical and analytical boundaries of its researchers. Early researchers were bounded by their training in economics and applied economic tools to their studies. However, the theories developed by these researchers did could not fully explain real observations and soon other perspectives were sought. Management theories were applied to the investigation but they too could not fully explain B2B behavior. Investigations that were based on stability and harmony in relationships have been supplemented by studies involving instability, disharmony, conflicts and the role of negative relationships. We have gained some knowledge from Wanamaker's initial thoughts as to where to place relationship and conceptual boundaries. On the base of business realities he included all actors, no matter if they were industrial, consumers or politicians bounded with behavioral concepts and relationship economy. A relevant unanswered question remains: where can the researchers put the empirical and theoretical boundary which can enable the researchers to perform a deep analysis, testing for generalization and explicit managerial implications? For example, arguing only on the behavioral ground will exclude insights that can be derived from the economic perspective and will thus come short in its explanation of business relationship, and *vice versa*.

It can be concluded that there are still implicit and tacit problems in issues such as '*relationship is the end or is the mean*'. While in one perspective there are no network foci and the network itself is viewed as the entity under investigation, other perspectives view the concept of ‘focality’ as a major concern and place greater research emphasis on investigation of network components as the focal point of network research and relationship expectation, knowledge, strategy and aim. This paper does not have the intention to hold or reject one perspective over the other. But explicit awareness and treatment of relationship can enrich and further increase the understanding of B2B research. Generally this review discloses the problem and requests researchers to devote some time discussing the underlying issue of “*What is a relationship*?”

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