



# Purchasing and supply management in an industrial marketing perspective

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on purchasing & supply management (PSM) research in an industrial marketing perspective, using *Industrial Marketing Management* (IMM) as a proxy. A systematic review of IMM papers is conducted, demonstrating that a large and growing number of PSM papers have been published in IMM and that a large proportion of these rely on the IMP Interaction Approach as theoretical perspective. The paper discusses themes of PSM research and proposes three avenues of future PSM research for industrial marketing scholars: 1) theorizing on the concept of supply networks, 2) revisiting the notion of managing supply networks and 3) debating established “best practices” in PSM.

The proposal is therefore to dedicate more research to develop further theory on supply networks and how to manage within supply networks, because there is a surprising lack of conceptual clarity as to the meaning of supply networks and the notion of *managing* supply networks. The paper argues that as increasing supply network complexity and risks, especially concerning sustainability, requires new thinking about how best to influence and manage supply networks.

## 1. Introduction

Purchasing and Supply Management (PSM) has changed from a tactical to a strategic function in many companies. This change has been in response to a recognition of the large proportion of value that stems from the supply chain, a trend that has increased in recent years as a consequence of outsourcing and which is widely seen as necessitating a mature PSM function dedicated to contributing to overall company value creation rather than merely aiming for cost savings.

Reflecting this trend in practice, PSM has also grown in academic standing to the extent that many universities and business schools now offer specialized (e.g. masters) degrees in PSM. Moreover, where PSM research used to be regarded as unserious and unworthy of publication, it is now widely seen as an emerging academic discipline (Harland et al., 2006) although still struggling to establish itself as truly independent. Often, PSM continues to be considered part of the wider field of supply chain management (SCM) (Larson & Halldorsson, 2002), industrial organization or even industrial marketing. PSM seems to be in a never-ending identity crisis, fighting for recognition among its more established peers.

*Industrial Marketing Management* (IMM) is naturally dedicated to

industrial marketing but considers PSM (and SCM) to be without the scope of the journal. In fact, as this paper will demonstrate, a large and growing number of PSM papers have been published in IMM to date, suggesting an increasing focus on PSM within the bounds of industrial marketing research and more widely. This paper discusses the evolution of PSM research, comparing PSM research published in IMM with PSM research in general i.e. published elsewhere. So, using IMM as a proxy for an industrial marketing perspective on PSM research, this paper reflects on PSM research in an industrial marketing perspective and offers avenues for future PSM research in an industrial marketing perspective. These avenues concern theorizing on the concept of supply networks, revisiting the notion of *managing* supply networks and debating established “best practices” in PSM.

The paper begins by providing a brief systematic literature review of PSM research published in IMM, giving an overview of the number of PSM papers published since the journal beginnings in the 1970s and an analysis of theoretical perspectives and how these have changed over time.<sup>1</sup> The systematic review provides the basis for a discussion of theoretical debates that have appeared in IMM including an evaluation of recent trends. A comparison with dominant themes in the wider PSM literature is then made to propose future avenues of PSM research in

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<sup>1</sup> A systematic search and analysis was carried out using Scopus, searching for the keywords purchasing, supply management, procurement within *Industrial Marketing Management* (in title, keywords and abstracts). This resulted in 259 articles from 1972 to 2016 (including articles in press). Exporting from Scopus to Excel provided the basis for the construction of a database that recorded, most notably, authors, titles, keywords, and abstracts. Each article was reviewed in order to record and classify the theoretical perspective used, which was sometimes possible to discern from the abstract but, especially in older IMM articles that were published in a different format, required reading of at least introduction and/or literature review sections.

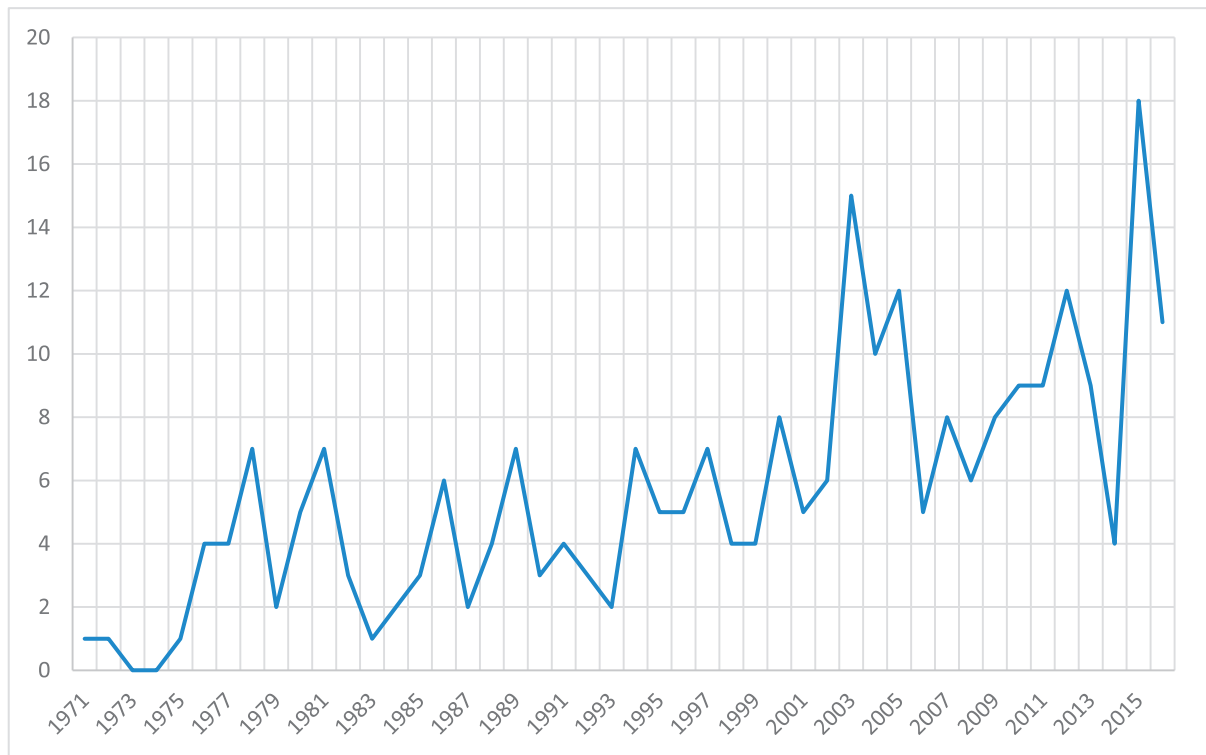


Fig. 1. IMM PSM papers over time.

IMM.

## 2. An overview of PSM papers published in industrial marketing management

With PSM struggling to be viewed as a serious academic discipline (Harland et al., 2006), it is hardly surprising that there is a relatively low number of journals that publish PSM research. Zsidisin, Smith, McNally, and Kull (2007) showed that *Industrial Marketing Management* is a key journal target for PSM scholars. Where the *Journal of Supply Chain Management* and *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management* are specialized PSM and SCM journals, *Industrial Marketing Management* is a journal that is open to PSM papers albeit without being a specialized PSM journal. Given the strong reputation and ranking of *Industrial Marketing Management*, PSM researchers have long considered the journal an important target. Fig. 1 shows an increase in PSM papers published since the early 1970s. However, with an increasing number of total *Industrial Marketing Management* publications (four annual issues from 1971 to 1995; then six annual issues until 2001; eight annual issues since 2001), this growth needs to be seen in the light of the overall increasing volume of publications in this journal as across the field in other journals. Nevertheless, this shows a gradual increase in IMM publications focusing on PSM with peaks often explained by special issues dedicated to PSM-related topics.

## 3. Underlying theoretical perspectives in IMM PSM papers

Focusing on papers published since 2000, Fig. 2 shows that a large proportion of PSM papers published in IMM is based on an Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) (Håkansson, 1982; Håkansson & Snehota, 1995) perspective. In fact, out of 155 papers 47 applied explicitly or implicitly an IMP perspective, referring varyingly to this as an interaction, industrial network, or IMP approach. This demonstrates the popularity of IMP especially when comparing with otherwise dominant theoretical perspectives in PSM research i.e. transaction cost economics (TCE) (e.g., Williamson, 1975), the resource-based-view

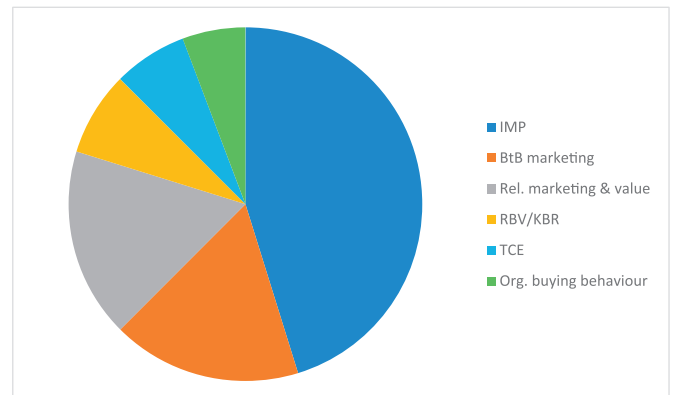


Fig. 2. Distribution of theoretical perspectives 2000–2016.

(RBV) (e.g., Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984), and knowledge-based view (e.g., Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). To put this into perspective, Spina, Caniato, Luzzini, and Ronchi's (2013, 2016) large cross-journal reviews of PSM literature found a strong reliance on TCE, RBV, the knowledge-based view and recorded no IMP-based papers. This is partly as a result of their focus on 'grand theories' (Spina et al., 2016), where IMP was not classified as such, but this picture still puts the widespread use of IMP in PSM papers in IMM into perspective. It is worth noting here also that many papers do not rely on a single theoretical perspective and often combine two or more, or authors may adopt, for example, an IMP conceptual framework and use these to interpret an empirical study but view their conceptual framework as founded on a more fundamental or grand theory underpinning the IMP perspective, such as resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Whatever the counter-arguments against classifying IMP at the same theoretical level as more widely accepted theories, such as resource-based view, or resource-based theory (Barney, 2012), the fact remains that IMP has a significant conceptual and theoretical stronghold over IMM PSM papers and this clearly characterizes IMM PSM papers, as

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