



2021 ISBM B2B Trend Study©

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About the ISBM

The Institute for the Study of Business Markets (ISBM) is a non-profit research institute situated at the Smeal College of Business at the Pennsylvania State University. The mission of the ISBM is to play a leadership role in advancing the theory and practice of business-to-business (industrial) marketing, and to advance business marketing as a specialized field within the broader marketing discipline.

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Executive Summary

The goals of the 2021 ISBM B2B Trend Study© are (1) to identify research priorities for the academic B2B marketing community and (2) to guide course content and other offerings for the corporate ISBM community.

Process

We followed a two-stop process: a qualitative phase with B2B thought leaders, both academic and practitioners, followed by a quantitative phase where 104 B2B marketing experts responded to a detailed survey instrument. The core of the survey consisted of a series of challenges, skills and capabilities, and knowledge gaps that might be critical for the next 3-5 years. Our analysis of the responses to the survey led to the identification of key priority domains.

Insights

Based on detailed item-level and factor analyses, we identified six key priority domains: ***agile, remote, digital, governance, value, and sustainability***. The first three key priority domains (agile, remote, digital) appear to be driven, in part, by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. It is critical to study how firms should rapidly respond to environmental change, using data analytics (***agile***), how firms can develop business and market remotely (***remote***), and how firms can use data analytics and digital tools to make better decisions and reimagine marketing (***digital***).

The next two key priority domains (governance, value) also emerged in a trend study conducted by the ISBM nearly 10 years ago¹, yet today we identify important nuances. It is critical to study how firms can align complex supply chains and complex, networked interorganizational forms, well beyond the classical one-on-one relationships studied previously (***governance***). It is also critical to evaluate the value of marketing to the B2B firm and to quantify value in value propositions and via B2B CRM practices (***value***).

Finally, the sixth key priority domain (***sustainability***) emerged from open, free elicitation questions. Many respondents, both academic and practitioner, raised this as critical area in need of further research and understanding, asking how firms should organize their B2B marketing activities to optimize not only profits, but also social and environmental impact, or how to deal with stakeholder pressures toward sustainability.

¹ For a copy of the 2012 ISBM Trend Study (“Insights to Action: ISBM B-to-B Marketing Trends 2012” by Ralph Oliva, Gary Lilien, and Helene Mathern), please reach out to Lori Nicolini (LNicolini@psu.edu).

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1. Introduction

The 2021 ISBM B2B Trend Study© helps doctoral students and academic scholars select research topics that are relevant not only today but also 3-5 years from now. Topics that emerge in a trend study have both academic and managerial relevance. At the academic side, the ISBM uses insights from trend studies to determine research priorities, evaluate submissions to the doctoral support award competition, and inform new activities including courses and conference themes. At the corporate side, the ISBM uses insights from trend studies to shape new member offerings, prioritize content, and upgrade curricula and other offerings such as tools and courses.

A trend study essentially is exploratory research. We use qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore what academics and practitioners find important and derive a set of key research priorities. This set of key research priorities is not exhaustive, but it gives a good overview of what the B2B marketing field (both academic and corporate) considers as critical for the coming 3-5 years.

Below, we will first give an overview of the methodology and discuss how we approached data collection, survey instrument, data analysis, and the identification of key priority domains. In the next section, we give a detailed overview of item-level insights, including importance rankings of all items, differences between subgroups, and responses to open-ended questions. Then we report on factor analyses used to unveil underlying dimensions among the items, motivating the use of this analysis technique and providing insight into the factor analysis outputs. Last, we discuss six Key Priority Domains that results from these different analyses. Readers who are primarily interested in the insights, and less in the technical details that got us there, may browse through sections 2-4 and read section 5 in more detail.

2. Methodology

2.1 Data Collection

Data collection went through three phases. In phase 1, during 2020 we listened in to roundtables, webinars, and other discussions initiated by the ISBM with both marketing practitioners and academics. In phase 2, we reached out to 20 thought leaders in B2B marketing academia and practice to identify a rich set of challenges, skills and capabilities, and knowledge gaps that are deemed critical for B2B marketers for the coming 3-5 years. In phase 3, we constructed a survey instrument which we distributed in our ISBM academic and corporate communities. 104 B2B marketing experts completed the survey². The sample includes B2B practitioners (35%) and academics (65%), seasoned experts (with ≥ 15 years of experience, 56%) and more junior experts (with < 15 years of experience, 44%), and US-based (66%) and international experts (34%). We analyzed and report on differences between groups. No meaningful differences were found between US-based versus international experts.

2.2 Survey Instrument

Based on the qualitative phase, we created a set of 60 items: 25 challenges B2B marketers will be facing in the next 3-5 years; 17 skills and capabilities B2B marketers will need to acquire in the next 3-5 years; and 18 knowledge gaps B2B marketers need to address in the next 3-5 years. We chose an electronic format, using Qualtrics, to make the survey easily accessible for respondents. Survey respondents evaluated all 60 items on 1-7 importance scales (1 = not at all important; 7 = critically important).

2.3 Data Analysis

We first analyzed the data at the level of individual items. In section 3, we report on average importance scores of all individual items. We also compare mean responses between groups of respondents (academics versus practitioners; junior versus senior respondents). Finally, we analyzed responses to open-ended questions that were included after each set of items (challenges, skills and capabilities, knowledge gaps). These questions gave respondents an opportunity to identify other issues that they consider critically important for the next 3-5 years, beyond those included in the items.

We then analyzed the data's factor structure, unveiling independent dimensions among the many items. We report on factor analyses and average importance ratings of the different factors, in section 4.

2.4 Identifying Key Priority Domains

Based on the analyses of individual items, factor structures, and open questions, we then derived six domains that the ISBM should prioritize in its future activities to maximally benefit both academic and corporate members. We report on these priority domains in section 5. We also briefly reflect on how these priorities compare to the outcomes of the last trend study the ISBM had conducted in 2012.

² Since we could not verify the eligibility of all targeted individuals, we cannot calculate an accurate response rate (which would require a precise estimate of the denominator).

3. Item-level insights

In what follows, we provide average importance ratings on all 60 items, categorized as “challenges B2B marketers will be facing in the next 3-5 years” (25); “skills and capabilities B2B marketers will need to acquire in the next 3-5 years” (17), and “knowledge gaps B2B marketers need to address in the next 3-5 years” (18). After providing averages across the entire sample, we report results from compare-means tests in which we contrast responses of academic versus practitioner respondents, and junior versus senior respondents. We end with reporting responses to open-ended questions that followed these items in the survey.

3.1 Average Importance Ratings

3.1.1 Challenges

Table 1 includes all 25 challenges, ranked from highest importance (top) to lowest importance (bottom), based on average importance ratings across the entire sample.

Table 1: Average importance ratings of challenges (1 = not at all important; 7 = critically important)

5.87	Leverage B2B data analytics
5.81	Create innovative customer experiences
5.68	Operate like digital natives—embracing the digital transformation
5.67	Sell effectively while working remotely
5.66	Engage customers in the new, no-contact world
5.54	Demonstrate the value of marketing in the B2B firm
5.48	Re-imagine marketing in a digital world
5.45	Manage the need for business model innovation
5.44	Enhance the value of marketing in the B2B firm
5.36	Address weaknesses inherent to global supply chains that have been unearthed by COVID
5.29	Maintain New Product Development effectiveness while working remotely
5.25	Introduce new products while working remotely (e.g. without trade shows)
5.22	Understand how to combat commoditization
5.20	Generate organic growth (in a world of COVID)
5.19	Manage the need for agility
5.18	Work effectively remotely
5.10	Market to complex international supply chains that are in rapid flux
5.07	Re-imagine marketing in a social media world
5.04	Justify New Product Development investments during a long economic recovery
5.01	Defend against entry of digital native competitors (e.g. Amazon)
5.00	Understand B2B2C in a COVID/post- COVID world
4.97	Rethink the value chain (e.g., account for shortcomings of Just-In-Time Management and Lean Manufacturing)
4.94	Understand privacy laws/issues
4.92	Plan for the next major global disruption
4.74	Understand and leverage the role of B2B social influencers

Leveraging B2B data analytics, creating innovative customer experiences, operating like digital natives—embracing the digital transformation, selling effectively while working remotely, and engaging customers in the new no-contact world make up the top 5 most critical challenges.

Understanding privacy laws/issues, planning for the next major global disruption, and understanding and leveraging the role of B2B social influencers are considered the least critical among the listed challenges.

3.1.2 Skills and Capabilities

Table 2 includes all 17 skills and capabilities, ranked from highest importance (top) to lowest importance (bottom), based on average importance ratings across the entire sample.

Table 2: Average importance ratings of skills and capabilities (1 = not at all important; 7 = critically important)

5.77	Agility—the ability to adapt to rapid environmental and industry changes
5.69	Effective selling in a world without face to face contact
5.68	Data analytics driving rapid business response
5.61	The ability to operate effectively in a world of uncertainty and rapid change
5.57	Govern complex, networked inter-organizational forms (e.g., platforms, collaborative networks)
5.52	Use digital tools to understand customer needs
5.48	Innovativeness in a rapidly changing world
5.34	Coordinate the value chain to ensure collaboration across multiple industry participants
5.30	Align multiple firms in the industry to jointly create value
5.29	Master social/digital communication
5.24	Manage teams remotely
5.15	Market research mindset and skills
5.13	Scenario and risk analysis
5.08	Translate how rapid changes in consumer behavior impact B2B
4.96	Blending traditional and new media in media management
4.79	IT skills to make remote seem like face-to-face
4.08	Use of VR (virtual reality)

Agility – the ability to adapt to rapid environmental and industry changes, effective selling in a world without face-to-face contact, data analytics driving rapid business response, the ability to operate effectively in a world of uncertainty and rapid change, and governing complex, networked inter-organizational forms (e.g., platforms, collaborative networks) are considered as the five most critical skills and capabilities for the next 3-5 years.

Blending traditional and new media in media management, IT skills to make remote seem like face-to-face, and use of VR (virtual reality) are considered the least critical among the listed skills and capabilities.

3.1.3 Knowledge Gaps

Table 3 includes all 18 knowledge gaps, ranked from highest importance (top) to lowest importance (bottom), based on average importance ratings across the entire sample.

Table 3: Average importance ratings of knowledge gaps (1 = not at all important; 7 = critically important)

5.62	How to manage large volumes of data from diverse data sources to support B2B business decisions
5.61	How to organize B2B marketing around the concept of value
5.53	How to use data science to enhance B2B decision making
5.45	How to adapt Voice of the Customer skills to the digital world
5.28	How to improve decision-making in inter-organizational relationships
5.21	How to use artificial intelligence (AI) to improve business decisions
5.18	How to determine the role of price versus cost and customer value in purchase decisions
5.17	How to make products smarter through software/technology.
5.11	How to effectively implement B2B segmentation
5.09	How to use deep learning to improve business decisions
4.97	How to balance obtaining deep knowledge of customers with privacy issues
4.95	How to find influencers in digital buying decisions
4.91	How to measure the effectiveness of social media in B2B
4.90	How to integrate field experimentation into business operations
4.89	How to merge marketing and operations/logistics in a digital world
4.88	How to determine the role of brand in B2B
4.88	How to design and implement automated service channels
4.80	How to manage overall communications processes

How to manage large volumes of data from diverse data sources to support B2B business decisions, how to organize B2B marketing around the concept of value, how to use data science to enhance B2B decision making, how to adapt Voice of the Customer skills to the digital world, and how to improve decision-making in inter-organizational relationships are considered the five most critical knowledge gaps to be addressed in the next 3-5 years.

How to determine the role of brand in B2B, how to design and implement automated service channels, and how to manage overall communications processes are considered least critical among the listed knowledge gaps.

3.2 Differences between Subgroups

While most of the analyses reported here are conducted on the complete sample of 104 respondents, we were also interested in revealing insights that derive from sample heterogeneity. We see two potentially interesting sources of sample heterogeneity: (1) the sample includes academics and B2B marketing practitioners, and (2) the sample includes more junior and more senior respondents. Do academics versus practitioners differ in terms of the challenges, skills and capabilities, and knowledge gaps they deem critical for B2B marketing in the coming 3-5 years? And how about junior versus more seasoned experts? We conducted “compare-means” tests, comparing the average ratings across these subgroups for all respondents who left personal information on their professional background and years of experience.

3.2.1 Academics versus B2B Marketing Practitioners

Table 4 presents all items that have significantly different importance ratings across practitioners versus academics. The third column conveys the means for both subgroups, where the group in bold assesses the item in question as significantly *more important* (e.g., practitioners evaluated “maintain NPD effectiveness while working remotely” as significantly more important than academics—the difference between the mean of practitioners (5.61) and the mean of academics (5.12) is significant with a significance level of 0.061. Only differences are reported that are significant at least at 10% level.

In general, across the observed mean differences, it appears that academics attach higher importance ratings to issues that reflect increased market complexity, such as the rise of digital natives, complex supply chains, complex interorganizational forms, and diverse data. Practitioners appear to attach higher importance ratings to more issues related to product-market approaches, including remote NPD and customer engagement and digital approaches to VOC.

Table 4: Overview compare means tests, Practitioners versus Academics

Category	Item	Mean importance ratings P=Practitioner A=Academic	Significance (two-tailed), based on t-test for equality of means
Challenges	Maintain New Product Development effectiveness while working remotely	P: 5.61 A: 5.12	0.061
Challenges	Introduce new products while working remotely (e.g. without trade shows)	P: 5.61 A: 5.07	0.049
Challenges	Defend against entry of digital native competitors (e.g. Amazon)	P: 4.61 A: 5.25	0.079
Challenges	Engage customers in the new, no-contact world	P: 6.13 A: 5.46	0.023
Challenges	Market to complex international supply chains that are in rapid flux	P: 4.74 A: 5.25	0.039
Challenges	Demonstrate the value of marketing in the B2B firm	P: 5.81 A: 5.36	0.06
Challenges	Understand privacy laws/issues	P: 4.35 A: 5.14	0.008
Skills & Capabilities	Scenario and risk analysis	P: 5.45 A: 4.95	0.072
Skills & Capabilities	Govern complex, networked inter-organizational forms (e.g., platforms, collaborative networks)	P: 4.84 A: 5.91	0.000
Knowledge Gaps	How to manage large volumes of data from diverse data sources to support B2B business decisions	P: 5.42 A: 5.81	0.092
Knowledge Gaps	How to adapt Voice of the Customer skills to the digital world	P: 5.81 A: 5.24	0.026
Knowledge Gaps	How to effectively implement B2B segmentation	P: 5.58 A: 4.91	0.019
Knowledge Gaps	How to design and implement automated service channels	P: 4.48 A: 5.09	0.033

3.2.2 Junior versus Senior B2B Marketing Experts

Table 5 presents all items that have significantly different importance ratings across respondents with less than 15 years of experience versus respondents with more than 15 years of experience. These may reflect generational differences, as they separate the more junior experts (<15) and the more seasoned experts (≥15). The third column conveys the means for both subgroups, where the group in bold on average assess the item in question as significantly *more important* (e.g., more seasoned experts evaluated “How to effectively implement B2B segmentation” as significantly more important than the more junior experts—the difference between the seasoned experts’ mean importance rating (5.44) and the junior experts’ mean importance rating (4.74) is significant at a significance level of 0.022. Only differences are reported that are significant at least at 10% level.

In general, across the observed mean differences, it appears that the younger generation of B2B marketing experts attach significantly more importance to issues related to social and digital (in terms of media, communication, decision-making, and go-to-market approaches). More seasoned experts attach higher importance ratings only to B2B segmentation.

Table 5: Overview compare means tests, Junior experts (<15) versus Seasoned experts (≥15)

Category	Item	Mean importance ratings <15=Junior ≥15=Seasoned	Significance (two-tailed), based on t-test for equality of means
Challenges	Re-imagine marketing in a social media world	<15: 5.31 ≥15: 4.76	0.062
Skills & Capabilities	Agility—the ability to adapt to rapid environmental and industry changes	<15: 6.05 ≥15: 5.66	0.086
Skills & Capabilities	Master social/digital communication	<15: 5.63 ≥15: 5.08	0.028
Knowledge Gaps	How to use deep learning to improve business decisions	<15: 5.47 ≥15: 4.82	0.014
Knowledge Gaps	How to effectively implement B2B segmentation	<15: 4.74 ≥15: 5.44	0.022
Knowledge Gaps	How to design and implement automated service channels	<15: 5.22 ≥15: 4.64	0.037

3.3 Open-ended questions

3.3.1 Answers to Other...?

After each survey subsection (i.e., after presenting 25 challenges, after 17 skills/capabilities, and after 18 knowledge gaps) we included an “other” question which was open-ended giving respondents an opportunity to mention other challenges/skills/gaps deemed critical that were not included in the survey. While several responses were isolated mentions of specific industries or the application of specific digital marketing tools, two themes were mentioned regularly: B2B Customer Relationship Management (6 mentions) and sustainability (10 mentions). B2B CRM is associated with items that were included in the survey on (quantifying) value.

Sustainability captures both the social and environmental impact of B2B marketing. The fact that this theme was unrelated to the 60 items in combination with the observation that it was mentioned 10 times in an open question format is indicative of its singular importance for B2B marketing. Table 6 below includes the verbatim mentions of “sustainability”.

Table 6: Mentions of “sustainability” in responses to open, free elicitation questions

SUSTAINABILITY
develop transparency around social and environmental impacts
Find your optimal position in the green movement
integrate social impact of B2B activity
link strategies to ESG performance
understand business dependencies and impacts on nature
Understand importance of B2B sustainability activities/plan
understand market pressures for sustainability
Understand the importance of fairness
Understand your firms role in environmental issues
understand cultural and social impacts of business strategies

As the table indicates, both the social and environmental facets of sustainability were mentioned. Some comments relate to improving social and environmental impact, whereas other comments relate to how to deal with the pressure from other stakeholders. Clearly, these comments beg for more research into sustainability and its impact for B2B marketing.

3.3.2 Who Are the Best Equipped Firms?

We also asked respondents to name B2B firms that they thought were best equipped to address these combined challenges, skills and capabilities, and knowledge gaps. Respondents mentioned 55 firms, most of which were mentioned only once. Gore and Hubspot were mentioned twice; 3M, Google, IBM, Salesforce, and Tesla were mentioned three times; Amazon and Microsoft were mentioned five times. Clearly, this list includes firms that use business models that are not typical for the “industrial manufacturing firm”. From a research perspective, the list may stimulate us to pay more attention to alternative business models and go-to-market approaches.

4. Factor analyses

4.1 Motivation for Factor Analysis

When thinking about challenges for the next 3-5 years, no academic scholar or marketing practitioner moves in a 25-dimensional cognitive space. It is extremely unlikely that all 25 challenges are orthogonal. Rather, it is likely that several challenges covary and reflect the same underlying dimension. Likewise, the 17 skills and capabilities listed earlier likely reflect fewer underlying dimensions. Finally, the 18 knowledge gaps are likely indicative of a simpler data structure with fewer than 18 dimensions.

Factor analyses help identify these underlying dimensions based on patterns in the respondents' importance ratings. We conducted three factor analyses, one to unveil dimensions among 25 challenges, one to unveil dimensions among 17 skills and capabilities, and one to unveil dimensions among 18 knowledge gaps.

We used the Principal Components extraction method and Varimax rotation to improve the interpretation of the resulting factor structure. Factor analysis is an exploratory analysis technique, which fits with the overall objective of the 2021 ISBM B2B Trend Study©, to identify the overarching themes of highest priority. Factor analysis is a very important step as we move from exploring individual items to deriving overarching themes. Below we report on the outputs of the three factor analyses.

4.2 Factor Analysis Outputs

4.2.1 Challenges

A factor analysis revealed 7 separate dimensions underlying the 25 challenges. Together these 7 dimensions represent 65% of variance in individual items. The loadings of individual items on the different "factors" help us name these factors. Table 7 reports the details.

Table 7: Dimensions across 25 challenges, identified via factor analysis

5.52	Agile & Data
5.49	Value of Mktg
5.46	Reimagine Mktg
5.35	Digital Natives
5.33	Work Remotely
5.07	Supply Chain
4.91	Social Media

4.2.2 Skills and Capabilities

A factor analysis revealed 6 separate dimensions underlying the 17 skills and capabilities. Together these 6 dimensions represent 67% of variance in individual items. The loadings of individual items on the different "factors" help us name these factors. The results are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8: Dimensions across 17 skills and capabilities, identified via factor analysis

5.56	Agility, Manage Change
5.33	Align & Coordinate (interorg)
5.23	Work Remotely
5.11	Scenario and Risk Analysis
5.11	Social & Digital
5.11	Market Research

4.2.3 Knowledge Gaps

A factor analysis revealed 5 separate dimensions underlying the 18 knowledge gaps. Together these 5 dimensions represent 62% of variance in individual items. The loadings of individual items on the different “factors” help us name these factors. Table 9 includes the details.

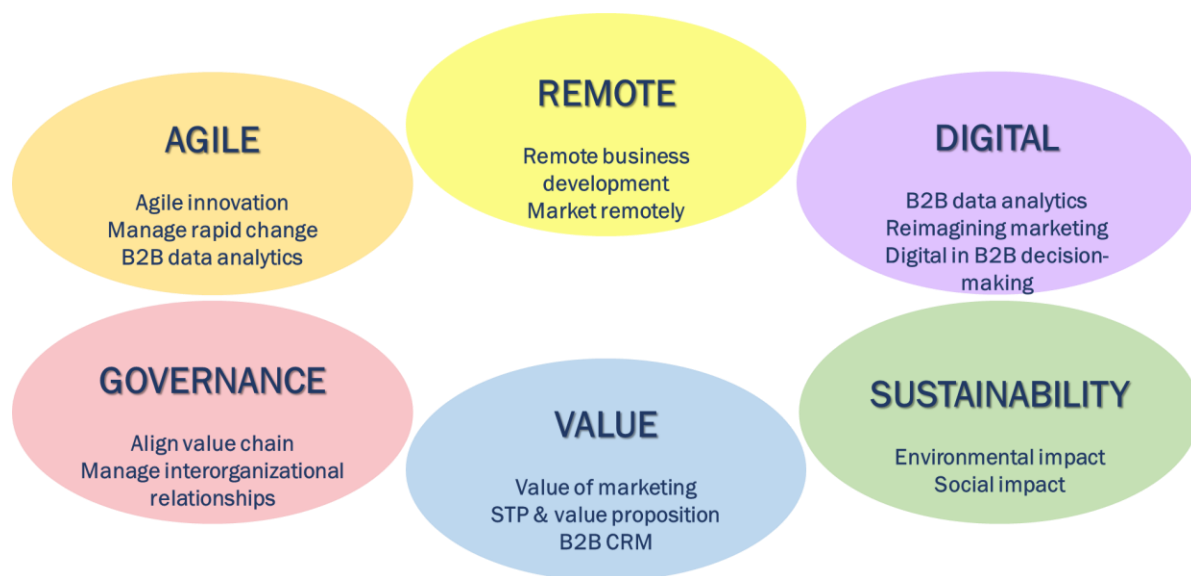
Table 9: Dimensions across 18 knowledge gaps, identified via factor analysis

5.29	Data & Digital for Decision-Making
5.27	Decision-Making in Interorg
5.13	Marketing Strategy Implementation
5.04	Smart Products & Social Media
4.88	Digital go-to-market

5. Identification of Key Priority Domains

On the basis of (1) detailed analyses and rankings of individual items, (2) responses to open, free elicitation questions into other critical issues not covered by the 60 individual items, and (3) the results from exploratory factor analyses which give an idea of covariation among items (and factors' average importance ratings), we identify six Key Priority Domains. All six represent areas of B2B marketing that are expected to be critical for the next 3-5 years. Figure 1 below summarizes the six key priority domains that emerged from the 2021 ISBM B2B Trend Study©.

Figure 1. Key Priority Domains



In what follows, we provide a brief reflection on these key priority domains and we draw a comparison with the outputs of the 2012 ISBM B2B Trend Study that was conducted nearly a decade ago. Interestingly, only two of these six key priority domains, governance and value, resemble trends identified in the 2012 study. Yet, even for these two key priority domains the focus today differs from the focus back then. The other four domains indicate even more notable differences.

We start with a reflection on the two key priority domains that show the closest resemblance with past trend studies. We pay special attention to how these areas, of governance and value, differ today.

- While the focus of **governance** in 2012 was on the development of close relationships with specific exchange partners, today the focus is on managing complex value chains and networks. Governing complex networked organizational forms was among the top-5 critical skills/capabilities, whereas decision-making in interorganizational relationships was among the top-5 critical knowledge gaps. We also see governance come up as separate dimensions with high importance ratings in the factor analyses of both challenges and knowledge gaps.

- The concept of **value** has been a key priority for the ISBM for decades, as it is essential in the development of business offerings and customer management. It remains critical today, especially with increased data opportunities for B2B CRM and increased pressure for marketing to demonstrate the value of marketing within the corporation. For B2B marketing academia to make significant progress, the 2021 ISBM B2B Trend Study© gives various concrete directions: (1) focus on challenges specific to B2B in the implementation of CRM, (2) address the long-standing challenge of demonstrating the value of marketing in the B2B firm, and (3) address the highly important knowledge gap about how to organize B2B marketing around the concept of value.

Three other key priority domains are clearly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences during 2020 and 2021.

- **Agile** refers to managing rapid change and remaining innovative when faced with a changing environment using B2B data analytics. Interestingly, managing in times of increased environmental uncertainty was deemed less important in 2012 while now agility emerges as key priority. It is important to acknowledge that this key priority domain is not just about managing change—the qualifier “rapid” is significant here and points to jointly consider speed and change.
- Whereas business development has always been important, also in 2012, the focus today is on the **remote** dimension of business development and marketing. Even though most items reflecting “remote” refer to a no-contact world, talks with both academics and practitioners suggest that learnings of how to learn/sell/engage remotely may well spill over to the post-pandemic world. Interesting for academics is that the “remote” theme was overall considered to be more critical by practitioners than by academics.
- Perhaps least surprising, but not any less critical, is the increased emphasis on **digital**. This includes both reimagining marketing in a digital world including digital natives and opportunities for digital transformation, and the use of digital technologies and data science to improve B2B decision making. Interestingly, various social/digital items in the survey (e.g., social media, social/digital communication, deep learning, automated service channels) were considered more critical by “junior” experts with < 15 yrs of experience than by “seasoned” experts with ≥ 15 yrs of experience.

The final theme, sustainability, emerged from the open, free elicitation questions that followed the importance rating tasks.

- Many respondents pointed to the social and environmental impact of B2B marketing, how to integrate these in B2B marketing activities, and how to position the firm and deal with market pressures for **sustainability**. It is exceptional to see a new theme emerge so dominantly from open-ended questions, underscoring the importance of this theme and the need for the ISBM to prioritize it. Academically, sustainability in business markets is largely uncharted territory. Given the scientific convergence that climate change is real and man-made, the focus has shifted to understanding its consequences. In that respect, the B2B marketing field lags behind as we know very little about how to assess the impact of B2B activities on the environment, or how to turn environmental stakeholder pressure into profitable business opportunities. The complexity of business markets coupled with the criticality of this trend presents a challenging new task—to jointly study B2B marketing’s economic, social, and environmental impact.

6. Conclusion

The outcomes of the 2021 ISBM B2B Trend Study© should benefit both academics and practitioners. At the time of this writing, we have shared insights and research priorities with the academic community via the 2021 European Marketing Academy Conference, the 2021 American Marketing Association Summer Conference, and the 2021 ISBM Academic Conference. We plan to use the insights to guide/support doctoral students as they embark on new research projects (e.g., via our ISBM Doctoral Support Award competition) and to help academic scholars conduct B2B marketing research that is likely still relevant in 3-5 years from now. The insights may also impact B2B curricula at undergraduate, MBA, and executive education levels. Further, we have presented the outcomes at the 2021 ISBM Members Meeting and an ISBM Marketing Excellence Roundtable. We hope that the insights will help the educational development of ISBM member firms, and we plan to adapt our offerings accordingly.