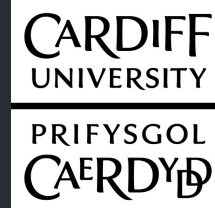


From silos to Synergy Across the B2B–B2C Spectrum:

*Towards the Development of Insights through
a Unified Marketing Lens*

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A Tale of Two Houses

In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the Montagues and Capulets live side-by-side yet remain divided by a deep-seated rivalry. Each house is consumed by its own world, unable—or unwilling—to recognize their shared humanity and intertwined fates.

The same is true of marketing scholarship. Over time, B2B and B2C research have become like rival houses: each developing rich theories, methods, frameworks, fundamental logics, tools, and insights, yet rarely crossing the wall that separates them.



The Marketing 'Divide'

B2C Marketing Foci *(clearly, not exhaustive)*

- Consumer psychology and emotions
- Brand building and communication
- Individual decision-making processes
- Social influence, relationships, loyalty and innovation
- Consumer experience and journeys



B2B Marketing Foci *(clearly, not exhaustive)*

- Organizational buying behavior and rationality
- Value chains and networks
- Multi-stakeholder buying centers
- Modularity and governed relationships
- Complex sales processes

Both are influential, but in isolation they remain incomplete. Just as Shakespeare reminds us that separation comes at great cost, our field risks missed opportunities if these two traditions continue in parallel without dialogue.



The Cost of this Bifurcation

Missed Theoretical Insights

Parallel development of similar concepts without cross-pollination limits theoretical advancement, cohesion and perspective

Methodological Silos

Different research approaches prevent comprehensive understanding of marketing phenomena across practice

Practical Limitations

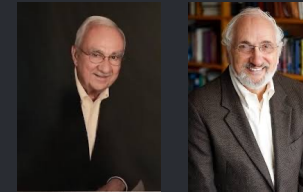
Managers struggle with integrated, actionable strategies when academic research remains fragmented

Historical Origins of this 'Divide'

1950s-1960s

Marketing discipline focuses mainly on consumer markets.
Industrial marketing seen as "special cases"

1



2

1972

Webster & Wind publish their book, *Organizational Buying Behavior* - first systematic framework distinguishing organizational from consumer buyers

3

1976

Formation of Industrial Marketing & Purchasing (IMP) Group in Europe pioneers B2B relationship approach

4

1980s

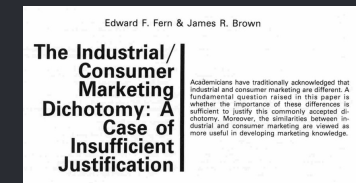
B2B emerges as sub-field of research in marketing with separate theories, journals, and conferences (akin to service marketing, international marketing)

5

1990s-2000s

Internet era cements B2B/B2C language in practice and academia, deepening the divide

Fern & Brown's (1984) Enduring Warning



In 1984, Fern and Brown identified the artificial separation of B2B and B2C research streams. Remarkably, their core critiques remain relevant today, despite the need for more convergence :

Issue Identified	Then (1984)	Now (2025)
Artificial separation	Two literatures with limited cross-citation	Silos persist despite parallel challenges in AI, sustainability, customer journeys
Decision-making assumptions	Rational B2B vs. emotional B2C	Both involve hybrid decision-making processes with limited alignment
Variable emphasis	Price/value in B2B vs. brand/attitudes in B2C	Loyalty, authenticity affect both markets equally but are differentially treated
Methodological separation	Different research approaches	Digital analytics allow comparable methods and greater attribution

The Process of Bifurcation



Market Structure Forces

B2B emerged around organizational buyers with long-term exchanges, while B2C developed from direct consumer engagement emphasizing psychology and mass persuasion



Academic Traditions

Separate communities, journals, and conferences created methodological and theoretical fragmentation with distinct research agendas



Organizational Silos

Marketing became viewed as functional departments rather than integrative capabilities, driving further specialization



Technology Evolution

Mass media prioritized B2C scale while B2B lagged in digital transformation, reinforcing different strategic approaches

Marketing Talk: Parallel Challenges

Derived from Q₁ 2025 (S&P 100) Earnings Transcripts

Recent earnings calls reveal that B2B and B2C firms face remarkably similar strategic challenges:

Theme	B2B Application	B2C Application
AI & Automation	Account-based marketing, predictive sales	Personalization, recommendation systems
Digital Transformation	E-marketplaces, partner ecosystems	Omnichannel, mobile-first engagement
Customer Experience	ROI delivery, co-developed solutions	Personalized experiences, authenticity
Sustainability	Supplier ESG compliance, green innovation	Sustainable products, brand activism
Marketing's C-Suite Role	Strategic role in industrial growth	Central to marketing strategy execution

MSI Research Priorities: Common Ground

The Marketing Science Institute's priorities reveal striking (but not explicit) parallels between B2B and B2C challenges:

Priority Area	Cross-Cutting Question	B2C Relevance	B2B Relevance
Marketing Analytics	How can AI balance performance with relationships?	Personalization vs. privacy	Account-based marketing ROI
Consumer Experiences	How do expectations shape trust and loyalty?	Authentic, sustainable experiences	Tailored solutions, transparency
Stakeholders	How can marketing break internal silos?	Cross-functional alignment	Sales-engineering integration
Innovation	What governance supports experimentation?	AI adoption, data security	Technology integration, compliance

Institute for the Study of Business Markets Research Priorities: B2B Insights for All

The Institute of the Study of Business Markets 2025-2027 priorities, while B2B-focused, translate directly to consumer contexts:

01

Analytics & ROI

Unified metrics for marketing value across contexts

02

AI & Human Expertise

Balancing automation with trust and relationships

03

Digital Journeys

Managing fragmented buying processes universally

04

Value Co-creation

Collaborative ecosystems spanning consumers and firms

05

Sustainable Growth

Innovation driving market expansion responsibly

Building Bridges: From Dichotomy *towards* Unity

Decision-Making

From Rational vs. Emotional To Human-Centered Complexity

Variables

From Price vs. Brand To Integrated Value Constellations

Methods

From Field vs. Lab To Shared Data Ecosystems

Foundations

From Separate Playbooks To Common Marketing DNA



A Possible Unified Marketing Lens Framework



Sustainability as Universal Driver

How One Theme Can Span the Spectrum

B2B Requirements

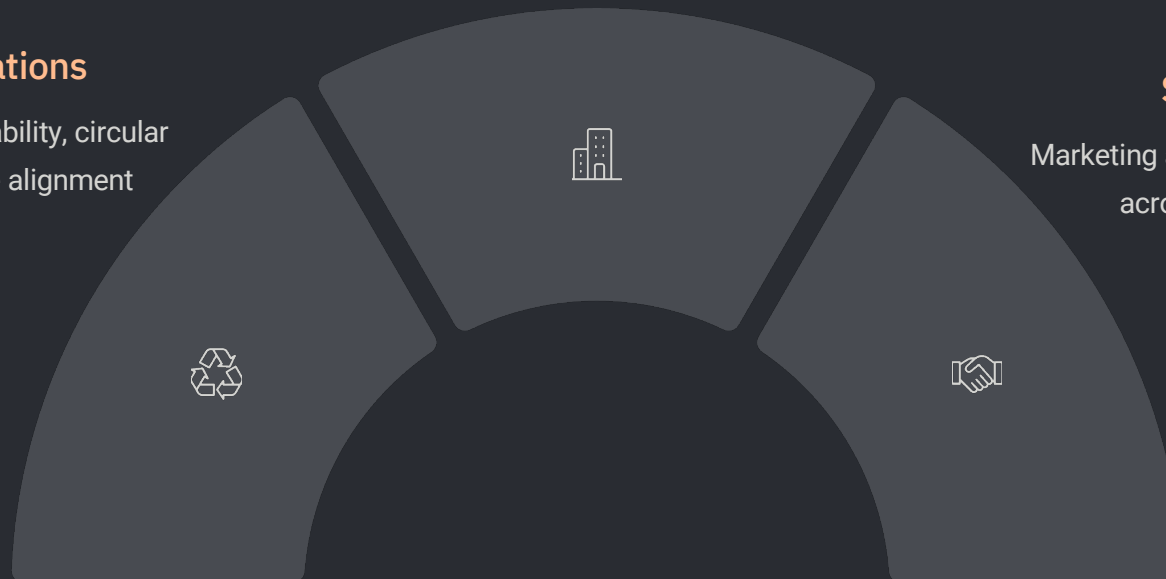
ESG compliance from suppliers, co-innovation
around green solutions

Consumer Expectations

Demand for authentic sustainability, circular
economy products, purpose alignment

Shared Opportunity

Marketing as bridge for sustainable innovation
across stakeholder engagement



How can marketing frame sustainability as both growth driver and trust source,
appealing to individual values and organizational mandates simultaneously?



The Digital Convergence

Shared Digital Challenges

- Fragmented customer journeys across multiple touchpoints
- Need for real-time personalization at scale
- Data privacy and security concerns
- Integration of AI with human judgment
- Omnichannel consistency requirements

Convergent Solutions

- Unified customer data platforms
- AI-powered insights and automation
- Cross-functional team integration
- Agile marketing methodologies
- Continuous testing and optimization

Digital transformation is collapsing traditional B2B-B2C boundaries, creating opportunities for unified approaches to marketing challenges.

Practical Implications for Managers



Break Down Silos

Create cross-functional teams that share insights between B2B and B2C divisions. Foster dialogue and knowledge transfer across traditional boundaries.



Unified Analytics

Develop common metrics and measurement frameworks that work across both consumer and business markets to demonstrate marketing's value.



Integrated Experiences

Design customer journeys that recognize the blurring lines between individual and organizational decision-making processes.

Future Research Agenda



Theoretical Integration

Develop unified frameworks that explain marketing phenomena across B2B and B2C contexts, moving beyond artificial distinctions.



Methodological Innovation

Create research approaches that capture the complexity of modern marketing while enabling comparison across contexts.



Cross-Domain Collaboration

Foster partnerships between B2B and B2C researchers to tackle shared challenges and build integrated knowledge.



Practical Application

Translate unified insights into actionable strategies that help managers navigate increasingly complex marketing landscapes.



Alistair and Jonny Brownlee ...crossing the line together



**The question is not whether a perfectly unified B2B-B2C lens exists. The question is:
are we willing to look across the aisle, to borrow, to collaborate, to build bridges instead of walls?**

Bridging Rival Houses

The tragedy of Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet is not just the feud—it's the missed possibility of what could have been if the two houses had sought common ground earlier. Our marketing field faces the same choice.

**The question is not whether a perfectly unified lens exists. The question is:
are we willing to look across the aisle, to borrow, to collaborate, to build bridges instead of walls?**

Because what might we discover if we did—what new theories, insights, and practices—could be the most important story our field writes in the years to come.