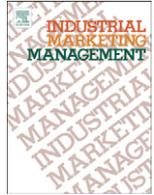




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## Industrial Marketing Management



## Past, present and future trends of purchasing and supply management: An extensive literature review

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to evaluate the state of the art of Purchasing and Supply Management (PSM). This is carried out through a wide, in-depth, and structured examination of published works. More than one thousand papers (i.e., 1055) published in 20 peer-reviewed journals were collected and analyzed to provide a snapshot of PSM research, including the extent of the overall production, the background theory used, the unit of analysis, the research method, and the main topics investigated. Other literature reviews related to PSM have been conducted in the past but have focused primarily on specific topics and/or considering a narrower set of publications. Furthermore, the authors define a framework useful for analyzing the PSM literature and outline the state of the art of PSM research from a content-specific perspective, including an evaluation of the maturity of PSM research as a discipline.

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### 1. Introduction

This study aims to assess the current state of the art and the trends of Purchasing and Supply Management (PSM) by conducting a broad and structured examination of peer-reviewed journal articles in recent years.

Following Monczka, Handfield, Guinipero, and Patterson (2010), we refer to PSM as the “strategic approach to planning for and acquiring the organization’s current and future needs through effectively managing the supply base.” We therefore make a distinction between PSM and the broader concept of Supply Chain Management (SCM), which is commonly referred to as “a process-oriented approach to managing product, information, and funds flows across the overall supply network, from the initial suppliers to the final end consumers” (Metz, 1998). In other words, we focus on the source side of the well-known SCOR model promoted by the Supply Chain Council (SCC, 2008), and we exclude topics dealing with planning, production, distribution, and logistics. As a matter of fact, all these processes require specific tools and techniques. As a consequence production planning, distribution, logistics and others have consolidated as stand-alone, though interconnected academic disciplines. Similarly, PSM increasingly gained its autonomy over the years both in research and practice. On the one

hand academic journals explicitly address PSM issues; on the other hand, companies increasingly design specific PSM organizational roles and responsibilities. In the end, we look at PSM as a stand-alone academic discipline within the broader field of SCM. This is in line with what Larson and Halldorsson (2002) define as the *unionist* perspective over this issue (see Fig. 1).

There are few doubts about the increased relevance of PSM for companies of various industries including manufacturing and services. Business organizations have experienced rapid external environmental and internal organizational changes due to increasing i) outsourcing, ii) globalization, and iii) e-business. Massive outsourcing has occurred in many sectors; as a result, companies tend to spend more money on procurement and to buy not just commodities but also more specialties and customized services. Globalization in trade, commerce and finance has stressed the need to seek opportunities for global sourcing and, in many cases, to revisit make-or-buy strategic decisions, thus combining offshoring and outsourcing. Finally, the advent of the Internet in all business functions and processes has posed challenges and created opportunities for e-procurement, e-auctions and other practices in the field of PSM. The combined effect of outsourcing, globalization and e-business has raised several critical issues for PSM as a function within organizations as a process that spans organizational boundaries and as a profession. Both companies and the purchasing professional face new challenges as PSM becomes more strategic and complex.

Moreover, PSM has gained growing attention among business schools, where the subject is increasingly taught in both open enrollment programs and corporate training courses. Several handbooks and textbooks have appeared over the last twenty years – e.g., Van Weele, Monczka, and Lysons – thus corroborating the perception of PSM as an institutionalized field of management.

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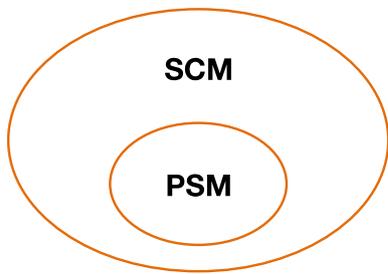


Fig. 1. Unionist perspective about PSM and SCM. Adapted from Larson and Halldorsson (2002).

However, from a research perspective, supply management can hardly be considered an established discipline in its full maturity. “Supply management: is it a discipline?” is the evocative title of an article by Harland et al. published by *IJOPM* in 2006. At that time, and based on a relatively small sample of 41 papers, the authors concluded that although the internal coherence of the field was high, there was not enough evidence of a theoretical debate to support the identification of supply management as a fully established discipline. Instead, PSM was identified as an emerging discipline in an early stage of its evolutionary cycle. Before and following Harland et al. (2006), others have proposed systematic literature reviews (LR) not primarily to answer the crucial question about the disciplinary status of PSM but with the purpose of identifying emerging issues, trends and gaps – for example, Giunipero, Hooker, Matthews, Yoon, and Brudvig (2008) – or to analyze and summarize the history of specific distinguished journals – for example, Wynstra (2010), who focuses on the *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management* and Carter and Ellram (2003), who focus on the thirty-five-year history of the *Journal of Supply Chain Management*. Other recent reviews show a narrow scope as they focus on specific issues. For example, Johnsen (2009) reviews 30 key papers on suppliers' involvement in new product development, and Miemczyk, Johnsen, and Macquet (2012) address sustainable purchasing and supply management analyzing a sample of 73 contributions.

A careful analysis of all major LRs on PSM left us with the opinion that previous reviews are not extensive enough either in source coverage or in their breadth of topics to provide a fresh and comprehensive picture of the entire domain of PSM or to determine whether it should be considered an established discipline or one still fighting to emerge. In addition, for the most part, LRs of the past have been mainly descriptive – offering statistics for topics addressed – or normative – suggesting in which direction research should be developed. Finally, some of the most valuable reviews concern Supply Chain Management (SCM) at large, including PSM as well as other issues, such as demand management and distribution networks.

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, we are going to extend previous analyses by providing a refreshed and comprehensive review of PSM academic literature that is broader and deeper than previous reviews. Therefore, we examine a large number of papers – over one thousand – covering a wide set of highly qualified academic journals over a large time span. We examine how overall research production has evolved over time, considering units of analysis, research methods, and topics under investigation. Along with this goal, we aim to focus on Purchasing and Supply Management (PSM), omitting other SCM-related topics.

Second, we intend to assess the theoretical foundations of the PSM literature and how they have changed and possibly strengthened over time. We also aim to position PSM research in its evolutionary cycle, as it appears at the beginning of the current decade. We intend to outline the nature of the contributions, as they are exploratory, theory-building, or theory-testing.

In general, we aim to offer an analytical perspective regarding the discipline's origins and trajectory. We hope that by meeting the above two goals, we will enable scholars already active in the field and new researchers to potentially i) gain a clearer understanding of where PSM currently stands and ii) find some support in designing cutting-edge research that allows PSM to advance and consolidate as a discipline.

The article is structured as follows: the next section investigates past LRs about PSM to assess the need for further research in this direction and establish our objectives. We then describe the methodology followed to deliver a systematic LR, which comprises four stages: source identification, source selection, source evaluation, and data analysis. Next, we analyze the database obtained and provide key statistics. Finally, we critically discuss the results in light of our objectives and provide main conclusions.

## 2. Previous literature reviews on PSM

LRs on PSM may be classified in two groups: generic and specific. Generic LRs reflect our own approach: they consist of broad overviews of the discipline focusing on a comprehensive set of subject areas. They answer the need for an analysis of the main research topics and methods in the field in general (e.g., Giunipero et al., 2008) or on a single journal. Given the breadth of the scope, this type of LR is not common, as it requires much effort to collect sufficient knowledge about the discipline. As a matter of fact, most authors decide to set some boundaries on either the time span, the number of sources considered, or the number of papers analyzed (e.g., Carter & Ellram, 2003; Wynstra, 2010; Zheng, Knight, Harland, Humby, & James, 2007).

Specific LRs are less of an issue because reviewing existing research on a narrower subject (e.g., supplier involvement in new product development – Johnsen, 2009 – or global purchasing – Quintens, Pauwels, & Matthyssens, 2006) is less problematic. Consequently, this second type of LR is much more common than generic reviews. Nonetheless, some boundaries for the analysis may be necessary to make it feasible, especially in the case of very popular topics.

Table 1 reports the list of PSM-related LRs that we have been able to find. Whereas the set of generic LRs is – to the best of our knowledge – exhaustive, the set of specific LRs is intended to be only a partial selection, given that very many articles dealing with a subset of PSM are available. It is not pragmatic (and most likely not interesting) to build a list of any LR published on any topic that might be related to PSM.

The information collected on past LRs includes authors' names, the year of publication, the type of LR, the specific domain (in case of specific LRs), the number of articles analyzed, the number of journals considered, the time range of articles, and the use of keyword-based research. Please note that in most cases, not all articles published in a given time range are scanned; rather, it is more common to adopt a keyword-based research, meaning that authors usually search for articles through academic search engines (e.g., Scopus, Google Scholar) and some selected keywords. Such an approach is certainly appropriate when shared and standard terms exist, whereas it becomes an issue when a commonly accepted set of keywords is missing.

Among the generic LRs, we can identify some studies explicitly dedicated to PSM (Ellram & Carr, 1994; Wynstra, 2010; Zheng et al., 2007); other studies focus on the broader domain of supply chain management (SCM) (Burgess, Singh, & Koroglu, 2006; Carter & Ellram, 2003; Giunipero et al., 2008). We considered the latter as well because they investigate contents that are, to a great extent, relevant to PSM. A couple of studies, Wynstra (2010) and Carter and Ellram (2003), focus on all articles published in the *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management* and the *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, respectively. All the others are keyword-based LRs considering multiple journals (even though it is not explicit, we might reasonably assume that the study by Ellram and Carr does so).

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