Seven Reasons Why Marketing Practitioners Should Ignore Marketing Academic Research

Peter November

Abstract
This article seeks to explain why marketing practitioners should continue to ignore marketing academic research. The reasons are organized into seven categories: customers, structure, causality, reductionism, precision, generalisations and replication. Evidence is drawn mostly from award winning articles. In the short term, the author advocates removing claims of usefulness from academic work, celebrating its academic value and maintaining the gap between academics and practitioners. In the long term, he anticipates the development of new approaches to academic work that might bridge the academic/practitioner gap.

Keywords: Academic/practitioner gap, Criticism of academic research

1. Introduction
Many disciplines that exist as professional practice and as university subjects face questions about the relevance of academic research to practice at some time in their development. In management, Porter and McKibbon (1988), Abrahamson (1996), Mowday (1997), and Rynes, Bartunek and Daft (2001) discuss the so-called gap between academic research and management practice. Anderson (1998) describes the views of managers on academic research in organizational behaviour as unreadable, banal and inconsequential. Bolton and Stoicis (2003) discuss what they call ‘the disconnect’ between academic research and practice in the field of public administration. Thomas (1994) in social work and Buckley (1998) in business administration both write about the questionable utility of scholarly research to practitioners in their respective disciplines. Senge (1988, p.49) says that a “gap has been observed between the practice and teaching of management accounting”. Lee, Koh, Yen and Tang (2002) report on the gap between academics and professionals in information systems and Ho (2000, p. 6) states that:

“Much academic research on information technology, systems, and management has been branded by practitioners in business as unusable, irrelevant, and unreadable.”

Finally, Wilkerson (1999, p. 599) sums up the position across business disciplines:

“Is academic research in business management disciplines readily related to workplace issues and practical management skills? And is it typically conveyed in terms familiar to practitioners. Generally, the answer to both would seem to be no.”

It should come as no surprise that this debate has also surfaced in marketing. For example, Westing (1977, p. 3), amongst other criticisms, summed up the efforts of marketing scientists as “the mountain has labored and brought forth a mouse”. Maiken (1979, p. 58), a thoughtful practitioner commenting on his attempt to keep in touch with academic work, wrote:

“The more I read in the Journal of Marketing, or tried to read in the Journal of Marketing Research, the more I realized that what was meaningful to the marketing academician in terms of tools or techniques to solve my marketing problems, had little or no application in the marketplace.”

Armstrong (1991) showed that practitioners had a poor knowledge of the findings of consumer research. Their guesses or predictions about findings published in the Journal of Consumer Research were less than chance. (Surprisingly, the guesses or predictions of academics
were worse than practitioners.) After a major assessment of the effectiveness of academic research, Myers, Massy and Greyser (1980) concluded that academic marketing research had relatively little impact on improving marketing management practice. Gautier (2002), in reviewing the 270 papers presented at an Australasian conference with the title ‘Bridging Marketing Theory and Practice’, could find little of practical relevance in the few papers she could actually understand. And finally, Shelby Hunt (2002, p. 305) wrote:

“Throughout its 100-plus year history, one of the most recurring themes has been that there is a ‘gap’ or ‘divide’ between marketing academe and marketing practice. As evidence, critics point out (among other things) that marketing practitioners neither subscribe to nor read academic marketing journals.”

The purpose of this article is to put forward reasons why marketing practitioners should not read academic journals and should not attend academic conferences: why, for the most part, they should ignore our work.

But first some words of warning. My purpose is not to argue that academic research in marketing should be irrelevant to practitioners. Myers (1979, p. 62) states that:

“Marketing academicians should recognize that the overall importance of research and knowledge development in this field, over the short-run or long-run, is to improve marketing practice and decision-making, and in general, to advance the state of knowledge useful to the profession.”

I am not disagreeing with Myers although it may look as though I am. I am arguing that in its present state,

Table 1: ANZMAC 2001 Conference Assessment Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Criteria</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>N/A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Extent of contribution to Marketing in terms of:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a The theoretical/conceptual framework</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b The presentation of findings</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c Methodology (case method, sampling, measures, statistical analysis, etc)</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d Results obtained and implications for Marketing</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 If not a major contribution in terms of 1, does it nevertheless:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Provide a useful summary of the state of knowledge in its field?</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Replicate existing work in a competent manner to provide further support / modification to existing hypotheses?</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c Suggest applications useful to practitioners?</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Organisation and writing style</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 References are sufficiently complete and adequate credit given to other contributors in its field?</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Overall contribution to Marketing of paper in its present form</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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academic research in marketing should be ignored by marketing practitioners.

Should we try to make it more relevant? Is it less relevant today than in the past? Is it less relevant to our practitioners than other academic disciplines are to theirs? These are interesting questions. But my focus is on seeking the reasons why practitioners who ignore academic work in marketing are doing the right thing at this point in time. Whether we should do anything about this or, indeed, if it is possible to do anything about this, are questions that others might like to tackle.

2. Seven Reasons Why Marketing Practitioners Should Ignore Marketing Academic Research

#1 Customers

The main reason why practitioners should ignore our work is that they are not the customers for it. They do not ask us to do the research and they do not pay us to do the research [1]. Why then should they expect academics to produce something of value to them? Strictly speaking, the university is the customer: he who pays the piper. We have a contractual obligation to conduct research to the standards of university work and the university pays us even though it is our secondary customers, the community of academic scholars, who listen to the tune.

Imagine you are a young academic. You have just finished your PhD and are at the lowest level in the academic hierarchy. You have a fairly substantial teaching load but it is clear that your promotion has little to do with how well you teach. As long as you do an adequate job of teaching, your chances of promotion will not be damaged. But actual promotion, especially to higher levels such as Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and eventually Professor will depend almost entirely on the amount you have published, particularly in the more prestigious journals. This is true irrespective of your discipline. There is no obvious reason why Marketing should be any different.

The relevance of this published material to practitioners has nothing to do with your promotional prospects or its chance of being published. At most universities, the critical factor is the number of publications and the type of journal in which they are published - not their relevance. The absence of relevance can readily be seen in the published products.

The absence of considerations of relevance can be seen in the assessment ‘rules’ that journal editors give to their reviewers and conference organizers give to reviewers of conference papers. For example, Table 1 is the list of criteria used for reviewing papers submitted for the 2001 ANZMAC conference.

While some recognition is given that work might be useful to practitioners, it is clearly possible to get a high score, and therefore acceptance of the paper, without this. Indeed it is fairly obvious that theoretical and conceptual findings, presentation, methodology, and implications for the discipline of marketing are the important issues. Rigor is clearly much more important than relevance. If you can also make your work relevant to practitioners so much the better, but this is not vital [2].

An article with the title “Aspects of Chi Square Testing in Structural Equation Modeling” and published in the Journal of Marketing Research would be regarded as much more valuable to the marketing academic community and the author would stand a far greater chance of getting promotion or funding to attend a conference than one who had written “How to Make Your Web Site Irresistible” in the Marketing Magazine. Indeed the majority of universities would assign no credit to an academic publishing the latter since it is not a refereed journal.

The fact of the matter is that marketing, viewed from the academic perspective, has many interesting aspects to it. These are not seen as relevant or interesting from the much narrower perspective that practitioners have. The same is true of other disciplines. For example, marine biologists have a much deeper and varied interest in marine life than fishermen (“Just tell me how to catch more fish.”). Although a little unfair, at times marketing practitioners seem equally narrow (“Just tell me how to catch more customers.”).

#2 Structure

The second reason why practitioners should ignore our work is that they naturally tend to use their own personal practice as a frame of reference. For the most part, they can only ask “How does this relate to me and what I do?”

The principle of academic freedom of enquiry means that each academic decides for him or her self what to research. Even within a university department, staff normally decide for themselves what research they will do. As long as they comply with the accepted practice of research, any topic within the very large boundary of marketing is acceptable. What matters is that you get published, not what you study, not why you study it, and certainly not whether it will be useful to practitioners.

The consequence of this is that each year thousands of...
independent and capricious studies are produced by well-meaning academics each trying to advance her or his career. Of course we all link our work to previously published material but we all know how easy it is to weave in a reasonable number of references so this does nothing to prevent the production of what, taken as a whole, is an arbitrary, chaotic and unpredictable collection of work that has no apparent structure. How is a practitioner to make sense of, for example, a day of papers presented at an academic conference? How is he or she going to put any given paper into a general context of meaning or knowledge advancement when we ourselves have no such thing? Some academics talk about ‘gaps’ in the literature as though the literature is a well-built wall with just the occasional gap that needs filling. Each study is, as Pink Floyd would say, another brick in the wall. The reality is that, while we do seem to have an agreed standard as to what a brick is, there is no agreement as to which bricks need to be made first, no foundations, no architect of the final wall, and no idea as to what the wall is expected to do when, if ever, it is built. It is as though we are constructing the Great Wall of China by agreeing that all the bricks will be empirical studies that pass certain statistical tests. However we do not agree on who will build each bit of the wall nor do we agree on when or where we will build it. The consequence is that we have hundreds of well-meaning marketing scholars working very hard at making bricks. Each journal and each conference is just a jumble of bricks with the occasional group cemented together by a short term research fad, fashion or multi-researcher project [3].

In strong disciplines there is a ‘natural’ organising framework built into the knowledge itself. In Chemistry there is the Periodic Table as well as subdivisions into Inorganic, Organic, Physical, etc. In Mathematics there is Algebra, Arithmetic, Geometry, Statistics, etc. In Structural Linguistics there is Phonology, Morphology, Syntax and Semantics. In Geology there are eons, eras, periods and epochs. In Music and Art there are the major historical periods. We have no agreed fundamental structure round which we build knowledge – only a ragbag system of textbook chapter headings. Its absence means that practitioners, with their narrow self-centred perspective on knowledge, are bewildered. What is truly remarkable is that marketing academics seem to thrive with a flimsy rather than a well-grounded structure of knowledge.

#3 Causality
The third reason why practitioners should ignore our work is that we sometimes make false or misleading statements about causality in our arguably misguided efforts in seeking relationships between variables in marketing systems.

Perhaps practitioners can be forgiven for not understanding the difference between causality and association, and we can help by wording our findings very carefully. However this is a mistake that academics should not make in their own work and reviewers need to be vigilant so that unfounded claims of causality do not taint our published literature. Let me illustrate this point with what must be one of the worst examples of this in recent times.

Narver and Slater (1990) wrote what some regard a classic and seminal article in the Journal of Marketing. It was a study largely devoted to a method of measuring market orientation, but it is better known (correctly or incorrectly, depending on your point of view) as giving the first empirical research evidence that the Marketing Concept is true even though it was predated by a British study (Lynch, Hooley and Shepherd, 1989) that did the same. Their conclusions section begins with the words (p. 32):

“The findings support our hypothesis that . . . market orientation is an important determinant of profitability.”

This is an unconditional causal statement and it is potentially seriously misleading. Readers are given no indication here or anywhere else in the article of how important a market orientation is, nor what other things are important, nor how it compares with other orientations, and there is no explanation as to how much effort should be put into obtaining a market orientation nor the extent to which the cost of doing this will affect profitability. In addition, and of particular importance here, the proposition suggests that market orientation has a causal impact on profitability. While the word ‘determinant’ is not the word ‘cause’, it means practically the same thing.

Do these authors understand that they cannot make such a claim? The mind-boggling answer is YES! In the very same article they say (p. 33):

“The cross-sectional nature of the data in our study restricts conclusions to those of association, not causation.”

Causality cannot be inferred from cross-sectional studies and it is by no means certain that it can be gleaned from
longitudinal studies either. Since most marketing academic research is cross-sectional, we are wasting our time if we think we are saying anything about causality and we are in danger of misleading practitioners because they, like some academic researchers, do not understand the limitations of most academic research.

**#4 Reductionism**

The fourth reason why practitioners should ignore our work is the good chance that they will not appreciate the dangers inherent in studying small parts of systems and then applying the knowledge gained to other parts or, worse, to the system as a whole.

Would-be PhD students are invariably advised that their initial ideas are too grand and are encouraged to scale down the scope of their proposed study to more manageable proportions. While a narrowly focused study is manageable and likely to lead to a definitive result, the results, assuming they have statistical validity, cannot be applied outside the scope of the study. This means that we can never generate any generalisations from a single reductionist study.

Just because a survey has a good response rate, the variance is high and the measures of significance indicate statistical significance, there are no grounds for drawing any inferences outside the bounds of the study itself. If the study happens to be an analysis of the opinions of a convenience sample of undergraduates in a suburb of Los Angeles on the web sites of fifteen car manufacturers then the conclusions are statistically valid only for the study itself. That statistical validity does not extend to other people (even students), countries, web sites, time periods or products. The study is a one-shot historical fact. Many aspects of the study might be interesting from an academic point of view but a practitioner could misuse the study unless it contains a clear warning of its limitations.

Scientists have recognised the problem of reductionism and started to do something about it. As Freedman (1992, p. 30) puts it:

"Nineteenth-century physics, based on Newton's laws of motion, posited a neat correspondence between cause and effect. Scientists were confident that they could reduce even the most complex behaviors to the interactions of a few simple laws and then calculate the exact behavior of any physical system far into the future. . . . But during the past few decades, more and more scientists have concluded that this and many other of science's traditional assumptions about the way nature operates are fundamentally wrong."

The marketing science approach, a requirement for most articles in all top marketing journals, is based on the Newtonian view and approach to science. Members of our marketing academic community who encourage us to conduct traditional science-like studies based on reductionism are old fashioned in their understanding of science. A new approach to science has emerged. Again in the words of Freedman (1992, p. 30):

"The way scientists identify the predictable patterns in a system has been turned on its head. Instead of trying to break down a system into its component parts and analyse the behaviors of those parts independently - the reductionist tradition - many scientists have had to learn a holistic approach. They focus increasingly on the dynamics of the overall system. Rather than attempting to explain how order is designed into the parts of a system, they now emphasize how order emerges from the interaction of those parts as a whole."

Thus to have any chance of understanding the behaviour of a marketing system we need to study it as a total entity. Studying a part, traditional reductionism, will only tell us about that part, not other parts and not the whole. Using the metaphor of bricks and walls again, reductionist studies create bricks. Several studies produce a pile of bricks, not a wall. Bricks do not self-organise into a wall: observation and the third law of thermodynamics tell us so. We have yet to work out how to study marketing as a total entity but there is a glimmer of hope: see for example the work of May (1976), Cvitanovic (1993), Hibbert and Wilkinson (1994), Levy (1994) and Doherty and Delener (2001).

But how can we expect practitioners to understand this when few marketing academics seem to understand it?

**#5 Precision**

The fifth reason why practitioners should ignore our work is that they might be deluded into thinking that it is thick ice when in fact it is thin.

Is Marketing a science? Can Marketing be a science? These are old and much debated questions. For the most part, the battle has been won by those who have argued that Marketing can be a science if it adopts a scientific approach (Hunt 1976). I agree that a scientific approach can be used in Marketing but its rigor gives a false sense of precision.
Because our measurement systems lack precision in comparison with those used in classical sciences, our findings are subject to much higher uncertainty even though we use a scientific method. And yet, somehow, this lack of precision does not come through in the Marketing literature. Authors mislead their readers (and themselves) into thinking that their results are more meaningful than they really are.

Poor data can never be corrected by high statistical validity. Measurement systems are the weakest part of our work and that weakness cannot be corrected after the measurements have been made. We take our statistical inference methods from sciences but we do not take their precise measurement systems. We can measure the distance to the moon with incredible precision but we cannot measure what Mrs Jones thinks of her favorite washing powder on anything other than the crudest of scales. Imagine if science relied on the opinion of Mrs Jones as to how far the Moon was from the Earth. Averaging a set of temperatures makes sense numerically. Averaging a set of ordinal opinions makes not.

It is perilously easy to create a false sense of precision through the application of statistical validity tests. A famous example of this from our literature comes from a frequently quoted but not carefully read article by Jaworski and Kohli (1993). The prime focus of this article is the relationship between market orientation and business performance. The authors collected two kinds of data on business performance: objective data on market share and judgemental (estimated) data on business performance. They found (p. 63 with emphasis added by the current author):

"... a market orientation appears to be significantly related to business performance when the overall performance is assessed using judgemental measures ($b=.12$, $p<.01$, Sample I; $b=.36$, $p<.001$, Sample II). By contrast, a market orientation does not appear to be related to performance using the more objective measure of market share."

Then, with a curious slight of hand, they conclude (p. 64):

"The findings of this study suggest that the market orientation of a business is an important determinant of its performance, regardless of the market turbulence, competitive intensity, or the technological turbulence of the environment in which it operates."

This finding not only has confusion over causality but it also favors lower quality data because this gives statistical validity to the proposition that the authors believe to be true. What happened to the objectivity of the scientific method?

Wensley (1997) offers an interesting example of how the graphical presentation of marketing academic work can easily mislead statistically naive practitioners into thinking that precision exists where it does not. The example he gives, the relationship between market share

Figure 1: Bar Chart showing the Relationship between Market Share and Profitability (ROI).

Source: Wensley (1997, p 64)
and profitability (ROI), is an object study in the problems that academic researchers face when studying complex phenomena and in the dangers practitioners face when reading research findings. Despite a large number of studies (high replication) this matter is by no means clear. The only safe conclusion one can make at this time is that there is some evidence that in some cases and in some industries there is a loose relationship between market share and profitability.

However by presenting findings in the form of bar charts such as is given in Figure 1, practitioners (who frequently make the same mistake) can be easily misled into thinking that the relationship is much stronger than is in fact the case.

This type of misleading graph is actually based on data that has the same statistical relationship between profitability (ROI) and market share as the scatter plot of Figure 2. The illusion of precision disappears.

#6 Generalisations

The sixth reason why practitioners should ignore our work is that the few generalisations we produce largely only corroborate what practitioners already know, do not help with decision detail and can become unquestioned articles of faith.

Leone and Schultz (1980), in another award winning article, describe how they tried to write a marketing book analogous to Berelson and Steiner's Human Behavior: An Inventory of Scientific Findings. They gave up because they found hardly any scientific findings and wrote the article on this dilemma instead. They said (p.11):

"... there is a great deal of empirical research, but very little of it is generalizable. Hence we have very little knowledge of marketing phenomena."

What then is the general nature of research output by marketing academics? Leone and Schultz refer to "one-shot studies that represent historical facts." They argue that it is only by replicating studies that we can move to generalisations, but they warn (p. 17):

"There are no universal generalizations in marketing. When we report, for example, that advertising has a positive influence on sales, we do not imply that this is true in every circumstance. It simply means that there is corroboration for this proposition from a number of sources for particular types of goods. The conditions under which the generalization hold are, strictly speaking, limited to the evidence reported herein."

Even with these caveats, the proposition that, in general,
advertising has a positive impact on sales is hardly news to a marketing practitioner.

And after many studies have been done in an area of marketing, a major difference seems to exist between the generalisation of science, such as Ohm’s Law, and the generalisations that we can produce. Ohm’s law is a generalisation for the flow of electricity in a conductor. It is both generally true and specifically true. It can be used to predict say the current flowing in a specific conductor given a knowledge of its resistance and the voltage applied across it [4].

Marketing generalisations, such as there being a positive relationship between advertising spending and sales, do not help with the specifics of advertising decisions. Once advertising budgets are set there are innumerable problems of detail to be handled, any of which can affect success. How many studies, how much time and how much money will be required before all these problems can be solved with our current research methods? Indeed are there theoretical grounds for even thinking that it is possible to produce empirically based generalisations for all this detail (irrespective of time and money)?

Many marketing decisions such as advertising have both quantitative (how much to spend on advertising) and qualitative (message and medium) dimensions. We also know that, at the brand level, there are important relative, as well as absolute, effects. It is not simply a case of how much you spend or what your advertising message is, but also a case of how much you spend relative to your competitor and what their message is in comparison with yours. Are generalisations ever going to help with this kind of complexity? And yet practitioners handle this every day without help from a set of empirically verified, statistically significant generalisations.

The most dangerous generalisations are those which are promulgated without question and which are used to build the very foundations of a discipline. Undoubtedly for marketing the key generalisation is the marketing concept. While Narver and Slater (1990) among others (Aaker 1988, Kohli and Jaworsik 1990, Peters and Waterman 1982) supported this notion, doubts as to its universality have been expressed (Hart and Diamantopoulos 1993, Greenley 1995, Wong and Mavondo 2000) although Kotler (1973), rather surprisingly, was perhaps the first to draw our attention to this possibility. This is strange because the very public debacle of arguably the epitome of a marketing oriented company, IBM in 1992, should have raised significant doubts (Rogers 1986, Carroll 1993, Heller 1994). But it took a non-marketing academic (Christensen 1997) to provide both evidence and a theoretical foundation that explains why the marketing concept is not a universal generalisation. Yet seven years later most of us still teach it as a fundamental part of marketing!

#7 Replication

The seventh reason why practitioners should ignore our work is that its truth-value is highly questionable: often it is not even thin ice, it is water.

The idea of marketing science espoused so clearly and persuasively by Hunt (1976) has dominated research in marketing ever since. It is built on three premises of which only the final one is really significant here:

- A distinct subject matter.
- The presumption that this subject matter has underlying uniformities and regularities.
- An intersubjectively certifiable truth content.

The idea of intersubjective certification means that . . .

“. . . different (but reasonably competent) investigators with differing attitudes, opinions, and beliefs will be able to make observations and conduct experiments to ascertain their truth content.” (Hunt 1976, p. 27)

The principle of replication has been acknowledged as an essential part of scientific study (Blaug 1992; Kane 1984; Rosenthal and Rosnow 1984). Thus even after a carefully constructed and executed empirical study in marketing has been published, in other words one which satisfies the stringent selection criteria of the leading journals, there are no grounds for accepting the findings until the work has been independently replicated a reasonable number of times without major anomaly. Lindsay and Ehrenberg (1993) are able to claim that unreplicated work is virtually meaningless and useless irrespective of its level of statistical significance. However Anderson (1983) points out that the smug feeling replication gives is ill founded because no one can say how many replications are required.

Several marketing academics (Hubbard and Armstrong 1994; Hubbard, Brodie and Armstrong 1992; Hubbard and Vetter 1996) have called for more replication studies as the essential way of creating a foundation for the marketing discipline. Indeed, this point was also made by Leone and Schultz (1980) in their work on marketing generalisations (see above). On this basis we need to add two questions to the criteria for accepting work for
publication:

- Can it be replicated from the information given?
- Is it probable that it will be replicated?

In Marketing we have no tradition of ascertaining the truth content of a published empirical study other than by repeating it with new data. This is far from the case in other disciplines. For example in political and social research the leading empirical methods journal Political Analysis sets a direct replication requirement (Epstein and King 2002, p. 46):

"Authors of a quantitative article in Political Analysis must indicate in their first footnote in which public archive readers can find the data, programs, recodes, or other information necessary to replicate the numerical results in their article."

In a showpiece longitudinal and comparative study, Hubbard and Vetter (1996) measured the extent of replication in Marketing, Accounting, Economics, Finance and Management for the period 1970 to 1991. They found an average replication rate of 6.2%. In the marketing literature the replication rate was 2.6% – the lowest of the five disciplines studied. Put another way, over 97% of marketing empirical studies is academic clutter: they have not been independently tested and until they have they are virtually meaningless and useless. They serve as potential starting points for further study but it is only when they are actually used for this purpose that they become of some value.

But some studies have been replicated. On the assumption that the unreplicated ones are similar, what does replication tell us about our research findings and, indirectly, about the effectiveness of our standard research paradigm?

Hubbard and Vetter found that when independent researchers did the replication, clear support was found in 11.5% of cases. When the original researchers did the replication, clear support was found in 57% of cases! Clearly, we need to ignore replication studies done by original researchers.

If a practitioner reads anything from the large unreplicated bulk of marketing academic work he or she needs to know, firstly, that there is almost no chance that the work will be replicated, and until it is, the study is virtually meaningless and useless. Secondly, if it is replicated, there is about a 90% chance that the study will not be validated on the first independent test.

3. Conclusions

At the end of most articles these days, editors request authors to put in a ‘managerial implications’ section. Often these go well beyond the bounds of validity in an effort to appeal to practitioners (who do not read academic journals). As Brown (1996, p. 260) wisely commented:

"Many scholarly papers continue to dispout a so-called ‘managerial implications’ section, but what manager in their right mind would proceed to act on such recommendations? In truth, how many of us would want managers to implement our pseudo-suggestions, especially if we were held responsible, despite all the standard caveats and get-out clauses, when things went awry?"

The managerial implications for this article are that managers should continue to avoid reading academic work and avoid attending academic conferences because we are simply not yet able to produce knowledge that is useful to practitioners in anything other than very meagre quantities. It is very difficult for practitioners to find this work among the very large quantity that, quite rightly, only serves academic ends.

Until a work has been thoroughly replicated it should contain, not a section on managerial implications, but a section giving a clear warning against the application of the work in any practical circumstance. Although academics are often criticised for writing in an abstruse style, this is actually an advantage since it is less likely that practitioners will read the work. It is important that we maintain the gap between academics and practitioners. It could be that eventually we will find ways of studying marketing systems that do not suffer from the problems outlined in this article, but until that time comes we should celebrate the complexity and difficulty of our chosen field of enquiry and serve our academic customers.

Endnotes

1. I acknowledge that there are exceptions where businesses, trade associations or other organizations sometimes sponsor academic research in marketing such as ARC linkage grants and the CRC support of sustainable tourism. However, sponsorship does not automatically mean that the work will be of use to the sponsor. Sometimes sponsors have a genuine interest in contributing, altruistically, to the world of knowledge. Also, just because practitioners have not requested and paid for our word does not, in itself, mean that the work
cannot be of value to practitioners. Rather, I am arguing that because, in most cases, practitioners have neither requested nor paid for the work, they are in no position to complain about the product.

2. Some academics also present work at practitioner conferences and directly to practitioners, usually through a consulting assignment. In these cases, quite different ‘rules’ apply.

3. Researchers who write state-of-the-art studies and those who do meta-analytic research sometimes alleviate this problem.

4. Possibly the closest thing we have to Ohm’s law is the Dirichlet model developed by Goodhardt, Ehrenberg and Chatfield (1984) and applied in quite a wide range of contexts (Ehrenberg, Uncles and Goodhardt 2004). However, the research process advocated by Ehrenberg (1994) is distinctly different from the one conventionally used in marketing academic work and therefore there is little ground for expecting that similar strong generalisations will be produced. And, of course, one swallow does not make a spring. Certainly the famous 1995 special issue of Marketing Science on empirical generalisations 14(3) part 2, G1-G236 was no spring for Marketing.

References


Biography

Peter November is a Senior Lecture in School of Marketing and International Business at Victoria University of Wellington. After completing his PhD at Nottingham University in new product development he worked for an American consulting company in industrial marketing research, worked as a New Product Manager for a British engineering company and then ran his own manufacturing business. He has taught marketing in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. His main research activity is creating marketing decision support systems for the WINDOWS operating system.

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