



Commentary on “From academic research to marketing practice: Exploring the marketing science value chain” (John H. Roberts, Ujwal Kayande, Stefan Stremersch)



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This article addresses the important but rarely explored topic of the relevance of academic research. While several authors have made compelling arguments for the role of relevance (in addition to rigor) in marketing (e.g., Lehmann, McAlister, and Staelin, 2011; Lilien, 2011; Reibstein, Day, and Wind, 2009), little empirical work has emerged. This paper makes a serious attempt in this direction. I found Figs. 3 and 4 and Tables 2–6 particularly interesting.

After initially experiencing a positive reaction to the topic and article, I instinctively shifted to “reviewer mode,” which essentially consists of trying to find faults and imagining how I would have done the paper (better). Ironically this is part of the problem the paper implicitly addressed: why not focus on whether there is something in a paper that is useful vs. whether there is something about the paper that is imperfect (which, having been authored by humans, there always is)? Viewed this way, the imperfections (which often reflect differences in tastes) are worth noting (as the authors largely do) but not deal-breakers/fatal flaws.

Several aspects of the paper merit are illuminating. First, the focus is on marketing decisions and tools to address them (rather than tools per se). Second, the increasing internationalization of marketing is encouraging. Third, while the correlation is low, Fig. 4 suggests the relation

between citations and impact on practice is positive, in effect debunking the notion of an ivory tower. Similarly Fig. 3 suggests that marketing science has tended to be more influential in more important decision areas. Thus the results are encouraging.

Of course as suggested earlier there are some additional things I would have liked to see in the paper. High on the list would be a bigger sample for the “transition” data in the Appendix. More problematic, many ideas emerge from face-to-face meetings (e.g., at seminars and conferences or during informal lunches) and are not derived from reading the literature. Others are literature-based but the source is forgotten and not cited (i.e., the “I think I remember hearing about that somewhere”). While practically untraceable, examining the role of such sources could provide some fascinating insights.

In summary, this work nicely quantifies the linking of academia and practice. Importantly, several entities have emerged to facilitate this link including MSI, the Lilien Practice Prize, and the Theory and Practice in Marketing (TPM) movement. While of course there is the potential to become overly concerned with relevance (and rule out basic R&D as in Google’s “moonshots”), the pendulum has a long way to go before this happens. Hopefully this paper will nudge authors to place a bit more weight on relevance in the future.

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