



The impact of marketing science research on practice: Comment



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1. Introduction

Thanks to John, Ujwal and Stefan (hereafter *RKS, 2014*) for both developing a conceptual model, i.e. their value chain, of the process by which academic marketing science articles have impacted practice and showing empirically that (1) we (the academic community) have indeed had an impact, and (2) pointing out the specific areas where the impact has occurred. I have always felt since I entered the field in the 1970s that, our impact on practice is much more than we perceive. I was giving a talk recently to our New York Marketing Modelers group, a long-time marketing research practitioner walked up to me and praised a paper I wrote in the 1980s as fundamentally helping his work. This is not only nice to hear, but is also an indication that we academics underestimate how our work has been integrated into practice.

It is, of course, difficult to measure this impact, and *RKS (2014)* have made what I think is the most systematic and theoretically sound contribution to do so. The purpose of this comment is to make a few points that complement *RKS (2014)*. These are: (1) It should not be a surprise that we have made some outstanding contributions to practice as it is in our DNA; (2) At the same time, the contributions to practice are declining, and (3) The future is clouded by the increase in marketing science that is occurring in non-academic institutions.

2. Academic contributions to marketing practice is in our DNA

Scott Neslin and I are co-editing a book titled *History of marketing science (Neslin and Winer, 2014)*. In the Introduction to that book, we note that many of the earliest marketing science articles were based on practical problems. One well-known example is *Brown, Hulswit and Kettelle (1956)* which was published in *Operations Research*. In this paper, the authors develop an approach to allocating accounts to salespeople after running field experiments. Another famous paper published in the same journal was written by two Arthur D. Little consultants, *Vidale and Wolfe (1957)*. Several of their clients had the following basic problems: (1) How do we evaluate the effectiveness of an advertising campaign? (2) How should the advertising budget be allocated across products? (3) What should be the size of the advertising budget? They developed a mathematical model to solve these problems that has been heavily cited. *Montgomery (2001)* notes that through the

early 1960s, many applied papers were published in *Management Science* on topics such as new products, customers, marketing organization, and other problems driven by issues facing marketing managers.

The establishment and the continued flourishing of the Marketing Science Institute (MSI), noted in *RKS (2014)*, is also part of our DNA. Founded in 1962 in Philadelphia by Thomas McCabe Sr., the former President of Scott Paper Company, MSI continues to be an important bridge between academia and practice with over 70 companies contributing resources to fund research that is consistent with priorities that are set by representatives of the companies themselves. Some titles of monographs produced in the 1960s demonstrate that MSI was successful in achieving its goals:

- Promotional decisions using mathematical models by Kuehn and Rohloff;
- Advertising measurement and decision making by Robinson, Dalbey, Gross, and Wind; and
- Promotional decision making: Practice and theory, by Robinson and Luck.

Finally, The TIMS Marketing College was founded in 1967 as the professional organization for academics and practitioners interested in the “application of scientific methods to marketing problems” (*Montgomery, 1967*). The link between academia and industry was fundamental and pervasive. For example, the book of Robert Buzzell (1964), *Mathematical models and marketing management*, documented the application of linear programming to media selection, the measurement of advertising effects, and cases representing industry practice. The senior academics entering the field had a distinct managerial orientation; *implementation* was high priority. It was no wonder that the 1968 census of the TIMS College membership identified 71 members from industry among the total of 148 members.

3. The field has changed

As *RKS (2014)* note, in 1983 about 50% of the attendees at the annual Marketing Science conference came from industry and by 2007, this had dropped to 4%. While the attendance at some more specialized conferences such as the Lilien Practice Prize do attract more practitioners, it is clearly the case that practitioner participation in our “business” has declined. In the first issue of *Marketing Science*, 3 of the 32 editorial board members were from companies as were 5 of the 9 Advisory Board members. Today, it is zero and zero. Scanning Table 1 of *RKS*

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(2014) shows 7 of the top 100 papers are from the 21st century and only 1 of the top 20 in Table 5. While some under-representation of newer papers would be expected, this imbalance is extreme. Also alarming is that the number of submissions to the Lilien Practice Prize competition has declined substantially.

I am not the first to observe that the field has changed. Lehmann, McAlister, and Staelin (2011) cited in RKS (2014), make the point that rigor is overwhelming relevance and point to four reasons: the manuscript review process, new faculty hiring, Ph.D. program curricula, and promotion and tenure processes. I find the second and third points most compelling. Many new marketing science faculty are entering the field, particularly from economics, who know little about marketing institutions. This changes naturally as they teach marketing courses, but often their peer group remains in their disciplinary field. Doctoral programs rarely expose students to practical issues in marketing. As a result, how would we expect junior faculty to be interested in problems facing marketing managers?

4. Have we lost the edge?

Marketing science academics conducting empirical work have been amply supplied with data for many years. From the early days of marketing science, diary and then electronic scanner data provided by IRI and Nielsen to many marketing scientists enabled the estimation of choice and demand models. Thanks to organizations like the Kilts Center at the University of Chicago, this availability of great data continues. Other secondary data have been obtained from companies, and many other papers use exciting primary data from field or lab studies. I am constantly impressed by the kind of data to which academic marketing scientists have access, particularly in this age of “big” data from social and other digital media.

As a result, I used to feel that we had pretty good data relative to what was available in industry. I do not feel that way anymore. Companies such as Facebook, Google, and other “new” media companies have lots more data than we do. While we can sometimes gain access to some of their data either through company contacts or “scraping” it off the Web, I do not feel confident that we have access to the quantity and quality of data that we had in the past.

In addition, our one competitive advantage relative to practitioners is that we have interest in big problems with general solutions. That is, our interest lies not in solving particular problems that companies face but rather developing new methods and answers to broad, important questions. In addition, we have always had a talent advantage. Even though there have always been Ph.D.s in statistics, economics, etc. in companies, those with a more academic inclination tended to take jobs in universities.

Again, I believe that has changed. Google, Yahoo!, Facebook, Microsoft, and other companies now hire people with Ph.D.s and often let them engage in what we would call academic research. The combination of the quality of people being hired and the access to company resources is obviously quite powerful and something we cannot match.

The problem is that information flow is asymmetric. The work that marketing science academics produce is obviously accessible to research scientists in companies. However, we do not see what the research scientists at Facebook are producing, perhaps only a sliver at some specialized conferences. As a result, I worry that marketing science academics at universities are necessarily producing the best applied research anymore.

5. Conclusion

I do not mean to be pessimistic; I see no reason why we cannot re-ignite our interest in problems that vex practicing marketing managers. As I noted above, MSI continues to flourish. The marketing science field has been invigorated by the growth of the digital economy and the research opportunities this presents. RKS (2014) argue persuasively in the Discussion section of their paper that rigor and relevance are not incompatible. In addition, their research indicates particular areas such as pricing, new products, and others where scholars who seek to make an impact might want to focus. The success of the three TPM (Theory and Practice in Marketing) conferences demonstrates that there is still considerable interest in academic marketing science research that resonates with practitioners. RKS (2014) remind us that we have been influential in the past and continue to be. I feel that this retrospective look at our collective impact on practice is a valuable “wake up” call to the marketing science community to continue these efforts.

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