

MARKETING SCIENCE

EDITOR
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Research on Research

For years, people in marketing research have talked about how important it is to do more research on how to do research. And there has been a lot of progress in recent years in this area. Two new journals have appeared devoted to technological studies of research methods. One is the *Journal of Marketing Research*, published by the American Marketing Association. The other is the *Journal of Advertising Research*, a more specialized journal published by the Advertising Research Foundation.

Samples of research on research articles from recent issues are the following:

“Numerical Taxonomy in Marketing Analysis”

“‘Effective Number’ as a Measure of Source and Destination Diversity”

“The Use of Mail Questionnaires in Columbia”

“Social Class and Life Cycle as Predictors of Shopping Behavior”

“Perception of Self, Generalized Stereotypes, and Brand Selection”

“Prediction of Consumer Innovators: Application of Multiple Discriminant Analysis”

“Attitude Measures That Predict Purchase”

“The Factor Analytic Search for Program Types”

Each of these articles reports on a study of research methodology. Material of this type was quite rare in earlier years. Some articles could be found in journals published by professional societies in the social sciences and the best bet for such material was the *Journal of the American Statistical Association*. Given the things which have been happening in marketing research, it is a good thing we are now able to get in these newer journals technological information from a variety of disciplines and with examples from marketing contexts.

There is a second sort of article carried in these journals which is more relevant to the development of marketing science. These are fairly rare and sometimes hard to distinguish from methodological studies. They attempt to describe important factors in the marketplace or to seek generalizations from studies of market and consumer behavior. From recent issues there are two titles which suggest the difference I mean:

“Differences in Retailer’s and Consumer’s Perceptions”

“Are there Laws of Consumer Behavior”

Studies of both types are often included in a category which research departments called “basic research.” This is a sort of catch-all category under which

fall all the projects that can't be pegged to a specific brand marketing problem. It can include such diverse things as 1) a study of housewives' reactions to inflation, 2) operations research, 3) experimental applications of statistical routines, and 4) studies of psychological correlates of consumer behavior.

The situation has some parallels to distinctions made between the two series of *Management Science*. In this journal we make a distinction between things which are technological (we use the word "technical") and things which are closer to the subject of management (which we all call "applications"). Those two categories are much like those that exist in marketing science today.

But this leads me to the observation that both marketing scientists and management scientists devote little attention to one important matter—namely the problem of how to put the knowledge we have gained into activities which make a difference. On this score, one has to grant the lead to Management Science. Here there are occasional articles which discuss implementation problems. Such articles may be few and far between, but compared to marketing science they seem to occur in profusion.

One friend of mine in marketing research argues that we must sell research to the people who are going to consume it. He doesn't mean, necessarily, that these research consumers should be asked to pay for it. Rather, he means it is incumbent on the good research man to convince someone who can change things that the research is meaningful and provides direction. That person may turn out to be any of a number of kinds of people. For instance: salesmen, retailers, copywriters, and promotion specialists. This friend deplors the usual procedure of filtering research information up and down the organizational hierarchy. He argues that perhaps 80%–90% of the value can be lost as research insights move from supplier to research manager to product manager to advertising manager to account executive to copywriter (choosing, for the sake of emphasis, one of the longest filtering sequences). The comparison might be made to the party game in which a sentence is whispered from one person to the next and comes out all wrong at the end of the line.

Actually, real life operations are rarely so formal and rigid that the research implication is completely wrong when it gets to one who is its ultimate consumer. The real life problem is one of obtaining a better dialogue between researchers and changers of things. That there is too little of this dialogue is as much the fault of researchers as of consumers of research. A little less attention to those methods articles and a little more attention to marketing theory and the marketing problem at hand would go a long way for researchers. Researchers have a bad habit of needing numbers in order to talk or have an opinion. Users of research, on the other hand, would do well to recognize that there are researchers who have good ideas and who are not intimidated by numbers. The users should make some considerable effort to search them out. These good researchers are worth all the trouble to find them.

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