The Pareto plus syndrome in top marketing journals: research and journal criteria

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Abstract

Purpose – Pareto’s Law often refers to the theory that a small percentage of a total is responsible for a large proportion of the total outcome. It is commonly known as the 80/20 law or principle. The objective is to review and debate whether there is a “Pareto syndrome” in the distribution of crucial research and journal criteria in top marketing journals.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors provide a review and a debate based upon previous research on top marketing journals. For this purpose, the Pareto syndrome concept is introduced, based upon a set of research and journal criteria. Their distribution is examined.

Findings – The review of research and journal criteria in top marketing journals generated an extremely skewed outcome. When it comes to the criteria, the top journals in marketing tend to be governed by narrow concerns of research rather than broad ones.

Research limitations/implications – The research and journal criteria that have a skewed outcome may reinforce the rigidity and the lack of innovativeness of the marketing discipline. The evolutionary speed of the discipline may at best be reduced or it may at worst grind to a halt. The authors argue that there are a number of serious concerns to be addressed in the future review and debate of top journals in marketing.

Practical implications – Editors and editorial boards need seriously to address the concerns reviewed and debated, namely the skewed distribution of criteria, such as affiliation, data and methodology.

Originality/value – The authors debate that there is evidence that confirms the existence of a Pareto plus syndrome in key research and journal criteria of top marketing journals.

1 Introduction

Academic journals support and facilitate the professional desire and the need among researchers to publish their research (Moxley, 1992). Mort et al. (2004) argue that academic journals represent the current outlets where researchers communicate their research.

Academic journals have been a topic of concern in literature for many years. For example, different concerns have been reviewed and debated for more than four decades in economics (Danielsen and Delorme, 1976; Hawkins et al., 1973). There have been different
topics of review and debate for almost two decades in management (Stahl et al., 1988), as there also have been in marketing (Fry et al., 1985; Jobber and Simpson, 1988; Luke and Doke, 1987). Today there are many academic journals in marketing and their numbers have increased dramatically since the emergence of the discipline in the early twentieth century (Baumgartner and Pieters, 2003). For example, Cabell (1998) in the late 1990s listed more than 550 marketing journals in existence. Marketing journals have also become more specialized (Baumgartner and Pieters, 2003; Malhotra, 1999).

Principally, two concerns have been raised in the review and debate of academic journals (Mason et al., 1997; Kim, 1991). One of the concerns addressed is underpinned by the citation frequency of articles, such as the citation index (Baumgartner and Pieters, 2003; Jobber and Simpson, 1988). The other is based upon the perception of journals, in terms of their reputation and prestige (Browne and Becker, 1991; Luke and Doke, 1987). There have also been other less frequent concerns addressed. For example, Polonsky et al. (1999) discuss an alternative concern of marketing journals referred to as the journal's accessibility. Emerald until 2004 (Emerald Management Reviews, 2005) utilized a different approach. This approach was based upon the process that each article published in academic journals was independently reviewed, all of which produced different journal ranking lists. Harzing (2005) provides a compilation of ranking lists that may be used in the review and the debate of academic journals.

The focus of journal ranking lists appears to be upon distinguishing the top journals in the field and embodying them with an aura of reverence and deference. Is this approach appropriate? What about the journal criteria, such as editors and editorial boards? How do they impact upon the process? Furthermore, what about the research criteria, such as author affiliation, research data and methodology? Research has indicated that there is a skewed distribution of journal and research criteria in top marketing journals (Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2005; Svensson, 2005, 2006, 2007). The distribution appears to resemble the so-called Pareto's Law[1]. Today, it often refers to the theory that a small percentage of a total is responsible for a large proportion of the total outcome. It is commonly known as the 80/20 law or principle, therefore, the objective is to review and debate whether there is a “Pareto syndrome” in the distribution of crucial research and journal criteria in top marketing journals. The Pareto syndrome concept is introduced and used to review and debate the topic at hand. It consists of:

- five research criteria (i.e. the affiliation of authors, the share of empirical data, the share of national research data, the continental belonging of collected research data and the methodological approaches applied); and
- two journal criteria (i.e. the affiliation of editors and the affiliation and composition of editorial boards).

The authors contend that the topic addressed will stimulate the ongoing debate concerning the characteristics of academic marketing journals. The authors believe that it is an important concern for the future prosperity of the marketing discipline and its research community across the world as the top journals have an enormous responsibility to preserve and strengthen the reputation of the marketing discipline in relation to other research disciplines and their research communities. The top marketing journals serve as a
point of reference for scholars and practitioners of the marketing discipline. For other research disciplines and their research communities, these journals are also the gateway to what is perceived as the “cutting edge” of marketing theory and thought.

In the literature, the definitions of what characterizes a top marketing journal are generally vague. They are often based upon single-item measures, such as perception (Luke and Doke, 1987) and citation (Jobber and Simpson, 1988). The authors have undertaken a longitudinal literature review of how marketing journals are perceived and how they have been ranked by different sources. In doing so, the Journal of Marketing, the Journal of Marketing Research and the Journal of Consumer Research are all considered by various authors to be top journals in marketing (Bakir et al., 2000; Clark, 1985; Fields and Swayne, 1991; Ganesh et al., 1990; Niemi, 1988; Petry and Settle, 1988; Pol, 1991; Polonsky and Whitelaw, 2005; Spake and Harmon, 1998; and Trieschmann et al., 2000). Depending upon the ranking list chosen, there are also a number of other potential top marketing journals that may be added to this list. For example, by using Harzing’s (2005) compilation of journal ranking lists, a few other marketing journals may be added, such as the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, the Journal of Retailing, and Marketing Science. These six aforementioned journals are also listed by Polonsky and Mittelstaedt (2005) as the “A” journals of the marketing discipline. The authors of this paper do not suggest that the aforementioned journals comprise a complete list of top journals. They are used to support the topic of review and debate addressed in this paper.

2 Frame of reference

There is an ongoing review and debate of marketing journals. (Hult et al., 1997; Mort et al., 2004; Polonsky et al., 1999; Polonsky and Whitelaw, 2005; Theorharakis and Hirst, 2002). Most of the reviews and debate have been based upon the perceptions of scholars from North America (Fry et al., 1985; Hult et al., 1997; Luke and Doke, 1987). Recently, the review and debate has also been based upon scholars' perceptions in the Asia Pacific Region (Mort et al., 2004; Polonsky et al., 1999; Polonsky and Waller, 1993). Theorharakis and Hirst (2002) contribute to this review and debate by using a worldwide survey of perceptions. In addition, Easton and Easton (2003) underpin their review and debate on scholars' perceptions in the UK.

There are formal lists of journal quality (Trieschmann et al., 2000; DuBois, 2000; Enomoto, 1993; Hult et al., 1997; Mylonopoulos and Theoharakis, 2001; Trieschmann et al., 2000; Van Fleet et al., 2000). There are also informal lists that are used in business schools (Brumbaugh, 2002). It appears that the access to formal lists appears to be important when the publication of research is reviewed and debated (Hult et al., 1997; Theorharakis and Hirst, 2002; Van Fleet et al., 2000). There is an ongoing review and debate of marketing journals in the literature.

One stream of reviews and debate of academic journals has used citation analyses (Baumgartner and Pieters, 2003; Jobber and Simpson, 1988). The citation index is often interpreted to be unbiased and a true reflection of the ranking of journals. This approach, however, may bias the ranking of journals for various reasons. For example, journals from some regions may be missing (Nobes, 1985). Day and Peters (1994) argue that the citation
index is dangerously flawed in that it is heavily biased towards high circulation journals, suffers from a single-item syndrome and that there is no direct correlation with quality. Furthermore, databases tend to be restricted to a selection of journals – i.e. English journals (Neway and Lancaster, 1983), which may exclude a variety of other journals. For example, journals published in languages other than English tend to be excluded (French, German and Spanish journals). Databases may also be restricted to a publisher’s portfolio of academic journals.

Another stream of reviews and debate of academic journals has been dedicated to the analysis upon perceptual evaluations to create journal rankings (Browne and Becker, 1991; Luke and Doke, 1987). The perceptual-based journal rankings may vary and be biased for different reasons. They may be influenced by institutional and/or individual demographics (Hult et al., 1997). For example, research has focused on leading institutions (Theorarakis and Hirst, 2002) and on active researchers/deans/heads of schools (Browne and Becker, 1991; Mort et al., 2004). The objective or focus of the ranking may have an impact too (Polonsky and Waller, 1993), as may regional variations (Danielsen and Delorme, 1976; Theorarakis and Hirst, 2002), and the journal’s focus may impact (Danielsen and Delorme, 1976; Hawkins et al., 1973).

The citation and perception-based streams of review and debate in respect to academic journals have in part contributed to the content of aggregated lists. For example, Harzing (2005) compiles a journal quality list that is updated periodically. The current list contains 18 different rankings of 844 journals. It is a compilation of journal rankings from a variety of sources and they are reported separately. Consequently, it is based upon a large number of journals in different areas. Actually, they are cross-disciplinary lists, all of which also include marketing journals. Primarily, the purpose of the list is to assist academics to target their research at journals of an “appropriate standard”. Harzing (2005) writes that the list should not be used for staff evaluation purposes in a mechanistic way, therefore, it should not be seen as a normative list or the only one to be considered. It is derived from different sources and consists of different ranking lists that are aggregated into one table. It applies a top-down approach, where an overall criterion (i.e. a single-item measure) usually underpins the compilation of each ranking list. Generally, the compilation of the list provides a fundament to discuss academic journals in different research disciplines and their research communities.

On the contrary to Harzing (2005), Emerald (Emerald Management Reviews, 2005) applied a bottom-up approach, where several criteria (i.e. a multi-item measure) underpinned the compilation of four differentiated journal ranking lists. These were cross-disciplinary journal rankings, including marketing journals that were provided and continuously updated by Emerald. It used a broader – as well as a profounder – approach to assess the quality of different journals across research disciplines. It was based upon the process that each article published was independently reviewed based upon four criteria, namely research implications, practice implications, originality and readability. Each article was assigned one, two or three asterisks across these criteria. These allocations were used to calculate the annual average score on each criterion for each journal. Annually, this database compiled a journal ranking of the top 400+ management journals in the world across different disciplines. It was discontinued at the end of 2004 due to the consternation caused amongst
some editors and some authors by the additional review and evaluation undertaken by independent reviewers. These editors and authors felt that the initial review process had vindicated the worth of the article and, therefore, a further review for them became contentious. The articles were peer reviewed before publication in a specific journal and then subsequent to their publication they were reviewed by an expert who ranked the articles according to the four criteria. This was a unique approach that fruitfully could have continued to support the ongoing review and debate of academic journals in marketing and other research disciplines. We contend that it is disappointing that this process has been discontinued as it gave a broader review and debate of individual articles than appears to be the case for other assessment regimes. This subsequent review process complemented and may have enhanced the original review process.

Consequently, the review and debate of academic journals may be underpinned by different criteria (Beed and Beed, 1996; Hawes and Keillor, 2002; Jones et al., 1996; Parnell, 1997; Rice and Stankus, 1983; Zinkhan and Leigh, 1999). For example, Parnell (1997) provides a taxonomy of journal quality based upon expert opinion surveys, citation counts, or a combination of both. Rice and Stankus (1983) provide criteria of journal quality such as: citation analysis of the journal (e.g. Social Sciences Citation Index), acceptance rate of journal (e.g. Cabell's Directory), sponsorship of journal (e.g. American Marketing Association), fundament of journal (e.g. authors, editor, review board, and their affiliation), and objective of journal (e.g. methodological approaches and readership). All of these criteria may be useful in the discussion of academic journals.

Technicalities tend to be stressed as an important criterion in the review and debate of academic journals. In fact, Hawes and Keillor (2002) write that higher status is usually attributed to journals that publish articles that are theoretical, scholar-oriented, highly quantitative or technical in nature and they comment:

... since it is hard to read such articles without highly specialized and extensive training, we assume that those people who are involved with such journals are legitimate authority figures. We ascribe expert power to them and these journals are typically rated very high by members of the scholarly community ... (Hawes and Keillor, 2002, p. 72).

We contend that this view and the previous citation/perception-based streams in literature that are used to review and debate the perceived quality of journals have contributed to a “Pareto syndrome” in the top marketing journals.

3 The Pareto syndrome – review and debate

The authors use two group criteria and seven sub-group criteria to review and debate the existence of a Pareto syndrome in top marketing journals, namely:

1. Research criteria (i.e. the characteristics of research published in the top journals in marketing):
   - affiliation of authors;
   - empirical research data;
   - national research data;
o continental belonging of research data; and
o methodological approaches.
2. Journal criteria (i.e. the fundaments of the top journals in marketing):
o affiliation of editors; and
o affiliation and composition of editorial boards.

These criteria should be seen as triggers for further review and debate. Consequently, the criteria do not aspire to be complete, but they complement the ongoing review and debate of academic journals and academic publishing in literature. They are interpreted as being crucial to support the topic at hand regarding a potential Pareto syndrome in top marketing journals. The authors contend that these research and journal criteria in part underpin and contribute to address and answer the following research questions: RQ1. Is there a Pareto syndrome in top marketing journals? RQ2. If so, why is there a Pareto syndrome in top marketing journals? The listed research criteria address the first question, while the mentioned journal criteria intend to address the second one. The authors' intention is not to focus on a specific journal, but rather to stimulate the ongoing review and debate of the adequacy of those concerns that dominate in the top marketing journals. The idea is also to let the readers reflect and decide on their own perceptions without the explicit influence or arguments provided by the authors. The authors wish to provide a reflection from their experiences and observations on these issues. The reader can verify for oneself the basis for the review and debate undertaken by performing an independent review of the selected top marketing journals, as the authors have done.

3.1 Is there a Pareto syndrome in top marketing journals?

The five selected research criteria provide an indication and a support of whether there is – or there is not – a Pareto syndrome in top marketing journals. They are reviewed and debated in this section. Table I summarizes the review of research criteria.

The affiliations of authors in published articles of the top marketing journals are predominantly North American (Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2005; Svensson, 2005). Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft (2005) find that in the top six journals, 89 percent of the articles have at least one American author. Svensson (2005) surveys the contents from 2000 to 2004 (i.e. a five year period) inclusive of one of the six previously listed journals and he finds that of the author affiliation reported, 95 percent have a North American affiliation.

Svensson (2006) finds in a selected top marketing journal that 87 percent of the articles are based upon empirical research data. In other words, the selected journal strongly supports empirical research. Svensson (2006) finds in a top marketing journal that 92 percent of the articles are based upon research designs that are limited to national research data. Only 8 percent are based upon research designs that comprise the collection of international research data. Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft (2005) in their study find that in the selected top marketing journals the research data collected is to a large extent North American with 83 percent including specifically USA data. Svensson (2006) finds that 84 percent of articles are solely based upon North American research data. In addition, 92 percent have a research design that includes North American research data (Svensson, 2006).
There is a skewed distribution of methodological approaches to explore marketing topics (Svensson, 2005). Svensson (2005) surveyed the contents from 2000 to 2004 inclusive of one of the six previously listed journals and he found that of the empirical work reported, 91 percent were articles based upon a framework of quantitative analysis. It appears to be the prescribed way to report research, if one is seeking publication success.

The authors suggest that there is a Pareto syndrome in top marketing journals. The question then becomes that if this assertion is correct – then why is this situation the case?

### 3.2 Why is there a Pareto syndrome in top marketing journals?

Two possible explanations may contribute to the understanding of why there is a Pareto syndrome in the reviewed research criteria as discussed in the top marketing journals. Principally, it goes back to the fundamentals of the journals. It could be traced to the affiliation of editors and the affiliations and compositions of editorial boards. Table I summarizes the review of journal criteria.

Svensson (2005) finds that the editors of the top marketing journals are invariably North Americans, namely six out of six (100 percent). A multinational composition of editors would broaden the understanding of the underlying cultural values of research across the world. At present, there is a predominant contextual insensitivity: an academic xenophobia that replicates itself, exclusive primarily to other ideas from beyond the North American academic community. It has to be kept in mind that they are the initial gatekeepers before entering the blind review process that takes place in top peer reviewed journals. Instead of celebrating the differences in research around the world, these differences appear to be expunged in favor of homogeneous research with a North American focus.

The editorial boards of top marketing journals mostly consist of academics affiliated to North American universities or organizations instead of having a worldwide representation (Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2005; Svensson, 2005). Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft (2005) have highlighted in their work that the editorial boards of the top six journals are comprised of members who are North American. These boards are comprised ostensibly of individuals from North America – Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft (2005) report 92 percent. In that sense, the editorial boards tend to be merely North American centric rather than representing an international perspective. There appears to be a lack of cultural sensitivity among them as well (Homburg, 2003; Easton and Easton, 2003). Consensus is easier to achieve by the selection of homogenous members of an editorial board, but it can create a reactive behavior rather than proactive initiatives in research efforts. In fact, only a minor part of many of these boards are representing the worldwide research community that flourishes outside of North America (Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2005; Svensson, 2005).

### 4 Concluding thoughts

The review of research and journal criteria in the top marketing journals generated an extremely skewed outcome. When it comes to the research criteria, the top journals in marketing tend to be governed by narrow concerns of research rather than broad ones (Czinkota, 2000; Easton and Easton, 2003; Homburg, 2003; Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft,
When it comes to the journal criteria, the top journals in marketing also tend to be dominated by narrow concerns of research rather than broad ones (Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2005; Svensson, 2005, 2006). The skewed distribution of reviewed research and journal criteria may reinforce the rigidity and lack of innovativeness of the marketing discipline. The evolutionary speed of the discipline may be reduced or at worst it may enter a dead end, therefore, the authors contend that there are a number of serious concerns to be addressed in the future review of the top journals in marketing. In sum, based upon the evidence and arguments provided there appears to be a Pareto plus syndrome in top marketing journals. In fact, the distribution is even more skewed than 80/20 – it appears to be more like 90/10!

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References


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Further Reading


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