Exploring Conference Proceedings Contribution to Marketing Knowledge- Some Initial Evidence and Directions for the Future

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Abstract

This paper examines the degree to which works appearing in JM, JMR and JCR cite materials other than academic journals. The results suggest the number of citations to proceedings has fallen since earlier works (Anderson and Haley, 1984). This may be explained by the increased number of marketing related journals available in hard copy and through electronic databases. Citations of non-journal materials within marketing literature are however, higher than were found by Armstrong and Pagell (2003) in the forecasting literature. Some suggestions for future research are provided.

Keywords: Conference Proceedings, Knowledge Development, Theory Building.

Introduction

Armstrong (2004) espoused the view that journals are the main source of academic knowledge and has supported this view with empirical research from within the forecasting literature (Armstrong and Pagell, 2003). However, this view potentially ignores the fact that materials such as professional publications, newspapers, industry/governmental reports, and corporate information, may also provide useful “theoretical” information (Rositter, 2004; Uncles, 2003). For example, some marketing academics have suggested that conference proceedings play a key role in knowledge development similar to journals (Baumgarter and Pieters, 2003; Fugate and Milliman, 1988; Zinkhan et al., 1990).

Journal ranking studies have identified that conference proceedings are “important” publication outlets. For example, Baumgarter and Pieters (2003) found that the Advanced in Consumer Research (ACR) proceedings were ranked 6th and American Marketing Association (AMA) proceedings were ranked 23rd, Theoharakis and Hirst (2002) found that the ACR proceedings were ranked 17th worldwide, and Hult et al. (1997) found that US academics ranked the ACR proceedings 13th and the AMA proceedings 28th. In all cases these proceedings were ranked higher than a range of other “respected” journals.

There would be little argument that over the past 30+ years marketing practice and research has changed (Brown et al., 1994; Green et al., 2003). Ulrich’s Periodical Guide (2004) identified there are 100 Academic and Scholarly journals with marketing as their key focus. Only nine of these existed in 1970, 39 started between 1970-1989 and between 1990 and 2000 a further 41 journals came into existence. Academics therefore have an increasing number of journals to publish in and to draw ideas from. This makes conference proceedings rankings within journals more impressive, with proceedings being cited in leading marketing journals (Anderson and Haley, 1984; Zinkhan et al., 1990).

The objective of this paper is to look at what sources (i.e. references) are used within the leading academic journals (JM, JMR, JCR) today, with comparisons made to previous studies.
in marketing (Anderson and Haley, 1984) and the forecasting area (Armstrong and Pagell, 2003). The paper will conclude with some suggestions for future research examining the impact of journals on the development of academic knowledge in marketing.

Background

The role of conferences, books and professional publications in the development of knowledge is not extensively discussed within the literature, although some have suggested that conferences serve a critical function in knowledge development (Fugate and Milliman, 1988; Holbrook and Thayer, 1985; Zinkhan et al. 1990). This view is consistent with the philosophy of science literature that suggests knowledge develops by building on existing ideas, where theory is continually re-examined in an attempt to improve theory (Fuller, 2003). Some would suggest that the replication of existing research is essential for knowledge to develop (Berthon et al., 2002). Marketing academics also suggest that the meaningful development of knowledge builds on previous work (see Rossiter, 2004, 2003 & 2001; Uncles, 2002), including conference presentations (Fugate and Milliman, 1988; Zinkhan et al., 1990).

Interestingly, some journal editors also recognise that the presentation and discussion of ideas outside journals, for example at conferences, is essential for works to be developed to a publishable level (Wittink 2004). Yet there appears to be limited explicit “recognition” of this potential value of conferences proceedings to knowledge development (Armstrong and Pagell, 2003). While citation rates of conferences proceedings in journals might possibly be low in comparison to journals, does this reflect a limited intellectual value? Might published works only intellectually evolve with the assistance of presentations of ideas at conferences, where authors are forced to focus these ideas, integrate or at least consider alternative perspectives as well as defend their thinking (Fugate and Milliman, 1988; Zinkhan et al., 1990)?

Conferences may also play a key role in academics professional and personal development, but this issue is also infrequently discussed in the literature (Fugate and Milliman, 1988). While other roles may also be important for conference attendance, these roles are not examined in this paper.

Table 1: Summary of results for 1975-1982 from Anderson and Haley (1984)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>JMR</th>
<th>JM</th>
<th>JCR</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total References</td>
<td>12480 (100%)</td>
<td>8499 (100%)</td>
<td>10438 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number from non-Proceedings (%)</td>
<td>11721 (93.92%)</td>
<td>8138 (95.75%)</td>
<td>9670 (92.64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number from Proceedings (%)</td>
<td>759 (6.08%)</td>
<td>363 (4.27%)</td>
<td>768 (7.36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number ACR references (of all proceedings citations)</td>
<td>261 (34.39%)</td>
<td>88 (24.24%)</td>
<td>384 (50.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number AMA references (of all proceedings citations)</td>
<td>202 (26.61%)</td>
<td>116 (31.96%)</td>
<td>173 (22.53%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While not published in journals, there are several papers appearing in conference proceedings that examine the issues related to the attendance of conferences and how this has changed over time (For example, Fisk et al., 2002 and Swift et al., 1997), similar to studies that have been undertaken in regards to journal publishing (For example, Cheng et al., 2003 and Helm et al., 2003). Another piece by Anderson and Haley (1984) explicitly examined conference
proceedings citation record in the JM, JCR and JMR (See Table 1 for a summary). This identified that between 1975 and 1982 the percentage of citations from conference proceedings was JM- 4.27%, JMR – 6.08% and JCR – 7.36% of all materials cited, with the ARC being the most cited conference proceeding.

Zinkhan et al. (1990) also examined citations of the ARC proceedings in journals and identified that the ACR has made a substantial impact on a range of journals and that between 1983 and 1987, with ACR, JCR, JMR, JM and JA all included more than 80 citations to the ACR works, which is consistent with Anderson and Haley (1984). Zinkhan et al. (1990), however go further by also discussing the general importance of conferences to knowledge development, which is not widely discussed in other literature, although Holbrook and Thayer (1985) also briefly refer to this issue.

Method

Given the exploratory nature of this research, the main objective is to identify the present citation behaviour in regards to alternative materials (i.e. non-journals). A content analysis of the citations in the four issues of JM, JMR and JCR published in 2003 (i.e. 12 issues in total) was undertaken. Works were categorised as journals, books, book chapters, proceedings/ conference papers, newspaper/professional magazine, and other.

An examination of the number of materials cited in JM, JMR and JCR in 1970, 1989 and 2003 was undertaken to identify general trends in these “major” published works. Citation rates across these three years were evaluated for each journal, by aggregating the number of references across the four issues published in 2003 as reported in the Business Premier database. Average citation rates per article for each journal were also calculated, excluding book reviews, editorials, etc.

Z-tests were undertaken to compare the citation rate for each relevant category type to the previous results of Armstrong and Pagell (2003) and Anderson and Haley (1984). It is suggested that the increasing number of journals, would result in the proportions of citations coming from proceedings and conference papers should decrease, as authors have a broader range of resources to draw upon and the increased number of journals are also easier to access because of full-text databases.

Analysis and discussion

Table 2 provides a summary of; number of articles, total citations and average citations per article for the JM, JMR and JCR in 1970, 1989 and 1993 (1975 was used as the first year for JCR). These years were selected to correspond to those examined in regards to the number of marketing focused journals, i.e. pre 1970, 1970-1989 and 1990+, discussed previously.

Table 2: Papers and citations in JMR, JM, and JCR over three selected years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>JMR</th>
<th>JM</th>
<th>JCR</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Papers</td>
<td>Refs (avg)</td>
<td>Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970*</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>964 (13.6)</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1288 (31.4)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1603 (47.1)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* 1975 is used for JCR, as it only started in 1994

The number of articles in each journal appears to have varied over time. Interestingly the number of papers published has reduced by half in JMR and JM since 1970, where as JCR numbers have increased. In regards to citations it is interesting to note that in the “early years” of JM and JMR there were several papers that did not include any references. This may relate to the limited existing literature base during the 70’s or the journal’s more applied focus (Wittink, 2004). Across journals the average number of references per article has increased over the three periods and is nearly double to what it was in 1970. This may relate to the increased number of journals, but might also relate to the fact that full-text databases also allow individuals to access a wider sample of journals more easily (Bar-Ilan et al., 2003; Herring, 2002). Thus, one might expect that the number of references to conference papers would have since decreased.

The second phase of the analysis involved manually evaluating all references cited within JM, JMR and JCR in 2003, categorising these as Journals, Books, Book Chapters, Proceedings/Conference papers, Newspapers/Professional Magazines, and Others. There were 5753 references in the 111 academic articles. Materials were classified by one researcher and then checked by another researcher, with discrepancies clarified by referring to Ulrich Publication Guide (2004).

Table 3 reports the percentages of various types of materials cited in the four issues of JM, JMR and JCR published in 2003. The results from Armstrong and Pagell (2003) and Anderson and Haley (1984) are also provided. Z-test comparisons are undertaken for proportions of proceeding citations in 2003 as compared to Anderson and Haley (1984) for each journal as well as the aggregate sets of journals. Comparisons are also made for the individual material categories reported by Armstrong and Pagell (2003).

Table 3: Comparison of Materials Cited- This Study (2003), Anderson and Haley 1984 (A&H) and Armstrong and Pagell 2003 (A&P).

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
<td>95.9%</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>6%#</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proceedings &amp; Conferences</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers Professional</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>3.1% (5.2%)</td>
<td>3%#</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of refs</td>
<td>1603</td>
<td>12480</td>
<td>2042</td>
<td>8499</td>
<td>2108</td>
<td>10438</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Anderson and Haley reported citations by conference and non-conference. Non-conference results are reported as “journals” in Table 3. Z-tests where undertaken on the aggregated non-conference categories for our data.
# z-tests of category proportions statistically significant at the .000 level or greater; between this study and A&H (each journal and total); and this study and A&P.

The journal specific comparisons identify that there are statistically significant differences (P< .000) in the use of citations in all three journals between 2004 and 1975-1982, and there was a decline in the percentage of citations to conference proceedings. A comparison of the overall usage of citations to proceedings by these three journals in 2003, with aggregate finds
of Anderson and Haley (1984) identifies the same statistical difference. That is fewer proceedings are referred to today then they have been in the past. This may relate to the increased number of publications that exists today as compared to 1975-1982. However, it could be suggested that proceedings are now also cited in a wider set of journals (Zinkhan et al., 1990) and thus their contribution is therefore spread across journals. Alternatively, proceedings may serve as a “first draft” of the paper, which directly results in a publication.

Comparisons for the individual categories - 2003 to Armstrong and Pagell (2003)- identify statistical significant differences across all categories (Journal, Books/Chapters, Proceedings/Conferences and others sources). Marketing literature cites conference proceedings, books/book chapters and other (newspaper/other), statistically more frequently than in the forecasting literature, and marketing literature draws on journals statistically less frequently.

This would seem to suggest that marketing academics draw on a broader set of materials than do those in these other areas. The higher level of citation of books, chapters and newspapers/professional materials in marketing literature is also worth noting (as are differences in citation rates within the three journals). Future research might examine how these materials are being used within the literature to better understand their impact on knowledge. For example, are books primarily used to deal with methodological issues? Are popular materials used to support theoretical findings, or are they used to develop background discussions?

**Conclusions**

The results suggest that conference works appear to be cited less frequently today in JM, JMR and JCR than they were in 1975-1982 and conference works are also cited more frequently in marketing literature than in the forecasting literature. While, this might seem to suggest these materials contribute less to knowledge development, the number of marketing focused journals has more than doubled since 1982 and thus the citations of proceedings should have potentially fallen even further.

The fact that an increasing number of conferences give authors the opportunity to publish an abstract rather than a full paper might lower the dissemination of material presented at conferences. This would further reduce the ability of others to “refer” to these unpublished ideas and works. It would seem that the accessibility to material published in proceedings is generally lower than journals. That is, many institutions do not hold proceedings in their libraries as frequently as they hold journals (Polonsky et al., 1999). There also seems to be a smaller “market” for individuals to purchase conference proceedings. The role of technology could potentially assist in the dissemination of conference works (Bar-Ilan et al., 2003; Herring, 2002), if these materials are available in full text either through sponsoring organisation’s web pages or through other databases. For example, the ACR proceedings are available in both formats. This might explain why the ACR proceedings have been found in this study and others (Zinkhan et al., 1990) to be the most cited conference proceeding in marketing journals.

The importance of conferences in academic life is something that generally warrants further research (Fugate and Milliman, 1988). While this paper examined whether conference papers were cited in published works there is extensive opportunity to look at how conference presentations contribute to the overall development of theory, research and knowledge.
Existing research does not consider the impact of sharing ideas at conferences, which occurs at various levels - reviewer’s reports, discussant’s comments, audience input, stimulation from ideas in other papers (Fugate and Milliman, 1988; Holbrook and Thayer, 1985; Zinkhan et al., 1990). In addition, two presenters may see links in their work and progress forward through collaborative partnerships. Such developments would not potentially be possible without having conferences to stimulate intellectual discourse. As such, there is an extensive opportunity to explore the role of conferences both from the perspective of knowledge development and social development.

References


