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The good practices manifesto: Overcoming bad practices pervasive in current research in business[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Under the “Metrics” link, Google.com/scholar ranks the top twenty journals by impact in 16 subcategories of “business, economics, and management” (e.g., accounting and taxation, economics, finance, marketing, strategic management, tourism and hospitality). This editorial describes bad practices appearing in the majority of published articles in the twenty leading journals within all of these 16 subcategories. Unfortunately, bad practices appear in most articles in the *Journal of Business Research*—even though the *JBR* is first in marketing and seventh in strategic management in the Google journal h5 impact rankings. Most of the articles in most of the journals in finance, management, marketing, and organizational studies include empirical positivistic methods and findings—and each of these empirical articles likely includes three-to-ten or more bad practices that this editorial describes. The editorial includes how to design-in good practices in theory, data collection procedures, analysis, and interpretations to avoid these bad practices. Given that bad practices in research are ingrained in the career training of scholars in sub-disciplines of business/management (e.g., through reading articles exhibiting bad practices usually without discussions of the severe weaknesses in these studies and by research courses stressing the use of regression analysis and structural equation modeling), this editorial is likely to have little impact. However, scholars and executives supporting good practices should not lose hope. The relevant literature includes a few brilliant contributions that can serve as beacons for eliminating the current pervasive bad practices and for performing highly competent research.

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1. Introduction: moving away from bad practices in research toward constructing useful theory and doing useful research

Across several decades several scholars (Inman, 2012; Lutz, 1991; Mick, 2006; Pham, 2013; Sheth, 1982; Wells, 1993) bemoan the low relevancy/impact of most articles in the leading journals in marketing and consumer research. The number of citations in the literature is the stable proxy for both relevancy and impact. Though scholarly, empirical, journal articles do appear that have high impact but low usefulness, and vice versa, most articles high in impact also have high usefulness. In a study of the impact of articles appearing during 2004–8 in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, Pham (2013, p. 412) reports that “very few articles—less than 10%—get very well cited, and the vast majority—roughly 70%—hardly ever get cited. In other words, the vast majority of the research that gets published, even in our top journals—perhaps 70% of it—hardly has any measurable scholarly impact in terms of citations.” Consequently, Pham (2013, p. 412) describes

“seven sins of consumer psychology” as “the roots of our relevancy shortcomings.” However, Pham’s (2013) proposal of seven sins in journal articles do not get to the roots of the low impact of most articles in ranked journals. The present article reframes, broadens, and deepens the discussion of the lack of relevancy/impact of the *JCR* and most (likely all) journals related to the business sub-disciplines. Rather than low relevancy, the claim here is that the deeper issue is the pervasive use of bad research practices appearing in most articles in most of these journals and all journals related to the sub-disciplines of business/management research.

With the objective of reducing the high volume of bad practices in research, this essay offers propositions for improving theory construction and empirical testing of theory especially by early to mid-career scholars in the sub-disciplines of business/management. Here is a brief summary of four of these propositions. (1) Most articles appearing in most of the ranked (i.e., A*, A, B, and C rankings in the ABDC, 2013 listings) journals of the business/management sub-disciplines exhibit 3+ bad practices in theory construction and research procedures. (2) The use of bad practices contributes to the low usefulness/relevancy/impact of most of the articles appearing in the leading the journals. (3) The prevalence of bad practices is likely a result of the training focus of doctoral students that is almost exclusively on the use of symmetric tests

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(e.g., regression analysis including structural equation models of collecting verbal responses to 5 and 7 point scaled questions) and the reading of literature exhibiting a plethora of bad practices. (4) Additional training and planning are possible to avoid the use of bad practices and embrace the use of good practices; early to mid-career scholars should do both: train and plan to adopt readily available but ignored good practices.

This editorial describes 18 bad practices prevalent in the sub-disciplines of business/management; most of bad practices appear pervasively among most articles among the ranked journals. A summary of the 18 bad (and good) practices appears in Table 1. The discussion of each bad practice includes suggestions of steps useful to take to avoid or eliminate such practices. The references in the discussion are particularly useful sources for learning how to avoid bad practices in business/management-related research and how to embrace good practices. The list and discussion of bad practices is incomplete; discussion of research by scholars “breaking bad” in a few studies may help decrease your use of bad practices and increase your use of good research practices. This essay does not include the accusation that many scholars seek to use bad practices purposively in designing and implementing their studies; the lack of training and the mental stance of asking what is bad and good practices are likely to be principal causes of the current domination of bad practices.

Recipes of antecedents to using bad practices are likely to include combinations of the following features: lack of experience (most scholars submitting most papers are likely to submit twenty or fewer studies based on completing twenty different data files in their lifetimes); lack of training beyond building and testing theories centering on the net effects of independent variables on a single dependent variable; modeling their own research behavior by reading published studies exhibiting several bad practices; and having zero to very limited exposures to the relevant literature on adopting good practices in behavioral/business research (e.g., here are some primary sources that

include exceptional insights and advice for designing and implementing good practices in research and data analysis: Armstrong, 2012; Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Dillman et al., 2014; Eskin & Baron, 1977; Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Gigerenzer & Brighton, 2009; Golder, 2000; Howard & Morgenroth, 1968; Levitt & List, 2007; McClelland, 1998; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Ordanini, Parasuraman, & Rubera, 2014; Ragin, 2008; Sawyer & Ball, 1981; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002; Whyte, 1984).

2. A profile of bad practices appearing in most journal manuscript submissions

Most submissions to the *JBR* (and likely other leading journals in the sub-disciplines of business/management) include several to all of the following features:

- a theory construction representable by boxes and arrows that focuses on proposing and testing net effects of two to twenty variables and a few moderating and mediating relationships on a single dependent variable or series of separate dependent variables
- an empirical study focusing exclusively on findings of a survey asking some sample of persons to complete 5-point and/or 7-point (verbal response) scales
- asking one person per unit (e.g., firm, household, near government organization) to complete the survey
- a useable response rate between 5 and 30%
- no presentation of correlations of items in scales and between scales representing variables
- the presentation of multiple regression analysis via stepwise or structural equation models (or a structural equation model, SEM) of findings of significant paths
- a report of findings emphasizing the net effects of terms in one or a few regression models having a few significant plus a few non-

Table 1
Recognizing and shifting away from the bad practices pervasive in research in business.

Topic/issue	Bad practice	Good practice	Shifting to good
1. Theory to data analysis/ type of models/“controlling”	Mismatch/ex ante modeling/ controlling by adding terms into regression models	Match/a priori modeling/controlling by examining different recipes	Case ID theory and case ID data analysis/no use of stepwise regression analysis
2. Validation	Testing fit validation only	Testing for fit and predictive validity	Test for predictive validity with additional samples
3. Contrarian cases	Ignore	Recognize and model	For continuous variables, create quintiles and crosstabs
4. Reporting findings	Using t, p, F, r, R ²	Reporting consistency and displaying XY plots	Compute consistency and show XY plots
5. Focus of findings	Net effects of variables	Recipes of antecedent conditions	Construct and test predictive accuracy of recipes
6. Type of data/ response metrics	Verbal self-reports only/ 5- and 7-point scales to measure processes	Observation and non-obtrusive methods/natural responses	Direct research—getting into the context; triangulation
7. Study of dynamics	No, cross-sectional study	Yes, longitudinal study	Collect data across 2 to 20+ time periods
8. Persons interviewed per firm, household, unit	One	Two to three	Interview 3 separately and examine and segment by answer consistencies
9. Useable share of respondents	5% to 30%	50% plus	Use four attempts to reach respondents, apply Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014) tenets
10. Measuring non-response bias	Compare demographics of early versus late respondents	Compare attitudes, brand involvement, and use of early versus late respondents	Cross tabulate attitude/behaviors by responses for each contact attempt
11. Type of modeling/recognition of causal asymmetry tenet	Symmetric only/no recognition of tenet	Asymmetric modeling separately of high and low outcomes	Estimate asymmetric models for high score and low score cases separately
12. Experimental control group	Use a nocebo control	Use a placebo control	Ask, “What ‘sugar pill’ am I using?”
13. Mushy variables	Using scale responses as surrogates to measure processes and outcomes	Observe real-life processes; create field experiments	Read Ariely (2010) as well as Levitt and List (2007) to stimulate your creativity
14. Outcome description/explanation of behavior-context	Little to none	Rich, nitty-gritty, details	Do “direct research”
15. Outcomes	One dependent/outcome variable	Recipe outcomes	Report on conjunctive outcomes
16. Hypothesis testing	Advocacy hypothesis	Multiple hypothesis	Design/perform critical tests
17. Modeling/forecasting	Create inductively using stepwise regression	A priori modeling using theory	Use thought experiments; do not use stepwise regressions
18. Replication of findings	No replication built into study	Replication/extension in the study	Use/test two separate samples; test in multiple contexts

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