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From academic research to marketing practice: Exploring the marketing science value chain[☆]

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ABSTRACT

We aim to investigate the impact of marketing science articles and tools on the practice of marketing. This impact may be direct (e.g., an academic article may be adapted to solve a practical problem) or indirect (e.g., its contents may be incorporated into practitioners' tools, which then influence marketing decision making). We use the term "marketing science value chain" to describe these diffusion steps, and survey marketing managers, marketing science intermediaries (practicing marketing analysts), and marketing academics to calibrate the value chain. In our sample, we find that (1) the impact of marketing science is perceived to be largest on decisions such as the management of brands, pricing, new products, product portfolios, and customer/market selection, and (2) tools such as segmentation, survey-based choice models, marketing mix models, and pre-test market models have the largest impact on marketing decisions. Exemplary papers from 1982 to 2003 that achieved *dual* – academic and practice – impact are Guadagni and Little (1983) and Green and Srinivasan (1990). Overall, our results are encouraging. First, we find that the impact of marketing science has been largest on marketing decision areas that are important to practice. Second, we find moderate alignment between academic impact and practice impact. Third, we identify antecedents of practice impact among dual impact marketing science papers. Fourth, we discover more recent trends and initiatives in the period 2004–2012, such as the increased importance of big data and the rise of digital and mobile communication, using the marketing science value chain as an organizing framework.

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1. Introduction

Does marketing science research affect marketing practice? Which decisions have marketing science articles supported? To which tools has marketing science contributed? Which marketing science articles have had dual impact on both science and practice? These are key questions that we address in this paper. We define *marketing science* as the development and use of quantifiable concepts and quantitative tools to understand marketplace behavior and the effect of marketing activity upon it. From this definition, one would consider it reasonable for marketing scientists to seek impact on marketing practice, i.e., seek relevance.

However, marketing scientists have recently rekindled the age-old debate on rigor versus relevance. On the one hand, marketing science

has been very successful in attracting scholars from other fields such as economics, statistics, econometrics and psychology. This inflow of talented scientists from other fields has clearly added to the rigor of marketing science and has allowed the development of new techniques. On the other hand, a number of academic scholars have recently called for more emphasis to be placed on the application of marketing science to industry problems, rather than rigor per se (e.g., Lehmann, McAlister, & Staelin, 2011; Lilien, 2011; Reibstein, Day, & Wind, 2009). Such application may also show positive returns to firms. Germann, Lilien, and Rangaswamy (2013) find that increasing analytics deployment by firms leads to an improvement in their return on assets.

Despite the importance of this debate for our field and the strong interest in the drivers of academic impact (e.g., see Stremersch & Verhoef, 2005; Stremersch, Verniers, & Verhoef, 2007), empirical examination of the impact of marketing science on practice is rare. Valuable exceptions are Bucklin and Gupta (1999), Cattin and Wittink (1982), Wittink and Cattin (1989), and Wittink, Vriens, and Burhenne (1994). However, their application areas were narrow. Wittink and his colleagues studied the commercial use of conjoint analysis in North America and Europe, while Bucklin and Gupta studied the usage of scanner data and the models that scholars have developed to analyze them. Other scholars

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have conceptually reviewed the impact of marketing science and prescribed areas in which marketing science might have an impact in the future. In a special issue of the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Leeflang and Wittink (2000) summarized the areas in which marketing science has been used to inform management decisions. Roberts (2000) acknowledged the breadth of marketing science applications, but lamented the depth of penetration of marketing science (i.e., the proportion of management decisions informed by marketing science models). Lilien, Roberts, and Shankar (2013) take an applications-based approach to best practice. However, there has been no broad systematic investigation of which marketing science articles and tools have been applied, the decisions that these concepts and tools have informed, and the perceptions of different stakeholders of the usefulness of marketing science in informing decisions. We aim to address this void.

We develop the concept of the *marketing science value chain*, which captures the diffusion of insights from academic articles in a direct (e.g., from article to practice) or indirect (e.g., from article to marketing science tool to practice) manner. We survey the primary agents in this value chain – marketing managers, marketing science intermediaries (marketing analysts), and marketing academics – to calibrate the practice impact of marketing science in all its facets.

2. Methodology

2.1. The framework: The marketing science value chain

An important step in our methodology is a conceptualization of the marketing science value chain. Our representation of this chain, illustrated in Fig. 1, depicts activities (full arrows) by which marketing science is translated from academic knowledge to practical tools, and

thence to marketing action, as well as the participants involved in the chain.

First, new knowledge (marketing science *articles*) is developed, often but not always, by marketing academics.¹ Second, knowledge conversion occurs when new knowledge in articles is adapted and integrated into practical *tools and approaches*, often but again not always, by marketing intermediaries, such as market research agencies (e.g. ACNielsen or GfK), marketing and strategy consultancies (e.g., McKinsey or Bain), specialist niche marketing consulting firms (e.g. Advanis or Simon-Kucher Partners), or the marketing science division of a marketing organization (e.g. Novartis or General Mills). Third, knowledge application occurs when marketing managers implement marketing science knowledge via practical tools to make *marketing decisions*.

While we contend in Fig. 1 that marketing intermediaries play a critical role in the diffusion process, we allow for a direct path as well (dis-intermediation). For example, marketing academics may work directly with marketing managers to have their tools adopted (marketing science push) or a firm's internal analysts may actively seek out solutions to address the firm's specific problems (marketing science pull). Alternatively, the locus of conceptual innovation may fall further down the value chain (user innovation). Moreover, diffusion may occur through routes other than through intermediaries (for example, via specialist books such as Lilien, Kotler, & Moorthy, 1992; Wierenga & van Bruggen, 2000, and Lilien, Rangaswamy, & De Bruyn, 2007 or general texts such as Kotler & Keller, 2012). In other words, the “direct” influence in Fig. 1 may include a number of further sub-stages that we do not explicitly identify or calibrate.

2.2. The elements: Decisions, tools and articles

In Fig. 1, we identify three core elements in the marketing science value chain: decisions, tools, and articles. Selection of stimuli in each of these elements is a critical part of our methodology, especially considering the scope of our study. Not only have thousands of marketing articles been published across many journals, but marketing managers make decisions to solve marketing problems in a wide variety of areas (pricing, promotions, sales force management, etc.), using a considerable range of marketing science tools (segmentation tools, choice models, etc.) to assist in that decision making. To make our calibration practically feasible, we decided to limit the three sets of stimuli to 12 decision areas, 12 marketing science tools, and 20 marketing science articles. We decided on these limits iteratively, by trading off the need for a comprehensive classification of the decisions, tools, and articles against the time required for respondents to react to the stimuli. In Section 3.5 we discuss the dynamics of these three elements.

2.2.1. Decisions

Marketing decisions refer to the choice of management actions regarding any part of the firm's marketing activity. To categorize marketing decisions, we followed a four-step procedure. First, we examined subject areas used at the major marketing journals and in leading marketing management textbooks. Second, we integrated and synthesized these lists to create an exhaustive inventory. Third, we aggregated the different decision areas into higher order categories, to create a manageable number. Finally, we tested our list with practicing managers and the Executive Committee of the Marketing Science Institute, and refined it based on their feedback. Our final list of marketing decision areas is:

1. *Brand management*: Developing, positioning and managing existing brands.

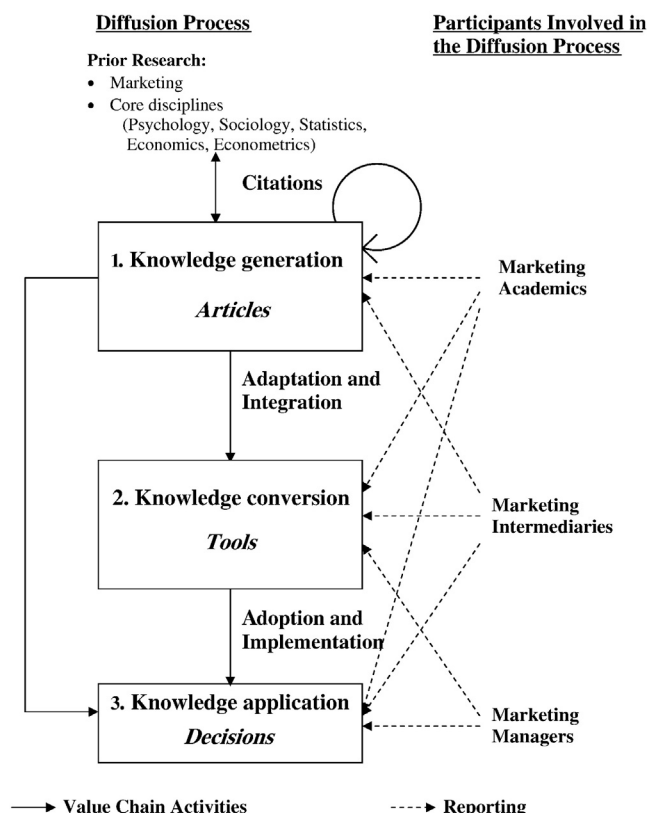


Fig. 1. The marketing science value chain.

¹ For example, a study of *Marketing Science* over the period 1982–2003 shows that of 1072 article authors, 1001 of them were academics (93.4%). Authors with multiple articles are counted as many times as they have (co-)authored an article.

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