



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Australasian Marketing Journal

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/amj

Making progress in marketing research

Robert East ^{a,*}, Lawrence Ang ^b^a Kingston Business School, London and Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, UNISA, Adelaide, 19, Archibald Road, London, N7 0AN, UK^b Macquarie University, Sydney, NSW 2109, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 October 2017

Accepted 31 October 2017

Available online 22 November 2017

Keywords:

Insight

Scientific progress

Survey

Experiment

ABSTRACT

Progress in any subject requires the origination of theoretical ideas. Often, new theoretical ideas are derived from unpredicted findings. Some methods, such as surveys, yield more unpredicted findings compared to experiments and too great an emphasis on testing theories by experiment may therefore lead to fewer new ideas. We argue that researchers in marketing and other social sciences should give more consideration to methods that produce large amounts of evidence; by doing so, they may speed up the development of their subject.

© 2017 Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

CHINESE ABSTRACT

任何学科进步都需要理论思想的出现。通常，新的理论思想来自不可预测的发现。与实验相比，某些方法，例如调查问卷，能够产生更多不可预测的发现。因此，过于注重使用实验来检验理论，可能会阻碍新思想的诞生。我们认为营销和其他社会科学研究人员应该更多地考虑能够产生大量实证的方法；这种做法能够加速学科发展与进步。

© 2017 Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. How does marketing research progress?

In the social sciences, much attention has been given to the status of theories and how these theories should be tested (e.g., Kuhn, 1962; Popper, 1980; Wilkinson, 2013; Kenworthy and Sparks, 2016; Yadav, 2010). Rather less attention is directed to the genesis of these theories. How do new ideas come into the minds of researchers in the first place? What helps or hinders this creative thinking? Let us start by admitting that much scientific activity is not that creative. Many of our findings rest on the application of established thinking but, occasionally, we get evidence that raises questions about widely held beliefs and practices or suggests an answer to a persisting problem. Such findings may redirect our work and we need to foster the circumstances that create this sort of outcome.

What will assist the production of new theoretical ideas? One way of exploring the origin of these ideas is to look at the scientists themselves: what drives these researchers? How do they conduct themselves? This has been done by Sternberg et al. (2016) but their account tends to focus on the individual traits of the behavioural scientists they studied and these are not easily modified or emulated, which limits the change that is possible via this route. Another approach could focus on the social aspect. Research is usually conducted collaboratively with fellow researchers.

Thus, if we ask how new thinking came about, the answer often relates to interactions with others within the social setting in which science is performed. The multiple authorship of many papers suggests that new ideas prosper in an interactive context but we also note that some of the greatest contributors to science acted individually (e.g., Newton, Darwin and Einstein), so this matter is not clear cut. We can also look at the established practices governing science – how can the reviewing process be improved, for example? Reviewers are often strongest on the methodological aspects of research and may not understand the new ideas or attach enough importance to them when they do understand. In contrast to such approaches, our focus is quite narrow. After a discussion of what is involved in idea generation, and noting that new ideas are often generated by new data, we look at the data yield provided by two different methods: experiments and surveys. We argue that we should invest more effort in methods that produce large amounts of data because it is here that new findings may emerge that require a new explanation. We suggest that survey work is undervalued as a source of new ideas in social science.

2. Testing new ideas

In marketing, many factors may operate at the same time to produce outcomes; in this respect, it belongs with other social sciences, and subjects such as biology, medical research and environmental sciences. This means that an explanation for an effect may be partial and prediction may be uncertain. In contrast, there are

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: R.East@kingston.ac.uk (R. East).

cases in the physical sciences where new theories are dramatically confirmed by classic experiments and observations. For example, in physics, Einstein predicted how much light would bend as it passed through the gravitational field of the Sun. His calculations of the deflection angle from a straight-line path were verified in an observational study of the solar eclipse in May 1919 (Kenefick, 2009). More recently, the gravitational waves predicted by Einstein's general theory of relativity were detected on September 14, 2015 in two large-scale experimental physics observatories in Washington State and Louisiana, USA. This was hailed as a triumphant confirmation of Einstein's theory (Conover, 2016).

In the social sciences, such crucial tests are hard to find. Because many factors may be at work to produce an outcome, the effect of one factor may be small. Sometimes, there is no theory to test; instead we have a problem to solve or are simply curious, and for some practical purposes we may be content to establish facts such as the relative purchasing power of different population segments. But in marketing research, we look for explanations. For example, why does the long-term effect of advertising relate to the short-term effect? Why are certain factors associated with the impact of recommendation? Sometimes these explanations rest on simple relationships; at other times, they may be cast as a formal theory. So, we have findings, their possible explanations, the testing of these (competing) explanations and subsequent evaluation which may give rise to more ideas and tests. In this rolling process, the generation of new ideas is essential.

3. Forming new ideas

Two types of new idea can be identified. First, we have *insights* that allow us to reframe our thinking in a new way. Such insights may arise from a single odd finding, strange association, or contrary result which does not fit existing thinking. Second, and perhaps more commonly, we *recognise* that an already established solution can be applied to a problem. In practice, it may be hard to say whether a new idea is a case of insight or recognition since some applications of existing thinking involve considerable imagination. These processes, insight and recognition, are the means whereby we identify research questions, make sense of unfamiliar findings and sometimes see new ways of investigating a problem. Nisbett and Wilson (1977) have pointed out that the mental mechanisms giving rise to insights are not directly accessible: we know that we have had a new idea but are not conscious of how we came to think it. This means that we must study such processes indirectly, by looking at the circumstances associated with them.

Of the two processes, insights particularly interest us because these seem most likely to redirect research in a major way. In the physical sciences, the insights of intellectual giants such as Newton, Darwin, Einstein, Lavoisier and Maxwell opened new fields of inquiry and changed the conduct of their discipline. How do insights emerge? Wallas (1926) proposed a four-fold model of the creative process: *preparation, incubation, illumination* and *verification*. We are doubtful about this neat order of phases and suspect that *illumination* (insight, recognition) is more distributed but *preparation* in Wallas' classification does suggest that there is often a period of assembling and reviewing the available evidence. To ground this discussion, we review cases where major advances in our understanding of marketing and psychology have been made, and consider how such breakthroughs came about. If we can show how our subject advances in practice, we may be able to stimulate such advance by focusing on methods that are associated with progress. To reflect the irregular pattern of new understanding, we include one case (relationship marketing) where the initial advance has been somewhat checked by contrary findings.

4. Examples

4.1. Stationary markets

One well-established field has been the modelling of near-stationary markets. Most markets are close to stationary and researchers led by Ehrenberg (1988) have shown that individual household purchasing has a near-Poisson pattern while the distribution of average household purchasing is close to a gamma distribution (with many light buying households and few that are heavy buying). Combining these distributions, Ehrenberg showed that aggregated brand purchase was closely predicted by a negative binomial distribution (NBD). This work was extended to all the brands in a category where a Dirichlet distribution was shown to fit. This research started when Andrew Ehrenberg was working in market research and a brand, Cadbury's Drinking Chocolate, seemed to have an unusually high purchase level (Ehrenberg, undated). One idea was that the brand had an excess of heavy buyers. To explore this, attempts were made to model the buying distribution, with the NBD fitting very neatly and showing that there was no excess of heavy buyers.

In this case, insight did not reveal the solution. The NBD was the *second* distribution tested by Ehrenberg; thus, the approach was by trial and error, though by someone who already knew what might work which attests to the importance of the preparation stage in Wallas' model discussed earlier. The fit of the NBD was repeated for other brands and Ehrenberg realised that he had found a pattern with wide application. Reading Ehrenberg's (undated) account of the research in this field, it seems that some original thinking was involved. The most prominent was the extension of the work from the brand to the category (Goodhardt et al., 1984). Ehrenberg (undated) credits his colleagues Chatfield and Goodhardt with the insight that the Dirichlet distribution would model category-level data.

Goodhardt (personal communication) reports two cases of startling findings that forced a reassessment of existing assumptions in this field. The first occurred when he studied TV programmes that were split into two halves and aired at different times. He found that many viewers of the first half failed to see the second half and that their place was taken by others who had not seen the first half. It appeared that the viewing of split programmes had a substantial random component and was thus stochastic to a much greater extent than he had anticipated. In the second case, Goodhardt described the purchase patterns observed in adhesive dressings (e.g., Elastoplast, BandAid). The researchers were interested in measuring the effect of a forthcoming ad campaign and, to induce new purchase in their population sample over the period of the campaign, they bought the adhesive dressings from those that had them (about 60% of the sample). After the advertising campaign, these people were checked to determine their rate of repurchase. To the surprise of the investigators, only about 20% had restocked. They also investigated the 40% who had not previously had a stock of adhesive dressings and found that here too, about 20% had purchased in the interval. These findings led the researchers to a new way of thinking about this market: all households were users but some were out of stock at any one time. Again, there was a strongly stochastic aspect to purchase.

4.2. Heuristic mechanisms

A second example of scientific advance comes from psychology. This is the research on heuristic thinking accumulated by Kahneman et al. (1982) and their many followers. This work, summarised by Kahneman (2012), has focused on the automatic processes in thinking that often displace more rational analysis. There have been some modifications to the interpretation of evidence in

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7431496>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7431496>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)