

Musings on Relevance and Rigor of Scholarly Research in Marketing

P. Rajan Varadarajan

Texas A&M University

Questions pertaining to the relevance and rigor (or lack thereof) of scholarly research in business disciplines have been the focus of numerous articles in academic journals (Ruback and Innes 1988; Shrivastava 1987; Thomas and Tymon 1982; Wells 1993a) and commentaries in the business press (Byrne 1990; Jennings 1994). Assessments of academic research in the business disciplines that have appeared in the business press have been particularly critical, characterizing most published research as lacking managerial relevance. Business school professors are often exhorted to engage in managerially relevant research and chastised for pursuing research endeavors that apparently lack such relevance (Byrne 1990; Jennings 1994).¹

During the past several years, I have had the opportunity to serve on a number of panel sessions on the relevance and rigor of scholarly research in marketing in venues such as the conferences of the Academy of Marketing Science, the American Marketing Association, and the Academy of International Business.² The "Meet the Editors" sessions regularly held at these conferences have been another forum at which questions relating to relevance and rigor of scholarly research in marketing have often surfaced. My review of selected published works on this topic and participation in these forums have sensitized me to a number of issues in this debate, chief among them being the following:

- The tendency among some to view relevance as being more important than rigor. Such views are often manifested in researchers being exhorted to pay greater attention to the managerial relevance of their work, even at the cost of forsaking some degree of rigor.
- The tendency among some to view relevance of scholarly research in business disciplines solely in

terms of managerial relevance, oblivious to other facets of relevance and constituencies for these facets.

- For the most part, the ongoing debate on the relevance and rigor of scholarly research in business disciplines has been at the level of individual research studies. I believe that the impediments to our collective quest toward greater relevance and rigor of scholarly research in marketing at the aggregate disciplinary level also merit attention.

In this editorial, I would like to share some of my thoughts on the above issues relating to the relevance and rigor of scholarly research in marketing.

RELEVANCE AND RIGOR

Relevance

Ruback and Innes (1988), commenting on scholarly research in psychology, noted that relevance of scholarly research to practitioners is a function of (1) the number of policy variables used as predictor variables and (2) the extent to which the dependent variables are of interest to practitioners. Along similar lines, the managerial relevance of scholarly research in business disciplines has been viewed as a function of the extent to which the research focuses on factors that managers can influence and examines effects that are of interest to managers. For instance, Lee (1999) labeled as the *instrumental model of practice* research that entails the formulation, testing, and validation of a theory that specifies independent variables, dependent variables, and the relationships among them. Here, the dependent variables represent outcomes that practitioners are interested in achieving, and the independent variables represent factors that can be manipulated by practitioners. Thomas and Tymon (1982) delineated the following as necessary properties of managerially relevant research:

- *Descriptive relevance*: the accuracy of research findings in capturing phenomena encountered by practitioners in organizational settings
- *Goal relevance*: the correspondence of outcome variables in a theory to factors that practitioners wish to influence
- *Operational validity*: the ability of practitioners to implement action implications of a theory by manipulating its causal variables
- *Nonobviousness*: the degree to which a theory meets or exceeds the complexity of common-sense theory already used by practitioners
- *Timeliness*: the availability of research findings to practitioners in time to use them deal with problems³

From A to Z, practically every topic that is the focus of scholarly research in marketing (e.g., advertising, branding, channels, distribution, e-commerce, franchising, global marketing, innovation, marketing ethics, new product development, pricing, quality, retailing, sales promotion, and strategy) is either integral to the practice of marketing, has public policy implications, or affects society at large. Consequently, as a field of study, marketing offers extensive opportunities for scholars to engage in research that has managerial, public policy, and/or societal relevance. Yet questions and concerns regarding the relevance of scholarly research in marketing persist. Some of the practices currently in vogue for uncovering managerially relevant questions worthy of scholarly research seem to be indicative of a concerted effort to be responsive to such concerns. For instance, the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) arrives at its biannual research priorities by involving both marketing educators and marketing practitioners in the process of identifying research questions deemed worthy of scholarly inquiry.⁴ Likewise, guideposts that have been suggested to ensure that scholarly research in business is managerially relevant are instructive. For instance, it has been suggested that researcher participation and involvement in certain activities can be conducive to the grounding of scholarly research in managerial relevance. They include activities such as case writing, consulting, teaching in executive development programs, participating in practitioner conferences, reading and reflecting on articles published in the business and trade press, and querying managers about questions that in their opinion merit scholarly inquiry (see Benbasat and Zmud 1999; Greyser 1993).⁵

Rigor

Criteria for assessing the rigor of scholarly research in business disciplines have also received considerable attention. Research rigor is construed as encompassing careful design, execution, analysis, interpretation of results, and retention of data (Academy of Management 2002). Zmud

(1996), a former journal editor, characterized rigor as soundness in theoretical and conceptual development, methodological design and execution, interpretation of findings, and use of findings in extending theory or developing new theory. Shrivastava (1987) suggested the following criteria for assessing research rigor:

- *Conceptual adequacy*: the extent to which a research program is grounded in a base discipline and uses a conceptual framework consistent with existing theories in the field
- *Methodological rigor*: the extent to which a research program uses analytical methods and objectively quantifiable data to empirically examine research questions
- *Accumulated empirical evidence*: the extent to which a research program has generated a substantial amount of accumulated empirical evidence supporting it

Evaluative criteria used by journals in marketing, such as listed below, to assess conceptual and methodological rigor also provide valuable insights.

Conceptual Rigor—Quality of Conceptual Development

- Consideration and treatment of relevant literature—concepts and theories
- Attention to definitional issues—precision and clarity of conceptual definitions
- Use of evidence to support position—conceptual reasoning underlying conceptual model and hypotheses
- Objectivity in the treatment of complementing and competing perspectives

Methodological Rigor—Quality of Empirical Research

- Appropriateness and robustness of research design
- Attention to measurement-related issues—construct operationalization, validity, and reliability
- Sample appropriateness, characteristics, and representativeness
- Appropriateness of methods of analysis/statistical procedures
- Accuracy and completeness in the reporting of results and procedures leading to the results
- Reliability and validity of empirical findings

Understandably, some of the evaluative criteria enumerated here for assessing the methodological rigor of research are pertinent only in the context of studies employing quantitative research methods. However, in recent years, a substantial number of manuscripts submitted to marketing journals for review and publication consideration happen to be qualitative methods based or mixed-methods based. In this regard, Woodruff (2003) voiced concern regarding whether manuscripts employing mixed

methods submitted to journals tend to be evaluated mostly on the basis of the rigor of the quantitative portion of the research.

Relevance Versus Rigor: The Tyranny of the "Or"⁶

On occasion, either as a member of a panel session or during one-on-one conversations about scholarly journals in marketing, I have been perturbed by individuals characterizing some journals in marketing as "high on rigor and low on managerial relevance" and others as "high on managerial relevance and low on rigor." Such characterizations are inherently erroneous and counterproductive to the advancement of our discipline. As pointed out by Hunt (2002), the rigor-relevance dichotomy wrongly assumes that research cannot be both rigorous and relevant.⁷ The following quotes by journal editors and other distinguished scholars shed insights into the inherent folly of viewing rigor and relevance of scholarly research as inherently entailing a tradeoff.

On relevance sans rigor:

Quality is a necessity, if *JM* is to achieve its primary objective—the advancement of the science and practice of marketing. Low quality papers, regardless of their relevance, are misleading and can cause more harm than good. Unsubstantiated findings, conclusions with no adequate statistical support, and poorly developed concepts can mislead the reader, and if accepted and acted upon might lead to disastrous results. (Wind 1979:10 [editor, *Journal of Marketing*, 1978-1981])

On rigor sans relevance:

We should not abandon scholarly and rigorous scientific analysis. However, if these efforts result in modeling, explaining, or describing something that is not, then little if any managerial relevance can be extracted from these monumental efforts. (Lusch 1997:2 [editor, *Journal of Marketing*, 1996-1999])

Developing better methods for assessing marketing phenomena is a necessary step towards understanding marketing phenomena. . . . However, the ultimate objective of marketing research is to enable marketing managers and public policy makers use their understanding of marketing phenomena to make more effective marketing decisions. (Weitz 1992:2 [editor, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 1991-1994])

On relevance and rigor:

The fact that we won the award reflects well on the field of finance and shows that rigorous scientific research can have an impact on practice. (Merton 1998:6 [cowinner of 1997 Nobel Memorial Prize for Economic Sciences])

The field of finance is unique among the social sciences in that extremely rigorous theory has very practical applications. (Lo 1998:4 [winner of 1997 Paul Samuelson Award in recognition of outstanding scholarly writing on issues related to lifelong financial security])

A number of marketing journals request reviewers to evaluate manuscripts on the criteria of potential relevance to one or more of the journal's readership segments, such as marketing managers, marketing researchers, marketing educators, and public policy officials. Building on Zaltman, LeMasters and Heffring's (1982) writings on "Being Interesting," *potential relevance* can be construed as the extent to which acting upon the findings reported in a manuscript, if true, would require one or more of the journal's readership segments to alter their beliefs and/or behaviors. The "if true" qualification here implies that any assessment of the potential relevance of a research study must necessarily take into account the rigor of the research reported. A recent commentary by Lehmann (2003), aptly titled "The Relevance of Rigor," is also instructive on this issue.

In addition to the business disciplines, research in a number of other fields is also instructive on this issue. Cases in point include the Green Revolution and space exploration. The Green Revolution is universally credited with alleviating poverty and hunger in developing countries by boosting the agricultural output of food grains through the development of genetically improved varieties of short-stemmed, disease-resistant plants that excel at converting fertilizer and water into high yields. It is inconceivable to envision any dissenting voice concerning the relevance of a research endeavor with the potential to alleviate world hunger by boosting the agricultural output of food grains. However, sans rigor in research, neither the development of genetically improved varieties of short-stemmed, disease-resistant plants that excel at converting fertilizer and water into high yields, nor growth in the agricultural output of food grains would have materialized. An investigation following the loss of contact with the Mars Climate Orbiter on September 23, 1999, led to the conclusion that the orbiter probably burned up as it entered the atmosphere of Mars. The fiasco was traced to a mix-up of English and metric units between the orbiter's operator and the contractor that built it. To even envision "rigor versus relevance" as an issue is inconceivable in reference to *manned* space exploration.

BEYOND MANAGERIAL RELEVANCE: THE EXPANSIVE SCOPE OF MARKETING RELEVANCE

Implicit in some of the assessments that are critical of scholarly research in the business disciplines seems to be

the expectation that by design all scholarly research in business, in addition to meeting the criteria of disciplinary relevance, must also be of managerial relevance. Careful reflection is warranted before one overreacts to such criticisms. As pointed out by Hunt (2002), most marketing practitioners and some marketing academicians tend to perceive the entire scope of marketing to be profit/micro/normative (i.e., the entire domain of marketing to be the analysis and improvement of the decision-making processes of marketers). Marketing relevance, broadly construed, encompasses scholarly research of potential relevance to one or more of the following constituencies:

- Marketing managers—research that makes a contribution to making better marketing decisions in for-profit and not-for-profit organizations
- Marketing researchers—research that makes a contribution to improving the quality of scholarly and applied research in marketing
- Public policy officials—research that is of value to decision makers affiliated with institutions such as the Department of Justice, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Securities and Exchange Commission in the formulation of regulatory policies and legislative initiatives that affect consumer welfare⁸
- Marketing educators and students—research that affects what is taught in the classroom
- Society at large—research on issues of broader societal relevance associated with acquisition, possession, consumption and disposal of products

Even as we acknowledge the importance of managerial relevance in scholarly research in marketing, certain caveats need to be borne in mind. First, construing the managerial relevance of scholarly research in marketing solely in terms of the extent to which it focuses on decision variables that managers can influence and examines outcomes of interest to marketing managers may be restrictive and limiting. Studies that focus neither on actionable decision variables nor on outcome variables of interest to marketing managers can be managerially relevant too. Scholarly research studies that enhance managers' understanding of the organizational and environmental context in which firms operate and make decisions fall in this genre (e.g., research focusing on contextual factors such as the culture of countries in which a multinational firm operates). The potential contribution to marketing knowledge of such research resides in its extending extant theories by providing evidence of moderator variables that hold implications for actionable marketing practice.

Second, as alluded to earlier, in reference to managerial relevance, variants of the phrase "research focusing on decision variables that managers can manipulate *and* outcome variables that managers are interested in" are commonly invoked. However, it is reasonable to assume that

the intended message is "research focusing on decision variables that managers can manipulate *and/or* outcome variables that managers are interested in." In fact, by design, the scope of a large body of research with a measurement focus is often limited to either factors that a decision maker can influence or effects that a decision maker is interested in.

Third, the place of managerial relevance within the broader schema of scholarly research should be borne in mind. As Hunt (2002) pointed out,

First, as members of the academy, we have a responsibility to respect, uphold and abide by the university's core mission, that is, retailing, warehousing, and producing knowledge. Second, we must uphold its "grand compact" with society, that is, in exchange for academic freedom, we must strive for objective knowledge. Third, as a professional discipline we have a responsibility to keep in mind that society is the ultimate client of the knowledge we produce and marketing practitioners are intermediate clients. (P. 58)

The Many Facets of Relevance

In addition to the multifaceted nature of marketing relevance specifically, a number of other more general facets of relevance must also be borne in mind when attempting to make assessments concerning the relevance of scholarly research in marketing. Consider, for instance, the following facets of relevance of scholarly research in general:

- Direct versus indirect relevance
- Latent relevance
- Serendipitous relevance
- Relevance articulated ex-ante by the researcher versus becoming apparent ex-post to the prescient reader
- Immediacy of relevance
- First-order versus second-order relevance
- Breadth of relevance
- Conceptual versus instrumental relevance
- Duration of relevance (enduring versus limited)

A brief elaboration of some of the above facets of relevance follows.

Direct versus indirect relevance. The managerial relevance of a significant body of scholarly research in business tends to be indirect and somewhat removed rather than direct. An exemplar of the distinction between the two is research focusing on measurement of market and marketing-related constructs. For instance, a number of measurement instruments developed by marketing academics such as SERVQUAL, a scale for measuring service quality (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml 1988), and

MARKOR, a scale for measuring market orientation (Kohli, Jaworski, and Kumar 1993), are currently available in the public domain. An indicator of the direct (instrumental) relevance to managers and organizations of measures such as the above is the extent to which they are in use in organizations. In this regard, a fact that should be borne in mind is the indirect contribution of a number of more fundamental scholarly research studies on measurement-related issues that serve as a foundation for the works of authors of scales with more direct (instrumental) managerial/organizational relevance. Indeed, authors of scales of direct instrumental relevance to organizations and managers invariably acknowledge the contributions of the works of authors of measurement models and principles with statements in the following genre:

The procedure employed for development and validation of the scale is in accord with the steps outlined in articles such as Churchill's (1979) "A Paradigm for Developing Better Measures of Marketing Constructs" and Gerbing and Anderson's (1988) "An Updated Paradigm for Scale Development Incorporating Unidimensionality and Its Assessment."

In effect, both scholarly research in marketing of direct relevance to organizations as well as of indirect relevance (i.e., research that serves as a foundation for subsequent research that is of more direct relevance to managers) have the potential to make a contribution to the advancement of marketing thought and practice.

Latent relevance. The notion of latent relevance serves to underscore the inherent challenges that journal editors and reviewers are faced with when striving to make an objective assessment of the magnitude of potential relevance of a research study. The fact that a number of scholarly journals have instituted best paper awards for papers published in their respective journals 5 to 10 years earlier (e.g., the *Journal of Marketing Research* O'Dell Award and the *Journal of Marketing* Sheth Award) attests to the veracity of latent relevance. The following quote from an editorial by a former journal editor points to the inherent challenges in presciently foreseeing the potential impact of a research study:

The editor of any journal cannot ignore that many innovative concepts and techniques, like fresh tea bags in hot water, at first appear colorless and only with time reveal their impact. Hence, an assessment of the long-term impact and relevance of creative thinking in a manuscript may not be apparent in the review process. (Mahajan 1995:iii [editor, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 1994-1997])

Serendipitous relevance. History is replete with instances of the serendipitous relevance of research. The No-

bel laureate Marie Curie, in a lecture she delivered in 1921 about the discovery of radium, noted the following:

But we must not forget that when radium was discovered no one knew that it would prove useful in hospitals. The work was one of pure science. And this is a proof that scientific work must not be considered from the point of view of the direct usefulness of it. It must be done for itself, for the beauty of science, and then there is always the chance that a scientific discovery may become like the radium a benefit for humanity. (P. 2)

Osserman (1999), in his review of a book on cryptography, drew attention to a quote from the book, *A Mathematician's Apology*, by the famous English mathematician G. H. Hardy (1941). Hardy noted, "No discovery of mine has made, or is likely to make, directly or indirectly, for good or ill, the least difference to the amenity of the world" (p. 90-91). Osserman also drew attention to Hardy's characterization of the great bulk of higher mathematics including the theory of numbers as useless.⁹ Reminiscing on this issue in his review of a book on cryptography, Osserman remarked that although number theory did initially seem useless, in 1977, three mathematicians affiliated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology came up with an ingenious method to put it to practical use. According to Osserman, their simple but clever use of a little-known elementary result from number theory evolved into a multi-million-dollar software business with millions of copies of a software program installed on computers worldwide.

Relevance articulated ex-ante by the researcher versus becoming apparent ex-post to the prescient reader. Commenting on the impact of the scholarly contributions of Paul Green, Don Lehmann, a former executive director of the MSI noted,

It is hard to predict when a piece of research will prove useful. For example, when a highly mathematical paper on the axioms of choice appeared in the *Journal of Mathematical Psychology*, few would have known that it foretold the development of conjoint analysis (by Paul Green, one of the first academics involved at MSI). Today, conjoint analysis is one of our most widely accepted research tools for understanding consumer choice. (Lehmann 2002:4)

The following illustration of how developments in other fields often affect phenomena of enduring interest to marketing researchers and practitioners, such as service quality and customer satisfaction, is also instructive on this issue: imagine a customer not even being aware of the fact that his or her credit card has been stolen and is being fraudulently used. Alerted by a neural-network-based software program that compares the most recent use pat-

tern with the customer's historical pattern of credit-card use and suspects fraudulent use, the credit-card company reaches the customer over telephone to inquire as to whether he or she is still in possession of the card. On confirming that the card has indeed been stolen, the credit-card issuer immediately cancels the card to deter further fraudulent use and arranges for a new card to be issued.

Immediacy of relevance. There is often a tendency to make an assessment of the value of a scholarly research study from the standpoint of its potential relevance in the immediate time horizon. In this regard, words of caution voiced by some leading scholars are particularly instructive. Paul Green, a distinguished scholar whose pioneering work on conjoint analysis has had a significant impact on business practice, scholarly research, and marketing education, noted the following:

Much of intellectually exciting research in marketing is in areas where short-term application is not likely to occur. While research impact is always satisfying (after all, we work for business schools), there should still be room for research contributions that do not have obvious, short-term uses. As always, the market mechanism (scholarly journals and research supplier adoption) provides an evaluation of research paper quality, relevance and impact. (Green 1997)

William Wells, a scholar whose career highlights include serving as a senior executive of a leading advertising agency and professor at a leading university, noted, "The university is one of very few social institutions where immediate usefulness is not a requirement. Scholarship that is not immediately useful may elevate society" (Wells 1993b).

First-order versus second-order relevance. In addition to intended relevance articulated *ex ante*, it is conceivable that *ex post*, the potential relevance of a specific research endeavor in other contexts might become apparent. For instance, in addition to alleviating hunger and poverty in developing countries, humanity has significantly benefited from the Green Revolution in other important ways including slowing deforestation and population growth. Although these may not have been part of the initial relevance calculus, the magnitude of significance of relevance in realms beyond those that were the initial impetus for the research is indeed impressive. According to one estimate, India's transition to high-yield farming is credited to have spared the country from having to plough in an additional 100 million acres of virgin land—an area about equivalent to the state of California. Rather than accelerating population growth, it has been argued that high-yield agriculture has been conducive to slowing population growth by start-

ing the progression from high-birth-rate, high-death-rate societies of feudal cultures toward low-birth-rate, low-death-rate societies of Western nations (see Easterbrook 1997). Also, the nursery industry, by tapping into research relating to the Green Revolution (the development of short-stemmed rice and wheat plants) was able to develop dwarf varieties of other plants (for decorative use indoors, in houses and in commercial establishments) and shrubs (for landscaping). Similarly, in the field of marketing, it is not uncommon for a research study focusing on a substantive issue in a particular subfield within marketing (e.g., advertising) to have a significant impact on future research in other subfields within marketing as a consequence of its methodological contribution. For example, it is conceivable that the first meta-analysis study on a substantive issue in marketing provided the impetus for researchers to undertake meta-analysis studies of other substantive issues in marketing such as customer satisfaction, innovation, market pioneering, pricing, and sales management. Such possibilities point to the potential first-order relevance (the potential contribution of a particular research study to knowledge in a subfield within the substantive domain of marketing) and second-order relevance (the potential impact of the study on future research in other fields of study within the domain of marketing).

RELEVANCE AND RIGOR OF ACCUMULATED KNOWLEDGE AT THE DISCIPLINE LEVEL

On one hand, there seems to be general consensus as well as constant refinement of evaluative criteria considered as appropriate for objectively assessing the rigor of individual research studies in marketing. However, there is also a need to pay equal if not more attention to issues relating to the relevance and rigor of the larger body of accumulated marketing knowledge at the level of the discipline. Collectively, the commissions and omissions of a community of researchers can impede the advancement of the field and its relevance to the intended constituencies. Consider, for instance, the implications of the following on the advancement of the field of marketing:

- Conceptual definitions and construct operationalizations being idiosyncratic to individual studies (or subsets of studies), coupled with the tendency to propose new definitions for even fairly well established constructs, building on numerous other definitions of the construct advanced to date.¹⁰
- Proliferation of new constructs, coupled with lack of clear articulation of how a newly proposed construct aids in enhancing our understanding of a phenomenon of interest, and is conceptually distinct from related constructs.

Kmetz's (2002) enumeration of the following as impediments to the advancement of the field of organizational science seem to ring true in the context of the field of marketing as well:

- Lack of baseline nomenclature and operationalizations inhibiting meaningful comparison and cumulation of research across studies
- Absence of standardized definitions and operationalizations resulting in a lack of a common basis for interpretation of research focusing on specific variables and relationships
- Ambiguity concerning what exactly is being measured due to the absence of standardized definitions

In this regard, Kinnear (1999), a former editor of the *Journal of Marketing* and the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, noted, "At the most elementary level, it is almost impossible to do high-quality research that builds the state of knowledge without a set of agreed definitions" (p. 113). Indeed, the emphasis on the importance of a clear and precise understanding of the meaning of constructs central to a field of study dates back to the times and works of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Voltaire, as implied by the following quote:

There was a hint of this new science in Socrates' maddening insistence on definitions, and in Plato's constant refining of every concept. Aristotle's little treatise on *Definitions* shows how his logic found nourishment at this source. "If you wish to converse with me," said Voltaire, "define your terms." How many a debate would have been deflated into a paragraph if the disputants had dared to define their terms! This is the alpha and omega of logic, the heart and soul of it, that every important term in serious discourse shall be subjected to strictest scrutiny and definition. It is difficult, and ruthlessly tests the mind; but once done it is half of any task. (Durant 1961:59)

Admittedly, it is inconceivable to envision universal consensus among a community of scholars in regard to definitions of constructs central to a field of study. For instance, drawing attention to Popper's position on this issue, Hunt (2002) noted, "Popper (1959) notes that all definitions of disciplines are largely arbitrary in content. That is, they primarily represent an agreement to focus attention on some problems, issues, and phenomena, to the exclusion of others" (p. 18). In a similar vein, Mintzberg (1987) noted,

Human nature insists on a definition for every concept. The field of strategic management cannot afford to rely on a single definition of strategy, indeed the word has long been used implicitly in different ways even if it has been traditionally defined for-

mally in only one. Explicit recognition of multiple definitions can help practitioners and researchers alike to maneuver through this difficult field. (P. 11)

While not disputing the merits of points of view such as the above voiced in regard to definitional issues, the likely adverse impact on the advancement of a field of study of issues such as enumerated below must also be borne in mind:

- Use of the same construct label when referring to a different phenomenon
- Use of different construct labels when referring to the same phenomenon
- Multiple (far too many) definitions and operationalizations of constructs central to our field of study
- Proliferation of new constructs whose conceptual distinctiveness relative to extant constructs and their potential to shed new insights into understanding of a phenomenon not being clearly articulated

IN CLOSING

This editorial constitutes my musings on relevance and rigor of scholarly research in marketing formed over the years as a student, instructor, researcher, author, reviewer, and journal editor, and is open to debate and discourse. In fact, discussion and debate centering on questions pertaining to relevance and rigor of scholarly research in the business disciplines dates back to at least a few decades, is ongoing, and is likely to continue well into the future.

NOTES

1. It is conceivable that some of the criticisms leveled are not due to scholarly research lacking in managerial relevance per se but the relevance not being apparent as a consequence of the writing style. Understandably, when a journal is either primarily targeted at a managerial audience or both a managerial and an academic audience, there is a need to strive to be scholarly in rigor and managerial in relevance *and* readability. In fact, a considerable body of published research in marketing and other fields has focused on the role of information characteristics, information user characteristics, and organizational characteristics on information utilization (see, for example, Deshpande and Zaltman 1982; Menon and Varadarajan 1992).

2. For instance, "Special Session on Marketing Thought: A Panel Discussion," American Marketing Association Winter Marketing Educators' Conference (San Diego, CA, February 1995); "Balancing Methodological Rigor and Managerial Relevance in Scholarly Research in Marketing: Perspectives of Journal Editors," Academy of Marketing Science Conference (Norfolk, VA, May 1998); and "Scholarly Research in International Business: Striving for Relevance and Rigor," Academy of International Business Conference (Phoenix, AZ, November 2000).

3. As evidenced by the works cited here, debate centering on issues pertaining to relevance and rigor of scholarly research are not unique to the field of marketing. They have also been the focus of extensive discussion and debate in other business disciplines. For instance, the March 1999 issue of the *MIS Quarterly* contains a series of articles and commen-

taries on issues relating to rigor and relevance of empirical research in the field of information systems (IS). An article in this series that I found to be particularly insightful is by Lee (1999). Here, the author drew attention to the nature of inquiry in natural sciences versus in professions such as medicine, law, and architecture. In regard to making IS research more relevant to practitioners, Lee noted that a question that the community of IS researchers should address is whether they should be doing research in a manner that emulates inquiry in professions, *in addition to or instead of* doing research in a manner that emulates inquiry in the natural sciences.

4. A comprehensive listing of Marketing Science Institute's biannual research priorities dating back to the early 1980s can be found at its Web site: www.msi.org.

5. Clearly, the quest for greater managerial relevance of scholarly research is likely to be well served when researchers interact with and query marketing practitioners about questions that in their opinion merit scholarly inquiry. However, to the extent that resource and/or time constraints limit the geographic area within which such interactions occur, there is a risk of scholarly research endeavors becoming too focused on marketing problems encountered by managers *here and now*. The practice of marketing is universal, and so are many of the marketing problems encountered by managers and organizations at the most fundamental level. From a scholarly research perspective, the challenge is to use insights gained from an understanding of specific problems encountered by individual decision makers and/or organizations to formulate more general research questions that transcend products, markets, countries, and/or time horizons. Needless to say, numerous marketing problems in the genre of here and now also happen to be important and merit scholarly inquiry. Consider for instance, the public policy implications of advertising of prescription drugs direct to consumers through mass media. While in recent years in the United States there seems to be a spurt in the above practice, in literally the rest of the world, laws and regulations governing the marketing of prescription drugs do not allow firms to engage in similar behavior. Similarly, the implications of the "do-not-call" registry, recently set up by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission to clamp down telemarketers from calling customers who wish not be contacted over the telephone, may be of relevance to marketers and public policy officials only in countries in which a sizeable percentage of the households own telephones.

6. Collins and Porras (1994), in their book titled, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, noted that highly visionary companies, instead of being oppressed by the "Tyranny of the OR," liberate themselves with the "Genius of the AND." Rather than choosing between A or B, they figure out a way to achieve both A and B (e.g., purpose beyond profit and pragmatic pursuit of profit; clear vision and sense of direction and opportunistic grouping and experimentation). In regard to relevance and rigor of scholarly research, the issue is not one of the "Genius of the AND" but the "Imperative of the AND."

7. Also instructive on this issue is the code of ethical conduct of the Academy of Management (2002) relating to conducting and reporting of scholarly research, which states, "It is the duty of Academy members conducting research to design, implement, analyze, report, and present their findings rigorously" (p. 292).

8. Cases in point include research by Christie and Schultz (1994) published in a finance journal reporting that markets treat small investors unfairly and research by Lin and McNichols (1998) published in an accounting journal reporting that brokerage firms are clearly inclined to say nice things about the stocks they underwrite.

9. Noteworthy here is Hardy's (1941) construal of the domain of useful knowledge:

If useful knowledge is, as we agreed provisionally to say, knowledge which is likely, now or in the comparatively near future, to contribute to the material comfort of mankind, so that mere intellectual satisfaction is irrelevant, then the great bulk of higher mathematics is useless. (P. 75)

10. The problem of conceptual definitions and construct operationalizations being idiosyncratic to individual studies (or subsets of studies) aside, in a recent article, MacKenzie (2003) noted that a major weakness in manuscripts that he has reviewed is poor construct conceptualization. In his article, he drew attention to how lack of attention to construct conceptualization (failure to adequately specify the conceptual meaning of the study's focal constructs) can undermine a study as a consequence of its adverse impact on construct validity, statistical conclusion validity, and internal validity.

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