

# **IS THERE A PARETO EFFECT IN TOP MARKETING JOURNALS? AN EXPLORATION**

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# **IS THERE A PARETO EFFECT IN TOP MARKETING JOURNALS? AN EXPLORATION**

## **ABSTRACT**

Pareto's Law refers to the theory that a small percentage of a total is responsible for a large proportion of the total outcome. It is commonly known as the 80/20 law or principle. The objective is to explore whether there is a 'Pareto Effect' in the distribution of crucial research and journal criteria in top marketing journals. The authors provide an exploration based upon previous research on top marketing journals. For this purpose, the Pareto Effect concept is introduced, based upon a set of research and journal criteria. The exploration of research and journal criteria in top marketing journals generated an extremely skewed outcome. When it comes to the criteria, the top journals in marketing tend to be governed by narrow concerns of research rather than broad concerns.

*Keywords: pareto, effect, marketing, journals.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Academic journals support and facilitate the professional desire and the need among researchers to publish their research (e.g. Moxley 1992). Mort et al. (2004) argue that academic journals represent the current outlet where researchers communicate their research.

Academic journals have been a topic of concern in literature for many years. For example, different concerns have been explored for more than four decades in economics (e.g. Danielsen and Delorme 1976, Hawkins et al. 1973). There have been different topics of exploration for almost two decades in management (e.g. Stahl et al. 1988), as they also have been in marketing (e.g. Fry et al. 1985, Jobber and Simpson 1988, Luke and Doke 1987). Today there are many academic journals in marketing and they have increased dramatically since the emergence of the discipline in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Baumgartner and Pieters 2003). For example, Cabell (1997-98) has listed more than 550 marketing journals in existence in the late 1990s. Marketing journals have also become more specialized (Baumgartner and Pieters 2003, Malhotra 1999).

Principally, two concerns have been raised in the exploration of academic journals (e.g. Mason et al. 1997, Kim 1991). One of the concerns addressed is underpinned by the citation frequency of articles, such as the citation index (e.g. Baumgartner and Pieters 2003, Jobber and Simpson 1988). The other is

based upon the perception of journals, in terms of their reputation and prestige (e.g. Brown and Becker 1991, Luke and Doke 1987). There have also been other less frequent concerns addressed. For example, Polonsky et al. (1999) discuss an alternative concern of marketing journals referred to as the journal's accessibility. Emerald until 2004 (Emerald Management Reviews 2004) utilized a different approach. It was based upon the process that each article published in academic journals was independently explored, all of which produced different journal ranking lists. Harzing (2000-2005) provides a compilation of rankings lists that may be used in the exploration of academic journals.

The focus of journal ranking lists appears to be upon distinguishing the top journals in the field and embodying them with an aura of reverence and deference. Is this approach appropriate? What about the journal criteria, such as editors and editorial boards? How do they impact upon the process. Furthermore, what about the research criteria, such as author affiliation, research data and methodology? Research has indicated that there is a skewed distribution of journal and research criteria in top marketing journals (Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2005; Svensson, 2005a/b and 2006). The distribution appears to resemble the so-called Pareto's Law<sup>1</sup>. Today, it often refers to the theory that a small percentage of a total is responsible for a large proportion of the total outcome. It is commonly known as the 80/20 law or principle, therefore, *the objective is to explore whether there is a "Pareto Effect" in the distribution of crucial research and journal criteria in top marketing journals*. The Pareto Effect is introduced and used to explore the topic at hand. It consists of:

- ✓ five research criteria (i.e. the affiliation of authors, the share of empirical and national research data, the continental belonging of collected research data and the methodological approaches applied); and
- ✓ two journal criteria (i.e. the affiliation of editors and the affiliation and composition of editorial boards).

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<sup>1</sup> It is named after the Italian sociologist and economist Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Pareto, V. (1906), *Manuale d'economia politica*, Milan.

The authors contend that the topic addressed will stimulate the ongoing and forthcoming explorations of academic marketing journals. The authors believe that it is an important concern for the future prosperity of the marketing discipline and its research community across the world. The top journals have an enormous responsibility to preserve and strengthen the reputation of the marketing discipline in relation to other research disciplines and their research communities. The top marketing journals serve as a point of reference for scholars and practitioners of the marketing discipline. For other research disciplines and their research communities, these journals are also the gateway to what is perceived as the 'cutting edge' of marketing theory and thought.

The definitions of what characterises a top marketing journal are generally vague in the literature. They are often based upon single-item measures, such as perception (Luke and Doke 1987) and citation (Jobber and Simpson 1988). The authors have undertaken a longitudinal literature review of how marketing journals are perceived and how they have been ranked by different sources. Doing so, the *Journal of Marketing*, the *Journal of Marketing Research* and the *Journal of Consumer Research* are all considered to be top journals in marketing by various authors (e.g. Bakir et al. 2000, Clark 1985, Fields and Swayne 1991, Ganesh et al. 1990, Niemi 1988, Petry and Settle 1988, Pol 1991, Polonsky and Whitelaw 2005, Spake and Harmon 1998, and Trieschmann et al. 1999). There are also a number of other potential top marketing journals that may be added to this list, depending upon the ranking list chosen. For example, by using Harzing's (2000-2005) compilation of journal ranking lists, a few other marketing journals may be added, such as the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, the *Journal of Retailing*, and *Marketing Science*. These six aforementioned journals are also listed as the 'A' journals of the marketing discipline by Polonsky and Mittelstaedt (2005). The authors of this article do not suggest that the aforementioned journals comprise a complete list of top journals. These six journals are used to support the topic of exploration addressed in this paper.

## **FRAME OF REFERENCE**

There is an ongoing exploration of marketing journals. (e.g. Hult et al. 1997, Mort et al. 2004, Polonsky et al. 1999, Polonsky and Whitelaw 2005; Theoharakis and Hirst 2002,). Most of the explorations have been based upon the perceptions of scholars from North America (e.g. Fry et al. 1985; Hult et al. 1997, Luke and Doke 1987). Recently, the exploration has also been based upon scholars' perceptions in the Asia Pacific Region (e.g. Mort et al. 2004, Polonsky et al. 1999, Polonsky and Waller 1993). Theoharakis and Hirst (2002) contribute to the exploration by using a worldwide survey of perceptions. In addition, Easton and Easton (2003) underpin their exploration on scholars' perceptions in the U.K.

There are formal lists of journal quality (e.g. Dennis et al. 2000, DuBois 2000, Enomoto 1993, Hult et al. 1997, Mylonopoulos and Theoharakis 2001, Trieschmann et al. 1999, Van Fleet et al. 2000). There are also informal ones that are used in business schools (Brumbaugh 2002). It appears that the access to formal lists appears to be important when the publication of research is explored (e.g. Hult et al. 1997, Theoharakis and Hirst 2002, Van Fleet 2000). There is an ongoing exploration of marketing journals in literature

One stream of exploration of academic journals has used citation analyses (e.g. Baumgartner and Pieters 2003, Jobber and Simpson 1988). The citation index is often interpreted to be unbiased and a true reflection of the ranking of journals. This approach however, may bias the ranking of journals for various reasons. For example, journals from some regions may be missing (e.g. Nobes 1995). Day and Peters (1994) argue that the citation index is dangerously flawed in that it is heavily biased towards high circulation journals, suffers from a single-item effect and that there is no direct correlation with quality. Furthermore, databases tend to be restricted to a selection of journals – i.e. English journals (e.g. Neway and Lancaster 1983), which may exclude a variety of other journals. For example, journals published in languages other than English tend to be excluded (e.g. French, German and Spanish journals). Databases may also be restricted to a publisher's portfolio of academic journals.

Another stream of exploration of academic journals has been dedicated to the analysis upon perceptual evaluations to create journal rankings (e.g. Brown and Becker 1991, Luke and Doke 1987). The perceptual-based journal rankings may vary and be biased for different reasons. They may be influenced by institutional and/or individual demographics (e.g. Hult et al. 1997). For example, research has focused on leading institutions (e.g. Theoharakis and Hirst 2002) and on active researchers/Deans/Heads of Schools (e.g. Brown and Becker 1991, Mort et al. 2004). The objective or focus of the ranking may have an impact too (e.g. Polonsky and Waller 1993), as may regional variations (e.g. Danielsen and Delorme 1976, Theoharakis and Hirst 2002), and the journal's focus may impact (e.g. Danielsen and Delorme 1976, Hawkins et al. 1973).

The citation and perception based streams of exploration about academic journals have in part contributed to the content of aggregated lists. For example, Harzing (2000-2005) compiles a journal quality list that is updated periodically. The current list contains 18 different rankings of 844 journals. It is a compilation of journal rankings from a variety of sources and they are reported separately. Consequently, it is based upon a large number of journals in different areas. Actually, they are cross-disciplinary lists, all of which also include marketing journals. Primarily, the purpose of the list is to assist academics to target their research at journals of an 'appropriate standard'. Harzing (ibid.) writes that the list should not be used for staff evaluation purposes in a mechanistic way, therefore, it should not be seen as normative list or the only one to be considered. It is derived from different sources and consists of different ranking lists that are aggregated into one table. It applies a top-down approach, where an overall criterion (i.e. a single-item measure) usually underpins the compilation of each ranking list. Generally, the compilation of the list provides a fundament to discuss academic journals in different research disciplines and their research communities.

On the contrary to Harzing (2005), Emerald (Emerald Management Reviews, 2004) applied a bottom-up approach, where several criteria (i.e. a multi-item measure) underpinned the compilation of four differentiated journal ranking lists. These were cross-disciplinary journal rankings, including marketing journals that were provided and continuously updated by Emerald. It used a broader – as

well as a profounder – approach to assess the quality of different journals across research disciplines. It was based upon the process that each article published was independently explored based upon four criteria, namely research implications, practice implications, originality and readability. Each article was assigned one, two or three asterisks across these criteria. These allocations were used to calculate the annual average score on each criterion for each journal. Annually, this database compiled a journal ranking of the top 400+ management journals in the world across different disciplines. It was discontinued at the end of 2004 due to the consternation caused amongst some editors and some authors by the additional review and evaluation undertaken by independent reviewers. These editors and authors felt that the initial review process had vindicated the worth of the article and therefore a further review for them became contentious. This was a unique approach that fruitfully could have continued to support the ongoing exploration of academic journals in marketing and other research disciplines. We contend that it is disappointing that this process has been discontinued as it gave a broader exploration of individual articles than appears to be the case for other assessment regimes. The articles were peer reviewed before publication in a specific journal and then subsequent to publication they were reviewed by an expert who ranked the articles according to the 4 criteria. This subsequent review process complemented and may have enhanced the original review process.

Consequently, the exploration of academic journals may be underpinned by different criteria (e.g. Beed and Beed 1996, Hawes and Keillor 2002, Jones et al. 1996, Parnell 1997, Rice and Stankus 1983, Zinkhan and Leigh 1999). For example, Parnell (1997) provides a taxonomy of journal quality based upon expert opinion surveys, citation counts, or a combination of both. Rice and Stankus (1983) provide criteria of journal quality such as: citation analysis of the journal (e.g. Social Sciences Citation Index), acceptance rate of journal (e.g. Cabell's Directory), sponsorship of journal (e.g. American Marketing Association), fundament of journal (e.g. authors, editor, review board, and their affiliation), and objective of journal (e.g. methodological approaches and readership). All of these criteria may be useful in the discussion of academic journals.

Technicalities tend to be stressed as an important criterion in the exploration of academic journals. In fact, Hawes and Keillor (2002) write that higher status is usually attributed to journals that publish articles that are theoretical, scholar-oriented, highly quantitative or technical in nature and they comment: “...since it is hard to read such articles without highly specialized and extensive training, we assume that those people who are involved with such journals are legitimate authority figures. We ascribe expert power to them and these journals are typically rated very high by members of the scholarly community...” (ibid. 72). We contend that this view and the previous citation/perception-based streams in literature have contributed to a ‘Pareto Effect’ in the top marketing journals.

## **THE PARETO EFFECT**

The authors use two group criteria and six sub-group criteria to explore the existence of a Pareto Effect in top marketing journals, namely: research criteria such as affiliation of authors; empirical research data; national research data; continental belonging of research data; and methodological approaches (i.e. the characteristics of research published in the top journals in marketing) and journal criteria such as affiliation of editors; and affiliation and composition of editorial boards (i.e. the fundamentals of the top journals in marketing).

These criteria should be seen as triggers for further exploration. Consequently, the criteria do not aspire to be complete, but they complement the ongoing exploration of academic journals and academic publishing in literature. They are interpreted as being crucial to support the topic at hand regarding a potential Pareto Effect in top marketing journals. The authors contend that these research and journal criteria in part underpin and contribute to address and answer the following research questions:

- ✓ Is there a Pareto Effect in top marketing journals?
- ✓ If so, why is there a Pareto Effect in top marketing journals?



The listed research criteria address the first question, while the mentioned journal criteria intend to address the second one. The authors' intention is not to focus on a specific journal, but rather to stimulate the ongoing exploration of the adequacy of those concerns that dominate in the top marketing journals. The idea is also to let the readers reflect and decide on their own perceptions without the explicit influence or arguments provided by the authors. The authors wish to provide a reflection from their experiences and observations on these issues. The reader can verify for oneself the basis for the exploration undertaken by performing an independent review of the selected top marketing journals, as the authors have done.

### **Is There a Pareto Effect in Top Marketing Journals?**

The five selected research criteria provide an indication and support of whether there is – or there is not – a Pareto Effect in top marketing journals.. Table 1 summarizes the exploration of research criteria.

The *affiliation of authors* in published articles of the top marketing journals are predominantly North American (Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2005; Svensson, 2005b). Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, (2005) find that in the top six journals, 89% of the articles have at least one American author. Svensson (2005b) surveys the contents from 2000 to 2004 (i.e. a five year period) inclusive of one of the six previously listed journals and he finds that of the author affiliation reported, 95% have a North American affiliation.

Svensson, (2006) finds in a selected top marketing journal that 87% of the articles are based upon *empirical research data*. In other words, the selected journal strongly supports empirical research. Svensson (2006) finds in a top marketing journal that 92% of the articles are based upon research designs that are limited to *national research data*. Only 8% are based upon research designs that comprise the collection of international research data. Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft (2005) in their study find that in the selected top marketing journals the *research data* collected is to a large extent North American with 83% including specifically USA data. Svensson (2006) finds that 84% are solely

based upon North American research data. In addition, 92% have a research design that includes North American research data (ibid.).

There is a skewed distribution of *methodological approaches* to explore marketing topics (Svensson, 2005a). Svensson (2005a) surveyed the contents from 2000 to 2004 inclusive of one of the six previously listed journals and he found that of the empirical work reported, 91% were articles based upon a framework of quantitative analysis. It appears to be the prescribed way to report research, if one is seeking publication success.

The authors suggest that there is a Pareto Effect in top marketing journals. The question then becomes that if this assertion is correct – then why is this situation the case?

### **Why Is There a Pareto Effect in Top Marketing Journals?**

Two possible explanations may contribute to the understanding of why there is a Pareto Effect in the explored research criteria in top marketing journals. Principally, it goes back to the fundamentals of the journals. It could be traced to the affiliation of editors and the affiliations and compositions of editorial boards. Table 1 summarizes the exploration of journal criteria.

Svensson (2005b) finds that the *editors* of the top marketing journals are invariably North Americans, namely 6 out of six (or 100%). A multinational composition of editors would broaden the understanding of the underlying cultural values of research across the world. At present, there is a predominant contextual insensitivity: an academic xenophobia that replicates itself, exclusive primarily to other ideas from beyond the North American academic community. It has to be kept in mind that they are the initial gatekeepers before entering the blind review process that takes place in top peer reviewed journals. Instead of celebrating the differences in research around the world, these differences are expunged in favor of homogeneous research with a North American focus.

The *editorial boards* of top marketing journals mostly consist of academics affiliated to North American universities or organizations instead of having a worldwide representation (Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2005; Svensson, 2005b). Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft (2005) have highlighted in their work that the editorial boards of the top six journals are comprised of members who are North American. These boards are comprised ostensibly of individuals from North America - Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft (2005) report 92%. In that sense, the editorial boards tend to be merely North American centric rather than representing an international perspective. There appears to be a lack of cultural sensitivity among them as well (Homburg, 2003 and Easton and Easton, 2003). Consensus is easier to achieve by the selection of homogenous members of an editorial board, but it can create a reactive behavior rather than proactive initiatives in research efforts. In fact, only a minor part of many of these boards are representing the worldwide research community that flourishes outside of North America (Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2005; Svensson, 2005b).

<b>Exploration of Criteria</b>	
<b>Research</b>	
North American Affiliation of Authors	89-95%
Empirical Research Data	87%
National Research Data	92%
North American Research Data	83-92%
Quantitative Methods	91%
<b>Journal</b>	
North American Affiliation of Editors	100%
North American Affiliation and Composition of Editorial Boards	92%

*Table 1: Summary – Exploration of Research and Journal Criteria.*

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The exploration of research and journal criteria in the top marketing journals generated an extremely skewed outcome. When it comes to the *research criteria*, the top journals in marketing tend to be governed by narrow concerns of research rather than broad ones (Czinkota, 2000; Easton and Easton, 2003; Homburg, 2003; Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2005; Svensson, 2005a/b and 2006). When it comes to the *journal criteria*, the top journals in marketing also tend to be dominated by narrow concerns of research rather than broad ones (Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2005; Svensson, 2005a/b

and 2006). The skewed distribution of explored research and journal criteria may reinforce the rigidity and lack of innovativeness of the marketing discipline. The evolutionary speed of the discipline may be reduced or at worst it may stagnate. The authors contend that there are a number of serious concerns to be addressed in the future exploration of the top journals in marketing. Based upon the evidence and arguments provided, there appears to be a Pareto Effect in top marketing journals. In fact, the distribution is even more skewed than 80/20 – it appears to be 90/10!

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