

QMrIJ Special Edition Editorial

By Jim Blythe and Ruth Rettie

This edition of the Journal is a special one for us, as guest editors. This year, the theme of the Academy of Marketing Conference was Theory into Practice: the intention was to encourage marketing academics to think about the relevance of their research to practitioners. As academics, we are not alone in producing “blue sky” research which has little obvious or immediate relevance to practitioners. In the long run, such research pays off, and there are of course plenty of practical marketing researchers out there who generate the day-to-day applied research that informs decision-making in industry. Where we, as marketers, differ from most academics is that marketing is nothing if not a practical subject. Most of the theory derives from practice (unlike the relationship between, for example, physics and engineering, where engineering principles derive from the theories of physicists).

One would expect, therefore, that our research would be deeply-rooted in practice, and we would not need to have a specially-themed conference to focus our attention. The conference certainly helped bring us back to reality, though, and the result was a stream of papers with a practical theme (not to mention the attendance at the conference of several practitioners).

As a discipline, marketing is well-placed in that we have a high proportion of marketing academics who were (in their previous lives) practitioners. We also have a high proportion of academics who are active consultants, or who run their own businesses, and who are therefore not entirely divorced from the “real world” of marketing practice. As your guest editors, we have tried to reflect the theme of the conference by choosing papers with strong practical implications: we tried to find ones which were academically rigorous, thought-provoking, and at the same time said something relevant to practitioners. The five papers in this edition, plus the book reviews, are an attempt to bridge the gap between academic “ivory tower” thinking and the real world of marketing practice: we hope you enjoy the result.

Our first paper looks at a burning issue for practitioners. The introduction of home video recording in the late 1970s was a major breakthrough in home entertainment, but it presented a clear threat to advertisers, because people were (for the first time) able to skip through advertisements by fast-forwarding (zipping) the programme. Advertisers panicked somewhat, thinking that all their efforts would be for nothing, but nobody actually went to the effort of finding out what the average viewer does with the video recorder. These concerns have been intensified by the popularity of the new generation of PVRs such as Sky +. In fact, people have always left the room, made a cup of tea, read a magazine, or chatted to the family during the commercial breaks, but the idea that people could edit out the advertisements was seen as a threat. What a good researcher should do is begin by questioning the received wisdom, and that is exactly what Sarah Pearson and Patrick Barwise did in their research. Their paper, “PVRs and Advertising Exposure: An Ethnographic Approach” reports on a fascinating study into what people actually do when playing a pre-recorded TV show. Our authors found that 32% of people played the advertisements at normal speed (without zipping). This in itself is an important finding, since the received wisdom was that most people zipped through advertisements, but the researchers also found that people’s attention tended to be higher for displaced advertising than for ads viewed in “real time”.

As academics we frequently question whether we are researching and teaching the right things. We are well aware that we send students out inadequately armed for the conflicts they will find

themselves in, but it is not always easy to know what to do about it. One of the main culprits is the textbook, and our next paper (from Barry Ardley) gives some words of advice about textbooks. Barry interviewed 24 marketing managers and found (guess what) that marketing textbooks bear little or no relationship with what happens in the real world of marketing. The paper, "Articles Of Faith and Mystic Matrices: Marketing Textbooks and the Misrepresentation Of Reality" provides those of us who write textbooks with a severe reality check.

Of course, as researchers we need to ensure that we are using the right set of tools to develop theory, discover truth, and improve our understanding. Our next paper reports on the use of a combination of laddering interview technique and the Kano model to examine customer complaining behaviour. Thorsten Gruber, Alexander Pepper, Isabelle Szmigin and Roediger Voss applied this revolutionary approach to a study of customer complaints, and give a fascinating account of how the combined technique led them to a closer understanding of how and why people complain.

As researchers, we can easily find ourselves hacking through a jungle of concepts and philosophies. Qualitative research in particular tends to suffer from this problem, because quantitative research is viewed as more "scientific" or objective, qualitative researchers find themselves in a perpetual battle to establish their credentials in a sceptical world. Our next paper, a practitioner who runs his own market research agency, Chris Barnham, takes a machete to the undergrowth and shows us the way forward for qualitative research. "Qualis? From Theory to Practice" offers us a new view of qualitative research expanding its contribution to day-to-day marketing practice.

Our final paper, "To Have and to Hold: Managing Channels in UK High Street Financial Services" brings us full circle, back to the real contribution that academic marketers can make to marketing practice. In the article, Jillian Dawes Farquhar, Tracey Panther, and Len Tiu Wright have used an inductive approach to investigate that most topical and practical of issues, customer retention. Our researchers identified five themes of channel management, and used these themes to develop a model for retaining customers within a banking environment.

In this special edition we include two book reviews, both with a practical focus. Margaret Hogg reviews "Composing Qualitative Research" by Karen Golden-Biddle and Karen Locke, and describes how (in its earlier edition) the book has proved useful both for herself and for her Phd students. For those of us engaged in qualitative research, the analysis and description of what we do is problematic, because the connection between data and theory is never transparent. As Margaret explains, the book throws us a lifeline by offering creative, practical suggestions for developing and writing theory from qualitative research. In our second book review, Philly Desai, an academically minded practitioner who attended the conference, reviews "Ethnography for Marketers" by Hy Miraimpolski. The book, written by a successful ethnographic marketer, is extremely (Philly suggests even excessively) practical, including many case studies and examples of field protocols for ethnographic marketing. As Philly notes, this book is especially welcome because ethnographic market research is becoming increasingly popular.

There were many occasions in the course of the conference where a real understanding of the practitioner viewpoint came through (and, one suspects, the practitioners present also acquired some understanding of the realities of academic life). For many of us, what came across was not so much the gaps between us (and there are still a great many) but the commonalities we share. We

are all interested in making marketing a more effective force, both in the corporate world and in the academic world, and we are all interested in finding out more about what makes marketing work. We hope that this special edition demonstrates that we can build on the foundations laid at the conference last summer, and reduce the divide that separates academic marketing theory from marketing practice.