UWE Bristol

Eclecticism rocks!

Presentation by

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Woah there academic marketing!

- Can we take a gentle swipe at some sacred cows of marketing academia here...

- And call for social marketing scholarship not to fall into the same trap

- Central messages:
  - Uber-positivism in marketing is dangerous
  - no one model should dominate
  - Use the models qualitatively
  - Be eclectic
Things I’ve (Alan) said about academic (mainstream) marketing (so you know who to blame)
Five Ailments of ‘top’ journal articles

- Researching the rather obvious
- Ignoring context
- Incomprehensible language
- Using a multi-variate sledgehammer to crack a nut
- Researching the arcane and obscure
Why is this?

• ‘Pure’ marketing academics operate as a closed user group

• Marketing sometimes behaves as a science, sometimes not

• Our insistence on treating it as a **hard** science is damaging us
• To justify these criticisms let’s illustrate what we think is happening

• Start with a quick look at a hard science that has been a success…chemistry
Observable fact: sodium reacts vigorously with water

\[ 2\text{Na} + 2\text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow 2\text{NaOH} + \text{H}_2 \]

Theory: The periodic table and valence theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 0</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ne</td>
<td>Li</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ar</td>
<td>Na</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kr</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xe</td>
<td>Rb</td>
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Look !!
• In chemistry, **a fact is a fact**

• It is an observable fact that if you throw sodium into hot water it explodes, creating hydrogen and sodium hydroxide.

• In chemistry, theories are settled, agreed ‘best guesses’ that unify the discipline **because they explain ALL the data not just some of it**

• So, valence theory and the Periodic table explains sodium’s high reactivity

• Sodium’s position in the periodic table leaves one sodium electron isolated in its own orbit. This vulnerability makes sodium highly reactive. The same is **predicted** of other elements with one isolated electron. The periodic table predicts that Potassium, Rubidium and Caesium will also be highly reactive, and observations demonstrate that this is so.
What are the characteristics of chemistry that allows positivism to be successful?

- **Reductionism** – the **drilling down** of knowledge into smaller elements – makes intuitive sense in this field.
- Researchers can **isolate the experiments, agree the constructs, control all the variables**, and deploy the hypothetico deductive method with complete confidence.
- Ontologically, **facts are facts**, and once settled they don’t change.
- There is an **underlying order and pattern** in chemical reactions that appears absolute.

- **The theories may not be literally ‘true’** – Kuhn exposed the risk in absolute belief in science – **but they work in an everyday way to help progress**.
• In summary, treating chemistry as a science has a demonstrable track record of astonishing success

• Treating marketing as a science…?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketing</th>
<th>Chemistry</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some agreed</td>
<td>Largely agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some disputed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Some have power and practical usage e.g. diffusion of innovations</td>
<td>Educated guesses refined to fit the evidence. Broad predictability at the core. Debates at the margins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some have poor evidence base and weak external validity</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
But we often deal with nebulous or difficult concepts

- Take something in social marketing like **promoting cycling over car use** and how much this relies on people’s feelings of **nostalgia for childhood cycling happiness**

- Can a definition of nostalgia be agreed upon? Can this construct be **consistently measured, in different situations, and over time**?

- Given the uncertainties and complexities of nostalgia, **is there much point in trying to express the concepts in a quantified model?**
Summary: scientific approaches can be appropriate but are over-used and grossly over-rewarded in academic marketing

- We have six major issues with the hard science approach
1. In contrast to chemistry, constructs in marketing are woolly and prone to disagreement.

- Quite often, what constitutes a fact is a lot less certain and rather woolly.
- There are lots of marketing phenomena where facts are disputed, such as attitude data, survey responses, or complex psychological constructs such as self image, or variables that are difficult to define such as market orientation.
- No amount of statistical wizardry makes up for these limitations.
- Our numbers are mostly illusions of false precision.
2. Chemists deal with absolutes, marketers usually deal with probabilities

- Probabilities are strange things to treat too scientifically.
- Observations might suggest that right wing people don’t like cycling, or that teenage boys from deprived areas drive aggressively.
- But these aren’t hard certainties – so why give that impression with advanced number bashing?
3. Sodium explodes in hot water all round the world. But people behave differently from one place to the next.

- The external validity of much of our literature is pitifully low, but this is never discussed
4. Chemists can isolate the problem. Marketers can’t

- **Marketers in management** deal with real life social systems, structures, and variables that are so vast and complex (almost weather like), that they are pretty much impossible to predict.

- Extraneous variables are **often more important than model variables**, and so the whole thing is **horribly prone to contextual change**

- This context specificity needs acknowledging not ignoring
5. Ironically, marketers can’t isolate the system, but do isolate their theories

- Chemists operate in a shared ‘web of belief’
- But take a close look at our literature...
- Academic marketers can’t agree. We selectively lift from literature to support our prejudices.

- We stick to our individual pet favourite theories
6. The formula driven approach of positivism kills any thinking by the researcher

- Positivism is increasingly deployed in academic marketing as a substitute for thinking rather than an aid to it.
- The language and the stilted process seem to disallow freedom to muse and ponder. The formulae drive the researcher to an expected outcome in which the answer must be... a model with antecedents and consequences.
- Academic excellence places emphasis on technical models not on their thoughtful application
Our use of the hypothetico-deductive method is pants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effort into formulating the question:</th>
<th>minimal</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effort into asking sensible questions that practitioners find important</td>
<td>zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort into a technically good questionnaire</td>
<td>often naive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort into sample size</td>
<td>huge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort into data analysis</td>
<td>gigantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort into interpretation vs other top journal literature</td>
<td>large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort into interpretation vs the reality of practice</td>
<td>zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort into sensible context setting</td>
<td>zero</td>
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</table>
The answer? Mix it up a bit!

- We should not eschew models, but we should make explicit our everyday, intuitive understanding of their limitations. Models are often just a start point for problem solving, not an end point.

- This gap between the model and the final solution is a fruitful space for academic research. The gap may be filled with case study work, qualitative studies or indeed any technique that helps us understand the difference between a model and the local reality.

- The issue is not that this doesn’t happen, but that this kind of work is not valued by upper echelon journals, and hence is frowned upon by deans with targets to reach.
Eclecticism rocks

Social and cultural capital theory
Social learning theory - copying
Cognitive self interest
Emotional self esteem
Social identity theory
Appreciate your time

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