

## Discussion: To What Extent is Scientific Research on Marketing Useful?

ELMAR Contribution by J. Scott Armstrong

February 5, 2003

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Evaluations of scientific research suggest that only a small percentage of journal articles are useful. Smith (1991) estimated that less than one percent of articles in medical journals are useful, and I have found that about three percent of articles on forecasting are useful. While I do not have a quantitative estimate for marketing, the percentage is surely low (my prior would be between one and three percent). I also expect that the iron law of important papers applies; that is, the percentage of useful papers declines over time (as shown for economics by Holub, et al. 1991). The following paper, just published in the *Journal of Business Research*, summarizes evidence explaining why the percentage is low. It also offers solutions.

Here is the abstract . . .

### "Discovery and Communication of Important Marketing Findings: Evidence and Proposals"

My review of empirical research on scientific publication led to the following conclusions. Three criteria are useful for identifying whether findings are important: replication, validity, and usefulness. A fourth criterion, surprise, applies in some situations. Based on these criteria, important findings resulting from academic research in marketing seem to be rare. To a large extent, this rarity is due to a reward system that is built around subjective peer review. Rather than using peer review as a secret screening process, using an open process likely will improve papers and inform readers. Researchers, journals, business schools, funding agencies, and professional organizations can all contribute to improving the process. For example, researchers should do directed research on papers that contribute to principles. Journals should invite papers that contribute to principles. Business school administrators should reward researchers who make important findings. Funding agencies should base decisions on researchers' prior success in making important findings, and professional organizations should maintain web sites that describe what is known about principles and what research is needed on principles.

The paper is in full text at <http://jscottarmstrong.com>.

### References

- Armstrong, J. S. (2003), "Discovery and Communication of Important Marketing Findings: Evidence and Proposals," *Journal of Business Research*, 56, 69-84, with commentaries by Rossiter and Lehmann, 85-90, and a response on pp. 91-92.
- Holub, H. W., Tappeiner, G., & Eberharter, V. (1991), "The Iron Law of Important Articles," *Southern Economic Journal*, 58, 317-328.
- Smith, Richard (1991), "Where is the Wisdom: The Poverty of Medical Evidence," *British Medical Journal*, 303, 798-799.