

Editorial: Towards an Enhancement of Knowledge Generation in Marketing by
Contributions from Non-Western Contexts

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Abstract:

This editorial paper highlights the significance of scholarly contributions from non-western contexts to business and management studies in general and marketing in particular. It calls for constructive, ethical, and committed collaborations between authors and reviewers of academic articles in order to collectively enhance knowledge generation in a global era. Using *Iranian Journal of Management Studies* as a case, it argues that whilst the increasingly epidemic west-centric journal rankings determine research quality perceptions globally, high quality research outputs from local non-western contexts can help draw the attention of researchers across the world to the value of work undertaken in non-western contexts. On this basis, it presents some hands-on suggestions for enhancing the quality of research outputs from non-western contexts, particularly in relation to new or emerging journals such as *Iranian Journal of Management Studies*.

Keywords: knowledge generation, non-western contexts, marketing, authors, reviewers

Introduction

Recently, the editorial management team of IJMS generously asked me to help the Journal with taking on the role of associate editor and process articles submitted in the area of marketing. With no hesitation, I accepted this kind invitation with much appreciation and honour mainly in order to help foster knowledge generation from non-western contexts, a thesis I strongly and passionately believe in. In the lines that will follow I will discuss in more detail what I exactly mean by this. I will deliver my argument in three main parts: I will begin with explaining why recognition is important for journals; then I will critically appraise the importance of knowledge generation from non-western contexts; and finally I will propose some hands-on suggestions for authors and reviewers.

My key objective in this editorial is to put forward a friendly word with colleagues (especially doctoral researchers and fresh PhD graduates) from non-western contexts who, in one way or another, seek to engage with academic journals and contribute to knowledge generation in different areas of business and management studies. While I hope to communicate with colleagues in a wide spectrum of socio-cultural contexts and geographies, I humbly seek to particularly address those colleagues who are interested in publishing in *Iranian Journal of Management Studies* (IJMS) or engaged with the Journal as reviewers.

Viewing IJMS as a case study would imply that the core argument of the paper can also be extended to other journals, especially emerging journals from non-western contexts. Without making any big claim to knowledge, here I primarily seek to share some of my thoughts and observations with my fellow researchers in order for us to collectively move towards building a more outreaching and appealing academic outlet. My specific focus on marketing is due to my personal background in marketing which can help me to deliver a focused and cohesive discussion within a limited space. Therefore, I do not intend, by any means, to exclude other disciplines to which a similar discussion could apply. I should also stress that this piece is not intended to signal a didactic order; rather, it is a modest invitation, in a scholarly manner, to collectively consider self-critique as a useful vehicle to: (1) exchange, based on good will, knowledge, expertise, and experience and accelerate learning in our large and borderless community of academicians; (2) build up and further enhance both individual and collective academic status; and (3) generate fresh knowledge that would benefit society at large.

Journal recognition

IJMS is a relatively new journal and as we all know, either from experience or by general reasoning, for any nascent journal it would take a while before it can establish itself as a credible academic outlet in the field; and by 'field' I mean not the limited boundaries of a geographic context (in this case, Iran) but the 'field of management studies' in a borderless global environment. IJMS, as its name indicates, is Iranian *Journal of Management Studies* (a management studies journal originating from Iran) and *not* Journal of *Iranian Management Studies* (a journal dedicated to issues of Iranian management). Similar examples are *British Journal of Management* and *European Journal of Marketing*, both of which have a global reach. This means that the Journal, as rightly planned and missioned by its founders, is meant to reach a global audience.

Fulfilling such an important objective necessitates recognition, of both the Journal and its authors. To begin with, for example, the theories of 'supply chain' and 'demand fulfilment', as basic tenets of economics, would easily explain the recognition status of the Journal: with so many (and I really mean SO MANY) academic outlets in the world of business and management (let alone numerous journals in other disciplines which also publish business and management related scholarship), academic journals are currently facing an unprecedented form of competition in terms of attracting distinguished authors, which would then lead to gaining a reasonably wide and interdisciplinary readership. A review of the (gradual) growth and establishment of top academic journals reveals that they owe their success to the reputation of their contributors. There is no doubt that journals' success highly depends on their authors. Where there is no monopoly (and obviously there is no monopoly in the context of academic journals), the success of supply side inevitably depends on its demand side; that is, the extent to which the audience need, want, and demand the supplier's service/products. Journal citation rate and interdisciplinary readership are best measures for determining journals' impact and success. Therefore, what matters is not an article's online or offline presence but whether or not it contributes to new research, public engagement, policy work, pedagogy, and industry, to name but a few. On the other hand, authors also gain recognition by publishing in high quality journals. Once an author's work appears in an esteemed academic outlet, she/he can start to boost their confidence in publishing more robust research work and benefit from their publications in a variety of ways.

However, in the social reality of life, recognition is not a self-given status; rather, it is an earned position of being respected and valued by peers or members of society for one's outstanding achievements or contributions. The politics of publishing and journal rankings (Adler and Harzing, 2009; Firat, 2010) aside, achieving recognition by an academic journal is highly dependent on at least two fundamental factors: (1) the quality of submissions; and (2) the quality of reviews. Based on my review of the papers published in IJMS, I am delighted to say that thanks to the founder's vision and editorial team's time consuming hard work and dedication, authors' commendable commitment to knowledge generation, and reviewers' generosity and good will, the Journal has produced a great array of high quality scholarly articles in different areas of management studies. However, as the old saying goes, "nothing is perfect" and there is always room for improvement. This is the reason why I thought that I could possibly contribute to this mission by sharing some ideas with my esteemed colleagues, especially those whose work falls within the general context of marketing. In the interest of brevity and collaboration, I prefer to use marketing as an example and leave the stage open for debate and contributions from senior colleagues (from other disciplines) whose valuable experience and expertise would certainly bring new insights to our research community. Below, I will share some of these thoughts:

West-centric knowledge: an appraisal

As I have already emphasised elsewhere (Jafari et al., 2012), the general field of marketing and consumer behaviour research has been, as though by default, west-centric. That is, the knowledge produced in numerous academic outlets has predominantly focused on either studying western contexts or analysing non-western contexts in the light of theoretical assumptions that have either contextually emerged from or been deeply rooted in western philosophies, worldviews, and methodologies. I would like to make it crystal-clear that I do not mean to undermine the scholarly value of such research contributions. I genuinely acknowledge the invaluable importance of the contributions made by such streams of research. Yet, my curious mind has been constantly and seriously preoccupied with the issues of exclusion, relevance, and limitation.

By 'exclusion' I mean if, for a host of reasons (see Jafari et al., 2012 for a summary), knowledge generated by or in non-western contexts has been less visible, this should not mean that the non-western knowledge does not exist. Indeed it does. It only needs to be extracted from local contexts and make its way onto the stage (international academic outlets such as conferences, journals, and books). Less visibility of such knowledge means deprivation of global research communities of novel or different ways of thinking, supportive or contradictory findings, alternative methodologies, varying theoretical lenses, rich historical evidences, and so forth. Exclusion of such contributions from the shared repository of global knowledge should be regarded as a loss for all shareholders. Since knowledge does not know any physical boundaries, producers of knowledge should not impose such limits on knowledge either. Researchers all around the world would certainly benefit from one another's knowledge and experience. Therefore, whilst all researchers should try to accelerate cross-border learning processes, researchers in non-western contexts should work a bit harder to make their research visible to colleagues across the world. This means paying more attention to publishing systematically and enthusiastically.

'Relevance' is another issue. Despite certain general similarities, research contexts have their own particular differences (see Askegaard and Linnet's 2011 notion of 'context of

context'). This implies that theories cannot be ubiquitously applied to different contexts. Take, for example, rational choice theory as widely applied to the studies of decision making in consumer behaviour research. How can one apply the theory to two or more sociocultural contexts that are largely different in terms of market structures and contents? Can consumers living in a more constrained market economy have the same level of access to market resources in comparison with their counterparts in less constrained market economies? The simple rationale here is that choice matters only when there are options in the market and consumers can choose. Therefore, researchers in non-western contexts should endeavour to think about a broad range of trajectories (e.g., history, economy, development, politics, culture, and technology) that influence consumption and market related phenomena in their own local contexts; and in doing so, they should use theoretical approaches that would better explain their research questions and objectives. Besides, a majority of theories that have been developed in western contexts and are often treated as grand narratives may not have the sufficient power to explain what is really going on in non-western contexts. Consequently, one may question their relevance to the reality of everyday life in a given context.

As the third issue, 'limitation' should also be treated more seriously. Given that there are contextual differences and that over the passage of time, research contexts also experience change (e.g., people's perception of advertising changes as their knowledge of markets and marketing develops), as a result of which some theories may become obsolete. Therefore, theories have their own limitations which are context and time bound. This indicates that even 'formal' theories may actually become more limiting than liberating. Formal theories may narrow researchers' analytical lens and claims to knowledge. Therefore, there will be a need for 'substantive' theories that can have the power to explain a particular phenomenon. Substantive theories do not completely reject formal theories; rather they are developed based on recognising the importance of data which are collected in specific life conditions. Such theories can then be proposed as fresh insights and upon their applicability be accepted by research communities as formal theories (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Generation of substantive theories from empirical work in non-western contexts can be a promising avenue for theoretical enrichment of marketing. That is, what matters is evidence; and evidence should be analysed (qualitatively or quantitatively) and interpreted in the light of theories that would push (even incrementally) the boundaries of knowledge.

Human civilisation has passed through countless ups and down. Societies around the world have experienced different phases of modernisation and re-modernisation and (re)development and (re)underdevelopment. These fluctuations have all left their traces behind. New and old books and historical archives and records such as artefacts and archaeological findings are great sources of re-generation of knowledge that has not been sufficiently utilised to enrich or possibly challenge established assumptions of knowledge. For a variety of reasons, a large number of old and new local authors, intellectuals, and social scientists are still unknown to the global research community. Their work needs to be explored or re-explored; it urgently needs to be incorporated into contemporary social science debates.

Furthermore, as a result of the rapidly changing conditions of life, new research avenues are opening up in marketing that significantly shed light on the relevance of marketing to the very reality of life in contemporary society. For example, issues of transformative marketing (Mick et al., 2011), macromarketing (Shapiro and Tadajewski, 2009), critical marketing (Tadajewski, 2010) and humanistic marketing (Varey and Prison, 2013) can particularly help develop new research that can contribute to enhancing overall quality of life in less economically developed contexts. These streams of research are

essentially policy oriented and their implications are critical to the sustainable development of societies in which different stakeholders such as businesses, consumers, educational and research institutions, NGOs and governments can immensely benefit. Researchers in non-western context should therefore proactively participate in these emerging and highly topical debates and disseminate their propositions to a betterment of life for all societies around the world.

Apart from the above-mentioned theoretical issues that underpin research, methodological decisions and approaches are also immensely important. As stressed by Arnould and Thompson (2005), methodological decisions should be based not on researchers' 'personal passion' but on the 'aims that drive' their research. My point here is not to reiterate the old debate on quantitative/qualitative divide; what I mean is that selection of methodological approaches should be mainly on the basis of the key research aims that would eventually result in the production of fresh knowledge. It is wrong to assume that quantitative methods are solely used in a deductive way and qualitative methods are employed inductively. Both approaches can be recruited in either way. Non-western contexts, however, as I mentioned earlier, are generally understudied. Therefore, it would make more sense to explore a diversity of marketing related phenomena using inductive methods. This approach would fructify theory building from local contexts. For example, as a historical review of the development of consumer behaviour research (Belk, 1995) indicates, marketing has inherited positivism from other disciplines such as west-centric psychology and sociology. Positivism oriented methods are not sufficiently capable of addressing an extensive number of phenomena rapidly emerging in the realm of marketing and consumer research. Researchers should therefore embark on new methodological approaches in order to explore the unexplored and less explored.

Implications for authors

Authors in non-western contexts are all invited to consider the above issues. Yet, as I mentioned earlier, since academic journals are generally seen as the main platform for research dissemination, I will explicate how authors should facilitate their own participation in knowledge generation by commitment to high quality submissions to a journal like IJMS.

IJMS is indexed in many international platforms. This means that a large number of audiences will have access to the Journal's articles. What audiences often look for are fresh theoretical and practical contributions. Validating and revalidating previously (and sometimes old) determined findings may not raise interest in the audience or result in significant contributions. Substantial contributions from authors will not only generate readership for authors and the Journal, but also automatically encourage colleagues from international contexts to consider the Journal for their publications. The enhancement of the Journal's quality can foster competition amongst authors and raise the quality of submissions. Consequently, knowledge generation will experience a boost of standards and authors can help accelerate their own personal development and career prospect planning in a variety of ways.

Besides, the authors' ongoing commitment to significant contributions will directly influence the credibility of the Journal in international journal ranking systems. Although, as I briefly mentioned earlier, the ranking systems have their own criticism, the reality is that academicians around the world are experiencing unprecedented pressure to publish in high ranked journals. High quality submissions to IJMS will help raise the Journal's profile

amongst other journals. Realistically speaking, however, this should be seen as a gradual process which needs determination and patience of all actors. Authors willing to submit manuscripts to the Journal should be aware of the critical role they play in helping both themselves and the Journal.

In addition, the quality of submissions has a direct impact on the quality of reviews received. For example, well-organised manuscripts with clear statement of theoretical positioning and contributions and solid methodological procedures are more likely to generate interest in reviewers who would then provide constructive comments to the authors. It is a fact that reviewers' varying knowledge background, opinions, and sense of ethical responsibility to providing constructive comments influence the quality and quantity of their feedback and recommendations of rejection, resubmission, or acceptance of papers. However, these are closely observed and considered by editors and associate editors in their final decisions. Therefore, it is the initial responsibility of authors to submit high quality manuscripts that have the following characteristics:

(1) A decent manuscript should follow the Journal's 'guidelines for authors'. Following the guidelines will accelerate the review process if deemed appropriate by editors. Guidelines are given for a purpose. Issues of format, citation, and structure are not there for aesthetic reasons. They influence the overall quality of a paper and demonstrate the authors' purposeful intention of engaging with the Journal. Well-organised manuscripts will not waste the editors and reviewers' time and energy. A common mistake amongst inexperienced authors is that they randomly submit their papers to different journals and this should be no surprise to hear 'reject'. A paper should be accurately customised for submission to a specific journal. This means that right from the beginning authors should decide which journal they have in mind so that they develop their paper according to the guidelines of that journal.

(2) What editors initially want to see in a manuscript is the value of the paper at hand. This means that authors should extremely clearly highlight the significance of their contribution. Again a common mistake amongst inexperienced authors is that they only state the research gaps they address. This is necessary but not sufficient. A high quality manuscript should clearly state why addressing a particular gap is important and how doing so contributes to knowledge or practice and in which specific area. Once this becomes evident to the editors, then they decide whether they will send the paper out to reviewers or they will instantly desk-reject it.

(3) High quality empirical articles enjoy tangible coherence in terms of research theoretical positioning, crystal-clear and focused aim and objectives, fair and critical (and not descriptive) appraisal of the pertinent literature, justification and clarity of methods, analytical integrity, plausibility of findings and their in-depth discussion, credibility of conclusions, significance of implications, in-depth acknowledgement of limitations, and relevant directions for future research. Likewise, conceptual papers should enjoy clarity of contribution statement, positioning, critical discussion, conclusions, implications, and directions for future research. Absence of or superficial or ambiguous statement of these elements will not result in ideal situations. A good way of resolving such issues can be seeking peers' view on a manuscript before it is submitted to the Journal. Pre-submission feedback can come, for example, from presentations in conferences and readings groups in which authors can encourage honest feedback from peers.

(4) Last but not least, the reality (whether some may or may not like it) is that the dominant vehicle for communication in today's global landscape of knowledge is the English language, as it was for example the case with other languages (e.g., Greek, Latin, and Arabic) in the past. The criticisms and issues of language dominance (e.g., imperialism, power and new colonialism) aside, the English language may not often be the mother tongue for many authors; consequently, writing in a foreign language may be a challenging task. Nowadays copyediting services are offered by various organisations and individuals. Authors can, along with undertaking personal development programmes that would enhance their writing skills, benefit from such services before submitting their work to the Journal. Well-written manuscripts can communicate their message much more clearly with the audience. No editor would desk-reject a manuscript which has these characteristics.

Implications for reviewers

Reviewers are anonymous individuals who immensely contribute to knowledge production. Out of good will and academic citizenship, they sacrifice their personal time and energy to read and evaluate others' work. This is highly appreciated. Experienced reviewers are very much aware of their critical role in enriching the realm of knowledge. However, with the development of PhD programmes, more colleagues are getting on board to act as reviewers. Less experienced reviewers can tremendously benefit from established senior academics and consequently contribute to the growth of the Journal by developing the necessary skills and knowledge in order to fulfil their task:

(1) As reviewers we should bear in mind that the manuscript at hand is not simply a soulless object. A manuscript is the outcome of a human being's thinking and hard work. This way of thinking can evoke a sense of responsibility towards other human beings. A reviewer's comments can have intellectual, emotional, and psychological impact on the authors. As reviewers, we should remember that we are also authors at some point in line, when we submit manuscripts to journals. Therefore, the peer review process should be seen as a platform for a deep humane interaction which is performed through a mechanical system facilitated by computers.

(2) When we happen to be in a reviewer position, we should provide constructive comments to the authors, comments that can help authors to rethink their work if not recommended for publication. Let us remember that 'what goes round comes round'. Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, reviewers may not be able to spend sufficient time to review a paper. If this is the case, when invited by (associate) editors, the best way to go ahead is to reject invitation as soon as they receive it. Ignoring or pending review invitations will not only delay review processes but also damage their own perceived image in the community. Poor review comments will produce similar results and harm authors. Not agreeing to review is much better than providing a bad review.

(3) Reviewing should also be based on critical reading. Recommendations of major revision or rejection based on fair and constructive critique can sometimes be much more precious than recommendations of acceptance or minor revisions. We can collectively grow only through fair critique. Sometimes, a manuscript

demonstrates some interesting findings and has the potential for making valuable contributions to knowledge, but the author has overlooked some areas of research in the literature, as we all sometimes do. Reviewers can help the author by directing them towards specific references.

(4) Last but not least, reviewers' in depth engagement with the Journal can be a vehicle for their own knowledge enhancement. As reviewers we can always learn new things from the research of colleagues whose work has been submitted to us. Reviewing is also a great opportunity for building one's own credibility in the field. Great reviewers are more likely to be invited to sit on editorial boards, conference panels, and other scholarly activities.

Conclusion

My main objective in this essay has been to share some thoughts with my esteemed colleagues in non-western contexts. Those who are, in one way or another, involved with new or rising journals such as IJMS are my primary audience. First, I explained how and why recognition matters to publishing in academic journals. Next, I briefly discussed the importance of generating fresh knowledge from local contexts and embarking on new research areas that highly relate to the reality of life in their societies. Then, I emphasised the significance of collaboration between authors and reviewers to help generate knowledge and provided some suggestions to authors and reviewers of IJMS as a case. As an individual who comes from a non-western context and has personally experienced the issues I raised above, I am very well aware of the practical everyday life hurdles that researchers in non-western contexts face in their career development and dissemination of their research. Yet, I believe and am positive that close collaborations between two main groups (authors and reviewers) can hopefully help resolve, in the long term, some of these issues and make newly established journals such as IJMS more visible in the field. High quality research output can inevitably encourage institutions (e.g., universities, governments, research bodies, funding organisations, publishers, and private enterprises) in both local and international contexts to support researchers and provide them with sufficient and sometimes very basic means of production and dissemination of research in an increasingly unequal global landscape.

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