

Assessing progress in industrial marketing scholarship: a contribution on contribution

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is on Industrial Marketing scholarship and academe. This paper examines the neglected study of academic contribution. We review the discourse on what contributes a contribution and propose a framework that brings together disparate discussion of four main types of contribution which we refer to as, *incremental*, *revelatory*, *replicatory* and *consolidatory*. Nine sub-categories of contribution strategy are offered within these four main areas and are then forward to conduct a systematic review of industrial marketing scholarship. As an aid to better scholarship, these categories form the parameters of a review of the *rhetorical acts* of authors in framing contribution claims. Through this approach the paper offers conclusions as to the blend of contribution strategies by scholars within *Industrial Marketing* scholarship. We find that while incremental gap-spotting strategies are dominant and that a healthy box-breaking mentality exists in the IM community.

1: Introduction

In this paper, we examine the components of academic contribution in the field of industrial marketing? Contribution is a fluid term, its semantic implications often casting a shadow over doctoral examinations, decisions of whether, or whether *not* to accept a paper for publication. But as a research student, publishing academic or reviewer, clear guidance as to what contributes a contribution is at best, fragmented and no systematic review has been performed on this topic in any discipline. In recent years, a number of academics within the business disciplines, particularly acting in the capacity of journal editors' have offered some advice as to what constitutes a contribution, offering instead a view of 'contribution' as having multiple meanings. In this article, a review of this literature is advanced and a procedure for assessing the progress of an academic sub-discipline – Industrial Marketing – based on this review, is demonstrated. The nature of contributions within a discipline is a worthy subject to periodically consider. The manner of the findings may point to conclusions that a discipline is progressing conservatively or radically. The findings should have value for authors, reviewers and editors as well as to a body of scholars within a discipline when considering its trajectory. For leaders in different areas of research, the approach outlined here offers the potential to compare and contrast the nature of progress relative to sister disciplines.

A trawl across multiple disciplines reveals a number of discussions proposing different types of/strategies for, making academic contributions. This work is fragmented and brought together in this paper as a taxonomy and conceptual framework (illustrated in Fig. 2) which consists of nine categories of contribution. The methodology used to operationalize the framework consists of systematically examining the introductions of 189 papers published in *Industrial Marketing Management* (IMM), the *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* (JBIM) and the *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing* (JBTB). For the purpose of further discussion and development the paper reports an initial test of the model and methodology using a one year survey (2013) of papers in these three industrial marketing journals.

Our contribution on contribution....

The points of analysis for this study are the semantics of contribution claims made by Industrial Marketing scholars. Rather than attempting to second guess the actual contribution made by authors, we study these claims as “rhetorical acts” (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997: 1028) by the authors. It seems then fitting that we therefore outline the contribution of this paper couched in the terms introduced and used throughout the paper. Four main categories of contribution which we will-call, *replicatory*, *incremental*, *revelatory* and *consolidatory*, and a series of nine sub-categories within them are brought together in a single conceptual framework (Fig. 2).

In these terms, the paper makes a *consolidatory* contribution (Type 4 in Fig. 2) – in that a review and report of the most significant discourse that has been entered in respect of contribution is advanced. We identify *neglect* (Type 2.1 in Fig. 2) as to the existence of a coherent framework bringing together the different discussions of contribution in any one

place, in any discipline. As the model is drawn largely from literature outside the discipline of marketing and applied to the study of industrial marketing; in presenting an interdisciplinary review, multiple disciplinary lenses are used to make a revelatory (Type 1.2 in Fig. 2) contribution.

Taking the nine types of contribution a systematic analysis of our sample of papers by industrial marketing scholars is presented. A further Type 2.2 confusion alleviating contribution claim is therefore made by proposing and operationalizing a set of procedures for assessing the relative progress made in a body of work based on the rhetorical acts of authors. In presenting a report of the semantics used by authors in making each type of claim, a further make a Type 2.1 *incremental* contribution is made which fills an area of *neglect* in the business disciplines in respect of the language associated with contribution claims. Additionally, by presenting an analysis of single or multiple claims of contribution in a body of work, the paper presents potentially the first analysis of multiple and single contribution strategies (an additional Type 2.1 contribution). This paper in itself therefore amounts to what we will refer to as having a claim for multi-dimensional contribution - those that contain claims to make more than one of the four main category areas. Through further replication of the methodology in other disciplinary areas (a Type 3 contribution), a means for comparing relative progress in different fields of study could be advanced. We contribute to the practice of scholarship by providing exemplars for scholars attempting to pursue/elucidate different contribution strategies.

The paper progresses as follows. First, in Section 2, a review of existing discourse surrounding academic contribution is advanced, leading to the presentation of our proposed conceptual framework. In Section 3 we outline the methodology for the systematic review of literature, and in Section 4 outline the findings of this survey in a series of charts and tables. Finally in Section 5, we tentatively advance some conclusions; tentatively as we leave room for discussion at conference.

2.0: What is a contribution?

In this section, a review the most significant discourse undertaken in respect of what constitutes a contribution is advanced. Interestingly, much of this discourse is written by journal editors. For clarity, we use the singular *contribution* to denote the statement made in a single paper (which may contain semantics claiming multiple dimensions of contribution) and *contributions* (plural) only when discussing the claims made across multiple papers.

2.1: Original, interesting and useful

Bartunek, Rynes, and Ireland (2006) ask a pertinent question as to what makes research interesting or capable of holding the attention of an audience; they discuss answers to these questions being an assessment of *interestingness*. However, there is a danger in a measure of interestingness that entertainment value is implied. An analysis of

contribution can therefore begin with one measure of an *interesting* contribution as being something that is also *original*. For instance, Corley and Gioia (2011:11) note:

“Our assessment of the current state of the art for publishing theory... indicates that the idea of contribution rests largely on the ability to provide original insight into a phenomenon by advancing knowledge in a way that is deemed to have utility or usefulness for some purpose.”

The terms *utility* and *usefulness* are references to the value offered to scientific and/or practitioner stakeholders, a subject that will be returned to later. In these senses, a contribution is interesting because it provides utility or usefulness to these audiences. A further nuance in a discussion of contribution versus non-contribution is that not all contributions are equally utilitarian or useful; indeed a single contribution may contain a substantial breakthrough in thinking. Corley and Gioia (2011) speak of two potential measures of scale in contributions; *incremental* and *revelatory* contribution. These terms will be discussed in turn later in the piece.

2.2 Practically useful

Returning now to the brief mention made earlier as to scientific and practical usefulness. We acknowledge first Editorial comments in *the Journal of International Business Studies* (Cuervo-Cazurra et al., 2013:285).

“More often than not, this [practical value] is dealt with in a token paragraph, written in the conclusion section as an afterthought once the research and article have been all but completed, with scant concern for praxis that results in dubious practicality.”

These comments are also mirrored by the Editors of the *Journal of Management* (Clark & Wright, 2009) and the Editor of *Organizational Studies* (Courpasson, 2013) who emphasize the importance of scholarship remaining socially relevant. Many leading marketing scholars have become proponents of marketing as a scientific endeavour (Bartels, 1951; Buzzell, 1963; Converse, 1945; Demirdjian, 1976; Hunt, 1983; Hunt, 1993; Hutchinson, 1952) while others have spoken passionately against this (Brown, 1996; Egan, 2009). Implicit in this dichotomy seems to be an assumption that a finding cannot be both scientifically *and* practically useful. Indeed, it would seem entirely possible to advance claims for both simultaneously. This tension has been discussed as the rigour-relevance gap (e.g. Baraldi et al., 2014; Brennan et al., 2014; Cederlund, 2014; Gummesson, 2014). The special edition of JBIM draws several conclusions as to the rigour-relevance gap.

The special edition of JBIM within our survey amounts a substantial contribution to the study of practical contribution. We do not seek to build on this research in this paper as we seek primarily to understand the semantics of contribution *claims* by authors in the Industrial Marketing field of study. However, it would seem probable that an initial focus

on a real world problem which informs a research question might be a better path to a practically useful contribution than starting with a gap in the scientific literature.

2.3: Conceptual and empirical contribution

Several authors have lamented the decline of conceptual articles in marketing journals (MacInnis, 2011; Yadav, 2010), even though conceptual articles are acknowledged to be some of the most heavily cited. Building on earlier discussions in this paper, it is probable that in strategies which attempt to combine lenses with widely differing underlying assumptions, or where attempts are made to blend theory from distant disciplines, then conceptual papers are needed to begin a series of contributions on that theme, probably starting as conceptual and moving towards empirical. We turn next to notions of scientific usefulness and originality.

2.4: Scientifically useful and original

2.4.1: Incremental originality

A contribution predicated on *incremental* originality is based on a traditional *gap spotting* approach (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). Many commentators observe this incremental approach as the dominant mode of publishing strategy (e.g. Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). Tadajewski and Hower (2011:450) for instance suggest that “embedding your research within the existing literature is a must and allows editors, reviewers, and readers to orient themselves”. The approach would seem to involve making a statement as to where current discourse of research is weak and present a credible case to be able to fill that gap. Alvesson and Gabriel (2013:248) refer to this approach as “a missing brick in a wall that the researcher diligently provides.” However, Tadajewski and Hower also cogently note that a gap may exist because there is no value in filling it; therefore a gap spotting strategy must be coupled to a measurement of utility in filling the identified gap.

Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) discuss different sub-strategies within the broader strategy of gap spotting. The first sub-strategy they identify is *confusion* spotting. Confusion exists where a collection of published papers within a theme fail to reach concord on a subject; simply said, where authors fail to agree. An author’s approach here would seem to be to attempt to resolve the embrangement. A second strategy Alvesson and Sandberg identify is *neglect*; an intent to focus on neglected or under researched areas, in which *neglect* could apply to theories, constructs or methodologies, but could also refer to areas where papers are substantially conceptual rather than empirical. An author’s strategy would seem to be to identify the closest and last increment made in a body of work and add an additional increment, thus resolving the neglect. A third approach Alvesson and Sandberg refer to is the gap offered by identifying a new application or context for an existing theory. An author’s approach here would seem to be to identify an explored ‘thing’ that through extension of an application to an unexplored ‘thing’,

extends understanding in some way. In each way, the contribution should amount to a clear statement regarding how and why the paper they are presenting closes, or narrows the identified gap. In other words, knowledge should be one increment further forward when the paper is published. Whilst dominant, critiques of this mode exist. Alvesson and Gabriel (2013:245) suggest that a *formulaic* approach involves:

“...extreme specialization, an incrementalist and ultra-cautious attitude toward theoretical contributions, formulaic methodologies, and a standardized article presentation targeted at very narrow and sympathetic academic communities”.

The *incremental* strategy would seem to amount to a publishing formula. Therefore, we turn next to consider *revelatory* contribution as an alternative approach to framing contribution.

2.4.2: Revelatory originality

A premise of incremental gap-spotting contributions is that a simple binary opposition exists. A gap exists versus a gap does not exist. But how should we inculcate a notion of the size of a gap, or the magnitude through which a contribute fills that gap? We note the following lament by Shelby Hunt (1994:15) in the European Journal of Marketing.

“Marketing reviewers react quite negatively when a manuscript offers a genuinely original contribution to knowledge. Criticisms such as “where is the precedent?” and “where is the authority?” are, in my experience, disproportionately prominent in reviews by marketing referees. Indeed, marketing authors have been known to cite nonmarketing researchers for authority (using locations such as “drawn from...”) even when, strictly speaking, the marketing author has made an original nonmarketing contribution. Marketers making genuinely original contributions to knowledge do so at their peril.”

Hunt’s comments clearly point to the comfort many reviewers have with incremental contribution and the discomfort they have with extant strategies. Alvesson and Sandberg (2014) speak of two typologies of research which they call *boxed-in* and *box-breaking*. The notions of boxes seem to refer to communities of specialization such as domain boxes, method boxes and perspective boxes. Confusion and neglect spotting strategies seem to us synonymous with boxed-in research, whereas new context seems to suggest a box-breaking mode, but potentially still of an incremental contributory magnitude. Corley and Gioia (2011:201) contrapose *incremental* contribution with *revelatory* contribution which rests “in the idea that contribution arises when theory *reveals* what we otherwise had not seen, known, or conceived” [emphasis added]. Alvesson and Sandberg (2013:132) further note that:

“The dominance of incremental gap-spotting research is even more puzzling, as it is well known that it is consensus-challenging, not

consensus-seeking theories that tend to receive most attention and become influential.”

A possible interpretation of these two preceding authoritative comments is that making a *small* contribution is a safer strategy for authors than making a *big* contribution, a troublesome notion for a discipline interested in progress. It is therefore here that we argue for the value offered by periodic systematic analysis of a disciplines output. Alvesson and Sandberg (2014:968) caution that specialization within a tightly defined research paradigm, or school of thought, can result in “an inclination to take too much for granted and often being oblivious about what is going on outside one’s specialized field.” Other authors note that gap spotting and a subsequent focus on methodological rigour downplay the importance of imagination, conceptual development and speculative thought (Weick, 1989) and equally reduce the chance of unexpected, challenging and surprising results (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013). We take forward three particular pieces of work which could have been seen to propose strategies in contrast to a gap spotting approach which could deliver revelatory contribution – these are:

- Alvesson/Sandberg’s (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; 2014; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011) notions of problematization and box-breaking research.
- Okhuysen and Bonardi’s (2011) discussion of revelatory contribution based on combining different lenses and challenging underlying assumptions; and
- Suddaby, Hardy and Huy’s (2011) combination of a problematization strategy with theorizing using implicit/explicit assumptions of a body of work and theorizing within one or across multiple bodies of literature.

2.4.3: Revelatory insight by combining lenses

Davies and Fitchett, (2005) have argued that marketing has been defined by its multi-disciplinary status for some time. Marketing has been discussed as “an eclectic activity studied and undertaken by people with a wide variety of skills and knowledge bases” (Ringold & Weitz, 2007:251) which has “borrowed heavily from other social science traditions” (Rust, 2006). There are numerous comments by leading marketing academics as to the *lack of*, and therefore *need for* indigenous theory (Rust, 2006) and subsequent theory weakness of the marketing discipline (cf Burton, 2001, 2005). Within the semantics of this discourse, marketing would seem to have a subordinate self-image relative to perceived mother disciplines. Economics, sociology and psychology have been argued to be ‘mother’ or ‘foundational’ disciplines to the management disciplines and the management field contains many sister fields of study alongside marketing, such as accounting, human resource management, organizational studies etc., many of whom have considerable overlaps (Birkinshaw et al., 2014; Cornelissen & Durand, 2014). In a similar vein, we note the comments of the Editors of the *Journal of Management who note*:

“Developing multi-disciplinary research in the pursuit of explaining complex observed puzzles may be a more fruitful means to generate significant insights than seeking to find gaps in existing theories” (Clark & Wright, 2009:7).

The above comment suggest the advantage of box-breaking research that steps outside of a specialized box. Suddaby, Hardy and Huy (2011) echo these views and stress theorizing within one body of literature and alternatively, theorizing across multiple bodies of literature. The notion of literatures brings the principle of interdisciplinarity into the discussion of contribution. Interdisciplinary research focuses on integration and combination of concepts from multiple disciplines in a theoretical contribution (Cheng et al., 2009). However, each *body* of research could resemble a *box* in Alvesson and Sandberg’s (2014) reading and therefore could refer to combining literatures between boxes as well larger disciplines. Indeed, Okhuysen and Bonardi (2011) speak of the distances between the two bodies of literature being combined based on their natural domain of residence. Oswick Fleming and Hanlon (2011) make a further distinction between the wholesale importation of theory from one discipline into another – theory borrowing, and the combination of concepts and constructs from two or more disciplinary areas – theory blending. Whetten, Felin and King (2009) also discuss notions of vertical and horizontal theory borrowing, for instance to take a concept from a sister or mother discipline and apply it at a different level of analysis, or using a general theory such as transaction cost theory to develop a mid-range theory of buyer-supplier interaction in industrial marketing problem. Horizontal borrowing suggests taking a mid-range theory from a sister discipline and applying it within an industrial marketing context.

Returning to our opening comments in this section regarding marketing’s self image, Marketing itself has numerous sub-fields (or boxes) of endeavour of which industrial marketing is one. Zahra and Newey (2009) make several very important points in respect of theory building using different lenses. First, they make a point in respect of the output of the theorizing process in which lenses were combined. Such output may lead to developments inside the discipline (or within a box) or may reciprocally change the fundamentals of the theory from the borrowed discipline, and such impact is therefore magnified – that is, the revelatory contribution is heightened. When the impact moves up from sister to mother disciplines, this would seem to be the most significant. We propose the potential of combining four typologies for interdisciplinary contribution.

	Horizontal	Vertical
Theory borrowing	When contribution using borrowed theory is made within box and is recognized by sister disciplines also using the borrowed theory	When contribution using borrowed theory is made within box and is recognized by mother disciplines
Theory blending	When blending of concepts drawn from sister disciplines applied within the box is recognized as a contribution by sister disciplines (distant horizontal) and in horizontal boxes (close horizontal).	When blending of concepts drawn from sister disciplines applied within the box is recognized as a contribution by mother disciplines

Fig 1: Contribution based on combining lenses (Author’s conceptualization)

Returning to the words of Hunt (1994:15) cited earlier:

“Indeed, marketing authors have been known to cite non-marketing researchers for authority (using locations such as “drawn from...”) even when, strictly speaking, the marketing author has made an original non-marketing contribution”.

By non marketing contribution, we argue that he is referring to a sister or mother discipline. The comment points to timidity in claiming revelatory contribution, and where no preceding increment is apparent in the marketing literature, to claim unnecessarily that their influence lies outside the discipline – seemingly to assuage concerns that papers will be rejected for being *unprecedented*. Hunt continues

“Also unsurprising is the lack of attention that our journals receive from non-marketing academics. If original contributions to knowledge are systematically screened from our literature, only those (few) non-marketing academics who have an interest in other disciplines’ theories applied in marketing will pay attention to our literature”.

A contribution based on theory drawn from another discipline may be original in marketing, but fears of “very narrow and sympathetic academic communities,” may instead steer an author towards framing their contribution in boxed-in incremental terms. A hoped for contribution of this paper is to find a point of reference within the industrial marketing box that allows (perhaps somewhat paradoxically) an in-box precedent to confidently claim the legitimacy of boxed-out/ revelatory contribution.

2.4.4: Revelatory insight through challenging underlying assumptions: problematization

Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) speak of a further strategy for attaining a revelatory contribution that they refer to as *problematization* (the meaning here seems distinct to the term as used by Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997). The crux of this strategy is to challenge the underlying assumptions of a body of work or challenge the consensus in a body of work (Grant & Pollock, 2011). Alvesson and Sandberg (2011:252) refer to this strategy as being:

“...to come up with novel research questions through a *dialectical interrogation* of one’s own familiar position, other stances, and the domain of literature targeted for assumption challenging”.

Alvesson and Gabriel (2013) also speak of this assumption challenging approach as being polymorphic research. The advice offered by both preceding author teams in pursuing this contribution strategy is to identify the underlying assumptions, expose them and articulate the challenge being offered to the underlying assumptions in a way that is meaningful to the audience of the paper. Equally, Suddaby, Hardy and Huy (2011), speak of theorising within the explicit or implicit assumptions of a body of literature. Where

assumptions are implicit, then logically an author must make explicit those assumptions as part of the rhetorical act;

Okhuysen and Bonardi (2011) suggest that in addition to combining different bodies of literature (or boxes) and research, a second competing tension after challenging the underlying assumptions of the body of works being drawn upon is the proximity of the theoretical lenses that a scholar seeks to combine. They suggest that a contribution based on challenging proximate assumptions is more difficult for an author to make as there can seem little value in challenging broadly compatible assumptions. More value can be discerned when those close areas of research have at least incompatible assumptions. However, this type of contribution is more difficult to articulate clearly.

2.4.5: Replicatory contribution

Having examined contribution as one measure of an interesting contribution, we here examine replication as a further source of interesting contribution, and one often overlooked in the social sciences (Evanschitzky & Armstrong, 2013; Honig et al., 2014; Hubbard & Lindsay, 2013; Hubbard et al., 1998; Hunter, 2001; Uncles & Kwok, 2013b). However, is originality synonymous with advancing knowledge? A further way through which knowledge can be advanced is through theoretical replication. By extending the generalizability, a contribution has arguably been made. We note the comments of Hunter (2001:149) in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

I have been very disturbed by articles rejected as mere replications of existing studies. [...] I intend to point out the grave errors in that judgment. The fact is that we need to publish replication studies of all types and we need many such replications for each study.

The comment reflect concerns expressed by the Editor of *Industrial Marketing Management* in respect of the lack for replication studies in *Industrial Marketing* (LaPlaca, 2013) and resemble those of Hubbard, Vetter, & Little (1998) in the *Strategic Management Journal* in respect of the lack of replication studies in the management and marketing journals. Hubbard and Armstrong (1994:236) define replication as:

“...a duplication of a previously published empirical study that is concerned with assessing whether similar findings can be obtained upon repeating the study.”

Uncles and Kwok, (2013a) utilize Brinberg and McGrath's (1995) framework to illustrate three types of replication studies. Brinberg and McGrath's discuss three aspects of research design *conceptual* (C), *methodological* (M) and *substantive* (S). The first type of replication they discuss is exact replication where C, M and S remain constant. Hunter (2001) refers to this as statistical replication. Statistical replication involves drawing the same correlations between the same variables in the same way, using the same procedures within the same sample. Uncles and Kwok, (2013a) refer to a second kind of replication as close replication where slight variation is allowed in C, M or S. Hunter

(2001) refers to such a type as scientific replication where the sample frames should be broadly representative in terms of the questions asked. Uncles and Kwok (2013a) mention a third category of replication as being differentiated replication where variances in C, M and/or S are deliberately designed to establish the generalization of a previous study. Hunter (2001) refers to this as conceptual replication studies.

Tsang & Kwan (1999) also note that replication should involve consistent underlying assumptions and ideally a replication should be performed by different researchers at a different time to the study being replicated.

“Scholars have too often conducted one or very few studies addressing many of the emergent topics before casting them aside as “settled business,” as though the evidentiary weight provided by a limited number of studies should serve as sufficient validation of a topic’s theoretical premises (Goldsby & Autry, 2011:325)

There seems outwardly some similarity between new context incremental strategy and differentiated replication, and we will explore this similarity in our findings.

2.4.6: Consolidatory contribution

We use the term *consolidatory* contribution to refer to dedicated literature review papers of scholarly work in the field to advance knowledge in some way. There are two main types of literature reviews. The first and most common, is a narrative review (also known as traditional or conventional) and involves conceptually presenting literature in a subjective manner. The second type is a systematic review in which greater objectivity is argued for because they provide results which can be generalised, and indeed replicated to some extent. As an already established type of literature review in the medical fields (Tranfield et al., 2003), systematic reviews in business research and sub fields have only recently recognised attracted attention (Denyer & Neely, 2004). Within both literature review types some validity concerns arise such as the thoroughness of the review, how well the literature review methodology is documented and also the selection criteria of studies used (Tranfield et al., 2003). Based on paradigmatic differences, researchers choose to use a narrative or systematic approach. According to Denyer and Tranfield (2006), interpretivist authors criticise the traditions of a systematic approach as they conform to positivist assumptions.

Regardless of the type of review, literature review papers still have to explicitly outline the type of contribution made. Hodgkinson and Ford, both Editors of the *Journal of Organizational Behaviour* underpin the importance of contribution in literature review papers in the following:

“We are seeking to attract well-conceived proposals that can be developed into timely and insightful papers that review the very best scholarship addressing up to the minute issues, as well as issues of enduring concern to I-O (industrial and organizational)

psychology/OB (organizational behaviour) scholars, offering incisive critiques that will stimulate further progress in theory building and theory testing, fresh waves of empirical work, and/or methodological advances, by mapping out future directions coupled tightly to the accompanying critiques of the work surveyed, thereby ensuring that the articles we publish are both novel and wide-ranging in their significance and reach for the research domain in question” (Hodgkinson & Ford, 2014:2).

Literature review papers therefore, provide important input and theoretical lucidity by conceptualising previous work and advancing knowledge, as well as addressing research gaps that can inform future research.

2.4.7: Conceptual framework

We bring together our review of the extant literature on contribution and propose the following conceptual framework that we will take forward as the basis of a systematic review of literature in the remainder of the article.

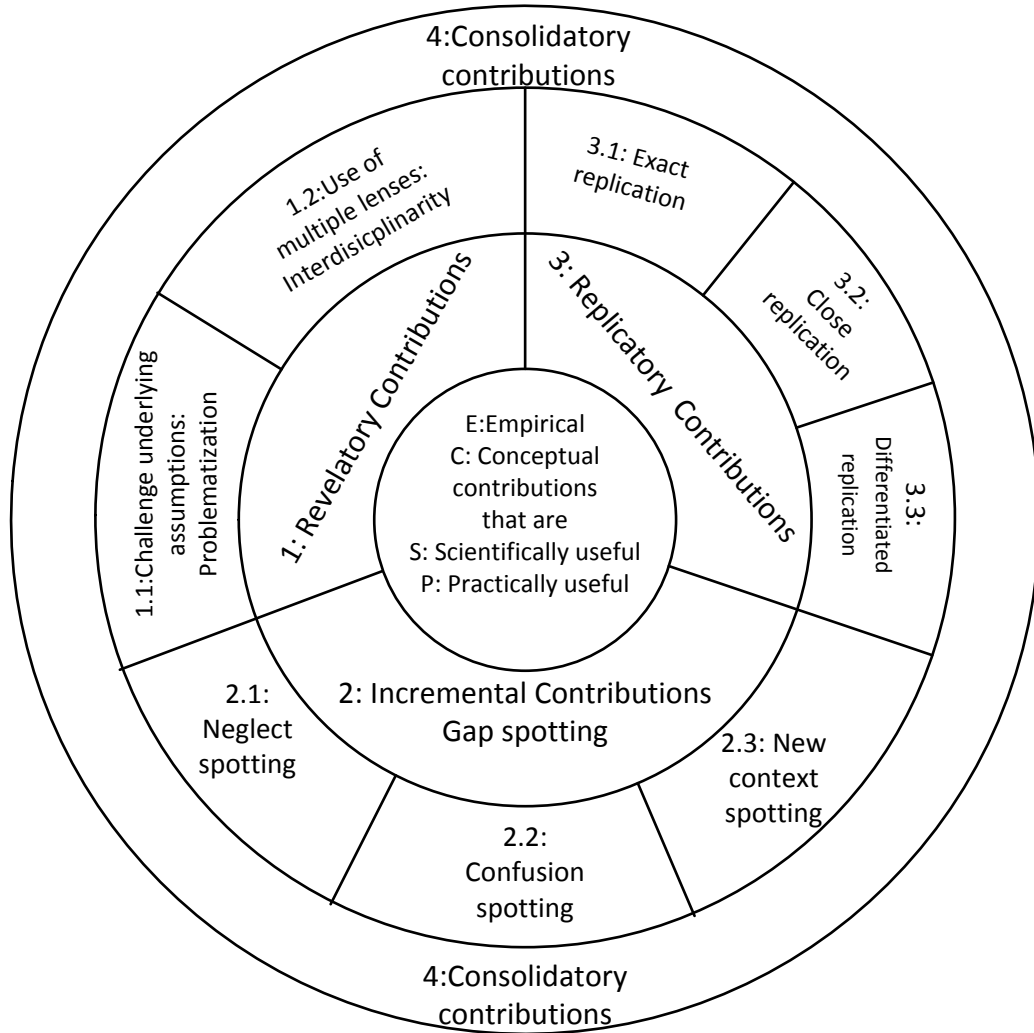


Fig 2: Conceptual model: Dimensions of contribution in Industrial Marketing

3.0: Methodology

The research methodology has two aims, to provide a procedure through which to identify the language used by authors in framing their contribution, and then to use that to allocate these claims to the categories of contribution outlined in our framework. In our results, we identify exemplars of the semantics we have associated with each category (in Section 4) and then we present a summary of the counts made in respect of each type of contribution. The methodological approach for this paper is informed by the work of Evanschitzky et al. (2007) who perform a systematic review of replication studies in the management disciplines, and by Locke and Golden-Biddle's (1997) grounded approach to examining the rhetoric of contribution statements. In this paper, a one year census (2013) was taken of the three most recognised industrial marketing journals, *IMM*, *JBIM* and *JBTB*. Each article was opened in its electronic form and the introduction sections and abstracts of the papers examined. A total of 189 articles were examined. Editorials and introductions to special editions were discounted. The validity of this assumption was supported in that we found that 90% of the papers reviewed were classifiable under this approach. A further 10% were, at the first pass unclassifiable and these were collected as a separate sample which we coded as *outliers*. An outlier analysis was conducted on completion of the survey by the research team as a panel; the results of which we present later in the analysis.

One of the research team examined the semantics of the contribution in each paper and attempted initially to associate the claims made by the authors in the reviewed papers deductively with eight categories of contribution drawn from the literature review (Fig. 1). We find support for this approach in the words of Locke and Golden-Biddle (1997:1027), who suggest that:

“In a formal publication, opportunities for contribution are developed in its introductory paragraphs and pages—regardless of when during the research process the work's relationship to the existing body of work was specified. It is also in the introduction that the theoretical traditions in the form of extant literature are integrated most fully into the text.”

However, a concern remained that the approach in relying on introductions and abstracts as a measure of contribution made may be unreliable as contribution actually made in the body of the work may differ. To address this concern, a further sample of 10% (24 articles) was then rechecked by a second researcher to assess whether there was consistency between what the claims were in the introductions against the remainder of the paper, especially in the contribution section of the article. We found 100% comfort between the introductions and bodies of work – comfort that the claims made in the introduction were not contradicted by comments made in the body of the paper. We believe that our approach offers efficacy in assessing contributions in a body of work. Contribution statements were found in some cases to be multi-level and therefore, a single paper could be classified into a number of categories. The maximum we found was in a single paper was 4. Where multiple claims (for instance 3 different areas of neglect)

were made, but which fitted under a single category, this was counted once under a single category.

4.0: Findings

In Fig 1, we have proposed four broad categories and in Section 3 have outlined a methodology through which the conceptual model could be deployed for the purpose of assessing contribution in a body of work. We present a summary of the main counts relating to the four main contribution types in Table 1.

Table 1: Split between the four main categories of contribution

Contribution type	Occurrence of a contribution type in a single paper *	Occurring in % of papers in the sample of 189
Type 1.0: Revelatory	52	28%
Type 2.0: Incremental	150	79%
Type 3.0: Replicatory	9	5%
Type 4.0: Consolidatory	6	3%
Papers classed as Outliers	18	10%

NB: *a paper can contain more than one contribution type.
N=189.

Our first conclusion is that the methodology is sound, in that we were able to categorize 90% of contribution statements in the 189 papers at a first pass, leaving 10% which we have classified as outliers, and to which we will return later in the paper. We feel therefore that the methods outlined above are a credible approach to assessing contributions in a body of work. To further establish the viability of the approach, a further random sample of 10% of the examined papers was taken and the full paper read to check for evidence of a contradiction between claims in the introduction and discussion in the remainder of the papers.

The results broadly confirm the dominance of incremental contribution strategies, which are evident in 79% of the sample, which is unsurprising. 87% of the papers in the sample were empirical and 13% conceptual. We identified 6 articles in the sample which we classify as consolidatory (type 4) contribution (3% of the sample). What seems outwardly encouraging for IM scholarship is the 28% of papers contain revelatory contribution. We next examine these findings in more detail.

4.1: Incremental contribution

It is quite apparent that incremental contribution is the dominant strategy by authors in their introductions with 79% of the papers examined assessed as containing claims for incremental contribution based on traditional gap spotting strategies. Within these 150 papers, a sweep was made for the semantics used by the authors in order to further sub-classify these contributions. In Table 2, we present a summary of the most consistent

terms used by authors and which we have chosen to associate with a neglect spotting strategy.

Table 2: Semantics used by authors in neglect spotting strategies

“neglect”	“first time”	“lack of focus”
“rare”	“first study”	“in its infancy”
“poor reporting”	“not attempted”	“no studies”
“not defined/tested/examined”	“little understood”	“not yet specified”
“scarce”	“little written”	“yet to be uncovered”
“lack of empirical insight/mostly conceptual to date”	“little evidence”	“only just begun”
“ignored/ignores”	“paucity”	“overlooks”
“have not been addressed”	“lack of research”	“relatively little attention”
“relatively unexplored”	“dearth”	“underutilized”
“have paid less attention”	“paid little attention”	“insufficiently acknowledged”

The semantics detailed in Table 2 denote again the dominant neglect spotting strategy to developing an incremental contribution with 56% (36% of the total sample) of incremental contribution being defined under these semantics as denoting neglect spotting strategies. These counts are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Counts of incremental contribution under the three sub-headings.

	Type 2.1: Neglect	Type 2.2: Confusion	Type 2.3: New context
Count	84	26	40
% of incremental contributions that are:	56%	17%	27%
% of the papers that have incremental contributions	36%	11%	17%

We feel a high degree of comfort in indentifying neglect spotting strategies as the semantics seem quite consistent across the 150 papers in which identify incremental contribution. Turning to confusion spotting, we also found the semantics quite consistent. We draw a distinction between neglect and confusion based on semantic nuances that suggest the confusion spotting denotes the existence of ‘something’ – but which

‘something’ is insufficient or inadequate in some way. We present the terms we have associated with a neglect spotting strategy in Table 4.

Table 4: Semantics used by authors in confusion spotting strategies

“clarify”	“underdeveloped”	“whilst some studies...others..”	“seek deeper understanding”
“poor understanding”	“limited evidence”	“not firmly established”	“modest support”
“not fully understood”	“requires further development/investigation”	“limited work”	“unanswered question”
“ongoing debate”	“controversy”	“remains unclear”	
“inadequately explained”	“inconsistency”	“conflicting evidence”	

Confusion spotting strategies were identified in 14% of the papers in the total sample and can be identified in 17% of those papers that have incremental strategies in them. Turning to the third proposed sub-category of incremental contribution of new context contribution (Type 2.3), the semantics were slightly trickier to identify. We identify in Table 5 some of the semantics we associate with a *new context* contribution strategy.

Table 5: Semantics used by authors in new context spotting strategies

“from a different side of a dyad”	“extensions of earlier work”	“compliments previous studies”
“problem from a different agents perspective”	“change of focus”	“not been systematically examined”
“different point of view”	“different paradigm”	“extends framework”
“extends understanding”	“patterns new to existing theory”	

21% of the incremental contribution papers we have classified as containing a new context strategy, and which amounts to 27% of those papers that contain incremental strategies. However, many of the contributions we have allocated to this category have somewhat more nuanced claims. We have therefore selected and present in Table 6, a series of exemplar statements which indicate what we feel are contribution based on extensions with new context spotting strategies.

Table 6: Table of exemplars for new context strategy contribution.

		Extension of	To context of
Bin (2013:609)	“Specifically, by adopting the theory of reasoned action (TRA) to the context of user innovation and focusing on individual user innovators...”	TRA	User innovation
Turkulainen et al. (2013:224).	“Although the arguments of the information processing model have been widely applied by scholars in different fields [...] they have not been elaborated in the context of integration of sales and operations functions in a global project-based firm.”	Information processing model	Sales and operations functions
Henneberg et al. (2013:3)	“There exists, therefore, a potential issue with regard to the applicability of such goods-based theories and concepts in the context of services.”	Good based theories	Services
Spring & Araujo (2013:60).	“The second way in which we complement the existing research is by linking this close examination of the factory or firm's manufacturing capabilities to the network in which the firm operates.”	Manufacturing capabilities	network

We have therefore chosen to more closely associate a new context strategy with extensions of x to new context y than that discussed by Alvesson and Sandberg (2011).

It is perhaps unsurprising when examining three journals which amount to a specialized box, that the dominant mode of theory advancement is incremental based on various gap spotting strategies. The significance of new context strategies suggests however a significant proportion of box breaking research is being attempted by researchers. We next further examine further box breaking approaches under the heading of revelatory contribution.

4.2: Revelatory contribution

Revelatory originality has been proposed by authors to consist of two main sub-grouping, assumption challenging (1.1) and using multiple lenses (1.2). Using multiple lenses and new context spotting (2.3) seem to us to be examples of box breaking thinking. We identified 52 (28%) of papers in our sample which had revelatory claims of contribution in them (these may be addition to or in combination with other contribution types). We illustrate the split between the two sub-categories in Table 7.

Table 7: The split between the two sub-categories of revelatory contribution in the sample.

	1.1 CHALLENGE ASSUMPTIONS	1.2 MULTI LENSES
Count	30	22
% of sample containing contribution type	16%	12%

4.3: Challenging assumptions

Similar to the findings in relation to new context gap spotting strategies, the semantics were more subtle and more difficult to define. Indicative terms included “contest,” “contrast,” “challenge,” and “alternative.” Our approach here was guided by the best practice advice offered by Okhuysen and Bonardi (2011). They discuss how the difficulties in pursuing this contribution strategy are tied up with semantics, particularly in the way an underlying assumption is surfaced and then challenged. We examined these more nuances attempts to expose underlying assumptions in an attempt to extract exemplars. We present these in Table 8.

Table 8: Exemplars of assumption challenging research

		Assumptions being challenged
Ford & Mouzas (2013:432)	“This paper aims to contribute to the development of an alternative interpretation of the process and structure of management in business companies that has been associated with the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP) of researchers and which appears to cut across these conventional ideas of the process and structure of business”	Assumptions relating to process and structure
Huang et al. (2014:455)	“In order to understand this we must go behind such general patterns of correlations among variables based on cross sectional studies to examine the mechanisms and processes by which they affect each other and how they change and evolve over time”	Assumptions of cross-sectional studies
Kowalkowski et al. (2013:19)	“This study contests the established view that firms undergo specific phases during a service transition trajectory and that particular business models are especially suitable for service provision in a manufacturing context”	Assumptions of transition to services being phased.
Möller (2013:325)	“The paper contributes to the advancement of business marketing theory by offering an enhanced understanding of the nature of current theory by challenging current views on the unifiability of the relationship marketing and business network approaches, and by providing a market versus network-based contingency view.”	Assumptions of incompatibility between relationship and network paradigms and markets versus networks logic
Oberg (2013:113)	“To provide an alternative view of creativity on the organizational level”	Assumptions of organizational creativity.

4.4: Using multiple lenses

We find that the semantics of using multiple lenses rather easier to identify than in an assumption challenging strategy. Words such as “interdisciplinary”, “disciplinary”, “multi-disciplinary” and “literature synthesis” we associate with a multiple lens contribution strategy. We find this contribution strategy in 9% of the papers in our sample. However, similar to assumptions challenging claims, making claims based on using multiple lenses also contain more nuanced claims. We provide some examples in Tale 9.

Table 9: Exemplars associated with multiple lens contribution strategies

Mason et al. (2013:347)	“We strive to draw on inter and multi-disciplinary research in ways that helps us develop sound and useful theory in the field of industrial marketing management?”
Hawkins et al. (2013:1267)	“Whereas researchers have called for an integration of ethics research with other areas [...] in a buyer supplier context, a fusion of the two levels of analysis has only occurred in one study. By bridging this gap, the opportunity exists to enhance our understanding of supply chain dynamics and to add significant understating to the decision making process that involves B2B opportunism.”
Oberg (2013:113)	“The paper pools research on creative processes and interaction, while discussing them from a competence integration point of view.”
Blonska et al. (2013:1296)	“We combine the transactional approach of supplier development investment with the reciprocal approach of relational capital building.”
Andersen & Kragh (2013:82)	“However, these streams of research exist almost independently of each other”.

4.5: Replicatory contribution strategies

Our intent in this paper was to create a conceptual framework and set of procedures based on all types of contribution discussed in current literature. Rather unsurprisingly, we found very limited evidence of claims of replication. Of the three sub-classifications of replicatory strategy, we found no claims which we could comfortably classify as exact or close replication. Differentiated replication is discussed as being a variation in conceptual, methodological or substantive (Brinberg & McGrath, 1995) domains. In the attempt to define type 3.3 contribution, we found ourselves debating whether they were in fact type 2.3 new context contribution. We found only 9 examples we initially thought were indicative of a differentiated replication approach. Key terms we identified were “confirm,” “confirmation,” and “this study builds upon.” We will return to the similarities between differentiated replication and new context strategies in our conclusions.

4.6: Multidimensional contribution

Our findings above were that 79% (150 papers) of our sample contained incremental strategies. We can further identify that in 72% of our sample (136 papers), an incremental contribution was claimed exclusively. However, what is also revealing is to consider the combinations of strategies. Taking our 9 sub-categories as a base, we identified that 127 papers contained a single contribution claim, 32 papers contained two discernable contribution claims, and 9 papers contained 3 or more contribution types, the most being 4 (in only 1 paper). What is also interesting is to consider contribution across the four main categories. In particular we find that 14 papers (7% of our sample) attempt revelatory contribution and incremental contribution in the same paper. A further 20 papers (11% of the sample) attempt a discreet revelatory contribution. Perhaps surprisingly only 7 of these 20 papers were conceptual, with 65% attempting discreet empirical revelatory contribution.

4.7: Outlier and control sample analysis

We were unable to classify 18 papers or 10% of our sample using our standard procedures. These papers were examined by a panel in their entirety. On inspection, we found that in six papers, the contribution remained unclear throughout the papers. In a further four the contribution claimed appeared later in the paper. Interestingly, a further 8 papers focussed on a practical problem throughout the paper, not really focussing on a theoretical contribution. In the 10% control sample, we were able to find 100% satisfaction that the contribution strategy outlined at the head of the paper was pursued throughout the piece. However, a qualitative observation was that a number of authors were under-claiming their contribution. Particularly in a number of papers where we identify a single incremental contribution, challenges to assumptions and multiple lens strategies were evident.

5.0: Conclusions contribution and future directions.

An overarching conclusion is that the model derived from the current discourse on contribution is sufficient to categorize all the papers in the sample. Examination of the outliers did not lead to a conclusion that a further contribution type existed not covered in the framework. However, an interesting point for further discussion is whether a paper can lead with only a practical problem stated in the introduction, in the absence of a literature based contribution. A further conclusions from the control sample was indeed the thinness of practical contribution, generally made (and indeed done so due to editorial guidance) in the closing sections of papers. We therefore offer this framework and procedure as a means of assessing the nature of contribution in a body of work.

We have offered in the paper a means by which authors and reviewers can bring the subject of contribution into sharp focus. Through examining and reporting on the semantics of contribution, we hope to have provided some guidance to better frame contribution statements. We find a basis on which to suggest that authors be braver in claiming multiple contribution in a paper, rather than looking for (as many authors seemed to have been doing) a single claim of contribution. The sample now requires extending and the number of years of study will be increased going forward. Replication strategies in particular require further investigation. Qualitatively it seems to use that some papers classified as new context might have been claimed as differentiated replications, and indeed some papers where replication is used as a term, may actually be better classified as new context extensions. Conclusions here are unsatisfactory and need further study, and indeed discussion in the industrial marketing community.

To our knowledge, this paper marks the first attempt to conduct a deductive and systematic analysis of contribution in a body of work (we note here the grounded approach to contribution statements undertaken by Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997). For this reason, it is difficult to draw conclusions about what the findings tell us about industrial marketing. The findings seem to confirm the dominance of incremental gap spotting approaches, particularly of neglect and confusion based variations. However, there seems to us to be a pleasing amount of assumption challenging and use of lenses from outside the core industrial marketing box. Conceptual papers regularly appear alongside empirical papers and many empirical papers employ assumption challenging strategies, rather than these just being found in conceptual papers. It seems to us that a healthy box breaking mentality is therefore at play in industrial marketing. In particular, we identify a confidence with combining incremental and revelatory approaches within the community. Our intent in this paper is to present to our community an initial view of our discipline, stimulate discussion and develop the insight available from a larger sample.

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