Journal of Business Research 63 (2010) 1269–1272

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Business Research

# Golder's historical method in research in marketing

Ann-Marie K. Thompson *

*AUT Business School, Auckland University of Technology, D93, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, New Zealand*

ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*
Received 1 July 2009
Received in revised form 1 August 2009
Accepted 1 September 2009

*Keywords:*
Historical method
Market share stability
Surprising findings
Seminal article

ABSTRACT

This article reviews a seminal article in the historical marketing literature — "Historical Method in Marketing Research: With New Evidence on Long-Term Market Share Stability" (Golder, 2000). The present study uses citation analysis and commentary to consider the contributions of Golder (2000) to the marketing discipline. This review explores why the article is seminal and how Golder's article influences marketing historical research. Golder's article is important for two main reasons. First for its findings, which contradict commonly held beliefs about long-term market share stability, though the relevant literature largely ignores these findings. The literature does recognize Golder's (2000) second contribution of the historical method: his article offers clear guidelines to new and emerging research in historical marketing.



## 1. Introduction

According to Armstrong, 2003, academic literature in marketing does not provide many important findings. Criteria to judge if findings are important are whether or not they are replicable, valid, useful, and surprising (Armstrong, 2003). Golder (2000) is one article that fits these criteria. Golder's article presents a method for historical research and uses the method to analyze the commonly held belief that market share is stable over time. Golder analyses Kotler's (1997, p. 352) statement, "19 out of 25 companies who were market leaders in 1923 were still market leaders in 1983." Using his historical method Golder (2000) finds this statement to be incorrect.

Woodside (2009) states that multiple methods are necessary for evaluating the importance of findings. Possible importance metrics include the number of citations in general, the average number of citations per article in that year, and the number of citations in high impact journals.

The present article evaluates the importance of Golder's (2000) findings based on Armstrong's (2003) criteria and citation analysis (Woodside, 2009). This paper concludes that Golder's (2000) article is important not only because of the surprising findings, but as achieving seminal article recognition for the historical method in marketing. The present study shows that though Golder presents important findings that contradict a commonly held belief, the relevant literature largely ignores these findings.

## 2. Historical method — The first contribution

Golder's (2000) article presents steps to undertake the historical method and illustrates these steps using the example of brand leadership studies. He synthesised prior historical methods literature and places the historical method for marketing within the landscape of cross-disciplinary historical research. He seeks to describe how historians view their own research method and its objectives. His description of the historical method, which also includes the strengths and weaknesses of the method, provides a thorough reference for marketers wishing to undertake historical research. The steps to undertake the historical method include the following actions:

1. select a topic and collect data,
2. critically evaluate the sources of evidence,
3. critically evaluate the evidence,
4. analyze and interpret the evidence, and
5. present the evidence and conclusions.

Historical studies in marketing include studies about marketing history and studies about the history of marketing thought. Marketing history studies look at the "history of marketing activities and practices" (Jones and Keep, 2009, p152) such as the representation of women in advertising over 100 years. History of marketing thought studies look at the history of "ideas about those phenomena" (Jones and Keep, 2009, p152), for example, a study may look at influences on the development of marketing between 1900 and 1930. Golder's (2000) article offers a method of undertaking historical research in both of these areas.

Historical research offers two approaches. One method follows the German school of development and is more hermeneutic/constructionist in its assumptions (Firat, 1987; Jones and Monieson, 1990).

* Tel.: +64 9 9219999x5826; fax: +64 9 9219990.
*E-mail address:* ann-marie.thompson@aut.ac.nz.

0148-2963/$ – see front matter © 2009 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.09.005

This first method focuses on change or continuity over time, and the specific contexts, geographies, events, and times where this change or continuity took place (Hollander et al., 2005; Savitt, 1980;). The method specifically seeks to investigate the causes and processes of change, by looking at the deeper contextual happenings surrounding the events (Dray, 1957; Hollander et al., 2005; Smith and Lux, 1993).

The second approach follows the French school–Annales–of development, and is more positivistic in its assumptions than the first method (Firat, 1987). A more positivist definition of historical research looks at verifying collected data and using the data to interpret and present causal evidence (Savitt, 1980). This version of the historical approach aims to collect information that is falsifiable (Calder and Tybout, 1987; Fogel and Elton, 1983) and able to generate causal scientific knowledge if collected using the historical method (Cochrane, 1929; Gottschalk, 1969; Iggers, 1979). Golder (2000) presents a historical method in keeping with this second philosophy.

When comparing Golder (2000) to another positivist historical method (Savitt, 1980), the key differences are that Golder (2000) provides a more detailed account of the historical method which is more firmly grounded in the literature. This expansion and extension of the historical method by Golder (2000) also gives more specific detail on verification and validity methods when assessing data, legitimizing the method further. The significance of Golder's (2000) article is in the detailed presentation of historical research as scientific. By synthesizing past historical method literature, Golder paves the way for the use of historical methods in academic journals that are more supportive of positivist methods. By laying out the specific steps for the historical method, secondary data's evaluation, validation steps, and verification, Golder gives legitimacy to the method within a positivistic framework. Golder's (2000) article facilitates historical research by providing a thorough resource to new and emerging researchers in marketing history.

## 3. Contradictory findings: The second contribution

In the second part of the article Golder (2000) demonstrates the usefulness of his method by re-examining the empirical generalization that market share is stable over prolonged periods. He first examines Kotler's (1997) statement that 19 out of 25 companies studied were consistent market share leaders between 1923 and 1983. He finds that this statement is based on Carpenter and Nakamoto (1989) who source the finding from a study in Advertising Age (1983). By critically evaluating the sources of evidence as well as the evidence itself, Golder (2000) finds that the original Advertising Age (1983) article is based on a book, and on reviewing the book, finds that the original study included 100 companies, rather than 25. The 25 were selected by the author of the Advertising Age (1983) article to support their long-term brand leadership viewpoint.

Consequently, Golder (2000) undertakes his own analysis of the original 100 companies by comparing the original companies from the original study with market share data from 1997. He finds that more of the brand leaders from 1923 failed by 1997 than reported, and that market share of the market leaders from 1923 was unstable over that time. This finding is contrary to the Advertising Age (1983) article and against the commonly held belief that successful brands have long-term market share leadership as well as the belief that market share leadership is stable over the long-term (Golder, 2000). These findings increase understanding of long-term market share by then providing a historical narrative of the organizations. In his analysis Golder identifies factors that do contribute to market leadership and brand failure.

## 4. Criteria of importance

According to Armstrong (2003) criteria for important findings are that they are replications/replicated, valid, useful and surprising. Replication implies consistent findings when studies are redone with different samples; replications are one of the most crucial measures of importance (Leone and Schultz, 1980; Rosenthal and Rosnow, 1984). Replications are especially important because they often do not find the same results as the original study (Hubbard and Vetter, 1996). However replication reports seldom appear in print (Kerr et al., 1977). Golder (2000) is an important study because his study is a replication, as well as being an example of a replication study that does not support previous findings.

The second criterion is that the findings are valid. While Armstrong (2003) states that research seldom assesses validity, Golder (2000) is an example of where validation is not only conducted, but includes a thorough description of the research steps taken.

Golder (2000) also provides a historical narrative which describes the context and variables that were present in each of the companies. This historical narrative allows for assessing the validity of the findings as the narrative gives alternative sources and measures of the success of the firms and brands in the study.

Usefulness is the third criterion needed for findings to be important (Armstrong, 2003). Findings are useful if they are actionable by practitioners, consumers, or policy makers directly (Armstrong, 2003). The historical narrative by Golder (2000), which includes an analysis of why some market leaders maintained their position and others did not, gives detailed information on the findings and the contextual elements of success and failure; Golder provides important insights for organizations. These achievements make the findings important and useful.

Lastly, Armstrong (2003) suggests that findings also need to be surprising to be important. However Armstrong also states that surprising findings often contradict generally accepted findings and so are disliked and hard to get published (Armstrong and Hubbard, 1991). The findings of Golder (2000) are surprising. The findings go against the commonly held statistics of market share leadership over time and also contradict beliefs in the stability of market share.

So, according to the criteria of importance set out by Armstrong (2003), Golder's (2000) findings are extremely important as his study is a replication that is valid, useful, and surprising. Turning now to citation analysis, the present article assesses the impact of these two important contributions.

## 5. Citation analysis

Woodside (2009) suggests that judging the importance of findings using a single measure is inadequate. Turning to citation analysis, Golder (2000) is also an important article based on the number of citations, though the expectation might be more citations for such a surprising finding. Delving further, the use of Golder (2000) as a citation also shows the importance of the article (see Table 2). The citation analysis here uses Google Scholar as the most comprehensive database and only includes citations in peer reviewed academic journal articles. The analysis here does not include self or book citations. Examining Table 1, the earliest citations of Golder (2000) were in 2000 (Chandy and Tellis) and 2001 (Brown et al., 2001). This diffusion rate is quick in general, but shows Golder's (2000) importance in comparison with the other articles in the same issue who were mostly not cited until 2002.

**Table 1**
Earliest and most recent citations of Golder (2000).

| Earliest citations | | Most recent citations | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Chandy and Tellis (2000) | 114 | Tellis et al. (2009) | 6 |
| Brown et al. (2001) | 8 | Sood et al. (2009) | 3 |
| Montaguti et al. (2002) | 8 | Bianchi(2009) | 0 |
| Mizik and Jacobson (2003) | 136 | Bronnenberg et al. (2009) | 0 |
| Tellis et al. (2009) | 120 | Ewing et al. (2009) | 0 |