Absence of Trade Press Coverage of Mass Communication Academic Research:

A Bittersweet Victory for Public Relations

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Abstract

A content analysis of 2,077 articles randomly sampled at five distinct points in the past decade (2000, 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2010) from five mass communication trade magazine titles was conducted to determine how professional-focused publications cover academic research and how specifically the PR trade press address scholarly work. The analysis revealed that academic research appeared in 10 of the total articles sampled (0.5%) while industry research was more prevalent and discussed in 125 of all articles (6.0%). The lack of research coverage, however, was not consistent across the trade journals. While publications targeting professionals in advertising, newspaper, magazine and broadcast all mentioned research in less than 10% of articles, *PR News* articles detailed research nearly 25% of the time.

Keywords: academician-professional gap, mass communication, trade press, content analysis.

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"Professionals are from Venus, scholars are from Mars" (van Ruler, 2005). The title of this commentary published in *Public Relation Review* epitomizes an underlying issue informally addressed by communication researchers for years (McElreath, 1980; Tirone, 1979) yet recurrently mentioned in the trade press (Lacy, 1994). Introduced as the academician-practitioner gap in the literature, the expression describes an apparent persisting divide between two worlds and across disciplines. In mass communication, scholars have certainly grown accustomed to mission statements and submission guidelines advocating an effort to link the academy and the profession, just like publications have consistently outlined a desire for academicians to share their work with an audience listed as scholars, students, and practitioners. Nevertheless, the scope of the gap continues to be mentioned (Corrigan, 1993; Nyilasy, & Reid, 2007; Phelps, 2011; Wilkinson, 2003a, 2003b). Various studies previously attempted to define the nature of the divide through surveys of professionals and scholars, content analyses of public relations journals and library sciences newsletters, as well as in-depth interviews. However, no known empirical assessment specifically focused on five areas of mass communication trade press to actually evaluate the existence of the depicted gap and legitimize concerns by scholars about the real existence of a professional readership. The present study thus investigates how often the trade press publishes articles mentioning academic research specifically and research defined more broadly between 2000 and 2010.

Observation of a divide across disciplines

Mass communication

Broadly, mass communication researchers have often been maligned by professionals who view academic work as remotely linked to practical concerns, written in an obscure and incomprehensible manner, and peppered with perplexing statistical analyses (Greenwald, 2003;

Lacy, 1994; Lovell, 1987). A feature article discussing the perceived faculty detachment from the journalism profession printed in *Quill,* the monthly publication of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), underlined how “the absence of even potentially useful topics is the greatest failing in pure journalism research” (Lovell, 1987).

In his published critique of a lack of a utilitarian approach to research, Lovell (1987), a seasoned practitioner, referred to his review of *Journalism Quarterly*’s index between 1974 and 1983 to highlight an uneven distribution of content between academic-oriented topics (46 articles on theory, 88 on effects analysis, and 38 on research methodology) and issues with applied benefits (ethics, media management, reporting, and readability). His conclusion directly attacked the Chi-squares (his pet term for academicians) whom he described as divulging “a detachment if not a disdain for the profession” (p. 22). He believed the practitioner-academician gap emanated from academicians overlooking current industry issues, journal editors limiting the publication of articles dealing with practical concerns, and academic administrators placing a higher emphasis on research agendas than professional experience when hiring research faculty (Lovell, 1987).

From an academician perspective, understanding the existence of the “canyon-wide disconnect between practitioners and the professorate” (Christian, 2005, p. 40) implied the investigation of reasons why journalists do not consult research. While the lopsided favoring of academic content over applied advice to professionals in the industry resurfaced as an overarching origin of the existing gap, Christian (2005) specifically inquired about the public availability of academic materials to journalists. Drawing from the example of a *Kalamazoo Gazette* editor in Michigan, the author pondered whether the source of the divide may in fact reside in knowledge distribution potentially solved by publicizing more efficiently research works to professionals.

In 2003, influential academic and professional associations had already discussed the topic behind closed doors in the hopes of findings plausible solutions. In a letter addressed to

the AEJMC Newspaper division, the International Newspaper Marketing Association (INMA) executive director explained that a 10-year review of academic papers had unearthed a small number of studies with strong ties to the newspaper industry (Lacy, 1994; Wilkinson, 2003a, 2003b). Taking a pro-active approach, the INMA then suggested first to recommend research topics to scholars, and secondly to give free online access to some of the best academic papers to its 4,500 members (2003b).

Public relations

The concern for a divide between scholars and professionals has particularly been a recurrent discussion topic in public relations (Broom, Cox, Krueger, & Liebler, 1989). As early as 1978, James Grunig expressed his preoccupation over a divergence of viewpoints between professionals and academics at a conference meeting while others in attendance, cognizant of the nascent gap, advocated scholars to develop a research agenda with practical relevance (Tirone, 1979). These initial empirical investigations depicted the emergence of two worlds, two groups: the professionals and scholars (McElreath, 1980). A content analysis of *Public Relations Review* and *Public Relations Journal* between 1975 and 1982 further established the gap between both entities. Indeed, data indicated that academic research appeared in only five percent of the overall content sampled in *Public Relations Journal,* a publication aimed at practitioners, whereas practical concerns (message strategy and techniques and media usage and technique) represented 42% (Broom, et al., 1989).

The same refrain continues to be sung today. In a special edition of *Public Relations Research,* the very same Grunig (2006) who had initiated the debate in 1978, tackled once again the divide urging scholars to study the profession and found support from Gower (2006) and Broom (2006) who both reemphasized the need to bridge the two worlds. Recognition of the separation has not been missed by full-time professionals or people studying or researching the field. A survey conducted in 2006 of 966 public relations educators, scholars and student members of three leading associations (AEJMC, ICA, and NCA) outlined the relationship

between academics and professionals as distant or very distant, and respondents believed that practitioners do not read academic journals (Cheng & de Gregorio, 2008). Additional data gathered from longitudinal content analyses only added evidence to support an established trend. The number of academic citations in professional outlets sampled declined between the 1980s and the 1990s only to represent less than 5% of the content in 1995 (Pasadeos, Renfro, & Hanily, 1999). Overall, public relations research is depicted as largely invisible, essentially focused on theoretical issues, and disconnected from day-to-day practices (Becker, 2007).

Besides individual and isolated efforts, the creation of the Institute for Public Relations (IPR), a non-profit foundation, appears as a genuine effort to provide practitioners with applied research. A simple glance at the organization's mission statement illustrates the ambition to aggregate and commission various studies, disseminate findings through seminars, lectures, as well as bring both groups together during an annual research conference. Additionally IPR maintains a website that catalogues and abstracts research done by academicians and industry professionals alike, presenting it in a format meant to be broadly applicable.

Advertising and marketing

Outside of mass communications broadly and public relations in particular, other specific mass communications disciplines have also turned attention to the divide. In fact, a special topics session on the academician-practitioner gap was held at the 2006 American Academy of Advertising conference (Nyilasy & Reid, 2007). That year, keynote speaker Joe Plummer, chief research officer of the Advertising Research Foundation, addressed the audience regarding the topic. Ultimately, scholars in attendance decided to create a newsletter series on applied research to solve the dissemination problem. This effort resulted in investigations of reasons behind the difference between what garnered attention of advertising/marketing scholars and what drew the interest of practitioners.

One of these studies identified five factors that might explain the gap: (a) knowledge dissemination; (b) knowledge content; (c) academic organizational structures; (d) philosophy of

science; and (e) practitioner knowledge utilization (Nyilasy & Reid, 2007, p. 48). Academicians have first been blamed for their failure to distribute adequately the academic knowledge (Christian, 2005). In 1998, the American Marketing Association Task Force had referenced the knowledge dissemination issue in a report, stating that research journals were not likely to be read by practitioners. Scholars also received criticism regarding the knowledge content, said to lack relevance to the field, and to be incomprehensibly presented to practitioners (Lovell, 1987). The third cause points to inherent characteristics of the academic system. It has been argued that the quest for tenure and promotion places a focus on achieving a total number of publications rather than articles relevant to the field (Nyilasy & Reid, 2007), and that "the type of work needed to decrease the practitioner-academic gap is not the type that leads to tenure or promotion" (Witte, 1996, p. 225). The fourth factor targets the dichotomous perception scholars have of their discipline. On one hand, academicians praise theory-based research and may brush aside possible profession-relevant materials; while on the other hand, some scholars focus on their areas as applied fields, and thus engage in practical-oriented studies. Practitioners receive the final blame for the miscommunication with academicians. The study questioned professionals' desire and ability to interpret research results.

In an effort to address the knowledge dissemination factor, the debate on the divide found an echo with the Association for Education in Journalism and Communication (AEJMC), which made available on its website a page titled "Research You Can Use." According to statistics available for the period between July 14, 2010, and March 11, 2011, this page represented 9.7% of the total of pages viewed (2,729 hits) for the entire AEJMC website (Alisha Brown, personal communication, March 3, 2011).

The academician-practitioner gap in other fields

A review of other academic areas indicates that the gap between researchers and professionals exists beyond mass communication, and in fact has generated exchanges

specifically in the disciplines of information science, management and even public administration (Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001).

Human resources

Following a web-based survey of human resources research experts, the editorial board members of four journals compiled a list of the most fundamental HR research findings useful to professionals. In an attempt to assess the scope of the divide, the list was compared with one emanating from a previous survey of HR vice presidents, directors, and managers (Rynes, Colbert, & Brown, 2002; Rynes, Giluk, & Brown, 2007). Results not only revealed that industry-oriented journals gave minimal coverage to the three topics cited as the most important for professionals but also indicated that article authors were more likely to support their arguments with data gathered from manager and consultant interviews than with mentions of peer-reviewed research or academics. A separate study further demonstrated that the issues of greatest importance to human resources practitioners received in fact limited coverage by academic publications (Deadrick & Gibson, 2007), a conclusion emphasized by a 30-year longitudinal content analysis of HR topics of interests to both scholars and practitioners (Deadrick & Gibson, 2009). The review of 6,363 articles from four publications (two academic journals and two practitioner magazines) between 1976 and 2005 revealed how academic journals underline motivation-related topics while the practitioner press devoted twice as much space to articles about compensation and rewards. This divide between scholars investigating theory-based and conceptual issues and professionals logically concerned with pragmatic matters clearly appeared in similar reports (Bingham & Bowen, 1994; Gibson & Deadrick, 2010; Watson & Montjoy, 1991).

Information sciences

The divide between academicians and professionals prompted researchers to address the responsibility of the communication channel for creating professionals' awareness in scholarly works (Christian, 2005; Phelps, 2011). A survey of Western Australian librarians

revealed that trade journals/newsletters represented nearly two-thirds of practitioners' readings (Haddow, 2006). Results showed that *InCite*, the Australian Library and Information Association's publication, contained only six mentions of academic research in the area over a five-year period. Findings also showed that the *Australian Library Journal* had the highest proportion of research mentions among practitioners' most frequently consulted scholarly publications, and yet its readership among practitioners represented less than 20%. It was eventually discovered that practitioners were more likely to come across academic research through institutional communication (continuing education courses, training, annual conferences) than through publications. In fact, findings indicated that publications may be the least likely information channel to lead to awareness of scholarly works.

A content analysis of research reports published in the Information Behavior Conference (ISIC) proceedings between 1996 and 2006 added to the picture by suggesting that scholars equally turn a blind eye to practical studies. According to the data, nearly 60% of manuscripts did mention practices, yet with vague, general and unclear statements, and these statements most often were included near the end of the study in the discussion and conclusions sections rather than applied throughout the works (McKechnie, Julien, Genuis, & Oliphant, 2008).

In all discussed disciplines, it appears a research-related chasm may exist between academicians and professionals. The literature posits that scholars and practitioners simply hold distinct views on the usefulness of research, employ disparate jargons, and have variant sources of motivations for accessing their respective studies (Haddow & Klobas, 2004; Turner, 2002). Reviews of academic publications pertaining to mass communications practice have thus resulted in criticism that reports written by academics often find no audience among those in the field (Lovell, 1987). Additionally, only isolated initiatives, the AEJMC and Journalist's Resource, have seemingly made effort to translate academic research to a professional audience.

Before any investigation of the cause of a potential gap can be undertaken, research must initially establish the nature of the gap—if one can be empirically identified in mass

communications disciplines at all. The first step addressed by this study logically becomes a content analysis of the attention paid to academic research in the trade journals aimed at informing the practice of those in the field. The current study hopes to provide that foundation on which further investigation can build.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

The literature review presented a picture of a rift between scholars and professionals. The majority of research done on the topic acknowledged a divergence in interests (Broom et al., 1989; Cheng & de Gregorio, 2008; Deadrick & Gibson, 2007, 2009; Rynes, et al., 2002), as well as the absence of any topics of relevance to professionals (Nyilasi & Reid, 2007). Moreover, critical comments (Christian, 2005; Lovell, 1987) and content analyses revealed limited mentions of academic research in the professional press (Broom, et al., 1989; Haddow, 2006). Thus, the following hypothesis will guide the research:

H1: Mass communication trade journals rarely mention academic research.

Additionally, because previous studies traditionally focused on the absence or presence of practitioners' studies or academic work in a specific press (McKechnie, et al., 2008), discussions rarely debated the presence of any other types of research. As such, the research investigates the following question:

RQ1: Is there any discussion of research that is not classified as academic?

Empirical evidence revealed that industry-led research found its way into academic publications. Yet, it was often presented with obscure details (McKechnie, et al., 2008). To determine the traits of research covered in the trade press, the following research question is addressed:

RQ2: What is the nature of the coverage of research quoted by trade journals?

Finally, past research suggests that various academic fields have differing gaps. The current study allows for a comparison of the coverage of research among the trade press targeting specific disciplines in mass communication. To determine if reporting on research is

consistent across mass communication fields, the following research question guides the study:

RQ3: Will there be a difference between publications targeting specific disciplines in their citation of academic or other research?

Method

A content analysis of five leading trade journals directed to an audience of mass communications professionals was conducted. As manifest content of articles appearing in the publications was under investigation, content analysis was selected as the appropriate means of study (Berelson, 1952; Krippendorf, 1980; Perry, 2002; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). This work used an a priori design requiring that all decisions on classification of variables be made before the data are collected.

Sample

The selected journals included *Editor & Publisher* for the print press, *Folio* for the magazine industry, *Broadcasting and Cable* for the radio and television sector, *PR News* for public relations, and *Advertising Age* for advertising. These periodicals were chosen as leading publications in their respective fields.

Three issues per year per journal were randomly included in the sample at five distinct points in the past decade: in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2010. Every edition had equal chances of being randomly selected. The articles (N =2,077) accessed through e-journals were printed and randomly distributed to two coders, who conducted a training session to test coding decisions involved in the study. Not coded as research articles were those focused on Nielsen ratings or any other industry viewership/readership ratings, as it was declared ratings were simply metrics used in the industry.

Variables

Every article printed constituted the unit of analysis. The coders first recorded descriptive data about each sampled journal: the name of the publication, the date, the volume and the number of the issue, as well as the total number of articles included in the issue.

Secondly, the coders decided on the presence or absence of a reference to research. For each article presenting research, the authors then collected the title of the article and applied a second set of variables which included the origin of the research and whether it emanated from academics or if it showed ties to the industry. An example of academic research would be research that referenced a university-affiliated investigator or research originally published/presented in an academic journal or academic conference. Examples of industry research comprised any research conducted by a non-academic entity such as a consulting firm, market research groups and/or the publication themselves.

Additionally, the coders reviewed whether a specific type of research methodology (survey, content analysis, experiment, focus group, in-depth interview, eye tracking, not mentioned or other) was detailed in the article. Besides focusing on the research, the authors also noted the presence or absence of any detailed reference to the researcher(s), concentrating on any nominal mentions as well as references to an affiliation (the name of the university or organization). The researchers further coded how research had been used by trade journals, and thus made notice of the usage of direct quotes. They specifically recorded whether quotes used in the article originated directly from the study or from interviews with the researcher(s) mentioned in the study.

Ultimately, the coders decided whether the article included any citation related to the conference or publication where the research first appeared. The final coding decision involved the use of statistics (presence or absence). A statistic was defined as the presence of numerical values directly associated to findings.

Intercoder reliability

The author/coders established intercoder reliability on a randomly selected overlap of 392 articles, a total equivalent to 18.9% of the overall sample. In accordance with content analysis literature, the reliability is reported first with the percentage of agreement and secondly with Krippendorf's *alpha,* a conservative index accounting for chance agreement (Lombard,

Snyder-Duch, & Campanella Bracken, 2002). The reliability on the presence or absence of a research in the unit of analysis amounted to 97.4% and a Krippendorf's *alpha* of .89. On the articles with agreement on presence of research, coding for methodology led to a reliability of 94% and yielded a Krippendorf's *alpha* of .89. Reliability reached 88.2% and .75 respectively on the origin of the study, 100% and 1.00 on the mention of the name of the researcher, 94% and .77 on the affiliation of the researcher, 100% and 1.00 on the use of direct quotation, 100% and 1.00 as well on the type of the quote, 100% and 1.00 on the name of the conference or publication where the research first appeared, and 94% and .85 on the presence or absence of research statistics.

Results

The data set comprised a total of 2,077 separate articles divided among five trade journals sampled: 381 articles for *Editor & Publisher* (18.3%), 347 for *Folio* (16.7%), 468 for *Broadcasting and Cable* (22.5%), 733 for *Ad Age* (35.3%), and 148 for *PR News* (7.1%).

H1, which stated that trade press articles will rarely quote academic research, was supported. As hypothesized the selected trade journals seldom mentioned academic research. In fact, the analysis revealed that academic research appeared in 0.5% of the total articles sampled over a ten-year period ($\chi 2$ (1, N = 2,077) = 2,037.19, $p < .001$). Of the 2,077 articles coded ten had some reference to academic research.

While academic research was significantly absent from the practitioner's press, non-academic research did not fare much better. In investigation of RQ1 that addressed the existence of any discussion of non-academic research, results yielded a total of 125 articles (6.0%) with references to industry research. The analysis revealed a significant lack of overall attention paid to industry research ($\chi 2$ (1, N = 2,077) = 1,607.09, $p < .001$).

RQ2 specifically focused on the nature of the research detailed by trade journals. Results first indicated that when trade journals mention non-academic research, they are more

likely to allude to surveys (57.6%) or to simply forego details about the methodology (34.4%). Focus group, content analysis and eye tracking each garnered one reference (0.8%). In fact, trade journals appear even more likely to abstain from any references to a methodology when it comes to academic research. Data showed that 80.0% of all articles containing scholarly work make no notice of the method used. Yet, when and if the authors cite the procedures, they detail either surveys (30.0%) or content analyses (10.0%).

Data related to the researchers presents another perspective to answer RQ2. Results demonstrated that articles with non-academic work rarely mention the name of a researcher. In fact only 10.4% of stories included the researcher's name in articles mentioning industry research. Instead, in this category, it appeared more common to present the name of the institution or the organization in charge of the study without any reference to a researcher (89.6%). A limited number of organizations emerged recurrently. *Folio* was quoted fifteen times as the researching organization while *Forrester Research* received three mentions. The *Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, Editor & Publisher, AARP,* and *Scarborough Research* were all respectively acknowledged twice. In line with the absence of a researcher's name, non-academic research hardly ever included a direct quote (11.2%). Data ultimately revealed that articles essentially integrated statistical details (83.2%) to complement the information in articles mentioning industry research. Finally, articles detailing non-academic work never mentioned any conferences or publications where the research had initially been presented.

The picture for articles containing academic research differs slightly. Articles that allude to scholarly work include the name of the researcher more often (42.9%) than do articles citing non-academic studies (17.6%).[1] Additionally, out of ten mentions of academic research, six specific universities were cited: Ball State University (2), Boston University (2), Northwestern University (1), UC Berkeley (1), the Columbia Journalism School, and the University of Wisconsin Eau-Claire (1). Additionally, 80% of articles citing academic work were published without statistics. Eventually, although the majority of articles did not cite a conference or the

publication where the academic work first appeared (60.0%), two peer-reviewed communication journals (*Journalism Quarterly,* and *Newspaper Research Journal*), and one conference, the International Public Relations Research conference, were listed.

RQ3 asked whether a difference would be noticeable between each trade journal in coverage of academic and non-academic research. Data revealed that certain trade journals are more likely to publish research than others. Results showed that reference to research was not distributed equally across all trade publication titles ($\chi 2$ (4, N = 2,077) = 85.82, $p < .001$). In fact, 23.6% of all articles appearing in *PR News* referenced academic and non-academic studies while no other trade publication published more than 10% of articles with a reference to research (8.6% of *Folio* articles mentioned research, 4.7% for *Editor & Publisher*, 3.8% for *Broadcasting Cable*, and 4.6% for *Ad Age.)* A closer look at articles containing mentions of academic work revealed that *Ad Age* exclusively referenced industry-related studies in the sampled period.

Discussion

Operationalized as the mention of academic research in trade press, the analysis revealed that scholarly work has been ostensibly absent from five leading trade journals covering the media industry between 2000 and 2010. The presentation of empirical evidence supporting this claim thus suggests the existence of an academician-practitioner gap in the field of mass communication. This divide previously alluded to in mass communications was particularly addressed in public relations (Grunig, 2006; Pasadeos, Berger, & Renfro, 2010) and also found in outside fields (Christian, 2005; Deadrick & Gibson, 2007, 2009; Lovell, 1987; Rynes et al., 2002).

Trade journals certainly ignored academic studies, yet did not devote many more column inches to non-academic research in general either. Over a ten-year period during which significant findings resulted from research in advertising, public relations, print radio, television, and certainly new media, studies emanating from the industry received just 6.0% of the total

coverage while mentions of academic work appeared in less than 1.0% of all articles published. As addressed by previous scholars, this result may illustrate the lack of relevance of research in general for an audience of practitioners, but it paints an especially dire picture for academicians hoping to reach an industry audience through their work (Becker, 2007; Grunig, 2006; Haddow & Klobas, 2004; Phelps, 2011).

Besides being rarely attributed, trade journals publish limited details about non-academic research. A typical article quotes a survey or no methodology at all, and does not mention a researcher nor any names of conferences or publications; yet most provide some statistical information. The fact that more than half of the non-academic research relies on surveys did not come as a surprise. Trade journals, namely *Folio* and *Editor & Publisher,* which quoted their own readership and practitioner surveys, often have a recurrent yearly edition describing socio-demographics and socio-economics characteristics of readers, managers, editors, or CEOs.

Ultimately, the analysis revealed the all-but-full absence of academic research in the trade press. Importantly, data also indicated that when journalists do mention such studies, they do so in vague terms—a fact previously noted in other fields (McKechnie, et al., 2008). In a period of ten years, the typical mention of an academic research included mostly no references to a precise methodology and no substantive statistics. Considering that the majority of mass communication research produced in the United States is of a quantitative nature, the absence of methodological references and statistical results emphasized a pragmatic and utilitarian approach taken by professionals. It may also indicate that the use of a scholarly jargon by academicians leave journalists ill-equipped to report any findings (Lovell, 1987; Phelps, 2011).

Results showed a broad spectrum of communication programs with schools such as Northwestern, Boston University and Berkeley as well as Ball State University and the University of Wisconsin Eau-Claire. While it would be expected that additional universities with well-known communications departments merit mention, their lack of reference may reflect that some institutions have established their notoriety through more theoretical research agendas.

Moreover, the absence of mentions of dominant mass communication programs may underline a need for departments to efficiently share findings with the press (Phelps, 2011), or simply further suggest the total disinterest in academic pursuits by professionals, thus reinforcing the existing gap uncovered in this study. The common citation of an academic institution contrasts with the absence of the name of a conference or a publication where the research was initially presented, a fact that can only underline the vague description associated to any academic work in the trade press.

Finally, some publications emerged as more likely to quote academic studies and research in general than others. Yet, aggregate data do not tell the entire story. Although, *PR News* boasts the highest ratio of research mentions among the trade journals sampled, the publication comprised the smallest number of overall articles between the five journals studied. While this could suggests that the field of PR, essentially geared toward practical concerns (Hughes, O'Regan, Wornham, 2008), also displays an overall atypical interest in research, previous studies suggest that PR scholars and professionals have recurrently been discussing the divide nonetheless (Broom, 2006; Broom et al., 1989; Pasadeos et al., 2010; Todd, 2009) and attempt to address such a concern through institutions such as the Institute for Public Relations, hence the mention of the annual conference bearing its name. The fact that *Editor & Publisher* (four references, 1.05% of the journal's sampled articles), *Broadcasting Cable* (three references, 0.64% of the publication's sampled articles), and *PR News* (two mentions, 1.35% of the journal's sampled content) appeared as the leading journals in academic research mentions seems more difficult to explain. While it may signify that journalists do not have a beat involving a recurrent analysis of research and professional studies, it may also imply that the irregular and infrequent decision to mention a study is not part of an editorial practice and has certainly not been established through a relationship with researchers (academics or otherwise) or the academic journals that first publish the works. In the end, it would be irresponsible to draw too

many conclusions about trade journals and their tendencies in publishing articles about academic work when only ten articles out of 2,077 serve as the basis for judgment.

Limitation and Future Research

Although the ten-year analysis paint a clear picture of the divide existing in mass communication, the researchers acknowledge some limitations, which could ultimately serve as advice for scholars furthering the discussed issue. Firstly, the recurrent vague mention of the origin of research and studies led to a lower intercoder reliability compare to the other variables of interest. While it did not reach a questionable level, this trait further underlines the conclusion that trade journals present research with limited manifest details.

Secondly, future investigation into the academician-practitioner gap in mass communication could be strengthened through the extension to a larger sample that would include every year between 2000 and 2010 and possibly more issues per year. Most importantly, a survey of randomly selected scholars and practitioners would give a clearer understanding of the perception of the existing gap and perhaps reveal its root cause. The questionnaire could then include items to assess the participants' opinions on the relevance of adding an executive summary underlining the study's meaning to practitioners and questions to evaluate the role university media relations play with academicians. Moreover, a specific survey section would be devised for the practitioners to discern whether academicians made their research understandable and if practitioners identify the benefits to the profession. If reasons for the existence of the divide could be uncovered, the opportunity then would exist for exploring ways to narrow the gap. The efforts put forth by *AEJMC* through the webpage "research you can use" and Journalist's Resource certainly constitute two initiatives worthy of mention, albeit still isolated.

Secondly, while public relations practitioners and researchers should not boast too loudly, it must be noted that public relations appears as a minor offender. Perhaps the most efficient effort currently underway to narrow the gap is being conducted by the Institute for

Public Relations, which holds as its core foundation the goal to stimulate conversation between practitioners and researchers. Finally, it may be of added value to investigate how medical research is covered to understand whether some lessons could be implemented in mass communications.

Conclusion

In an article in the October/November 2005 issue of *Quill*, contributing writer and assistant professor of journalism Sue Ellen Christian relays a conversation she had with a journalist from the *Chicago Tribune*. The professor had sent the reporter an academic research article investigating how editorial writers had adapted a President's polarizing rhetoric to their own columns. Evidently, the reporter found the article interesting and replied to Christian, "I've never read any [academic journal on journalism]. Are there any? I would read them, for sure…if I knew they existed, but I don't" (Christian, 2005).

This exchange between a media researcher and a media constructionist epitomizes the breadth of the gap between what academics research and what practitioners know of those pursuits. It may be assumed, as in the case of the *Chicago Tribune* reporter, that a lack of awareness rather than total disinterest results in the divide. And as the present study concluded, the limited cognizance may simply stem from a quasi-absence of coverage of research in general and academic research in particular among the trade journals. When fewer than ten articles out of more than 2000 in publications aimed at keeping practitioners abreast of important industry happenings mention academic research at all, one can easily speculate that awareness may be abysmal.

For academicians, it is not as simple as laying the problem at the feet of the trade press editors and publishers. Researchers outside of mass communications concluded their investigations into their own field's gap by posing two questions: "Can any of the forms of the gap be bridged by the activities of researchers, practitioners, or intermediaries? In what way practice fails to benefit from research and to what extent?" (Haddow & Klobas, 2004). Both

questions are equally important in mass communications and equally deserving of attention in further research.

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[1] Descriptive statistics were used here, as the presence of cells with less than five expected count prevented researchers from conducting a Chi-square analysis, which was deemed as the adequate test to thoroughly address the question. The numerical discrepancy between ten academic research and 2,077 articles coded explains the impossibility to run such an analysis.