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## Academic Research on Marketing in Central and Eastern Europe: A Comparative Analysis of Scholarly Papers Published in Polish versus International Journals

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Malgorzata Karpinska-Krakowiak<sup>1</sup>, Edyta Rudawska<sup>2</sup>,  
Barbara Mróz-Gorgoń<sup>3</sup>, Łukasz Skowron<sup>4</sup>

### Abstract:

**Purpose:** Poland, as one of the largest countries in Central and Eastern Europe, is still in its early stages when it comes to scholarly development, particularly in the field of marketing. Even though Polish marketing scholars have been improving their research accomplishments for years now, they are still learning how to publish their work in highly ranked journals and how to make their work attractive to international audiences. This study was therefore designed to gain insights into scholarly practice of preparing manuscripts in Poland and to compare them with publications in highly ranked international journals.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** A content analysis was conducted on a sample of 93 papers taken from two distinctive publishers (i.e., 48 papers published in a Polish journal versus 45 manuscripts drawn from an international journal with a moderate impact factor).

**Findings:** Our content analysis allowed to assess the methodology behind academic papers published in both outlets. The results reveal systematic differences between the papers, and they show how the manuscripts vary on many levels (including research design, data analysis and conceptual backgrounds).

**Practical Implications:** This study could be potentially helpful for Polish scholars, as well as scholars from other emerging European markets, in increasing their chances to get their work published in good journals.

**Originality/Value:** This is the first empirical attempt to investigate the quality of research in one of the largest countries from Central and Eastern Europe (Poland), and to make comparisons with more advanced scholarly markets. Prior studies on scientific excellence and research evaluation referred mostly to bibliometrics. Little has been done, however, to examine qualitative aspects of research practices in various countries.

**Keywords:** Marketing research, publication process, comparative analysis.

**JEL codes:** I23, M3.

**Paper Type:** Research paper.

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<sup>1</sup>Faculty of International and Political Studies, University of Lodz,  
[malgorzata.karpinska@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:malgorzata.karpinska@uni.lodz.pl)

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Management, University of Szczecin, [edyta.rudawska@usz.edu.pl](mailto:edyta.rudawska@usz.edu.pl)

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Management, Wrocław University of Economics and Business,  
[barbara.mroz-gorgon@ue.wroc.pl](mailto:barbara.mroz-gorgon@ue.wroc.pl)

<sup>4</sup>Faculty of Management, Lublin University of Technology, [l.skowron@pollub.pl](mailto:l.skowron@pollub.pl)

## **1. Introduction**

Compared to the United States (US) or Germany, Poland is still in its early stages when it comes to scholarly development, particularly in the field of marketing. Even though Polish marketing scientists have been improving their research accomplishments for years now, they are still learning how to publish their work in highly ranked journals and how to make their work attractive to international audiences. For example, there is still a relatively limited number of Polish marketing scholars (affiliated at the Polish universities) who publish their work in prestigious international journals. Polish academics (working in Poland in the field of marketing) are not highly internationalized; they are not frequent European Research Council (ERC) grant holders, and only few of them achieved high citation figures in the Web of Science data bases (Kwiek, 2014; Ryś and Chadaj, 2016).

To explain such unsatisfactory performance, one might use some arguments about communist history (centrally planned science and economy inhibit development of good research) and non-effective research evaluation models in Poland. Until 2019, for instance, Polish research assessment system was structured in a way to promote quantitative (not qualitative!) growth of publications. In other words, Poles were encouraged to produce more and more papers or books, with little financial and non-financial incentives to publish their work in high-quality outlets. These arguments, however, do not shed much light on more in-depth reasons behind low citation figures, low number of ERC grants or low visibility in highly impactful journals.

In the current study we attempted to address the question of why Polish authors are not frequently present in international journals. The idea behind our work was to investigate the quality of research in Poland, and to make comparisons with more advanced scholarly markets (such as the United Kingdom, Germany, or the United States). Prior studies on scientific excellence and research evaluation referred mostly to bibliometrics (Bornmann, 2014; Kulczycki, 2017) and quantifiable characteristics of highly cited papers (Aksnes, 2003) or provided assessment of current funding systems (Lepori, Reale, and Spinello, 2018) in different educational markets (Good *et al.*, 2015). Little has been done, however, to examine qualitative aspects of research practices in various countries, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. This seems to be an important gap, since bibliometrics alone do not convey sufficient information about the quality of research and do not explain what needs to be improved.

## **2. Components of High-Quality Research and High-Quality Papers**

Scholarly papers are intended for sharing original research findings. As such, they contribute to the evolution of contemporary science in a way that the work of one scholar is based on the work of others. To be accepted for publication, scholarly papers cannot just copy existing theoretical concepts, but they need to advance current knowledge, identify research gaps and solve research problems, thus

bringing new data to the world of science. They should go beyond a chronological description of investigated phenomena, and they should provide evidence that the research findings they present are in fact important, valuable, and significant.

There exist two basic types of scholarly papers: conceptual and empirical ones. Conceptual manuscripts provide systematic literature reviews, and they synthesize our knowledge on a given topic (Bergkvist and Zhou, 2016). They may also introduce new theoretical concepts, pose new questions, and forward research propositions (Warren, Barsky, and McGraw, 2018; Morales, Amir, and Lee, 2017). Empirical papers, on the other hand, present research findings derived from the data collected by their authors. These manuscripts demonstrate the results of field studies, interviews, experiments (Eggert, Steinhoff, and Witte, 2019) or empirical generalizations such as meta-analyses (Van Laer, Feiereisen, and Visconti, 2019; Purnawirawan *et al.*, 2015).

A scholarly paper should be organized around specific key sections, including, introduction that poses research questions and presents how the authors contribute to the literature and practice, theoretical framework and conceptual background, research design and results (empirical papers), references. All of them serve some important functions (i.e., they deliver scholarly information), they thus need to be structured in a way to provide scientific value. In the following, we provide a brief description and requirements of each component separately.

## **2.1 Contribution to Theory and Practice**

Any scholarly work is (should be) aimed at contributing to the scientific discourse by developing generalizable theories and testing them or by discovering new phenomena and explaining mechanisms behind them. Such contributions require much empirical effort, and they should be preceded with a proper identification of a research gap (i.e., first we need to find out what is missing in the extant literature and/or practice). A contribution is therefore a meaningful solution or “a brick” that would help us close an existing gap, and nowadays it has become the most important component of a valuable scholarly paper (see e.g., the *Journal of Marketing* or *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* submission guidelines).

As Geuens and De Pelsmacker (2017) suggest, a good paper offers substantial, rather than incremental, contribution. In other words, one should attempt to bridge the entire research gap that has been identified, instead of filling it partially. This means that an argument such as ‘*Even though this effect was uncovered and examined by French researchers, we want to test it in Poland*’ may be too weak to convince reviewers about added value of our work. If another scientist has already created and tested a certain model, investigating it again in narrower conditions might be pointless, especially when replication studies are not welcome in social sciences (Park *et al.*, 2015).

## **2.2 Conceptual Background**

A comprehensive literature review allows one to find an interesting research gap, formulate a meaningful problem and pose important research questions. Without an exhaustive analysis of what has been already investigated and what theoretical concepts already exist, one might fail to identify an attractive research problem. Simply saying that the problem is ‘obvious’ or ‘evident’ does not qualify for a thorough literature review. Besides, digging into the body of prior knowledge substantially helps us develop a proper conceptualization and operationalization of investigated constructs, which is essential for maintaining high validity of final research results (Berkvist and Langner, 2017).

Not only does a good paper offer interesting research problems, but it should also forward attractive hypotheses. The attractiveness of a hypothesis stems from the type of effects that are examined. For instance, interaction effects are far more exciting than main effects, as they consider the complexity of investigated phenomena; therefore, they are frequently encountered in manuscripts submitted to highly ranked journals (Huang, Liang, Weinberg, and Gorn, 2019).

## **2.3 Research Design**

Research design is about the choice and structure of methods used by an author to examine a particular phenomenon. It largely depends on the research problem and formulated questions, but certain empirical approaches provide considerably bigger benefits and advantages than the others. For instance, experiments allow one to evaluate causal relationships, instead of correlations. Not only does experimental research make it possible to observe certain effects, but it also helps explain the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions. It is thus not uncommon for many scholars to carry out a series of experimental studies to uncover new phenomena and eliminate alternative explanations or confounds (Huang, Wong, and Wan, 2019). Furthermore, experiments offer much control and are unlikely to generate some types of errors (e.g., common method bias), provided one uses proper control checks and introduces procedural and/or statistical solutions to maintain high reliability and validity of findings. For all these reasons, an experiment is one of the most welcome research methods, and it has now become a major source of scholarly knowledge in marketing (particularly in advertising – Chang, 2017).

Apart from methodological approach, any research design section should also systematically describe other procedural details regarding, for example, recruited samples and construct measurement. Apparently, even in highly ranked journals many authors fail to deliver sufficient information about how they select or develop their measurement scales (Berkvist and Langner, 2017), which constitutes a certain threat to their findings. To increase a final value of our work, however, we should always try to use and rely on validated measures taken from

validation studies, instead of referring to sources that did not follow any scale development procedures (Chuchill, 1979).

In sum, any research design section should contain a thorough description of our methodological approach and procedures. On the one hand, it determines credibility of our research, and on the other – it will allow for replications, comparisons, and empirical generalizations in the future (Klingner, Scalon, and Pressley, 2005).

## **2.4 Data Analysis**

The analytical component of a good scholarly paper remains always adequate to the type of data collected by the authors, as well as their research questions and hypotheses. In other words, when we formulate a hypothesis about causality, not only should we apply an appropriate research method (e.g., an experiment), but we also need to use an appropriate method of data analysis that will allow us to evaluate relationships between our variables. Highly advanced statistical tools are not a *sine qua non* for publication; however, running purely descriptive research and using basic descriptive statistics would rather lower one's chances to get published in a highly ranked journal. In high-quality papers one may encounter at least some forms of regression models or analyses of variance, which primarily stems from the fact that the authors run mostly experiments (and thus need to compare several experimental groups) and formulate hypotheses that search for mediation and/or moderation effects.

Editorial policies of many marketing journals encourage scholars to submit rather short and simple manuscripts that could appeal to wide and diverse audiences. Consequently, the authors are rarely asked to present complicated calculations, equations, or results of assumption checks (e.g., regarding homogeneity of variance or distribution). Besides, it is expected that researchers are aware of basic requirements and limitations that each test bears, and they thus proceed in accordance with appropriate statistical rules of conduct, while not having to report it in detail.

## **2.5 References**

A list of references often plays an important role in the submission process, as it informs the editor and reviewers about the quality of concepts developed in the paper and about its fit to the target journal. If we cite studies published in peer-reviewed journals, it means that we use rather high-quality data and relatively reliable research results. If our reference list contains a few papers that were published by our target journal, we signify potential consistency between our topic and the issues covered by this publisher. If we refer to rather current studies (e.g., published in recent 2-5 years), we inform our audience about how familiar we are with the most recent literature.

### 3. Research Design

Based on the above theoretical discussion we formulated the following research questions about the differences between papers published in highly ranked international journals (hereafter referred to as HR journals) versus Polish marketing journals (hereafter referred to as NRP journals, i.e., non-ranked Polish journals):

*RQ1: What type of scholarly paper prevails in HR versus NRP journal?*

*RQ2: Are there significant differences between papers from HR versus NRP journals in terms of contribution to the literature and marketing practice?*

*RQ3: Are there significant differences between papers from HR versus NRP journals in terms of their structure and conceptual background?*

*RQ4: Are there significant differences between papers from HR versus NRP journals in terms of their methodological approach and research design?*

*RQ5: Are there significant differences between papers from HR versus NRP journals in terms of data analysis?*

*RQ6: Are there significant differences between papers from HR versus NRP journals in terms of quality and quantity of references?*

To address these questions, we performed a content analysis and we evaluated publishing practices in HR- versus NRP journals. Specifically, we selected two journals that were contrasted in terms of their impact factor (it is an indicator that reflects citation figures and significance of a journal in each area, like every other measure, it has its strengths and weaknesses – see Gruber, 2014). We chose an internationally renowned journal with a 5-year impact factor equal to almost 3.0, published in the US (HR journal), the second outlet that we selected was a leading marketing journal, published in Poland, albeit with impact factor equal to 0 (NRP journal). Both journals were recognized in the field of marketing in their countries of publication, and they cooperated with prominent scholars worldwide. Next step was to download all the papers that were published in said journals between July 2017 and July 2018. It resulted in a sample of 48 manuscripts from a NRP journal and 45 texts from an HR journal. Finally, we content analyzed all those 93 papers in terms of their scholarly components.

#### 3.1 Content Classification Variables

Based on our theoretical discussion and our research questions, a list of criteria was created in a way to reflect basic components of a high-profile paper that is likely to be published in a highly ranked journal (i.e., contribution, conceptual background,

research design, data analysis, references). Specifically, each component was operationalized by means of 4 to 10 binary items that were coded on present versus absent basis (e.g., ‘There are (is) research questions formulated in this paper’, where 1 = yes and 0 = no). The resulting coding sheet comprised 35 questions that were used by two coders to assess each of 93 papers.

#### 4. Results

A series of  $\chi^2$  tests was run to compare basic components of investigated papers (Table 1). The HR journal published significantly more empirical manuscripts than its Polish counterpart (43 vs 28;  $\chi^2 = 17.81$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and in all HR publications the authors attempted to substantially contribute to the marketing field, while in the NRP journal only 2 out of 48 papers managed to do it. Nevertheless, 30 texts from the Polish journal offered a partial contribution to the extant literature and practice. Compared to the HR journal, considerably fewer scholars from an NRP outlet explicitly informed in their papers about potential impact of their work (43 vs 7;  $\chi^2 = 61.25$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and performed an extensive literature review to identify any theoretical or research gap (45 vs 8;  $\chi^2 = 65.80$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). In both journals, however, the authors comparably used market significance argumentation as a reason to address a particular topic ( $\chi^2 = 0.004$ ;  $p = 0.94$ ) e.g., “there is a growing importance of XXX phenomenon in business practice”, “more and more marketers use XXX solutions” or “XXX gains its popularity among marketing practitioners”. These results provide answers to research questions RQ1 and RQ2.

**Table 1.** Cross-tabulations comparing HR versus NRP journals in terms of paper types and contribution to the literature and practice,  $n=93$

Components of a scholarly paper	Content classification variables		HR journal	NRP journal	$\chi^2$
Paper type	This is an empirical paper	No	2	20	17.81
		Yes	43	28	$p < 0.01$
	This is a conceptual paper	No	43	28	17.81
		Yes	2	20	$p < 0.01$
Contribution to theory and practice	The paper attempts to substantially contribute to the extant literature and practice	No	1	46	81.42
		Yes	44	2	$p < 0.01$
	The paper attempts to partially contribute to the extant literature and practice	No	0	16	0.57
		Yes	1	30	$p = 0.46$
	There is explicit information on how the paper contributes to the field	No	2	41	61.25
		Yes	43	7	$p < 0.01$
	A research gap is explicitly identified in the text and derived from the extant literature	No	0	40	65.80
		Yes	45	8	$p < 0.01$
Market significance of the investigated phenomenon(a) was pointed to as a reason to address the topic	No	23	26	0.004	
	Yes	20	22	$p = 0.94$	

**Note:** HR journal = highly ranked journal; NRP journal = non-ranked Polish journal.

**Source:** Own work.

Next step was to investigate empirical papers and to assess their methodology, conceptual background, measurement approach and analytical components. In our further analysis we therefore used only those papers that had been identified as empirical (43 papers from the HR journal and 28 from the NRP journal, Table 2).

All HR empirical manuscripts presented a conceptualization and operationalization of the key phenomena under study, while only 64% of NRP texts managed to provide such information ( $\chi^2 = 17.87$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Research question formulation was not a factor that considerably differentiated HR versus NRP papers ( $\chi^2 = 1.35$ ;  $p = 0.24$ ); hypotheses were, however, more frequently encountered in the HR rather than NRP journal ( $\chi^2 = 35.06$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). In all HR manuscripts hypotheses were derived from theoretical discussions and literature review, while less conceptual argumentation for hypotheses development was provided in NRP papers ( $\chi^2 = 24.98$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Importantly, over 75% of HR papers (versus only 7% of NRP texts) presented some interaction effects between investigated variables ( $\chi^2 = 32.86$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). These results address our RQ3.

**Table 2.** Cross-tabulations comparing HR versus NRP journals in terms of conceptual background and research design,  $n=71$  (empirical papers only)

Components of a scholarly paper	Content classification variables		HR journal	NRP journal	$\chi^2$
Conceptual background	All variables are conceptualized and operationalized	No	0	10	17.87
		Yes	43	18	$p < 0.01$
	There are (is) research questions formulated in this paper	No	26	13	1.35
		Yes	17	15	$p = 0.24$
	The research questions stem from / are derived from the literature review*	No	0	14	28.20
		Yes	17	1	$p < 0.01$
	There are (is) hypotheses forwarded in this paper	No	3	21	35.06
		Yes	40	7	$p < 0.01$
	The hypotheses stem from / are derived from the literature review**	No	0	4	24.98
		Yes	40	3	$p < 0.01$
The authors have searched for interaction effects in their theoretical model	No	10	26	32.86	
	Yes	33	2	$p < 0.01$	
There is a visual presentation of theoretical framework and investigated relationships	No	27	27	10.53	
	Yes	16	1	$p < 0.01$	
Research design	The authors explicitly say what research method they employ	No	1	11	16.49
		Yes	42	17	$p < 0.01$
	Experimental method was used	No	10	28	40.14
		Yes	33	0	$p < 0.01$
	Survey-based research method was used	No	36	14	9.25
		Yes	7	14	$p < 0.01$
	The authors have employed some control checks in their study (either procedural or statistical)	No	2	28	63.18
		Yes	41	0	$p < 0.01$
	The sources or development procedures of measurement scales are described***	No	0	18	45.98
		Yes	37	3	$p < 0.01$
The mechanisms underlying investigated	No	12	27	32.16	



phenomena are tested	Yes	31	1	p<0.01
	No	27	26	8.10
	Yes	16	2	p<0.01

**Note:** HR journal = highly ranked journal; NRP journal = non-ranked Polish journal; \* n = 32; \*\* n = 47; \*\*\* the values in cells do not add up to 71 as in certain papers no measurement scales were used.

**Source:** Own work.

In almost 40% of NRP papers (compared to 2% of HR papers) the authors did not specify explicitly what research method they used in their study ( $\chi^2 = 16.49$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Experiments were the most prevalent methodological approach in the HR journal, while no Polish author employed experimental design in their investigations ( $\chi^2 = 40.14$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Most empirical papers from the HR journal aimed at testing various mechanisms behind examined phenomena ( $\chi^2 = 32.16$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), and significantly more HR than NRP manuscripts presented numerous studies to inspect alternative explanations or to rule out confounding variables ( $\chi^2 = 8.10$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). No control checks (e.g., manipulation checks, common method bias checks or pretests) were reported in the texts derived from the NRP journal ( $\chi^2 = 63.18$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Such results deliver answers to RQ4.

**Table 3.** Cross-tabulations comparing HR versus NRP journals in terms of data analysis and references quality, n=71 (empirical papers only)

Components of a scholarly paper	Content classification variables		HR journal	NRP journal	$\chi^2$
Data analysis	Data analysis is based on mean or percentage differences but with no statistical significance calculated	No	42	7	41.88
		Yes	1	21	p<0.01
	Basic descriptive statistics are reported (e.g., means, medians, SDs etc.)	No	0	21	41.88
		Yes	42	7	p<0.01
	Correlation coefficients are calculated and reported	No	28	23	2.43
		Yes	15	5	p=0.11
	Analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been run (or ANCOVA, MANOVA)	No	12	23	19.95
		Yes	31	5	p<0.01
	Regression analysis was performed	No	22	27	16.24
		Yes	21	1	p<0.01
	Other advanced methods of data analysis were employed (including, for example, structural equation modeling etc.)	No	33	26	3.13
		Yes	10	2	p=0.07
	The paper presents "null results"	No	40	6	5.83
		Yes	0	1	p=0.01
References	The reference list contains current (i.e., published within 5 years after submission) papers from HR journals*	No	1	37	5.83
		Yes	44	11	p=0.01

**Note:** HR journal = highly ranked journal; NRP journal = non-ranked Polish journal; \* n = 93.

**Source:** Own work.

The analysis of variance (or modifications thereof) was the most frequently exploited method in HR papers (Table 3), which might have stemmed from the experimental designs that prevailed in these texts. Additionally, 30 out of 43 HR manuscripts (and only 4 out of 28 NRP papers) employed more than one data analysis approach and combined, for instance, ANOVA with regression or structural equation modelling ( $\chi^2 = 36.54$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Authors publishing their work in the NRP journal seldom used any advanced analytical devices and they rather reported basic means, percentage, or median differences between variables, without accounting for their statistical significance ( $\chi^2 = 41.88$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). These findings address RQ5.

HR manuscripts were more likely than their Polish counterparts to cite current papers from high-profile journals ( $\chi^2 = 5.83$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), which might be linked to the fact that their lists of references were considerably longer ( $Me_{HR\ journal} = 61$  vs  $Me_{NRP\ journal} = 21$ ; Mann-Whitney  $U = 78.00$ ,  $Z = -7.70$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and thus the authors had more room to use various sources. When we calculated the exact percentage of current versus non-current papers in the lists of references, however, the NRP journal outranked the HR journal. Specifically, Polish manuscripts were citing a higher percentage of current (i.e., max. 5 years old) papers ( $Me_{HR\ journal} = 0.33$  vs  $Me_{NRP\ journal} = 0.44$ ; Mann-Whitney  $U = 772.00$ ,  $Z = -2.36$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) and lower percentage of “non-current” ones (i.e., “older” than 10 years;  $Me_{HR\ journal} = 0.46$  vs  $Me_{NRP\ journal} = 0.32$ ; Mann-Whitney  $U = 584.50$ ,  $Z = -3.81$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Such results provide answers to RQ6.

## **5. Conclusions**

Publishing a paper in an internationally recognized journal is a contemporary way to distribute research findings and, more frequently, it constitutes a part of an ‘academic sell-out’ (Gruber, 2014), as it helps scholars in reaching their career goals and in filling requirements set out by their employers. Therefore, the idea behind our study was to investigate whether scholars from developing educational markets, such as Poland, have chances to compete with their more advanced colleagues by means of disseminating their work in highly ranked international journals. We therefore examined the differences between papers published in HR versus NRP outlets. Specifically, we ran an extensive content analysis on a sample of 93 manuscripts taken from two distinctive publishers, i.e., US- versus Poland-based ones. Our results show how the papers differ in various ways, and they also provide certain insights about current publishing practices on marketing in Poland, as an example of a European region that is still in its early stages when it comes to scholarly development.

One of the biggest differences between Polish and international papers comes from theoretical and conceptual foundations. More specifically, most hypotheses in Polish manuscripts were not always comprehensively conceptualized and research gaps were seldom derived from the extant literature. As a result, theoretical models

presented in NRP manuscripts often failed to provide compelling arguments for how they improved our understanding of various phenomena or how they contributed to the field of marketing. In addition, considerably less empirical (versus conceptual) papers were encountered in the NRP than HR journal. Scholars who published their findings in a Polish outlet had relied mostly on survey methods, and they had not exploited any experimental designs in their studies. An experiment, however, was a leading research method in the HR journal.

Given the nature and type of differences between NRP and HR papers, one may conclude that much further work is needed to increase the chances of Polish authors to publish their findings in an internationally renowned journal. First, the authors should focus on developing more comprehensive and theoretically grounded conceptual frameworks. Second, they should put more emphasis on empirical research, and try to use riskier and more effortful (albeit more reliable) methods, such as experiments. Instead of running purely descriptive research, Polish scholars should focus on solving specific research problems, so they could meaningfully contribute to the field. All these improvements seem feasible, though they might become a big challenge. In Poland academics have always been struggling with many systematic barriers and obstacles (e.g., too much teaching load and too little funds for research), which considerably threatens their scholarly development and publishing practices.

The current study is not devoid of certain limitations. For example, it considers only one-country perspective. Even though Poland represents one of the largest developing educational market in Central and Eastern Europe, future research might further investigate the quality of academic research in other countries.

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