



# DIFFERING CONSIDERATIONS IN THE CONDUCT OF COMMERCIAL AND ACADEMIC MANAGERIAL RESEARCH

Nimal CN

Assistant Professor, Kochi Business School  
Edachira, Kakkanad, Kochi, Kerala 682030

Dr. UV Somayajulu

CEO & ED, Sigma Research and Consulting  
South Extension, Part I, New Delhi 110049

**Abstract**—Although commercial research is based on the same methodology as academic research, based on the experience of the researchers, it was felt that the conduct of academic and commercial research differs substantially on several important parameters. The objective of this paper is to understand the nature of these challenges and list them out. The differences start from the purpose of the study to the differences in implementation. While most academic research is more general in nature, commercial research is specific to a firm that needs the data to make an informed decision. The reason for some of the most important of these differences is that while academic research is done by individuals using a small sample size, commercial research may involve a large sample of people in the study at the same time in widespread locations conducted by different sets of people. These create many challenges which need practical solutions. The study found that further research is needed to find solutions.

**Keywords**—Commercial research, Academic research, Conducting research.

## I. INTRODUCTION

There is a fairly large body of literature that has studied management research in academic institutions. Most of them have studied the question of how to make academic research more relevant to the industries. Ankers and Brennan (2002) discuss the barriers that marketing academics will have to overcome if they are to make their research significant and applicable to practitioners. Panda and Gupta (2014) suggest that the difference between rigour and relevance needs to be bridged to make academic research more relevant to businesses. Wickert et al (2021) found that management scholars struggle to produce concrete solutions to management problems and gives suggestions as to how they can broaden the research to make an impact in industry. Worrall et al (2008) bemoans the fact that in academia, it is publishing in top

journals or attracting research funding from government sources that count rather than cater to the end users, the corporate managers.

Further, management research according to Pfeffer and Fong (2002) has limited influence on management practice. Business organizations as researchers like Hambrick (1994) and Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) have found, rarely implement management practices that are created out of the findings of academic research, even if they claim to enhance employee productivity and the financial performance of the organization. Still Huffman and Benson (2021) are optimistic that business academics are becoming more and more interested in collaborating with businesspeople in conducting research.

## II. PROBLEM DEFINITION

But delving deeper into management research, it was found that there is not much literature that considers the methodology of the study itself. This paper delves deep into how the conduct of academic research differs from commercial research. The researchers have years of experience in the field of commercial research and this paper has drawn heavily from what was encountered during the conduct of some of the studies.

One of the biggest distinctions is that, although academic research is conducted by one person or a small group of people, commercial research may involve a large number of people. Many of them might be based in disparate locations and not even communicate with one another. This leads to several problems that require workable answers. Throughout this article, we shall examine these and other issues.

## III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Despite using the same methodology as academic research, the researchers' experience indicates that there are significant differences between the way academic and commercial research is conducted on some crucial factors.



The objective of this paper is to enumerate and comprehend the nature of these challenges. These challenges are mainly on the practical application and may not be perceived by those who have never worked in the industry.

#### IV. FINDINGS

The discrepancies begin as we have seen with the research purpose and continue with variations in execution. Commercial research is tailored to a company that requires the information to make an informed decision, whereas the majority of academic research is more general in nature. Let us consider the first difference, the aim and objective of the research per se.

##### **A. Difference in Purpose and Goals**

The primary aim of academic research is to contribute to the broader body of knowledge, advance understanding, and address theoretical questions. It's typically driven by curiosity and the desire to explore new ideas, often with no immediate application in mind. According to Panda and Gupta (2007), it is concept-centric rather than problem driven. As per Pfeffer and Fong (2002) and Vermeulen (2005), although management science is applied in nature, management research itself, it seems to strive for understanding of concepts and ideas, rather than their applicability in practice.

However, the primary aim of commercial research is to understand and answer management problems. Managers need data so that they can make informed decisions. And it is this data that is collected and analysed through research. Hence these researches are precursors to action that can bring in hundreds of crores of revenue or an equal amount of losses. These may even make or break a company. At the bare minimum, the research results in a competitive advantage for the company in one way or the other.

##### **B. How problems are defined**

While the problems are defined by the academician mostly through secondary research, that of the manager is defined by the symptoms he or she is facing. He may or may not know the cause of the problem, and the study would be to find out the said cause. In any case, the end aim of the study would be to give the information and subsequent suggestions which the manager would then use for effective decision-making.

Academic problems are often broader and less defined, where as commercial problems are typically more specific, with clearer goals tied to business metrics like profit, efficiency or market share.

This brings us to a generic difference between academic and commercial research mentioned earlier. Which is that while academic research is conducted by a single person on a small sample of people, there may be many people involved in the commercial study, with a large sample distributed, may be across the country.

##### **C. Brief to the Research Team**

The manager needs data to make informed decisions. However, it is the research team who has to provide the manager with that information. It is not the job of the manager to do the survey or analysis. Hence the manager notes down his information needs as a brief to the research team. Thus, many commercial researches start with a request for a proposal for a study with the manager briefing the internal team or an external research agency. He only clears the study and uses the results he receives as a report or presentation from the research team.

##### **D. Literature Review**

In the case of academic research, the literature review forms a cornerstone of the process. The problem definition, gap analysis, research questions, selection of variables all are in one way or the other usually linked with the literature review. Sometimes they are also a secondary source of data. In the case of commercial research, the problem and research questions are already defined. And most studies are primary in nature. Hence, the literature review is hardly relevant. Unless it is used in the guise of an exploratory study.

##### **E. Operations brief**

When you have a field team working for you, they have to be given a written brief on how the study has to be conducted. Especially if this team is distributed in different states of the country. This includes details regarding how the questionnaire has to be administered. Otherwise, the teams may ask the same questions differently, which may impact the answers given and further, the result of the study. Which brings us to the next part – training.

##### **F. Field Training**

The field team has to not only be given the operations brief but has to be given training on the work, along with some role plays. The quality of the research is dependent on the quality of the investigators – the term used by the industry, rather than the more general interviewer – and they have to be given clear instructions on how to gather the information. Moreover, these days the data collection usually takes the shape of CAPI (Computer Aided Personal Interview) and this maybe new to many field staff.

##### **G. Translation**

Now, if the study is being done in different parts of the country, the questionnaire as well as the briefs would have to be translated to different languages. Similarly, the findings also would have to be translated back to English.

##### **H. Quality management**

In case of academic research, usually carried out by an individual, the researcher himself/herself may carry out the data collection and take care of the data quality.



On the other hand, for commercial research, the data collection maybe carried out by the in-house field teams or by the outsourced teams and data quality assurance measures should be in place. In what all ways can quality be assured is an important consideration.

#### **I. Analysis brief**

The researcher prepares the research plan and further the research instrument. After that, the field team gets on the job. The collected data then is sent for entry and analysis to the analysis team. The job of the researcher is to decide on what information he needs from the data, and once he gets the analysis, interpret it and give suggestions. Since the analysis is done by experts in analytics, they have to be briefed by the research team on what kind of tests and output they want.

#### **J. Random sampling without sample frame**

The accuracy of the research depends on a number of factors. The sampling method is one of them. In case it is an enumeration there is no question of a sample as it is census in nature. But in case of sampling ideally we should be doing a random or probability sampling. Non probability sampling by its very nature tends to be more biased and less representative than probability ones. For doing a proper simple random sampling a sample frame is required which is very difficult, in fact well nigh impossible to obtain in many cases. So what is the alternative. The best we can do in case of a probability sampling is systematic sampling and that too has its challenges. Bruwer, Haydam and Lin (1996) for example in their paper looks at how mall intercept interviews can be made into systematic time- based sampling method. Even for calculating something like market potential we need to have a fair idea of the population forget the sample frame, which is usually not available in India. So the question as to whether there is any other method for doing a probability sampling and how the commercial researcher can accurately and reliably find such data is important.

#### **K. Funding and cost calculations**

Academic research is typically funded by government grants, nonprofit organizations, or university budgets. These funding sources are often competitive and may come with specific requirements related to advancing knowledge or public welfare. Commercial research on the other hand is funded by businesses, private companies, or venture capital. The research is generally focused on market-driven needs and is designed to yield profitable products or services. Commercial research looks at cost benefit when they decide on the budget.

#### **L. Setting timelines**

Academic projects tend to have a longer timeframe as they focus on long-term discoveries and insights, and results may not have immediate commercial value. Commercial research on the other hand is typically more short-term and product-oriented. There is often more pressure to deliver results

quickly and meet deadlines tied to product development timelines or market needs. The time lines would be tight and the deadlines have to be met.

#### **M. Hypothesis Testing**

In any research, hypothesis testing would be taken up but in academic research it is done much more systematically while in commercial research this is not given importance always. One of the reasons for this is that the human mind and hence behaviour is very fickle and it is not always possible to consider the likely scenarios, especially sitting thousands of miles away from the location of action.

#### **N. Ethical practices**

In academic research, adherence to ethical aspects is given importance while in commercial research, not much attention is given to this aspect. There are rules and regulations set up by the institutions as well as the universities which has to be followed by the academic researcher. As long as nothing illegal is done or it is outright irresponsible there are usually no questions asked in the case of commercial research.

#### **O. Report/Presentation**

In academic research, a detailed report in the form of a thesis is prepared. Together with this a PPT is also prepared and open defence of the research is conducted. On the other hand in commercial research, usually, a PPT serves the purpose. With maybe topline findings, highlighting those findings that are really relevant interpretations of those findings and the recommendations or suggestions by the researcher concerned.

#### **P. Dissemination of findings**

Findings of academic research are disseminated through publication in journals and presentation in seminars /conferences/workshops organised by academic institutions and professional associations. On the other hand, findings of commercial research are not supposed to be put in the public domain and is accessed only by the funders and are kept confidential.

### **IV. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. Relevance for academics**

The gap here is not about the relevance of the academic research per se. It is the way managerial research should be taught in business schools. Rather than an academic orientation, which is only useful if the MBA is planning to go for higher studies, a more practical industry-based application is needed. Then the knowledge will be useful if the management graduate has to use it in industrial settings in his career.



### **B. Relevance for research job seekers**

Many students have a wrong notion of what the research executive does in organisations. They think it is all about analytics. The researcher is not doing the analysis himself. His job is to create proposals and present it to the client. It is to create questionnaires and get it cleared by the client. It is writing the operations brief and getting the field work done by the team and then doing the same with the analytics team. Giving them instructions on what results are needed and then interpreting them and presenting the report to the client with suggestions and recommendations.

As the paper explains, there are many differences between the methodology used in the conduct of academic and commercial research and these have different ramifications for both the commercial as well as academic world. These differences reflect the distinct objectives and environments of each type of research. The contrasts mainly stem from the fact that one could be a solo effort while the other is a team effort. And these teams maybe spread out over the country. There is a whole lot more scope for further research. Especially the solutions to these problems. And how research methodology can be really applied in practice. Ideally, the research should be initiated on this topic by people with fairly long experience in the field.

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