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Challenging Conditions, Social Networks and Performance of Academic Research in Marketing

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Based on research in the fields of global history and social networks we suggest that challenging conditions imposed on academic researchers, at the individual or team levels, may lead them to be more effective and innovative, overall improving their articles’ performance. We demonstrate that challenging conditions such as the involvement of authors from non-core countries and women authors in an article positively affect the performance of academic research articles in marketing. These effects are direct as well as indirect through authors’ better utilization of their social networks. We suggest that the positive effect of being challenged as a single author on an article’s performance is balanced against the benefits from teamwork but still, that single authors can increase an article’s performance by highly utilizing their social network.

We examine how marketing research articles' performance is affected by three factors that constrain and therefore challenge authors: (1) involvement of non-core country author/s, (2) involvement of women author/s, and (3) number of contributors to an article. This model suggests that challenges affect an articles’ performance both directly and indirectly, through the utilization of social networks.

BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Challenging Conditions

In A Study of History (1965), Arnold J. Toynbee suggests that accomplishment and innovation are achieved through difficult environmental, economical or social conditions, posing considerable challenges and consequently stimulating individuals and societies to overcome them. Marketing researchers have discussed challenging conditions primarily in the context of creativity and teamwork (Amabile et al. 1996; Andrews and Smith 1996; Chatman and Flynn 2001) and the utilization of boundary-setting strategies facilitating innovation (Dougherty and Takacs 2004; Välikangas and Gibbert 2005). Overall, it seems that the lack of constraints generated by challenging conditions inhibits performance by not stimulating individuals to innovate in order to overcome the challenges.

Social Networks

Social networks research (e.g., Granovetter 1973; Rindfleisch and Moorman 2001) is most relevant in the context of academic research, where individual researchers are actors in social networks of professional or demographic cliques, which are likely to affect an article's performance (Cote, Leong, and Cote 1991; Friedkin 1980) both before its publication by providing a platform for comments, suggestions and inputs which contribute to the quality of the final product (Henard and Szymanski 2001; Rindfleisch and Moorman 2001) as well as after publication, by facilitating its diffusion (Friedkin 1980), and hence its impact.

Challenging Conditions within the World-System

The global-history oriented World-System Theory (e.g., Chase-Dunn and Grimes 1995; Wallerstein 1974) divides the world to core-countries (possessing a strong state mechanism, a complex and strong economy and a complex social structure) as opposed to non-core countries (i.e. Periphery and Semiperiphery countries, Wallerstein 1974). Non-core countries possess lesser economic capabilities when compared with core countries, and are less able to allocate funding for infrastructure, welfare and education (Chase-Dunn and Grimes 1995). Therefore, unlike individuals from core countries, individuals from non-core countries face a variety of challenges in terms of education possibilities, wages, and economic opportunities, thus academic researchers originating in non-core countries are likely to have experienced the overcoming of challenges in their past, and hence possess motivation and better
challenge-overcoming abilities. We suggest that the involvement of authors originating from non-core countries in an academic research article has (a) a direct positive effect on the performance of the article, and (b) an indirect positive effect on the performance of the article through the better utilization of social networks.

**Challenging Conditions within the Halls of Science**

Another challenged group within the academia is women. As a minority group within the academia, women must overcome greater obstacles than men in order to stay in academia or improve their position (Toren 2001; 2000). Small minorities encounter discrimination, isolation, and performance pressures due to high visibility and perceived contrast (Kanter 1977), conditions which pose considerable challenges on women in academia, who are consequently motivated to overcome the challenge by optimally utilizing available resources in order to improve their position. Since women possess an advantage over men in social capabilities and a larger number of social ties (Halpern 1997; Hirscfeld et al. 2005), we suggest that the involvement of women in an academic research article has (a) a direct positive effect on the performance of the article due to women's higher ability and experience in overcoming challenges, and (b) an indirect positive effect on the performance of the article through the better utilization of social networks.

**Challenging Conditions and Team Size**

One of the resources available to a team is the number of team members. While a large team of authors is likely to have accessibility to a large number of social ties, it is less likely to be motivated to optimally utilizing these (Stremersch, Verniers, and Verhoef 2007). Conversely, fewer authors are more likely to make the most of comments, suggestions and inputs, in order to overcome the challenging condition of lacking resources. We suggest that while the challenges imposed on a single or very few authors may be balanced against the benefits associated with a large team of authors, the former are more motivated to better utilize their social network and thus increase their article’s performance.

**METHODOLOGY**

We randomly sampled a single Journal of Marketing issue and a single Journal of Marketing Research issue for each year between 1965 and 1995 (283 JM articles, 382 JMR articles). Performance of articles was measured by the number of citations received by subsequent articles (Garfield, Malin, and Small 1978; Price 1963) a measure commonly used by marketing researchers (Cote, Leong, and Cote 1991; Hoffman and Holbrook 1992; Stremersch, Verniers, and Verhoef 2007). Biographic information regarding authors’ country of origin and gender was obtained from the published article and public sources available on the Internet. The number of authors and utilization of social network were measured by the number of contributors and the number of acknowledgements listed on the article's front page respectively. We controlled for authors' affiliation and for publication (JM/JMR). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test the model.

**MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Results suggest that the involvement of authors originating from non-core countries and of women in an academic research article positively affect an article's performance both directly, and indirectly through the utilization of social network. However, it seems that multiple-authorship articles outperform single-authorship ones, although the latter are more likely to use acknowledgements, indicating a better utilization of their social network.

Overall, the better utilization of social network by challenged teams or individuals indicates that higher performance stems from a better utilization of available resources rather than mere intelligence of the authors. Additionally, it seems that it is not national diversification per-se which accounts for our results, but rather experience diversification stemming from dealing with challenges, as we find that nationally diversified non-core country teams outperform nationally diversified core country teams.

Our findings suggest that incorporating challenged individuals, such as women and members from non-core countries, in research teams positively affects an article's performance, and due to apparent similarities between academic research teams and New Product Development teams, such an incorporation is likely to positively affect new product performance as well.

**REFERENCES**


