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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether the "most frequently published academic researchers" in mass communications, who collectively wrote 292 refereed articles, informed the public of their research findings by writing articles for consumer and trade publications. An examination of the "Reader's Guide to Periodicals" showed that the 53 academic researchers cited wrote only three consumer magazine articles during a specific period, while a similar examination of "Proquest" showed that these researchers wrote only 6.33 trade magazine articles. A "Nexis" search found that the researchers were cited by the media once every 3 years on average. These findings suggest that academic research findings are not reaching the general public and support previous arguments of C. J. Sykes and R. Jacoby that academic research is not reaching anyone except the readers of academic journals (whose readership is small). (One table of data is included. Contains 22 references.) (NKA)

WITH WHOM ARE MASS COMMUNICATION RESEARCHERS COMMUNICATING?

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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether "the most-frequently published academic researchers," who collectively wrote 292 refereed articles, informed the public of their research findings by writing articles for consumer and trade publications. Reader's Guide reported that the 53 academic researchers wrote only 3 consumer magazine articles. ProQuest showed that the 53 academic researchers penned only 6.33 trade articles. A Nexis search found that the researchers were cited by the media once every three years on-the-average. This suggests that academic research findings are not reaching the public.

WITH WHOM ARE MASS COMMUNICATION RESEARCHERS COMMUNICATING?

Academics have paid substantial attention to their own research activities during the past twenty years. Studies have examined the research article productivity of faculty in such disciplines as sociology (5), psychology (4), education (20), management (18) and marketing (2). Although researchers from many fields have studied their disciplines' research output, more attention has probably been paid to research productivity in communication than in any traditional discipline.

The earliest study of research productivity in communication was conducted by Cole and Bowers (3), who examined research article publication by journalism faculty between 1962 and 1971. Since that time, articles have appeared on the productivity of speech (9), broadcasting (21, 22), advertising (1, 17), and mass communication (6, 10) researchers. The focus of these studies has shifted from the universities that published the research to the individuals who wrote the articles.

One researcher, John Schweitzer, has developed a cottage industry that examines research in mass communication. Schweitzer conducted studies of the "research climate in journalism" departments (15), the motivating "factors affecting scholarly research" (13), "organizational and cultural factors affecting scholarly research" (11), "faculty research expectations" (12), the authorship of American Academy of Advertising conference proceedings papers (16), and the authorship of papers at conferences of the International Communication Association (14).

In 1988, Schweitzer (10) blished an article listing the 53 "most productive" researchers in mass communication between 1980 and 1985.[1] To determine productivity, Schweitzer (10) recorded the authorship of articles in nine academic journals, including Journal of Communication, Journal of Broadcasting, Journalism Quarterly and Journal of Advertising, and gave each author up to one point credit for the article, depending on the number of coauthors. When there were two coauthors, each received .50 credit; when their were three, each received .33 credit. Schweitzer's study contained several tabulation errors, including one that placed the fourth most-frequently published researcher in the number one spot.

Schweitzer's (10) method and findings were contested by Bradley Greenberg (6), whose name did not appear on Schweitzer's list. Greenberg reanalyzed Schweitzer's data so that every author of a coauthored article received one point, regardless of the number of coauthors (6). The reanalysis showed Greenberg to be the seventh most frequently published researcher rather than a no-show, and Michigan State University (MSU) to be the most productive, rather than second most productive, university. MSU is Greenberg's university. With these exceptions, the reanalysis added little to Schweitzer's orginal findings.

While communication researchers have been busy examining their own productivity, and arguing about the best way to assess it, others have criticized academic research for being irrelevant and obfuscative. One of the most scathing critiques of academic research in general, and communication research in particular, was presented in Charles Sykes' Profscam. Sykes (19, p. 109) contends that academic

research is a "direct product of the [academic] culture's Triple Imperative of Obscurantism. The slavish use of obscure jargon, convoluted syntax, and the symbols and trappings of mathematics" are used to make "trivial subjects sound impressive and the most commonplace observation immeasurably profound, even if the subject is utterly insignificant."

To prove his point about academicians' use of obscure jargon, Sykes (19) cites an article published in Human Communication Research, which he claims found that "people say things for a variety of reasons and choose the sort of words appropriate for the occasions" (p. 111). Rather than reporting this simplistic finding, the article instead reported that "speakers generate utterances to satisfy cognitive, affective, or aesthetic urges, selecting specific lexical combinations from a personal lexicon determined by the content of the interaction."

Sykes (19) used an article in Communication to illustrate "profspeak," and an article in the Southern Speech Communication Journal to illustrate how mathematical symbols are used to hide the triviality of academic research. Rather than describe the television show, The A-Team, as "a bunch of macho guys" doing macho things, the Communication article hautily reported that "the male group is ubiquitous in colonizing the conventional spheres of interpersonal activity as a self-sufficient autonomus unit." The Southern Speech Communication Journal article ridiculed by Sykes reported that "the frequency of sexual acts and other than implied intercourse increased substantially from 1978 (130) to 1979 (243: $X^2(df=1) = 34.23$, p. 001)."

Sykes (19) also contends that scholarly research journals are rarely read, and that "the motivation to read appears to fall far short of the motivation to publish" (p. 117). According to Sykes, professors publish because it boosts their salaries and provides lazy professors with an excuse not to teach. Pursuit of knowledge is the least important reason why professors publish in scholarly journals, he claims. Despite all the criticism, the book fails to offer any positive solutions to the publish-or-perish syndrome. Sykes' only solutions are to abolish tenure and academic journals, which he says are "unread, unreadable, and unused except to bulk up academic resumes" (p. 259).

A more penetrating criticism of academic publication is presented by Jacoby (7, 8), who contends that post-World War II academics are professionals rather than "public intellectuals." Unlike the earlier generation of intellectuals, who became professors after spending years as free-lance writers, analyzing issues of social importance for a public audience, modern academicians write reports for each other. Jacoby (7, p. 274) contends that "as American intellectuals decamped from garrets and seedy apartments to offices and campuses, their lives and perspectives changed. Specifically, their audience shifted, from a lay general audience to professional colleagues; the language of intellectual work also shifted. It was no longer necessary to write in lucid or accessible English; colleagues cared for findings, not form."

Like Sykes (19), Jacoby (7, p. 277) sees academic prose as "unreadable communiques sweetened by thanks to colleagues and superiors." But unlike Sykes (2), Jacoby (7, 8) sees the decline of

academic writing to be the result of professionalism, because "professionals cared for substance, not form." This lack of attention to writing style eventually gave way to "crabbed academic writing" -- and an inability of academic professionals to communicate with anyone other than those in their field. This, Jacoby argues, has resulted in the replacement of public intellectuals by academic professionals who cannot and do not communicate with the public. Jacoby (7, p. 276) writes that "academics no longer rel[y] on either the small magazine of opinion and literature or the bigger periodicals, such as The New Yorker or Fortune, as their outlets. Professional journals and monographs became their lifeblood."

Jacoby (7, 8) does not write off academic research as mere posturing or of poor quality, as Sykes (19) does. Instead, he laments that academics have become, in the words of C. Wright Mills, "powerless and resigned" -- with little impact on society.

While Sykes (19) and Jacoby (7, 8) approach the issue of academic publication from entirely different perspectives, both conclude that academic research has relatively impact or importance to society. If they are correct, little of the research contained in academic journals ever makes its way into the media to which the general public is exposed.

This study examines whether research published in communication journals is being communicated to the public and the professions. Specifically, this study examines whether academics who have published in mass communication research journals have presented their findings to the nonacademic world, either in consumer publications such as

Harper's, or trade publications such as Editor and Publisher. The study also examines whether newspapers, news magazines and wire services carried reports about research appearing in communication research journals or quoted productive academic researchers. This study tests Jacoby's (7, 8) and Sykes's (19) hypothesis that academic research isn't communicated to anyone except the readers of academic journals.

METHOD

Because of the difficulty associated with tracing the publication records of all communication faculty who have published in academic journals, this study is restricted to examining the consumer and trade article productivity of the individuals listed by Schweitzer (10) and Greenberg and Schweitzer (6) as the "most productive researchers." According to Schweitzer (10), the 53 most-frequently published researchers authored 292 articles in the "nine journals [that] account for the vast majority of research published by mass communications scholars." The 52 authors produced 25.6 percent of all articles published in the journals.

To determine how many consumer and trade publications these professors authored, searches of CD-ROM databases were conducted. The correct spellings of the 53 professors' names were entered into the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature and ProQuest CD-ROMs.[2] The Reader's Guide indexes consumer magazines; ProQuest indexes consumer, trade, and scholarly publications. They are not discrete: Some consumer periodicals included in Reader's Guide are also included in ProQuest. The Reader's Guide CD-ROM indexed the period between January 1, 1983 and January 31, 1993, or ten years. The

ProQuest databases covered the period between January 1986 and June 1991, or five and a half years.

Each professor's name was entered in several ways. For example, "D. Charles Whitney," "Charles Whitney" "D. Whitney" and "Chuck Whitney" were entered. Bruce Vanden Bergh was also entered as "Bruce Vandenbergh."

Book reviews, sidebars, commentaries, and full-length articles were counted as articles for the purposes of this study. Consumer and trade periodicals in ProQuest were defined as those that did not bear the "education" of "academic" descriptor contained in the database.

To determine how many times the research of the 52 most-published academic researchers appeared in news reports, a Lexis/Nexis search was conducted. Unlike the CD-ROM databases of Reader's Guide and ProQuest, Lexis/Nexis can retrieve the names of individuals occurring anywhere in the story text.

The "Omni" file in Nexis was accessed for this search. Because of the relatively small number of periodicals with backfiles before 1984, the database search was restricted to the period between January 1, 1984 and December 31, 1992. In Nexis, the Los Angeles Times goes back to January 1, 1985, and Advertising Age to January 1, 1986. Some publications, such as the New York Times, have larger backfiles, while others, such as the Chicago Tribune, begin even later. The Tribune file begins on January 1, 1988. Despite these limitations, there is no other way to effectively and efficiently search for names of individuals within news texts, except to use a

database like Nexis/Lexis.

The Nexis "Omni" file contains full-texts of such newspapers as the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Boston Globe, Christian Science Monitor, and Minneapolis Star Tribune. In addition to the texts of newspapers, Nexis contains the texts of articles from many consumer and trade magazines, including Newsweek, People, Mediaweek, and Communication World. Also in the database are the texts of UPI, Reuters, and Agence Presse France wire stories.

All Nexis stories discussing the research of the academic researchers or quoting them as communication "experts" were counted, except those appearing on the PR Newswire, which distributes press releases for a fee, rather than bona fide news stories. Included in the count were reviews of books written by the 53 researchers. Not counted were quotations dealing with education or non-communication topics. For example, Bruce Vanden Bergh was quoted in the Los Angeles Times about the large number of advertising majors in his department, Bradley Greenberg was quoted in a Detroit Business article about a grant from MCI to MSU's student enrichment program, and Tony Atwater was quoted in the Atlanta Constitution about the difficulty of diversifying faculty. None of these were counted.

RESULTS

The results of the Reader's Guide and ProQuest searches are presented in Table 1. As can be observed from the table, the most-productive academic researchers produced very few consumer or

trade articles. The 53 academic authors wrote just three consumer magazine articles during the ten year period indexed by Reader's Guide. The three articles appeared in Harper's, Mother Jones, and Commonweal.

The ProQuest search turned up 13.33 articles. Of these, 6.33 were trade articles and 7 were consumer articles. The numbers are very low considering the operational definition of an article, which included book reviews, sidebars, commentaries, and full-length articles.

Two of the 6.33 trade articles were published by one person -- M. Bruce Garrison, who actually coauthored four articles with Michael Salwen for Editor & Publisher. As coauthor, he received authorship credit for just two articles, using Schweitzer's (10) coding method.

It should be noted that the 6.33 trade articles slightly understates the impact of academic research for two reasons. First, books written by the 53 most-published researchers were reviewed in trade publications, but the reviews are not included in Table 1. For example, Editor & Publisher reviewed Fred Fedler's Media Hoaxes (March 17, 1990), M. Bruce Garrison's Professional Feature Writing (July 28, 1990) and Ted Glasser, et. al.'s Media Freedom and Accountability (April 21, 1990).

Second, ProQuest is an index and abstract and therefore cannot locate quotes from academicians or academic articles that are mentioned in the texts of articles. (Nexis can do this, but Editor & Publisher and Columbia Journalism Review are not included in the Nexis database.) For example, a study by David Weaver on reporters' salaries was described in an Editor & Publisher article of February 21, 1987, but ProQuest did not report this. However, ProQuest did

locate an article in Columbia Journalism Review that discussed an article which originally appeared in the Newspaper Research Journal. That article was coauthored by Fred Fedler. However, the overall results do suggest that academic research findings are not making their way into trade publications.

Academic researchers are also not writing articles for the general public. The 53 most productive researchers authored only seven consumer magazine articles, according to ProQuest. The articles appeared in such magazines as Dissent, Commonweal, and the Utne Reader. In the two instances where academic researchers did write for larger circulation publications, the writings were primarily commentariess. These were authored by Joseph Turow for the Los Angeles Times (December 29, 1992) and by Michael Ryan for the Houston Chronicle (April 20, 1992). The Nexis database search located these.

The academic researchers were much more successful at getting cited in news stories than in getting published in consumer or trade magazines. During the nine year period of the Nexis search (January 1, 1984 through December 31, 1992), the 53 researchers were quoted or cited 155 times, or approximately 17 times per year. However, relatively few of the researchers were ever cited or quoted. Twenty-eight of the 53 researchers were never cited or quoted during the nine years, and another nine were quoted just once.

Just seven individuals accounted for 75 of the 155 (i.e. 48.4 percent) citations. The most frequently-cited of the 53 researchers were Joseph Turow (19 citations), David Weaver (13 citations), Charles Atkin (11 citations), Bradley Greenberg (9 citations), and Mark Levy (9 citations). In Turow's case, six of the 19 citations were reviews

of his book, Playing Dector. In the case of David Weaver, nine of the 13 citations concerned the findings of a Freedom Forum Foundation-funded study of journalists that was released in November 1992.

Besides Weaver's survey, very few research studies became the focus of news stories. When academic research did stimulate news stories, the research tended to be surveys of public attitudes and behaviors. For example, a survey by Mark Levy that found Walter Mondale moving ahead of Gary Hart in the Maryland Democratic primary was quoted in the Washington Post (April 11, 1984). A survey by Leo Jeffres that found Clevelanders to be happy with their city's cultural offerings and entertainment was picked up by UPI in Ohio (September 6, 1988), and a survey by Sharon Dunwoody that found sexually active college students were changing their sexual activities as a result of the AIDS epidemic was picked by UPI (November 10, 1987).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide evidence supporting the arguments of Sykes (19) and Jacoby (7, 8), who claim that academic research isn't reaching anyone except the readers of academic journals, and the readerships of these journals are very small. The most frequently-published researchers are not writing articles that are distributed to the public, and they are not writing articles for professionals. Their audience appears to be exclusively academicians.

Academic researchers were more successful in getting quoted by the news media than they were in getting published in the media. The 53

researchers were quoted or cited 155 times in publications included in Nexis during the nine years between January 1, 1984 and December 31, 1992. That averages out to one quote every three years per academic. This is not very frequent. The infrequent appearances suggest that the leading mass communication researchers have little impact on the general public.

While having little impact on public opinion, academic research might be having an impact on public policy. This research did not examine whether academic research is cited by policy makers, or whether many academics have testified at hearings or court cases. Future research needs to determine whether academic research is having an impact in this area.

One explanation for why the most-frequently published mass communication researchers rarely write for consumer or trade publications is that their academic style is "crabbed" rather than imaginative. If this is the case, academics who have become conditioned to write for academic journals are unable to write articles that editors of consumer and trade magazines find acceptable, even if they were to try.

Another explanation is that the merit systems at universities reward publication in academic journals, rather than consumer or trade publications. This is undoubtedly the case at universities that see their mission as research.

The irony of the reward system is that it has produced research for research's sake. Academic research findings are not being reported in the mass media or trade press and therefore have little impact on professionals or the public. The way to change this is to

reward professors who write for consumer and trade publications.

If reporters were aware of the research being conducted by academics, they might be more inclined to interview them as "experts" for their stories. That, of course, assumes that the research that is conducted is important. If it is trivial, as Sykes contends (19), research by academics will continue to be ignored.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Although Schweitzer's article reported that 53 researchers were found to be "most productive," his list contained only 52 names. Bradley Greenberg's name was apparently left out by accident.

[2] Schweitzer's list had the last name of one professor misspelled, and the wrong middle initial for another.

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TABLE 1

Article Productivity of the 53 Most Published Academic Researchers

Articles in Academic Journals, 1980-1985 (from Schweitzer).....292

Articles in Consumer Magazines, 1983-1993 (from Reader's Guide).....3

Articles in Consumer and Trade Magazines, 1986-1991 (from ProQuest)....13.33

Citations and Quotes in Periodicals, 1984-1992 (cited in Nexis).....155