

The HBR-Effect: How Publication in Managerial Transmission Journals Increase Research Visibility

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Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of publishing in managerial transmission journals, specifically Harvard Business Review (HBR) and MIT Sloan Management Review (SMR), on the broader dissemination of academic findings. In bridging the "research-practice gap," the study quantitatively assesses how articles published in these journals influence media engagement metrics, including Altmetric attention scores, news and social media citations. Using a dataset of nearly 16,000 articles from 39 leading journals, the analysis indicates that publishing practitioner-oriented articles can significantly amplify public visibility and engagement with academic research. Furthermore, the results also identify several influential factors: timing, topic, journal quality, geographic location, and author pedigree. This study underscores the role of managerial transmission journals in increasing the societal impact of academic research, and fostering knowledge transfer from academia to industry.

Keywords: Altmetric attention, knowledge diffusion, responsible research, research visibility

Tracks: Special track

Introduction

For decades, business research has been concerned about the “research-practice gap” and lamented that much, if not most, of academic research rarely leaves the scientific ivory tower. Academic publications often remain confined within scholarly circles, with limited reach to managers who do often find the content difficult to digest due to an excessive focus on rigor and an overly complicated writing style. This has fueled discussions about the accessibility and utility of academic work for practical problem-solving, spotlighting the need for more effective channels of knowledge transfer from academia to industry (Kohli & Haenlein, 2021; Shapiro et al., 2007; Van De Ven & Johnson, 2006). Unfortunately, the current state is that the business community rarely benefits from knowledge transfer from academic to practice (Stäbler and Haenlein, 2021; 2024).

To address this problem, multiple stakeholders – including researchers, university PR offices, and journal editorial offices – have sought ways to make academic findings accessible to a broader audience. This outreach effort, particularly through news and social media, aims to disseminate research to the general public and industry professionals. However, despite these efforts, there is a significant variation in media coverage: while some studies gain widespread public attention, most remain unnoticed (Jedidi et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2014). This discrepancy prompts investigations into the relevance of research to practice (Jedidi et al., 2021), the communication and dissemination of academic findings (AACSB, 2022; Shapiro et al., 2007), and factors influencing journal and media coverage (Stäbler & Haenlein, 2021, 2024; Warren et al., 2021).

Our study integrates into this stream of research and proposes that the publication of practitioner-oriented articles that translate complex academic insights into more accessible content for a wider audience can increase the public engagement with academic articles. Understanding whether practitioner-oriented publications can foster broader engagement with academic research is crucial for the field of business, where the impact of research on real-world applications is increasingly valued (Kohli & Haenlein, 2021) and included in business school rankings (Haenlein & Jack, Forthcoming). Thus, we investigate how the coverage of academic articles in two major managerial transmission journals – Harvard Business Review (HBR) and MIT Sloan Management Review (SMR) – influences measures like Altmetric attention, news and social media mentions. The following sections introduce the research data collection and key results.

Data Collection

Following Stäbler and Haenlein (2024), this study adopts an empirics-first-approach. By analyzing a significant dataset comprising nearly 16,000 articles published between January 2011 and October 2019 and their corresponding practitioner-oriented versions, we examine whether these outlets can bridge the research-practice gap by amplifying the public impact of academic findings. Our sample of academic articles covers all conceptual and empirical papers published in 39 leading marketing and business journals used in Stäbler and Haenlein (2024).

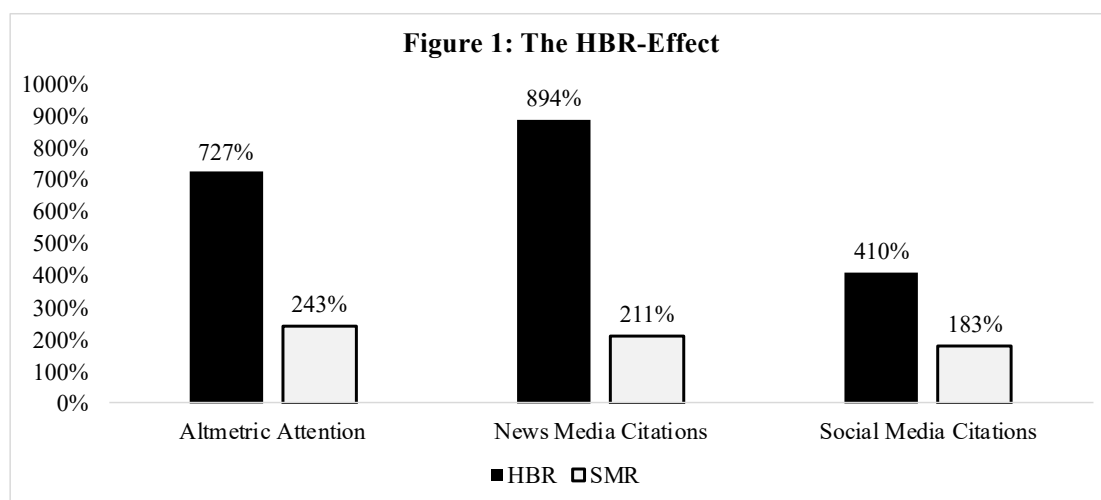
To identify the corresponding managerial transmission versions of these academic articles, we used a two-stage process. First, we identified all authors who had published in HBR and SMR between 2011 and 2019 by searching individual authors’ names in the Business Source Complete database and on the MIT Sloan Management Review journal page in ProQuest. Since both HBR and SMR store authors’ names in the format of “Last Name, First Name (+ middle name),” we excluded middle names in the search terms to broaden the scope of matching results. For HBR, we used the search terms – JN “Harvard Business Review” and “author name (in the format of “Last Name, First Name”)”. For SMR, we used search term “author name (in the format of “Last Name, First Name”)”. If an author’s name appeared in a search, the respective

article and author names were retrieved for the subsequent screening process. We automated the searching process by using Python. This process resulted in a total list of 842 authors and 2,254 articles. Second, we manually checked the articles retrieved from Stage 1 to identify all articles that were managerial versions of academic articles. For HBR, we selected an article (1) if the reference information provided in HBR’s “About the Research” section matched an academic article, or (2) if the HBR article shared similar information (e.g., similar title, co-authors, research questions, data used, key conclusions, journal names). For SMR articles, we selected an article (1) if the reference information provided in SMR’s “Related Research” section matched an article in our sample, or (2) if the key information (e.g., co-authors, research questions, data, research methods, key conclusions) provided in SMR’s “About the Research” section suggested that this article was a shorter or practitioner-oriented version of the sample article. This screening process led to 201 managerial equivalents – 139 in HBR and 62 in SMR.

The dependent variables – Altmetric attention, social media citations and news media citations – were obtained from Altmetric database, which gathers news and social media citations by monitoring a carefully selected list of RSS feeds from various news sites. Given that the independent variables, such as publication with HBR/SMR, affiliation, and topics, were not readily accessible, three researchers worked together to collect and code this information manually. The independent variable, labeled as “HBR_SMR,” indicates whether an academic article has a corresponding publication in HBR or SMR. Additional variables include: (1) timing, which specifies whether the HBR/SMR equivalent was published before or after the academic article (before vs. after); (2) topics, representing the main focus areas of the article—consumer behavior (CB), strategy (STG), quantitative modeling (Quant), and others (Others); (3) Ivy League affiliation, indicating if any author on the co-author team is affiliated with an Ivy League school in the US (Ivy); (4) continents, identifying the continent where each affiliated institution is located (North America, Europe, and the Rest_of_the_World); and (5) journal ranking, reflecting the rank of the original academic journal according to the Meta Journal list (A+, A, B, and C).

Data Analysis and Results

Figure 1 shows that publishing a managerial version of an academic article in HBR substantially impacts the visibility of the research within the broader media landscape. Altmetric attention scores increase by a factor of 7, news media citations by 9, and social media mentions by 4 if a paper has a HBR version. Interestingly, the effect of publishing in HBR vs. SMR is nearly three, four, and two times as large for Altmetric attention, news and social media citations, respectively.



Note: This figure contains only descriptive statistics, showing the percentage change in key metrics (i.e., Altmetric attention, news media citations, and social media citations) when an academic article is also published in HBR or SMR, compared to when it appears only in an academic journal.

Many factors can impact why academic research gets covered in news and social media channels (Stabler and Haenlein, 2024). In addition to the descriptive statistics in Figure 1, we also estimated a series of econometric (general linear) models to account for different article characteristics. This analysis allows us to confirm the findings reported above more statistically robustly and identify characteristics of articles that benefit disproportionately from the HBR Effect. We highlight the summarized results of the drivers with regard to the Altmetric attention score (Figure 2). In these analyses, we do not differentiate between HBR and SMR because the results are consistent. Some particularly interesting results are listed below:



Timing matters: Publishing a practitioner-oriented version *before* the academic version vs. after increases the HBR Effect by 2.7. Early exposure to broader, non-academic audiences likely sparks interest and enhances the public's awareness, potentially driving engagement with the academic version when it is later released.

Topic matters: Academic articles focusing on consumer behavior have the strongest HBR Effect – 2.5 times larger than an average article – potentially because these issues are more relatable and appealing.

Quality matters: Articles originally published in highly ranked academic journals benefit more significantly from exposure in HBR or SMR, suggesting that high-ranking journal publications have credibility or authority that enhances their visibility and engagement with practitioner audiences. In our sample, the HBR effect for the highest-ranked journals is 6.7 times larger than for the lowest-ranked ones.

Pedigree matters: Authors from Ivy League schools enjoy a 7.8 times stronger HBR Effect, likely due to their prestigious affiliations, which lend greater credibility and visibility.

Location matters: The HBR effect is strongest for authors affiliated with North American institutions, whereas scholars from Europe and, even more so, those from other regions experience significantly lower benefits. The HBR Effect of a US scholar is 2 times larger than the one of a European one and 4 times larger than the one from the rest of the world.

Conclusions

Our findings highlight the benefits of publishing academic work in managerial transmission journals, especially for those authors who work on high-impact topics and publish in prestigious journals. By leveraging the visibility of these outlets, academics can make their research more relevant to broader audiences, strengthening the bridge between academia and industry. Our findings also point to the value of timing, indicating that strategic sequencing of publications can amplify public engagement. Publishing in managerial transmission journal first can set a strong foundation for broader impact. In summary, our results stress the vital role that practitioner-oriented outlets play in maximizing knowledge transfer from academic to practice.

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