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Undertaking a Literature Review in Marketing

Writing a literature review is often considered to be one of the most difficult tasks a student will undertake and is often the most significant part of the academic contribution of essays and theses. Academia is a broad and inclusive community and all research takes place within the context of others work. It is therefore imperative that we review current knowledge before we can advance. This article provides guidelines for the construction of a literature review in marketing and focuses upon three key tasks. The first is the identification and sourcing of literature. The second is the interpretation and critical understanding of what has been collected and the third is the preparation and writing of the final document. Within these three tasks a number of suggestions and examples are given to aid anyone starting to prepare a marketing literature review.

Keywords: literature; retrieval; critical review; writing-up.

Introduction

By general agreement and on the basis of first hand experience, the review of literature in most student research (and some professional academic research too) is clumsy, naïve, turgid, confusing and often down right dull. But given the central importance the literature review holds in our academic writing tradition, and its pivotal role in the academic assessment of research why are we still executing them so badly? Specifically, why do students find them so difficult to write? And academics find them so disheartening to read? There is no shortage of guidance in how to undertake a literature review. Comprehensive guides to business research such as Gill and Johnson (1991) or Cooper (1989) contain some guidance. More comprehensive are the general thesis guides such as Dunleavy (2003), Teitelbaum (1998), Baker (2003), or Evans (1996). There are also many specific guides to undertaking a literature review such as Baker (2000), Rowley and Slack (2004) or Hart (1999). Indeed, any competent trawl of the internet will generate innumerable guides and resources from universities around the world. The issue it seems is not the lack of guidance, but how such guidance is translated into the finished product. As a consequence this article focuses upon how to write the literature review, some techniques that can be used to

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make the process easier, and some advice on how to avoid sending the reader to sleep. To start we need to understand some background to writing a literature review; this will ensure that when we write, we know our purpose.

What is a Literature Review and Why do you need one ?

The first question to answer is what do we mean by the word 'Literature'? In its raw form literature is any source of recognized information. The key here is *recognised* and the meaning of this caveat is that the material be credible within the scholarly community as representative of the output of scholarly study; that does not include advertising material, newspaper articles, or quotes from friends. At the core of any literature review are works that appear as books or journal articles which represent the systematic communication of scholarly knowledge. These sources can be amplified with other credible literature which include but are not limited to: Edited Books, Journal articles, Monographs, Databases, Conference Proceedings, Dissertations, Newspapers, Empirical studies, Government reports, Historical records, Statistical handbooks, Policy guides. Be aware that 'literature' is in the public domain and therefore transparent to everyone. Wherever you use a private or proprietary piece of research you are denying its scrutiny by your academic peers so check with the owner, author or publisher about whether the work can be cited.

The term literature review actually refers to a variety of different forms of commentary on existing knowledge. In simple terms they are stories or accounts of what is known about a topic based upon the publications of recognized scholarly work Different disciplines have developed their own protocols for reviewing current knowledge, and in every discipline there will be different requirements for the presentation of work. Broadly there are three forms of literature review: Stand Alone, Embedded, and Segmented. A stand alone literature review is one which has no other purpose than to review the literature. If you look through the major journals in our discipline you will find a number of articles which are published as stand alone literature reviews (see Ponsonby and Boyle 2004, Ngai 2003, and Akpan 2002). They don't necessarily relate to a project or thesis or even a particular problem, but codify what we know about an area.

Embedded literature reviews are those which appear as parts of other pieces of work. For instance we refer to the literature review as a component of an academic article or a grant application or a thesis. This form is the most common among students and academics since almost all of the work they will produce will contain some form of embedded literature review. The final format is a segmented literature review. This describes a literature review which is often articulated into separate sections, chapters, themes or headings in a book or extended thesis.

Literature reviews are undertaken for a variety of different reasons. In terms of a thesis, there are some good reasons for undertaking one, and if your goal is to produce a competent piece of research then getting the

literature review right is an absolute essential. Remember, this is not just a ceremonial event before you get to the real research, this is part of the research and will help you through everything else in your thesis. These are good reasons to undertake a literature review.

- **To identify gaps or omissions in what has already been published**
  Most academic research is an incremental contribution, in other words it is a small advance on a body of knowledge. This is especially true of most theses. This requires new research to be able to find its niche, or to slot into a gap in what is known. If research has established that market orientation is dependent upon organizational culture and only three cultural types have been investigated, then your research on the fourth type has found its niche.

- **To avoid re-inventing the wheel**
  This is perhaps the most important reason why you are doing a literature review. I remember a thesis defence that went something like this;

  Examiner: So how has your work extended the ideas presented by 'X' in their 1997 article in the Journal of Y
  Candidate: I'm not familiar with that article.
  Examiner: But I assumed that this thesis was a replication of that work
  Candidate: No I haven't looked at the journal you mention. It isn't a marketing journal, but maybe I should read it before we continue?
  Examiner: Good idea, we'll re-convene in one hour.
  Candidate: Oh Dear.

  There is nothing worse than discovering that your research has already been done, that the particular gap in the literature that you identified, would have put your name on the tip of everyone's tongue in academe, was actually done in 1991 and published in 1993.

- **To identify other people working in the same field**
  A literature review can help identify experts who are part of the research conversation you are attempting to join. Their expertise can help resolve initial problems if they are contactable, and can help you and your supervisor refine your research and find additional literature. You will be surprised how often you will discover someone very close, perhaps the next building, or a different department who has published something in the area. In today's environment you may find out from them about themed on line discussion groups, bibliographic databases, or special symposia or conferences.

- **To increase your breadth of knowledge**
  Research is not simply the production of new knowledge, it is an educational process in its own right. To really understand the problem you are trying to solve you will need to approach it from a number of different directions. For instance, in consumer research you might need to consider individual psychology, the role of social groups and social structures, the imposition of legal control, and the prevailing culture. A literature review can open up new avenues of understanding.

- **To identify seminal work**
  In every field of research there are some pieces of published work which are more influential and more significant than others. In pursuing your research, these seminal pieces will provide a level of detail, insight, or application which will change the way you think about a problem. Even if they provide little change to your direction there are some papers which have to be considered just because they are foundational, and their presence in your review will provide the reader with some sense of the field you are operating in.

- **To help you analyse and interpret the results of your research**
  The literature will provide a summary of the different methodological and analytical approaches which have been used and accepted within your field of enquiry. Often when we come to analyse results or interpret the meaning of the results we generate, previous work and examples can help to focus upon what is important or significant about our data. It may even provide some support for a particular approach you wish to pursue.

In general terms, literature reviews are undertaken as part of knowledge generation, and in almost every discipline there will be the need to establish what is known. The published literature of an area constitutes the archival record of conversations between academics. You can join the conversation, as you join any other, by first listening to what is being said, and then on the basis of your understanding formulate comment of your own which is designed to advance that dialogue. What we want to avoid is making a comment that has already been made, otherwise we have added nothing and just provide one of those embarrassing pauses in the conversation. We do this by looking back at the conversation archives or records, which is the literature. The process of finding individual conversants is called retrieval or search, i.e. finding out what has been said, when, by whom and on the basis of what evidence. The process of listening carefully to the conversation as it progresses is the called the review. This involves understanding both the history of the conversation, and the current direction the conversation is taking. Once the search and review has been mastered only then are you in a position to credibly propose your own ideas, to have your own voice heard

in the scholarly conversation. But remember that each researcher will be part of a slightly different conversation, since your research will always be different from what has occurred before. In practical terms you will need to follow the main conversations, but also be aware of other conversations going on around you. Marketing is a composite discipline and this means being aware of relevant conversations in Economics, Sociology, Management, Psychology, Operations, Philosophy and Mathematics and many sub disciplines as well.

Undertaking the Literature Review

Undertaking a literature review is not a weekend activity for an academic, as it can take three or four years! But for the purpose of a thesis or extended essay the time is hopefully shorter. You need to approach the task systematically. I'm not suggesting that you plan every task in advance, but you should be aware of some simple milestones. There are five key tasks you will be involved in. The first task is identifying what you need. I'll assume that you know roughly what your research is about, i.e. that you and your supervisor have defined the topic area and you have a fair idea of your research question. The second task is the retrieval or sourcing of the 'literature'. The third task is to review it, that is critically assess what you've found, and then the fourth task is to write it into a document. Once that has occurred you move into the fifth and final stage which is setting up your research questions based upon your literature review. In this document I'm concerned with steps 2, 3, and 4 i.e. retrieving the literature, critically reviewing it, and writing the document. All tasks should be undertaken in consultation with your supervisor, but tasks 2, 3 and 4 can be undertaken independently by students supported by reading and reflecting on articles such as this. In order to make the structure of the article more coherent, I'm going to re-label tasks 2, 3 and 4 to tasks A, B and C.

Task A: Retrieving the Literature
    This is the first non supervisor dependent activity, and is often the point where students panic. So far, you know in broad terms what your research is about, and now you have to focus it down to something concrete. You have familiarised yourself with the library and all the support resources. The first step is to broadly define your terms. What is it that you are talking about? The answer will help you start the process of retrieving your literature. In these first stages you will have discussed the research in some detail, and may even have developed a broad research question such as 'The different ways in which customers respond to in-store promotional campaigns'. Use this as the start point. There are two big terms here; 'customer response' and 'promotional campaigns' and these are the first search terms we should use. Improving retrieval is best achieved by reference to a series of retrieval rules. Remember these for the first time, subsequent iterations will not need to be as detailed.

1. Do not begin the process without talking to your supervisor and, equally as important, other colleagues who might be familiar with aspects of your research. Check web 'staff publication' lists or 'research interests' pages, and go and talk to colleagues who seem to have some knowledge of the area. Make a list of what they think you should read. Find the references, skim read the paper and record the full citation. When you have finished the list, go over the references at the end of each article and select those references that appear relevant to your research from title, source or year, and make these your priority for the next level of search. You will find many common references i.e. references to the same source in different articles. These are core references, and the material needs to be obtained as a priority. I recommend that these core references are the only physical copies you need at the moment.

2. Talk to library staff who can tell you which retrieval systems can take you to the literature. Listen carefully to information about database retrieval systems, they all vary and have different strengths and weaknesses. Good information and search strategies can save hours. Plan to spend some time learning how library and on-line systems work. You might think about database searches as the 'be all and end all' of a literature search but that is a very dangerous assumption. Never overlook manual search. The value of browsing back issues of journals, checking citation indices, browsing in other areas of the library, and finding journals never referenced can't be over emphasised. Note that most databases started in 1987-ish and don't index all journals. ABI which is the most popular system doesn't include the Journal of Marketing Management before 2004, and many other literature sources at all, so check your reference list from step 1 with the list of journals covered by the database. Keep a note of the words used to describe the research you find, such as the search terms that gave you the best hits. These provide key words that can be used to update literature quickly.

3. Record a complete citation for every item you identify as relevant in a separate place to your working file or notebook, preferably do it at the time you identify the article or book. You can use Endnote or similar citation management software to build your own database from short abstract output from databases, although it can be quite time consuming, especially if there is a lot of literature. Maximise your use of others work as a lead to relevant literature, especially published literature reviews, dissertation abstracts, and working papers. These are often difficult to find but are worth searching for as they contain leads to other literature that you may have overlooked, or to literature that your search hasn't included. Don't be afraid of age! If there is an article referenced written in 1931 and it looks relevant, then add it to your list.

4. I have observed as a supervisor and as a head of department, the enormous effort that students go to to accumulate for themselves as much as possible of the earth's paper resources. The task of copying everything in the library, and then storing it in whatever accommodation you have, seems almost a right of passage. After a time the paper starts to accumulate dust, bits of stale food and dead insects, and eventually the student feels an enormous sense of panic that they are getting out of date and starts the process all over again. You will need to source hard copy and, if only to protect your eye sight, don't try and read articles from a computer screen. Try not to source physical copies of articles which are only partly or peripherally relevant in the early stages of your retrieval. You will probably not appreciate the content, will lose them, or the relevance is so tangential you wasted paper. When you get a physical copy read the abstract, first literature summary, and conclusion to get a feel as to relevance. You could possibly note the broad content on the first page such as 'good for methodology' or 'good summary of relationship literature'.

5. You must have some idea of how you are going to organize the hard copies you are now starting to generate. You can use a bibliographic software package such as Endnote which has many advantages in the long term, such as linking your writing to the reference list thereby avoiding typing out references again, being able to add notes to the file, search your references on keyword to name but a few. However it is also a substantial task in putting such a system together. You might not relate well to order, and structure, and prefer to just use piles of articles built around a theme. Alternatively you might decide to use a reference book, or a reference file, which is just a numbered list of references you have noted, with each physical copy marked with the corresponding number. You will have to decide how to organize the paper based upon what resources are available, such as space, technology, time etc.

The process of identifying and retrieving literature is likely to continue throughout your study. Its emphasis might change from literature review to methodology, to analytical techniques but you will develop your own approach, your own short cuts, and your own favourite list of places or publications that will carry literature relevant to your study.

Task B: Understanding What You Have Found
The retrieval process, however well executed, is going to produce a lot of literature to read and understand. The first step in approaching any literature is to fill in the background to the specific topic you are studying. This will include scoping out the area, identifying argument or disagreement about issues, appreciating key articles, and getting to know who the main authors are and, perhaps most importantly, the major terms used. As you start to engage with your literature, a number of things become apparent fairly

quickly. The first is that there are some topics which have lots of references, and others which have very few. Second, that some work is of an extremely high quality, and some is not. Third, that some literature is immediately relevant to your research and some is not.

It is quite normal to be overawed by the amount of literature relevant to your research. There is no shortcut here, you have to read as much as you can and in doing so isolate the specific issues you're more interested in.   In this way, you can focus your reading more and more.   Sometimes though, you seem to find lots of literature on subjects which are associated with the research you are undertaking, but there isn't anything which is right on your topic. If you are sure that you've tried every avenue to search then there are three possible reasons:

- The topic you are searching is so new that there is little already published but lots of research being undertaken. The solution is to look for sources of literature which have quicker publication times than the main journals or books. This might be conference proceedings, special symposia, working papers or in some cases, professional magazines.

- You have missed some critical understanding of your research topic and how it relates to the wider literature. For instance you might be searching for literature upon 'collaboration' when you should be searching for 'knowledge networks'. Equally you might be in the wrong area of literature, you should be in organisational theory and not brand management. The solution is to stop and try a completely different approach to your topic by thinking about different perspectives on the same subject.

- That other academics have decided the research is either not worthwhile or impossible to do. Either way the absence of a good literature should be starting to ring warning bells, and you need to review what it is you plan to do and re-cast your topic so as to find an avenue of existing literature.

Starting to Read

When starting to read (and to generate more material from your on-going search) you are entering an important part of the literature review process. But it is often how to start that causes the most problems. If you are searching for more and more literature, and your room is filling up with paper, you might have the 'don't know where to start' disease. Your starting point could come out of previous work you've done, such as an essay, short thesis or even an article you've read. If you're new to the area, your supervisor could suggest fruitful starting points. Sometimes, when a student looks like they have a problem starting, I ask them to prepare a short abstract of the top ten articles in the area which should at least get ten articles read. You could read some recent review articles to begin with and update them, or use some of the meta analyses published to derive some sort of writing framework.

There are three other techniques which are well used to prompt the transition from search to read, and seem to be effective in stimulating some sense of structure: Date Order, Author Sequence, Inside Out.

Date Order: This is simply to place the articles you have sourced in date order (usually by year) and read them sequentially oldest to newest. This has the advantage of allowing you to follow how ideas unfolded. Specifically, to identify the major articles which changed the way people thought about an issue. It also has the advantage of revealing gaps in thought, ideas which were presented but never subsequently picked up and investigated further.

Author Sequence: In some areas of literature the work is dominated by a number of key authors. For instance Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry made a significant impact upon how we thought about service quality. The technique is to place all these authors works together and read them sequentially by date. This again allows you to understand how the individual authors work developed, and provides links between different areas of work.

Inside Out: This technique relies upon your initial categorising of the articles or books as to their likely relevance. By placing your material in three piles, core, secondary and periphery, you sort the perceived relevance. By reading the core, followed by the secondary and finally the periphery you are then able to re-classify each article as truly core etc. I've seen some students use a room to lay out their articles with different distances from the centre indicating different degrees of relevance. This allows you to focus your subsequent reading and analysis on those articles and books which will help pursue your research question. Clearly these three techniques can be pursued in combination, and they are described here only to give some idea about how to start. Subsequent reading, and literature sourcing will determine how you approach your reading as you enter the 'making sense' phase.

Reading Well

   As you make sense of the literature you will gain more and more expertise, which in turn will allow you to become more confident with the terminology and the construction of the arguments. While you are still reading, and perhaps needing to re-read some of the literature, you will find you are able to talk about it easily to your supervisor and discuss a papers strengths and weaknesses. You will also find that you are beginning to appreciate the differences in how and why research was conducted. For instance papers which concentrate upon relationships as mutual often research dyads, while papers focussing upon relationships as long term use longitudinal measures. It will also become apparent that there are genuine differences in how the same literature is used and interpreted. Each author will have their own particular interpretation of what has been found. This point should highlight the danger in second referencing, that is not reading primary sources but relying upon someone else's interpretation of what has been written. You must come to your own understanding of the literature

relative to your own research. In reading any particular research you should be focusing on the strengths of the study and the significance and contribution made by researchers. Watch out for sweeping conclusions such as the suggestion that this paper will change the way we think about marketing on the basis of three interviews. You should also be looking for limitations, flaws and weaknesses of particular studies, such as the number of respondents used, the questions asked, or the context of the study. You will only learn to evaluate the literature by reading and reflecting. When you have read thirty articles on the same topic you will know what to look for in a good clear article versus a confusing and unsatisfactory one. There is no shortcut to reading and immersing yourself in the literature, but there are some ways to make the process more effective.

The first is to use your time efficiently. You don't have to spend five hours reading every article. Go through the article quickly paying special attention to the introduction and literature referred to and then cutting straight to the conclusion. This will give you a quick insight as to whether you need to spend time on the article. The second thing to do is to make sure you are spending your time on articles which are worth your time. This will make you gravitate toward quality journals since you are relying upon the journal referees to help you select good papers. The better quality the article the less contentious the material will be. A quick caution here about the Internet which is increasingly being used to publish work, but usually work that has not been peer reviewed, whereas journal articles and most scholarly books have. It is very important that you read web material critically and objectively, indeed some might say sceptically. There are a lot of excellent resources and knowledge on the internet, you just need to be a little careful. Watch out for self promotion sites where the author is publishing their own work. Watch out for sites which might look credible but are in fact trying to sell services or even research. Finally make sure that you check any data, references or statements quoted.

To improve your focus it is helpful to have some specific questions in mind as you read. These may be quite general ("Have there been any specific studies on the role of women in creative advertising teams?") or more specific, ("Are these marketing orientation results comparable with the British study using the same questionnaire?"). These sorts of questions will help you concentrate but, more significantly, they are a pre-cursor to constructing your literature review document. Answers to simple questions such as: What were the authors trying to discover or responding to? What was measured? What were the results? And how can I apply these findings to my own work? can provide help in phrasing a good literature review. For instance:

XXX (1999) in their study of how relationships develop used a composite measure for relationship expectations. While the results were inconclusive they did suggest that viewing relationships as multi-dimensional was far superior to the uni-dimensional measures used by ZZZ(2001) and AAA(1987).

These types of questions will form the basis of your written review, but asking them as you read will tend to slow your reading process down and may hinder your understanding of the work. Much better to take notes as you read and your note taking should reflect your reading questions. Just summarising an article isn't enough, and is not the basis of a good literature review. The setting and answering of critical questions as you read will provide the basis of both content and style to your final work and, while taking notes is time consuming, much of it will be directly useable later. You can use any method that is effective for you, making written notes, typing into a laptop, marking up the article, entering answers into an Excel spreadsheet, or dictating into a tape recorder. Whatever method you are using you must be systematic about collecting and keeping those notes. Watch out when making notes from articles that you clearly distinguish your notes from word for word quotes. The reason is that you might later inadvertently think that the words are your own but turn out to be un-attributed quotes. Two methods have been suggested to help organize notes; these are using columns and using colours.

When making written notes, split the page vertically into two. Write your summary of the article's conclusion and the evidence used to arrive at that conclusion in one column. For instance "Good service recovery activity can make customers feel more positive about the organization than before". With evidence as, "satisfaction scores pre complaint 4.2 and post complaint with good recovery 4.5". In the other column, write down your views on what you have read. You might like to consider the methodology used and whether the complaints were all of the same severity. You could make some observations on when the data collection took place, before and after, or only after. Even simple assessments like "nice study", or "not convincing" can help you later on. An alternative to using columns is to use two colours of pen. One colour of pen for factual notes and quotes from the article, and the other colour of pen for your comments and views.

You will really only make sense of the literature when you are looking back to place your own research within the field i.e. when you are just about ready to submit. At this final stage you should be able to see how your research has grown out of previous work. In particular, you may be able to identify points or problems referred to in previous work that lead directly to your own research. You may see points whose significance you really didn't understand, or realise that some aspect of your research has supported one argument in the literature over another. Alternatively you might decide your initial attempt is hopeless and cut out half of it, or re-write large chunks. Remember that research is being conducted and published constantly, so your literature may be changing even as you prepare to submit. It's not unusual to discover some recently published literature that causes a real problem for your research. You need to integrate it and come clean, you might not agree with it, you might think it's a one off, but it will need to be covered otherwise your examiners might think you've deliberately avoided it.

Task C Starting to Construct the Document

One of the most difficult decisions you will make in the process of preparing your literature review is when to stop reading for a moment and start writing. Although you will be writing notes and short summaries almost constantly, at some point in time you will have to turn your mind to the final document. If it helps, you can think of starting to write the document as testing your knowledge of the literature, whether you can in fact start to tell the story of knowledge in your area.

If you are taking notes and writing these up as you go, you should have quite a lot of material already upon which to base your ideas, and if you have used a computer or laptop then it can sometimes help to copy your notes and put them into a sequence. This will provide a skeleton of a narrative that you can then go back and embellish. If you are having trouble starting to write, you might like to start on a small section of the review, maybe a definitional argument or the meaning of a phrase or word. Look for something you feel comfortable with, and try to write about it. It is impossible to sit down and write a literature review in one go, so take your time and start to construct it bit by bit. Clearly, some idea of a structure will help you to identify the component parts of your review, but all literature reviews are different and so it is difficult to suggest a common structure, but you might be able to use the following broad skeleton.

To start, provide an introduction, this is always a good option. In the introduction outline the general topic area and, more importantly, some idea of the history of the topic. Is it relatively new or has it been around for hundreds of years? You should also try and clarify any alternative ways to describe your research topic. From here the literature review should start to consider the main themes of the literature. For example if your research is about service quality then you need to review issues associated with quality, which is a high order construct, and then look at how this has been applied in services. Similarly, if your research is about brand development start with the literature on what is a brand, and then proceed to look at different definitions of development. There may be many sections which review areas of research as well as individual articles or books. Finally, make sure you lead the reader by placing short summaries or signposts as to where they have been, and where they are going next.

The Argument

In order to write a cohesive literature review, you need to present a clear line of argument. That means taking all those critical comments you made in your reading notes and using them to express an academic opinion. A well argued literature review will demonstrate the following qualities:

- A clear relationship between what you say, and the evidence in the form of supporting observations from the literature. Be careful not to over quote, i.e. make word for word quotes from each article. It should be enough for you to use your notes and comments combined with the factual material.

- Any opinion is supported with references and appropriate literature. If you want to suggest that relationship marketing is flawed due to the impossibility of implementation, then back up that view with references to other authors who think the same.

- Different or competing explanations are identified, explained and either adopted or distanced, rather than ignored. There is no such thing as consensus in social science, and therefore never 100% agreement on everything. Be careful to retain your objectivity by laying all the evidence on the metaphorical table, and then explaining why you are only going to pick up a few parts in constructing your argument. You must make some attempt to acknowledge opposing views.

- The writer makes it clear what his or her position is, rather than 'sitting on the fence' or leaving it to the reader to draw their own conclusions. You must be clear in taking a position, it may be a difficult one to defend but at least you have used the literature, critically assessed the content, and concluded something from it.

You will write your literature review several times during the course of your study, and each version will be a contribution toward the final document. Don't think you are writing the same thing over and over and getting nowhere. Be careful not to take whole sections out of an earlier version and paste them into the final version because the writing style will need to be updated. In practical terms, it is helpful to have an overall picture of how your argument runs through your analysis of the literature before you can get down to actually writing. As a suggestion, you might like to try and explain your argument to someone who knows nothing about your research. This can alert you to gaps in the argument which you will need to go back to and clarify. One strategy frequently used is to proceed from the general, (i.e. the wider view) to the specific (your research topic). In this example the progression from general to specific is clear, and is reinforced by the statement of the aim of the research.

> *Despite the acceptance of relationship marketing as a valid approach to enhancing customer value,* [This says that the idea has general acceptance] *there are many important and fundamental criticisms which remain unanswered (see for example XXX 1995). These can be summarized as* [this is where the structure of the next section is laid out] *issues relating to the recognition of a relational state, issues associated with defining the parties to the relationship, and problems in progressing elements of the human analogy into the commercial domain.*

[This is the introductory section, which starts with a statement of the problem in very broad terms, and suggests that not everything is agreed by referring to overall areas of disagreement.]

Perhaps one of the most widely discussed issues in respect of implementing a relational approach [this closes in on the problem] is whether a customer relationship should be the focus of attention for marketers or the behavioural consequences of that relationship. Like most fundamental issues in marketing this question leads to challenges at several levels of thought [this phrase organizes the issues in subsequent sections]. At the theoretical level this issue poses questions about …. At the operational level we are forced to examine issues of measurement such as …. At the strategic level many questions are raised about the competitive advantage presented by ….

[This technique allows for a more lengthy exposition on each of the issues identified and it also provides a clear voice from the author which cuts through the confusion]

An important debate in which all of these questions converge is in the precise derivation of 'customer lifetime value' (see XXX 1995), specifically the impact of a relational dimension on the forecasting of customer revenue flow over time.

[Here the research question emerges almost seamlessly from the previous text and brings together the relationship literature (general) with CLTV literature (more specific) and finally customer revenue flow (very specific)]

You need to keep in mind that you have to write about the literature, not just report that it exists. Specifically, how well you think it was done, and what you think it means in terms of your own research, or in terms of current knowledge. This distinction is absolutely critical and marks a very clear difference between barely adequate and outstanding literature reviews. For those literature reviews which are just reporting work they are usually constructed like this:

Smith (1975) reported that brand personality was an important part of customer response. Jones (1978) found that customers responded more consistently to heavily advertised brands regardless of what they were, and Brown (1980) suggested that customer response wasn't associated with brand at all.

This doesn't demonstrate either an understanding of the literature (you are just reporting a summary), nor an ability to evaluate other people's work (there is no evidence of critical thinking). Such a form of literature review in the final document should be avoided at all costs. By way of contrast, your final document should read like this:

"There seems to be general agreement upon the existence of customer defection (for example, Smith 1999, Brown 1980, Long 1977, Short

1975). Long (1977) sees defection as a consequence of dissatisfaction with existing provision, while both Short (1975) and Brown (1980) explain customer defection in terms of the activity of competitors. It is only Smith (1999) who provides evidence that defection is a combination of these two effects, and while this work has some limitations it does suggest that ...."

Approaching it in this way forces you to use your notes, your voice and your assessment of the work and to provide a rich and compelling story for the reader as to where your research fits into the existing literature. When you cite others work in this way you might choose to focus upon what they have said, or the author themselves. In the first case you would use this approach when dealing with broad or general issues, such as at the beginning of a review. For example the following is an information emphasis:

It is apparent that relationship marketing is seen to comprise both a set of operational activities and an overall marketing philosophy (Gabbott 2002)

In the second case, where the author is the focus, you might be drilling down into a specific area of enquiry later in the thesis. These two examples are both author emphasis, with the first an example of strong author emphasis, and the second, weak author emphasis.

Gabbott (2002) developed a simple mechanism for assessing the validity of an academic argument. (This is a strong author emphasis)

Several authors have provided evidence that customers do not remember their behaviour (Balmer 1987, Brown 1994, Carver and Ling 1995) (This is a weak author emphasis)

In the next section we will look in more detail at some of the stylistic techniques you can employ in preparing your literature review.

Giving the Argument Direction

Directions are comments on the text in the text, i.e. they give signals to the reader of where the author is heading, where the argument has got to, and what has been achieved so far. In stylistic terms the author intrudes into the narrative to direct the reader in a particular way. This form of dual narrative is almost like an actors 'aside' when on stage. For an author these subtle techniques can have an enormous impact upon how the reader interprets the text. When writing a literature review this is especially important since, just like a barrister calling witnesses, you are calling other authors to develop your case. There are a number of techniques which are employed to achieve this outcome, and they are applied in a number of different circumstances. Each technique produces a different effect and has a different purpose.

At different levels you will need to link sections or pieces of the argument using linking phrases;

- For a whole thesis (The focus of this thesis is......)
- To another Chapter (the precise dynamics of organizational buying decisions are presented in chapter 5)
- To parts of the current Chapter (the rest of this chapter will examine....)
- To another section in the same Chapter (in the previous paragraph it was demonstrated that)
- To the same section (this approach would suggest that .....)

You can also use phrases or language to inform the reader of the authors (not you but the article's author) position on other literature included in the review. This is fundamental to a critical review which is part of your task in preparing to enter the scholarly conversation.

Reporting Techniques
When we are talking about literature or text, we use a series of reporting verbs. These verbs when used in a literature review allow us to impose a range of different connotations to the material we are writing about. Thompson and Ye (1991) in their analysis of reporting verbs, distinguish between two dimensions of reporting. They first make a distinction between 'author act' and 'writer act' verbs. Author act verbs denote what the author has done such as 'Smith found', or 'Smith argued'. By contrast, writer act verbs denote something that you are implying, such 'Smith's claim has become', or 'Smiths model mirrors that of'.

The second distinction made is between denotational verbs and evaluational verbs. Denotational verbs are those which merely observe such as 'Smith reports that' or 'Smith studied'. Contrast these verbs with evaluational verbs which reflect some form of assessment, such as 'Smith clearly believes that' or 'Smith argues convincingly that'.

Using Tenses
The tenses you select for the verbs that you use can also reveal information to the reader. This may be more than just the associated time frame, and they can help in establishing your position. We use the present tense when we are making a generalization such as "This thesis *concentrates* upon the second of these arguments". We would also use the present tense if your were making a statement such as "It is evident that Market Orientation *contains* many sub orientations within it". By contrast the past tense is used where results are being reported of studies which took place and have been completed, for instance "The model which *was* presented by Elgin (1996) suggested that trust preceded commitment". All the descriptive work of research should be written in the past tense since it has been published. The present perfect tense is useful for communicating

that something is still relevant or on going such as "Several authors *have referred to* this discrepancy in model calibration" or "the question of whether satisfaction precedes or follows customer loyalty *has remained* unanswered".

Techniques for Indicating Support or Disagreement in the Literature

When we wish to indicate a positive stance (i.e. when an author is positively inclined toward another) we would use a selection of words which reflected this such as; accepts, emphasizes, notes, point out, subscribes to, posits, presents, or confirms. For example a positive stance sentence would look something like this (these are fictitious references); 'Berry (1998) accepts that the basis of customer satisfaction is....' Or 'Keller (1993) confirms that this explanation is consistent with...' Whenever you are leading the reader through complex and difficult terrain in your review make the path obvious, quote simply by pointing out which authors agree and which authors disagree.

When we wish to indicate that one author disagrees with what another author has written, we need to take the opposite or negative stance. We would use a selection of words that implied distance such as; attack, dismiss, dispute, deny, oppose, question, reject, or contest. For example a negative stance from you, the author can be communicated like this: "Berry (1998) dismisses the suggestion that customer satisfaction is...." Or "Keller (1993) questions that this explanation is consistent with..." These two techniques allow for literature to be clumped together in supporting groups, and in doing so we can indicate broad areas of agreement about things as well as areas upon which authors disagree. The next level of directing the argument is to make our position known as well, and this is where we have to reveal our own stance on what we have read.

Techniques for Indicating your Position on the Literature

These techniques are used to indicate whether you are in support or not, of what a particular author has said. The first position is that you agree with the author and this is called a 'factive' position. The words which support a factive position include acknowledge, demonstrate, prove, throw light on, help identify. For example "Berry (1998) demonstrates how customer satisfaction can...." Or "Keller (1993) throws light on why this explanation....." This kind of phrasing allows you to add emphasis to references that you are going to rely upon to support your position.

The alternative of course is to distance yourself from authors and this is referred to as a 'counter factive' position. In these circumstances you would use words such as confuses, disregards, or ignores. For instance "Berry (1998) confuses how customer satisfaction can....." or "Keller (1993) disregards this explanation...". The overall impression is that you have a problem with what the author has said. Sometimes you might not want to take a position at all, and this is referred to as a non factive. This form of comment makes no evaluation, and so we would use words like believes, claims, proposes, uses, shows etc. For example "Berry (1998) shows how customer satisfaction can..." or "Keller (1993) uses this explanation to"

Academic Tone

There is not much opportunity to impress the reader with your command of language and rhetoric when reporting the results of a structural equation modelling exercise. But a literature review gives you an opportunity to show your ability to express yourself. From your reading of the academic literature you will have become familiar with how authors express themselves, and it is this tone of an extended article that we are trying to emulate in our own work. You will have noticed a few things about the language used in academic work; its objectivity, its diplomacy, and it's precision.

One of the most important qualities of academic writing is its focus upon objectivity. Criticisms of other author's works need to be fair and backed up by some kind of reasoning. It is important to avoid a personal tone as you are only criticizing a person's work not them personally. Try not to use words which are judgemental such as 'wrong', 'misguided' or 'stupid'. These sentiments can be communicated through less emotive words such as 'flawed', 'erroneous' or 'limited'. In writing you must always try and be respectful of other scholars even if you think a researcher's method was inappropriate, their analysis appalling and the arguments ridiculous, using a phrase such as "the research suffers from a number of shortcomings", will communicate your view perfectly well.

Finally

Literature reviews are an everyday event in the communication of academic work simply because they are the accepted format for synthesising what is known and what is not known. They help identify areas of controversy and help to formulate and defend specific research questions. Any academic must master the techniques involved if they are to continue to research and publish. For those undertaking a thesis, the literature review is a test in its own right. One designed to demonstrate your skills in information search and retrieval, and your ability to critically appraise scholarly work in your area. There is no shortcut to a good literature review. It relies upon selecting literature relevant to the research in hand, using your reading to develop understanding, and critical appraisal skills that work to inform your own understanding. Finally, being able to translate that understanding into a written document. Remember that the most important thing is your voice, have confidence in what you believe but make sure that it is a position you are prepared to defend with evidence.

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Mark Gabbott graduated from the University of Essex with a BA(Hons) in Economics followed by an MSc in Technology Management from Imperial College, University of London. After working in government for six years in consumer policy and protection, he joined the University of Stirling as a Research Fellow and completed a Ph.D. in Marketing. He was Lecturer and then Senior Lecturer at Stirling, researching and teaching in the areas of Electronic and Direct Marketing, Services Marketing, Consumer Behaviour and Consumer Policy. Mark joined Monash University in 1997 as Professor of Electronic Marketing and was appointed Head of Department in 2000. Mark has published three books and has published research in a variety of academic journals including the *Journal of Business Research, Journal of Public Policy and Marketing, European Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Management* and *Journal of Healthcare Marketing*.