

# JACR: Successes, Challenges, and Prospects

---

Nearly four years ago the Association for Consumer Research launched the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* with sizable fanfare and support. Since then eight issues have been published, each with its own editors and focal theme. There are eight more that will emerge every quarter for the next two years. At this mid-way point it is appropriate to assess how well JACR has done in achieving its goals and what it needs to do in the future.

The goals of JACR are detailed in two editorials appearing in the first issue, one from the JACR Policy Board and one from me. The plan was simple. The journal would generate four issues a year, and each would be organized by leading experts and would focus on a particular theme. Knowledgeable editors would provide continuous guidance to authors and faster processing of their submissions. Authors would have the additional advantage of being associated with a growing area of research and have a chance to work with others to help establish that area. Readers would benefit by seeing related articles together in one issue and gain insight from commentaries written by regulators, managers, and consumer advocates. Ultimately, JACR was designed to broaden the scholarly reach of ACR members by making their work more accessible to those with different academic orientations and to expand their intellectual palates with new ideas, frameworks, and methods.

These goals represent a high bar for any new journal. My sense is that JACR has done better than we could have guessed, although that might be expected from the glowing intellectual father of any 2-year-old. Thus, the purpose of this editorial is to dispassionately assess how well the JACR has achieved its stated goals, to summarize its important learnings, and to assess its opportunities and challenges going forward.

## WHAT HAS JACR ACHIEVED SO FAR?

There are two critical measures of achievement that we can assess at this time. The first relates to the degree to which JACR has captured deep levels of involvement by signifi-

cant players. How well has the journal recruited the brightest and best to be editors, reviewers, and authors? The second measure assesses the internal and external impact of the journal. How broad is the set of topics and methodologies reflected in its pages, and what is the geographic range of its contributors?

Perhaps the most surprising success of JACR is its ability to attract outstanding editors who explore a remarkably broad range of topics. Table 1 shows the 16 themes and the editors who have guided their process. The editors are an inspiring group, with over 70% holding chair positions in their institutions, and about the same percentage having been editors or associate editors for a major journal. Their acknowledged expertise is critical. Authors do not submit an article to JACR generally but instead respond to the calls for papers and personal requests from a particular editorial team. The JACR editors know the best talent and how to recruit them as authors and reviewers.

The breadth of topics generates excitement for the journal. Some, like *The Behavioral Science of Eating, Goals and Motivation*, or *Consumer Emotions in the Marketplace*, reprise topics that are currently familiar to ACR members. Others, like *Embodied Cognition*, *The Habit-Driven Consumer*, and *Consumer Ownership and Sharing*, import established scholarship from other fields. Finally, some of the topics develop research in an area that reflects a new way of thinking about an under-researched topic. Examples include *Resource Valuation*, *The Science of Hedonistic Consumption*, and *Risky Consumption*.

The breadth and commonality of these topics can be illustrated in a number of ways. Figure 1 provides a word cloud of the abstracts from the articles that were published in the first two years, showing the consistent and novel words that surround consumer research.

Variability is also apparent in the geographical location of the editors and reviewers. Among editors, 29% are from institutions outside of the United States. Additionally, of the 361 manuscript reviews generated for the first six issues, 34% were completed by scholars with home schools

Table 1. Themes and Editors for the First 16 JACR Issues

Issue / Publication	Theme	Editors
1.1 / Winter 2016	The Behavioral Science of Eating	Koert van Ittersum, U of Groningen Brian Wansink, Cornell University
1.2 / Spring 2016	Consumer Ownership and Sharing	Linda L. Price, U of Arizona Russell W. Belk, York University
1.3 / Summer 2016	Consumer Response to Regulation	David W. Stewart, Loyola Marymount Debra L. Scammon, U of Utah
1.4 / Fall 2016	The Science of Hedonistic Consumption	Angela Y. Lee, Northwestern University Kathleen D. Vohs, U of Minnesota
2.1 / Winter 2017	Resource Valuation	Chris Janiszewski, U of Florida Luk Warlop, Norwegian Bus. School
2.2 / Spring 2017	The Consumer in a Connected World	John Deighton, Harvard University Jacob Goldenberg, Hebrew University Andrew T. Stephen, Oxford University
2.3 / Summer 2017	The Habit-Driven Consumer	Aimee Drolet, UCLA Wendy Wood, U of Southern California
2.4 / Fall 2017	Embodied Cognition, Sensory Marketing, and the Conceptualization of Consumers' Judgment and Decision Processes	Aradhna Krishna, Michigan University Spike W. S. Lee, Toronto University Xiuping Li, National U of Singapore Norbert Schwarz, U of Southern California
3.1 / Winter 2018	Risky Consumption	Cait Lamberton, Pittsburgh University Ronald Paul Hill, George Washington
3.2 / Spring 2018	Brand Relationships, Emotions, and the Self	C. Whan Park, U of Southern California Debbie MacInnis, U of Southern California
3.3 / Summer 2018	Consumer Response to the Evolving Retailing Landscape	Barbara E. Kahn, U of Pennsylvania Jeff Inman, Pittsburgh University Peter C. Verhoef, U of Groningen
3.4 / Fall 2018	The Science of Extraordinary Beliefs	Pankaj Aggarwal, Toronto University Lauren Block, Baruch College Thomas Kramer, UC Riverside Ann L. McGill, U of Chicago
4.1 / Winter 2019	Goals and Motivation	Ayelet Fishbach, U of Chicago Ravi Dhar, Yale University Uzma Khan, U of Miami
4.2 / Spring 2019	Consumer Emotions in the Marketplace	Michel Tuan Pham, Columbia University Leonard Lee, National U of Singapore
4.3 / Summer 2019	Consumer Response to Big Innovations	Page Moreau, U of Wisconsin Stacy Wood, North Carolina State
4.4 / Fall 2019	Everyday Consumer Aesthetics: Transformative Directions for Aesthetics in Everyday Life	Vanessa M. Patrick, U of Houston Laura Peracchio, U of Wisconsin Claudia Townsend, U of Miami



Figure 1. Word cloud of the first two years of JACR abstracts.

outside the US. More important, in the first 10 issues, 40% of the authors work outside the US.

Thus there is evidence that *JACR* has broadened the intellectual palate and the geographical reach of its members, and that was indeed one of the primary goals of the journal. However, with all this effort it is important to assess the kinds of impact the articles can have. Initial citation data require time for authors to read the works, cite them, and then get the citation published. Thus we will not have projectable citations until a few years pass. In the meantime, an important measure of impact derives from the number of downloads of the PDF or HTML copy of each article. On average, around 1,500 downloads occur for each issue in the six months following publication. Downloads come from the almost 2,000 ACR members who receive the paper copy and want the PDF or the HTML version. They also come from non-ACR members who pay for a

copy. All abstracts, the editor's introduction, and one featured article in each issue are freely available to all.

A good sense of the kinds of articles that generate the most attention can be seen in table 2, which identifies the article that generated the most downloads for each issue. The most downloaded articles build on new ideas or novel ways of thinking. For *The Behavioral Science of Eating*, the most downloads came from an article that makes neurological sense of portion size. Then, for *Consumer Ownership and Sharing*, an invited thought piece by international scholar Floyd Rudmin places the articles within a historic frame. Rudmin's introductory article served a similar function as the lead article by Dorsch, Tornblom, and Kazimi's outstanding review of *Resource Valuation*. The leading downloads in *Response to Regulation* and *Hedonistic Consumption* provide useful advice for correcting the obesity crisis and improving family events, respectively. Finally,

Table 2. What Attracts the Most Attention? Articles with the Most Reader Hits in the First 6 Months Following Publication

Issue Theme	Most Downloaded Article	Authors	6-Month Response (abstract hits; HTML + PDF downloads)
"The Behavioral Science of Eating"	"Can Smaller Make You Happy? Behavioral, Neuropsychological Insights into Motivating Smaller Portion Choice"	Peters, Beck, Lande, Pan, Cardel, Ayoob, and Hill	38; 181
"Consumer Ownership and Sharing"	"The Consumer Science of Sharing: A Discussant's Observations"	Rudmin	67; 420
"Consumer Response to Regulation"	"The Obesity Crisis as Market Failure: An Analysis of Systemic Causes and Corrective Mechanisms"	Karnani, McFerran, and Mukhopadhyay	418; 68
"The Science of Hedonistic Consumption"	"Celebrate or Commemorate? A Material Purchase Advantage When Honoring Special Life Events"	Goodman, Malkoc, and Stephenson	66; 162
"Resource Valuation"	"A Review of Resource Theories and Their Implications for Understanding Consumer Behavior"	Dorsch, Tornblom, and Kazemi	239; 228
"The Consumer in a Connected World"	"Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity"	Ward, Duke, Gneezy, and Bos	2,331; 1,090

the "Brain Drain" article showing that thinking suffers in the presence of a smartphone generated a viral storm of media mentions and logged nearly 100,000 hits in its first six months.

The patterns here are important. They suggest that articles that bring new insights, resolve old problems, or integrate our thinking in a novel way will have the greatest impact. It also confirms the initial goal of *JACR* stressing the impact of articles that broaden both our horizon and scope of influence.

### *What Have We Learned?*

In two years we have come to better understand the factors that are central to the success of each issue, and to *JACR* generally. Here are a number of salient and sometimes unexpected insights.

**The Critical Roles of ACR and the University of Chicago Press.** *JACR* would not exist without the active support from these two institutions. The Association for Consumer Research helps in so many ways. The most important commitment involves covering subscription costs for the nearly 2,000 Association members, who receive print copies and have online access to every issue. When I recruit editors and when they recruit contributors, one of the strongest selling points is the fact that all ACR members will have in hand a colorful copy of their *JACR* issue. The supportive role of ACR does not stop there, however. The Association has been generous in providing links to their website, air-time at ACR meetings, and rooms at ACR conferences to promote or organize emerging thematic issues. Finally, the Association provides up to \$5,000 in support for each issue's editorial team to organize a focal conference that serves to



either recruit submissions or help integrate contributing authors to work together. We are exploring other ways to use these funds. For example, for *The Science of Extraordinary Beliefs*, those ACR funds were used to run a series of full-page Call for Papers in *Psychological Science*.

The University of Chicago Press also has played a critical role in the success of *JACR*. They provide essential support for managing the review process and for editing, production, and distribution of the journal. The Press has developed a lively layout pattern that updates the look and feel of a marketing journal. They work with each editor team to design a colorful and issue-relevant cover. The Press has also been central in designing and maintaining the *JACR* website. The website is particularly valuable, since the electronic delivery of the journal provides an effective way to assist ACR members and to reach nonmembers. Finally, special mention must go to James Ellis, *JACR*'s managing editor. His job has been to train a new set of editors every three months and to keep a quarterly journal in rough conformance with its schedule and its page budget. He does that job with courtesy, wit, and unending good humor. He has a remarkable facility for teaching new editors, managing the journal's communications, and encouraging everyone. He has been critical to the success of *JACR*.

Table 3. Who Reviews? *JACR* Most Active Reviewers with Three or More Reviews

Reviewer Name	Institution
Nidhi Agrawal	University of Washington
Aaron Ahuvia	University of Michigan
Yakov Bart	Northeastern University
Simons Botti	London Business School
Les Carlson	University of Nebraska
Utpal Dholakia	Rice University
Bob Ferris	University of Groningen
Joseph Goodman	Ohio State University
Rebecca Hamilton	Georgetown University
Kelly Haws	Vanderbilt University
Jeff Inman	University of Pittsburgh
Cait Lamberton	University of Pittsburgh
Brent McFerran	Simon Fraser University
Andrea Morales	Arizona State University
Shintaro Okazaki	King's College London
Aric Rindfleisch	University of Illinois
Maura Scott	Florida State University
Rebecca Walter Reczek	Ohio State University

**Importance of Outstanding Editor Teams.** Editor teams have two critical jobs. First, they need to define and promote a theme that will organize their special issue. That theme must attract contributors by defining new research that has the potential to revise current thinking. Then the team has to manage the review process, one that relies more heavily on the editors than most journals, in part because of the tight time schedule and also because the expertise of the editors enables them to act without associate editors.

I have been pleased and surprised by the willingness of ACR's brightest and best to become editors. It is important that at least one member of the team have substantial experience with editing, either as an AE or editor in chief. It is also valuable for the editor team to have broad networks both within ACR and in allied fields that can contribute strongly to the defined theme.

**Critical Nature of Active Recruiting of Contributors by the Editor Team.** Unlike most journals that do not have to act until submissions cross the transom, *JACR* editors have to actively recruit and manage contributors and reviewers. That process begins right after the announcement of the special issue, with personal emails to likely contributors, asking them to submit now, and later to review. These initial contacts are then followed by more emails and sometimes phone calls as the submission deadline approaches. The net result of this effort is that about 80% of articles published so far are the direct result of personal recruiting by editors.

**Need to Guide Reviewers on Goals of the Issue.** Selection of reviewers is very important, but it is also important for editors to specify what they want in a review, particularly if a reviewer is accustomed to reviewing for a major journal with clear methodological or theoretical standards. For example, when sending a field study to a reviewer familiar with laboratory studies, it may be useful to specifically focus the reviewer on whether the fieldwork complements what is known from the lab, and whether the field study provides novel practical insights whose mechanisms can be later validated by carefully controlled studies. More generally, the *JACR* editors need to articulate to their reviewers their vision for the issue, and that articles need not be so complete in themselves but instead serve to help complete an issue.

Perhaps because most reviewers are personally known by the editors, less than 20% decline to review, and the reviews that are provided have been very thoughtful and con-

structive. There have been over 250 different reviewers for the first six issues. Table 3 provides a list of the names and institutions of those who have completed at least three reviews. It is a very impressive list.

**The Value of Editorial Prerogative.** The special-issue editors are given relatively free reign to manage the review process and ultimately control the content of each issue. There was worry that such freedom might be a risky strategy for *JACR*, but I have found it to be an advantage, and not just as a recruiting pitch to attract editors. My job as editor in chief is to be a guest editor when one of the editors is involved with a submission, and to help resolve conflicts and appeals. So far, there have been very few complaints, yet many compliments for the editorial teams. That makes sense. Since the editors have strong and valuable reputations, it is very unlikely that they will allow weak, indefensible, or corrupt research to be published under their own banner. Thus, the combination of recruiting outstanding editors and letting them have substantial authority has worked in the past and can be expected to continue to be effective in the future.

**Meetings among Scholars Participating in a Special Issue.** Increasing communication among those contributing to an issue can be valuable but must be handled carefully. There are three ways that meetings can help: a presubmission recruiting and planning meeting, a prepublication coordination and publicity meeting, and sharing mutual support of conditionally accepted documents among authors.

The presubmission meetings typically occur three months before the submission deadline. Examples include a meeting in Catalina Island for the *Consumer Habits* issue, a meeting in Philadelphia for the *Consumer Response to the Evolving Retail Landscape*, and a meeting as part of the Choice Symposium at Lake Louise for *Embodied Cognition*. These meetings serve to help define the focal topics for the issue among people who are very likely to submit articles and be part of the review process. They also inform contributors of related work and encourage coordination among those authors with complementary insights.

Once the review process is underway, meetings among authors for an issue take on a different flavor. For *The Behavioral Science of Eating*, Brian Wansink and Koert van Ittersum invited authors of articles to an intensive two-day conference at Cornell. The process, detailed in their introduction to their special issue, asked contributors to share

their articles and suggest changes. Further, each author team had to develop a two-minute video providing a nontechnical article summary. A written form of that summary was edited by communications experts at Cornell and became the focus used in a very successful publicity campaign to generate over 90 media mentions for the special issue, far beyond the media success of the other *JACR* special issues.

Where the goal is to have authors in the same issue support each other, the University of Chicago Press has facilitated sharing of articles that the editors believe are ready for such scrutiny. That process augments the cohesion and effectiveness of the issue.

### **Challenges and Actions for the Future**

While there is much to be proud of and much we have learned, there is work to be done. Challenges and actions for the future involve questions about the scholarly reputation of the journal, its ability to continue recruiting outstanding editors, its ability help ACR members reach out to and learn from others outside our sphere of influence, and its ability to deliver articles across multiple formats that are attractive, clear, and useful.

**Challenge 1: Will *JACR* Become an A Journal?** Whether we like it or not, academic careers depend on articles published in top-rated journals. It will be structurally difficult for *JACR* to become generally established as an A journal, simply because of the inherent variability in its different themes every quarter. Instead, rather than *JACR* being an A journal, it is likely that there will be A-rated issues that generate surprising and noteworthy impact. There will also be A-rated papers that receive a large number of cites because their insights generate more excitement because they leverage the thematic forum of each issue. Thus, some of the issues and articles have the potential to become classics because they introduce a new idea, construct, or methodology that then becomes central to the field. *JACR*'s focus has then made them more accessible and effective, but not because they are attached to an A journal. Seen that way, *JACR*'s role is as an enabler that helps scholars define and refine risky intellectual topics. That flexibility may make the journal less likely to be considered an A journal, but it increases its ability to entrepreneurially establish new ideas and dig deeper into established ones.

**Challenge 2: Will *JACR* Continue to Attract the Best Editors?** Recruiting editors falls largely to the editor in chief,

with substantial help from the *JACR* policy board. There was worry initially that we would run through the likely editors and then the journal might simply run out of appropriate candidates. Recently, however, more candidates are coming to the journal, and currently there is a six-month wait before editorial teams can even announce their special issue to be published two years later. That increase in interest may be related to the gradual acceptance of *JACR* as an important force in our field. Its familiarity has increased as more ACR members read the colorful journal that is mailed to their desks. They download its content, respond to requests to submit articles from scholars they admire, and experience its submission and review process firsthand. Once familiar with the process, the idea of being able to edit or take part in an issue has become less daunting and more exciting.

Given the quality of the topics and the editors shown in table 1, it is reasonable to conclude that in the near future we will be able to attract the brightest and best editor teams. However, for that optimism to carry to the future, we will have to do a better job with the three more operational challenges.

**Challenge 3: How Can *JACR* Deal Better with Its Compressed Review Time?** After the submission deadline, editors have eight months to put together an issue before it goes to production for editing, typesetting, and distribution. The editors deal with this compressed reviewing time by specifying short review and revision times and by providing clear, manageable directions to authors. However, the review process remains a rough-and-tumble one for all involved. Once articles have been conditionally accepted, the editors then need to work on manuscripts that still need guidance and prepare an editorial introduction to the issue. That time pressure discourages editors from trying to get input from industry or academia to discuss controversial issues. It also makes them reluctant to introduce changes in the article based on suggestions or critiques from other authors. Thus, editors often miss an opportunity to enable their authors to help each other.

Since eight months from submission to acceptance is a very short time frame, the journal would certainly benefit by extending the review time. To help, as of the *JACR* issue announced for the summer of 2017, there will be a three-month shortening of the recruiting time, and a corresponding increase in review time. Thus, the submission deadline now comes nine months after the issue is announced, with

publication 15 months after that. We hope that shift will allow more time for articles to improve and will also create opportunities to integrate commentaries and suggestions among authors who share in the special issue.

**Challenge 4: How to Expand ACR's Palate?** The initial goals of *JACR* encourage expanding the comfort level of ACR members with new theoretical ideas, using cutting-edge methodological tools, and providing commentaries on our research from marketers, those concerned with consumer well-being, and deep theorists. *JACR* has done well in introducing new ideas and constructs but has done less well reaching out to people in industry, regulation, or popular press. *JACR* also needs to become more comfortable with new kinds of data and ways that data can be analyzed.

Consider first the desire to reach out to those in other fields, such as management, regulation, or academics coming from different theoretical disciplines, like economists or public policy experts. Asking for articles by them can be difficult, as they may be confused by the deep and seemingly idiosyncratic reviews from ACR members. The best way to recruit such intellectual visitors is through an invited commentary on an article. There have been relatively few such commentaries, probably because of difficulty receiving such commentaries and possible rejoinders as the final publication deadline approaches. Still, for articles that have been conditionally accepted early, such commentaries serve a good function for the ACR and non-ACR reader. It is important for *JACR* to increase its efforts to bring new voices into our discourse.

The goal of encouraging new forms of analysis has been central to *JACR* but has also proven more difficult than expected. Consumer research could clearly gain from an expansion of our technical toolbox. Consider the value of tests of the long-term impact of well-known effects, the insight from longitudinal data that can help shed light on the gradual adoption of consumer values, and the sense of history from archival data that can track changes in consumer behavior. Part of the resistance to the expanded tools is that aggregate data across consumers over time often obscure unique psychological mechanisms driving that behavior. Another difficulty arises because economists, sociologists, and historians who do such work use techniques that can be difficult for some ACR members to clearly understand and evaluate.

Progress requires that *JACR* does a better job recruiting editors, articles, and commentaries from scholars with even

broader perspectives, in order to reach different audiences and help science progress from multiple perspectives.

**Challenge 5: Expanding Media Coverage for *JACR* Articles.** The University of Chicago Press collects mentions in online, print, and television coverage of articles written in *JACR*. However, except for *The Behavioral Science of Eating*, there have been very few mentions of *JACR* articles in the media. To increase the impact of the ideas from articles in the popular press, it is important to mimic two steps that Brian Wansink and Koert van Ittersum used in their special issue. First, the authors need help to frame their nontechnical summaries and make more attention-grabbing titles and abstracts that will attract the general public. Then, the appropriate summaries and copies of the articles need to be sent to specific media that are likely to respond. Both steps will be difficult for many editors who have not had experience with the marketing of articles to general audiences. Accordingly, it will be important for *JACR* to set up processes that will assist editors in that task.

In summary, I am pleased to report that *JACR* is off to a good start. We have succeeded in attracting our best minds to define topics and edit issues that have generated notice

and excitement both within the Association for Consumer Research community and beyond. As a measure of impact, downloads and online hits provide reasonable near-term measures of the successful articles in *JACR*. The issue-based structure of each issue provides an opportunity for somewhat risky or novel articles that will change the way scholars think, governments regulate, businesses manage, and consumers cope.

Challenges remain. How can we make *JACR* an increasingly valued journal that attracts the best work and leverages the impact of the work within each issue? How can its editors use the compressed time limit to both screen individual articles and stitch them together into a coherent and valuable quilt? How can *JACR* reach out to those in other scholarly fields and to those in management or government who can gain from our insights? Finally, how can this journal reach the broadest audience of all: the consumers that we study and the nontechnical audience that can be delighted and guided by the insights we provide?

Joel Huber  
*Editor in Chief*