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Journal of Marketing Research in the New Competitive Journalistic Environment

February, the first annual issue of *Journal of Marketing Research* (*JMR*), is the traditional time for new *JMR* editors to answer questions about their policies. What kind of work will be favored? How will the new editor try to shape the field? The purpose of this first editorial is to answer such questions. The simple answer can be given in one sentence. Through the associate editor (AE) system, I will broaden the range of articles that *JMR* publishes and focus on high-impact articles that reflect the cutting edge of research while striving to make them increasingly accessible to a wider range of scholars and practitioners.

AN INCREASINGLY COMPETITIVE JOURNALISTIC ENVIRONMENT

Not long ago, the premier marketing journals occupied relatively distinct competitive niches that limited strenuous competition among themselves. *Journal of Marketing Research* focused on ways to perform and interpret marketing research. *Journal of Marketing*, which is more practitioner oriented, relied less on quantitative analysis but offered far better coverage of strategic research that used survey methods. *Journal of Consumer Research* reveled in social science research, and true to its multidisciplinary roots, it was more open not only to various functional areas but also to interpretive analysis. *Marketing Science* specialized in complex modeling and analysis that built on economic and statistical foundations.

Arguably, *JMR* was the first to change. From its inception and then increasingly under Russ Winer, Wagner Kamakura, and Dick Wittink, *JMR* moved from a focus on how marketing research is done to the theoretical and practical results of marketing research. The goal of *JMR* has consistently been to be the central academic-oriented journal for people who practice and think about marketing. This shift made sense from the perspective of the journal because narrowly defined marketing research became mature as a research area. Although *JMR* could still be expected to feature a few articles on market research techniques, such as scale formation or conjoint analysis, the majority of the published research came to explore ways that marketing academics and research-oriented practitioners could analyze and understand markets.

The other journals responded by moving into each other's turf. Under Steve Shugan, *Marketing Science* has proudly expanded its focus from high symbol density to high impact, regardless of the area. Under John Deighton, *Journal of Consumer Research* has moved away from consumer psychology and toward consumer research that is generally relevant to understanding consumers and marketing managers. Finally, under Roland Rust, *Journal of Marketing* has moved away from applications-based articles for managers and theorists and toward more analytic and modeling-oriented articles.

What created this drive toward the center, this erosion of partitions that previously rationalized the premier journals? Part of the erosion arose from the reasonable desire on the part of each editor to get the articles with the most impact in the field and an unwillingness to reject preemptively articles that did not fit a predetermined mold. In addition, each new editor would feature his or her personal areas of expertise without excluding those of the predecessor. This mission creep was supported by the broad skills of large review boards and teams of AEs who could make up for the limitations of any one editor. Simply put, editors poached each other's territory because they could; even if editors did not understand an issue, there were review board members or AEs who understood it well.

Who are the winners and losers in this increasingly competitive academic marketplace? What are the implications for editors, readers, and the field in general? I believe that the editors now have a more difficult job because they must process more articles across a broader range of topics. Moreover, if they do not do their jobs well, they could visibly lose out to the competition. From the perspective of a reader, it could be argued that information gathering is less efficient because each journal can no longer be counted on to carry its traditional assortment of articles. However, in today's system of Web-based access to journal articles, this loss of efficiency is arguably less binding than it was even five years ago. I believe that the field and the authors are the big winners as journal editors jockey for dominance. The authors are winners because editors actively compete for their work. This increased author power leads to several changes. Reviews have become noticeably more civil and constructive, if not less painful. Turnaround time has dropped by at least a factor of two as the editors compete on the number of days to respond to authors. It is theoretically possible for a person to have the same article reviewed by all four journals within a year. The gain to the field is that

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this better, faster feedback ultimately leads to improved manuscripts and better-informed authors. The field also gains from a more active review system. Reviewers benefit from their thoughtful understanding of the manuscripts and from being able to see the reactions of the other reviewers, editors, and AEs. This intense intellectual discourse brings several advantages. First, it helps the marketing field develop new researchers and new ideas at a rate that would be difficult without an author-centric review system. Second, the system helps the field preserve intellectual coherence and agreement with respect to what counts as good scholarship. Finally, the reduced uncertainty in the review process leads to a greater sense of civility and joint participation that is arguably a hallmark of marketing researchers.

JMR'S RESPONSE

As editor, there are two polar responses to this increased competitive intensity. One is to resist by trying to reestablish the partitions. The other is to embrace the increased competitiveness as fundamentally better for the field, even if it makes *JMR* more difficult to manage. I strongly endorse the latter strategy. I will continue the practice of previous editors to maintain the excellence in reviews, support, production, and output that has defined *JMR* in the past. There are three areas that define my strategy as editor: (1) a focus on high-impact articles, (2) an increase in the number of articles per year, and (3) an improvement in the review process.

Focus on High-Impact Articles

Impact is the ultimate goal for any article published in *JMR*. Impact can be defined narrowly in terms of citations, but it is most appropriately defined in terms of an article's ability to shape the thinking and research of scholars and, ultimately, managers. Impact may be difficult to assess ahead of time, but to focus on it reinforces the passion that editors and reviewers have for articles with significant incremental contribution. Caring about incremental contribution forces the review team to nurture articles that surprise and delight the reader—those that are most likely to lead to changes in thinking, practice, or teaching. The corollary to this attention to major contributions is that minor improvements in methods, nuanced interpretations in theory, and standard applications of research techniques may have a difficult time getting published in *JMR*.

It is not the case that replications, comments on previous articles, and applications of theoretical findings are not important for the field. They are important. However, they do not belong in *JMR* if they take the place of high-impact articles. Note that high impact is not a function of the length-to-contribution ratio but rather an absolute measure of how likely the article is to alter future marketing thinking. Thus, readers can expect to see *JMR* articles of varying length that are united only by their promise of high impact.

Increase the Number of Articles per Year

The field has grown substantially in terms of the number of worldwide academics who are active in marketing research (McAlister 2005). In contrast, the number of articles in first-tier journals has not grown proportionately. Submissions to all the journals have grown by approximately 30% in the past three years. Both *Journal of Con-*

sumer Research and *Marketing Science* are moving to six issues per year. In the past three years, *JMR* has increased its number of articles by 50%. During my editorship, I will strive to grow the journal in proportion to the number of quality submissions.

Increase the Impact of Individual Articles

Traditionally, *JMR* has done a fine job presenting articles within one of its many theoretical or methodological subfields. This depth within subfields is necessary if the published articles are to reflect the cutting edge of thinking. However, to increase impact, it is also important that individual articles attract the attention of researchers who are at the margin of the subfield. This group of readers includes people who teach from the article and practitioners who change the way they act or think because of the article. Put simply, a better job must be done marketing *JMR* articles to a wider range of potential readers.

Two changes at *JMR* will help increase the impact of individual articles: the availability of a Web appendix and an increased focus on more powerful figures and tables. The Web appendix is available at www.marketingpower.com/content17866.php.com. In addition, readers of the electronic version of the article will be able to click directly through to its Web-based appendix. Web appendixes provide a helpful way to include information that is needed for replication but is less critical for understanding. They can hold the details of procedures, scales, analyses, and results, thus freeing the article to focus on its conceptual contributions.

The second stylistic change involves more effective figures and tables (see *JMR*'s "Initial Submission Guidelines" at <http://www.marketingpower.com/content1531.php#initial>). There are two ways these figures and tables can be improved. First, they should be understandable to a person who has not read the text. The goal is to encourage the casual browser to read the article and help the casual reader better understand its contribution. Second, figures and tables are more powerful to the extent that they clearly communicate the intended takeaway. Thus, for example, a caption such as "Means from Study 1" could be more effective as "Fluidity and Relevance Generate Efficient Advertisements." The ability to communicate can be improved if authors work harder to improve their figures and tables. Given that exhibits are so important in PowerPoint presentations, improving them will increase the impact of both our presentations and our writing.

Improve the Review Process

The American Marketing Association's four academic journals are all moving toward being processed by Manuscript Central's Web-based system. This offers several advantages to the journal and to the field:

- Authors know the progress of their manuscripts at any time.
- Reviewers, AEs, and editors are clear about deadlines through automatic reminders.
- Editors can more easily keep track of reviewers and AE to balance their load. The system also facilitates finding reviewers with special expertise.

My experience with the system so far has been positive. I ask for the patience of authors and reviewers as they

undergo the inevitable start-up cost of the new system and their forbearance as the *JMR* editorial team learns to use it better.

In terms of the review process, I intend to follow Dick Wittink's system of assigning two reviewers, with an additional reviewer only if special expertise is needed. In addition, an AE will summarize these reviews to provide higher-level feedback and direction on the papers. These AEs are integral to the success of the system. The only case I will not use an AE is when the reviewers' comments are sufficiently unambiguous so that further input is not needed. In general, I will try to resolve the review process in two rounds. However, this constraint should (and will) be released in the case of new scholars to *JMR*. These include researchers who are submitting thesis papers, people from different countries, and contributors from different research traditions. These groups understandably take longer to adapt their papers in response to the norms of the field. However, they also bring new insights with great promise to generate high-impact articles.

Finally, it is important for authors whose papers have been accepted to be able to circulate these papers right away rather than waiting for them to appear in press. To facilitate the referencing of in-press articles, it is now possible to click on the *JMR* forthcoming list (see www.marketingpower.com) to download a PDF of the final-submission version of a paper.

In closing, it is a privilege and an honor to be selected as the editor of *JMR*. For the next three years, I will enjoy representing the journal in its increasingly competitive environment, and I will strive to continue the traditions that have made it an outstanding journal in a vibrant and exciting field.

REFERENCES

- McAlister, Leigh (2005), "Unleashing Potential," essay in "Marketing Renaissance: Opportunities and Imperatives for Improving Marketing Thought, Practice, and Infrastructure," *Journal of Marketing*, 69 (October), 16–17.