Advancing marketing strategy research

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An outgoing editor's last editorial offers an opportunity to recognize the efforts of key people, reflect on the journal's accomplishments and challenges, and pass on any potential insights gained in the journey. It was an honor and significant learning experience to be given the opportunity to steward the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (JAMS)* over the past three years. In turn, my three objectives for this editorial are to (1) recognize the key people who have and continue to support *JAMS*, (2) provide a snapshot of the state of the journal, and (3) highlight some potential insights gained in the journey, to help advance marketing strategy research. In pursuing these objectives, I also seek to emphasize *JAMS*'s *raison d'être*, achieved through the considerable efforts of authors and editorial team members, namely, to *generate marketing knowledge and advance the practice of marketing*.

Any progress that this journal has made would not have been possible without the excellent efforts contributed by the distinguished group of past Editors-in-Chief (EIC) in the past two decades, including William R. Darden, Rajan Varadarajan, David Stewart, and Tomas Hult. The critical importance of Area Editors (AEs) also must be recognized; they were instrumental in enabling many of the initiatives that we launched and guiding the process of developing the manuscripts that *JAMS* has published in the past three years. The strength and expertise of *JAMS*'s AEs are highlighted by their editorial paths: seven of the founding AEs subsequently were selected as editors of top marketing journals. I take pleasure in passing on the thanks of the *JAMS*

community, as well as my personal appreciation, to this distinguished group of marketing scholars:

Michael Ahearne, University of Houston
Dipayan Biswas, University of South Florida
Michael Brady, Florida State University
Marnik Dekimpe, Tilburg University
Eric Fang, University of Illinois
Dhruv Grewal, Babson College
Satish Jayachandran, University of South Carolina
Constantine S. Katsikeas, University of Leeds
V. Kumar, Georgia State University
Son K. Lam, University of Georgia
Martin Mende, Florida State University
Vikas Mittal, Rice University
Neil A. Morgan, Indiana University
J. Andrew Petersen, Pennsylvania State University
Rebecca Hamilton, Georgetown University
Kelly L. Haws, Vanderbilt University
Mark B. Houston, Texas Christian University
John Hulland, University of Georgia
Tomas Hult, Michigan State University
Shailendra P. Jain, University of Washington
Linda Price, University of Oregon
Lopo Rego, Indiana University
Anne Roggeveen, Babson College
Maura L. Scott, Florida State University
Shrihari Sridhar, Texas A&M University
Raji Srinivasan, University of Texas at Austin
Rajkumar Venkatesan, University of Virginia
Stefan Wuyts, Koç University

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Although its members are too numerous to list, the expanded Editorial Review Board (ERB) of 185 academics processed more than 1500 manuscripts during my tenure, to help achieve an average turnaround time of 22.6 days for all submissions

(including desk rejections) and 46 days for full first-round reviews (ERB/AE/EIC). Every journal depends on its voluntary editorial team, and the marketing community appreciates their dedication. Finally, Anne Hoekman has been Managing Editor of *JAMS* across the past two editors and will continued to support John Hulland as the next EIC; she has been exceptional in managing the journal through many changes, including vast increases in submissions.

State of the journal

In my reflections on the state of the journal, I considered past editorial initiatives, key performance metrics, and some challenges that will be passed on to the next editorial team.

Editorial initiatives

The editorial initiatives during my tenure primarily focused on increasing the number, diversity, and quality of submissions to *JAMS* while effectively processing manuscripts across broad domains of managerially relevant, substantively focused research. In the past three years, we held six *Thought Leaders' Conferences* dedicated to an array of topics and in five different locations around the world (Paris, Amsterdam, Beijing, Hyderabad, Oslo); the corresponding Special Issues focused on *Customer Engagement and Customer Relationship Management*; *Service Marketing Strategy*; *Consumer-Based Strategy*; *Marketing Strategy in Digital, Data-Rich, and Developing (D³) Market Environments*; *Managing Business and Innovation in Emerging Markets*; and *Generalizations in Marketing: Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses*.¹ These efforts primarily sought to expand our research scope to include substantive or managerially impactful papers from different domains of the marketing discipline and geographically diverse authors. As an example, I want to highlight a forthcoming managerially relevant consumer-based strategy paper since it has been a focal domain for *JAMS* over the past few years, with a dedicated special issue edited by Rebecca Hamilton and Linda Price still forthcoming. The paper titled “Sounds like a healthy retail atmospheric strategy: Effects of ambient music and background noise on food sales,” by Biswas et al. (2018) generated an overwhelming amount of media attention, with over 80 media mentions and interviews in TV, radio, and newspapers including *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Today Show*, *Newsweek*, and *Food & Wine* magazine. This managerially relevant, high impact consumer-based strategy research is well suited to *JAMS*.

We also instituted a new AE structure and expanded the number of ERB members to provide the bandwidth required

to process more papers and achieve better coverage in novel domains. By implementing an AE process structure, *JAMS* can work with authors and reviewers more closely, to develop a manuscript to its full potential. At the end of each year, we provide each AE and ERB member with an individualized report card, benchmarking her or his performance in terms of quality and responsiveness, relative to peers, to encourage and enable continuous improvement.

We succeeded in our campaign to add *JAMS* to the *Financial Times* (FT 50) list. It is now one of only six marketing journals on that list, which is crucial in increasing *JAMS*'s impact; many universities use the FT 50 list to select “approved” journals. To that end, we continually update the Benchmark Report, initially developed for the FT 50 campaign, so that authors may use it to substantiate *JAMS*'s impact when their business schools evaluate the different journals.²

Finally, my last editorial initiative focused on adding two new “editorial thrusts” to *JAMS* to help differentiate it from other premier marketing journals and ensure that we were advancing marketing strategy. First, we *increased the number of invited editorials and commentaries* by leading scholars to give *JAMS* a “voice in marketing” and be more relevant to the marketing community, enlarge its readership, and signal more diversity of thought. These invited editorials and commentaries focused on topics that we believed would be of interest to a broad audience, authored by experts such as John Deighton, Darren Dahl, Rebecca Hamilton, Mark Houston, Chris Moorman, Leigh McAlister, John Hauser, Gerry Tellis, Rajan Varadarajan, Dave Stewart, O.C. Ferrell, Raj Venkatesan, V. Kumar, Gary Lilien, Mike Ahearne, Donald Lehmann, Russ Winer, Mike Hanssens, J.B. Steenkamp, Manjit Yadav, and John Hulland. The *JAMS* community appreciates their efforts and insights. Second, reflecting our belief in the importance of review papers for advancing the scientific process, we sought out leading scholars to contribute such manuscripts, in an effort to make *JAMS* the recognized outlet for substantive, methodological, and theory-focused review papers (for a detailed overview of this initiative, see Palmatier et al. 2018). The Thought Leaders' Conference and Special Issue on *Generalizations in Marketing: Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses* formalized this initiative. An analysis of articles published in marketing journals that appear on the FT journal list also shows that in the past three years *JAMS* has become the primary outlet for such reviews, publishing nearly one-third of all review articles.

Performance metrics

Before starting this discussion of journal performance metrics, I acknowledge that every measure has specific

¹ Some of these special issues are still in the review process and will be published in coming years.

² See <https://goo.gl/HCBjPX>

strengths and weaknesses, and none of them should be used as a sole proxy for a journal's or article's impact. With this caveat in mind, *JAMS* performs well across different metrics that frequently inform evaluations of journals, including the number of submissions, number of papers published, rejection rates, 2- and 5-year impact factors (with and without self-citations), and independent journal rankings. Specifically, the number of *submissions* has grown from 487 in 2015 to 582 in 2017, representing a 20% increase. We increased the number of *papers published* from 42 in 2015 to 56 in 2017, a 30% increase, and we will publish 60 papers in 2018 (including editorial, empirical, conceptual, and review papers).

For 2017, the impact factor (IF) for *JAMS* was 8.5, increasing from 5.9 in 2016, representing a 30% increase.³ This IF moves *JAMS* to 3rd of all business journals and represents its second year as the highest ranked FT 50 marketing journal (*Journal of Marketing* 7.3, *Journal of Marketing Research* 3.9, *Journal of Consumer Research* 3.5, *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 2.8, *Marketing Science* 2.8). *JAMS* remains the leading marketing journal in IF after removing self-citations and in the 5-year metric. Perhaps most salient to international scholars, in 2018 *JAMS* advanced to a top category of 4* in the Chartered ABS Academic Journal Guide (the most widely used non-FT 50 ranking outside the United States)⁴; it is one of just six marketing journals to earn this ranking.

Challenges

One of the greatest challenges facing the journal, and perhaps the discipline, is the shift exhibited by some marketing departments, away from marketing strategy or managerially focused research in general, which undermines *JAMS*'s primary research domain. This trend also may reduce the number of managerially focused scholars, as fewer doctoral students are being trained in this area, which threatens to decrease the supply of papers to *JAMS*. In addition, *JAMS* will need to continue balancing emerging methodological hurdles against substantively important and managerially relevant research questions, which do not always lend themselves to the new methods' requirements. I recommend a focus on providing insights into substantive research questions, using appropriate methods in support of the efforts to answer key research questions or substantive issues, not vice versa (for more discussion of these issues, see Houston 2016; McAlister 2016; Moorman 2016).

Encouraging greater inclusion of *JAMS* in promotion and tenure decisions by universities also remains a work in

progress, especially at schools where researchers mainly focus on consumer behavior/psychology or quantitative/economics areas. Providing more opportunities for these researchers to publish managerially relevant research and review papers in *JAMS* will be important in this effort. In addition, efforts to support and encourage doctoral students working in *JAMS*'s underlying research domains will remain important.

Universities outside of the United States increasingly require their faculty to publish in FT 50 journals, representing both an opportunity and a challenge for *JAMS*. The journal can expect to process more submissions, and *JAMS* should work to increase its global presence, recognition, and support offered. For example, China's Ministry of Education recently changed the way it ranks and funds business schools, focusing primarily on the FT 50 and University of Dallas journal lists. A similar shift is occurring in other nations (e.g., Australia), reflecting the use of premier publication counts by many MBA ranking and accreditation organizations. From 2015 to 2017, the number of submissions from researchers outside the United States to *JAMS* has increased significantly. However, their rejection rates are also higher than average, suggesting the need to devote more effort to integrate these global scholars into the *JAMS* community.

Insights to advance marketing strategy research

Broadly speaking, *JAMS* publishes managerially relevant research that addresses substantive marketing questions; work in this domain is often labeled strategy, managerial, or substantive research. I use the label *marketing strategy research* to reflect the focus on managerial actions, adopted to improve performance, but with the recognition that the unit of analysis can be the consumer, employee (e.g., salesperson), or firm.⁵ After processing more than 1500 manuscripts at *JAMS* and meeting with many other scholars, I have developed a few thoughts that may be worthwhile to help advance marketing strategy research.

Avoiding common research pitfalls

Each month, *JAMS* continues to desk reject between 40 and 60% of new submissions; the overall rejection rate remains between 91 and 92%. By highlighting the most common reasons for rejection, I aim to help researchers increase their chances of publishing in *JAMS*. Positioning and contributions continue to be the top two causes of

³ Clarivate Analytics, *Journal Citation Reports*, <https://jcr.incites.thomsonreuters.com/>.

⁴ <https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal-guide-2018/>

⁵ I take this opportunity to note explicitly that *JAMS* is open to any substantive research that offers relevant insights to business, government, policy makers, or society at large.

rejection. First, papers that have not been positioned to match *JAMS*'s editorial focus (e.g., behavioral research without meaningful managerial insights or relevance) tend to be rejected. Behavioral effects can be relevant to managers, but only if they clearly relate to important performance outcomes and managerial interventions (e.g., managerially relevant moderators). Scale development and pure methodological papers often do not fit the journal's positioning, unless the paper is exceptionally relevant to *JAMS* readers. Therefore, authors should ensure that any paper they submit to *JAMS* offers insights relevant to managers (ideally, ones that are unknown or surprising at some level), featuring a conceptual model that has both actionable levers and meaningful outcomes for business, consumers, or public policy decision makers.

Second, the failure to generate sufficient contributions—such as testing a model with mostly main effect hypotheses, using cross-sectional survey data, such that common method variance provides a strong alternative explanation for the findings—will lead to rejection. Papers that replicate known effects or theories in a narrow context (different country or market segment) often offer limited contributions too. The contributions and methodological hurdles continue to increase in academia, as they should; successful authors will continuously refine their skills and research designs to meet these escalating requirements. Authors new to *JAMS* should model their manuscripts on the most recent publications in *JAMS* or *Journal of Marketing (JM)* that use a similar research design or method, because that approach can help them understand the requirements from both positioning and contribution perspectives.

Collaborating with business practice for impact

Successful marketing strategy researchers recognize that sales and marketing managers are the key stakeholders and consumers of their papers' insights and implications. However, insights can flow both ways. As a strategy researcher, editor, and past AE at *JM*, I feel that the benefits of closely collaborating with businesses to develop and execute academic research are often underestimated. Rapid changes in technology, globalization, legislation, and "big data" are evoking vast shifts in sales and marketing activities and strategies at an accelerating rate, and firms often face business issues that the academic community has not yet addressed—or even recognized in some cases. In my experience, researchers who work most closely with firms, perhaps through affiliations with research centers, are also working on the most interesting, emerging topics, with excellent access to data that enable them to address their research questions convincingly (e.g., longitudinal consumer data, randomized field or

natural experiments). Focusing on current business problems with good data often results in high impact papers that are eligible for awards, citations, and references in the business press. Accordingly, my recommendation to strategy researchers is to help build a research center at their university or become affiliated with one of the many existing research centers to connect with today's firms and the issues they confront.⁶

Conclusion

It has been my privilege and honor to serve as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* for the past three years. I tried to be a good steward and continue the journal's positive trajectory by leveraging its strong foundation and implementing a few new initiatives to help advance its position as a leading publication outlet for top quality, high impact, managerially focused marketing research. I am excited to pass the editorial reins to John Hulland, who brings a broad knowledge base to the position, as well as many new ideas to advance the journal. In closing, I believe *JAMS* has significant impact, providing an outlet for research with meaningful insights that connect academia to marketing practice. Marketing can benefit society and people's lives around the world; I am grateful to play a small part in helping *JAMS* achieve these worthwhile and relevant objectives.

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⁶ To read more about sales- and marketing strategy-focused research centers, see Kumar (2017), Lilien (2017), and Palmatier (2017).