Marketing Science: A Strategic Review

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Abstract

Marketing Science is in a great competitive position with a strong editorial board and infrastructure support. This editorial summarizes the state of the journal as perceived by its stakeholders. They believe that the journal should strive to remain a premier international journal and embrace diverse topics, methods, and foci. It should continue to draw upon allied fields while being open to the various methods and philosophies as recognized in those fields. It should strive to avoid silos and embrace applications and relevance while not sacrificing rigor. The path may not be easy, but we can move forward successfully. We highlight potential threats to success and recommend how the journal might overcome those threats.

1. Assessing the State of the Journal

Marketing Science is in the enviable position of being perceived as a premier journal with a strong Editor, a well-qualified editorial board, and dedicated reviewers. Authors perceive *Marketing Science* as one of the most prestigious publications for quantitative research in marketing. In addition, the annual Marketing Science conference, run by the INFORMS Society of Marketing Science (ISMS), provides potential authors with a venue at which they can share and test their ideas, and network for new ideas. The conference generates funds for other special conferences, shared databases, support for new initiatives, a doctoral consortium, and other activities that enhance the ecology upon which *Marketing Science* authors rely.

At the request of the Editor, Preyas Desai, we examined the state of the journal as perceived by its stakeholders. Our goal was to provide insight so that the journal will maintain its strength and address any challenges on the horizon. Many of those challenges are driven by success. (1) *Marketing Science*'s strength is international. Universities and other research institutions around the world value *Marketing Science* publications. As research strength diffuses, so will submissions. The sheer volume of submissions could strain editorial resources if we are not ready. Worldwide demand also implies heterogeneity of methods, problems, philosophies, and skill levels. We must proactively manage in light of that diversity. (2) New journals are being introduced and existing journals are seeking to be perceived as top journals. Competition is good for the field. Hopefully we can embrace and learn from that competition. We gain strength if competition leads to synergies; we suffer if competition leads to fragmentation and isolation. (3) New ideas are entering the field from a variety of sources. We've already seen the influx of game theory and structural models from economics, of Bayesian methods from statistics, and of dynamic programming applications from operations research and machine learning. The influx will continue, but the influx comes with differing methods and philosophies. We need to be open to these new ideas and build upon them to expand our knowledge base in marketing science. We suffer if there is resistance to new ideas or if the new ideas denigrate other approaches. (4) Big data, social media, and other changes are driving the need for fresh tradeoffs to be made for good research. The review process must reflect these tradeoffs. (5) Publishing models are now electronic and the associated economics have changed. Readership and interest is moving from print to online. Being found by search engines requires relevant content as well as careful thought to abstracts and keywords. And (6) there is welcome pressure for research ethics, leading journals to think carefully about disclosure and replication policies. An editorial announces *Marketing Science*'s new policy (Desai 2013).

We would like to provide answers to address all of these issues, but we are not that prescient. Instead we summarize the perceptions of *Marketing Science* as held by its stakeholders. Those perceptions include prescriptions which we attempt to summarize. Our methods were simple. All stakeholders—editorial board, other reviewers, authors, and ISMS members were invited to share their opinions through eight qualitative questions. We received 274 responses, most with detailed and thoughtful answers. We coded each question and summarized the responses. We discussed the summaries and made recommendations. Our recommendations are humble. We recognize that the data are qualitative and we endorse the INFORM's philosophy that the Editor should be given both the freedom and responsibility to manage the journal for long-term success.

This commentary complements an article in this issue about the evolution of marketing science as seen through the keywords that were selected for *Marketing Science* articles (Mela 2013). That article illustrates that the field has been dynamic since its inception. It further illustrates a nice balance between relevance and rigor and reinforces that balance as an important goal of the journal.

2. Changes in the World Around Us

About two-thirds of the *Marketing Science* stakeholders who responded to the survey felt that the journal was doing too little about emerging markets, internationalization, food, energy, healthcare, sustainable development, poverty, ethics, politics, litigation, and the environment. An often-stated reason is that the journal is preoccupied primarily with methodological sophistication. At the same time, many respondents felt that the responsibility for change rests with the authors. The one-third minority agreed that the current coverage is about right. They argued that, as a premier journal, *Marketing Science* should keep its focus on high-quality theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions. Broader environmental changes should not detract from that mission. However, they also believed that the journal should be open to contributions in emerging areas, as long as quality conditions are met.

We recommend that the journal maintain its high-quality standards, but encourage special areas of interest through special sections, perhaps combined with ISMS conferences. The recent conferences on emerging markets and on the theory and practice of management provide excellent models. These initiatives demonstrate the journal's (and ISMS's) openness to the changing world environment and nudge research in that direction, without compromising quality nor overtly channeling research. Relevance enhances prestige and, in an electronic age, helps researchers outside the field find marketing science contributions.

3. Internationalization

The overwhelming majority of stakeholders support a goal to remain the premier international journal in marketing science. These stakeholders encouraged *Marketing Science* to move well beyond a North American focus to gain or maintain global readership. Indeed, 9% felt that we were already there. Nonetheless, there was caution. 19% felt the journal should not sacrifice quality for the sake of globalization. They opined that, by maintaining quality, *Marketing Science* will remain an aspirational journal.

A strong sub-theme emerged for the journal to broaden topics, focus, and/or the editorial board (13%). This included a desire for more international content and data, more substance, more applied work relevant throughout the world, and a broader set of methods. Some stakeholders felt *Marketing Science* was too focused on methods (vs. substance) and suffered from "econ envy [their words]." A few people (not many) worried that *Marketing Science* would not remain the premier international marketing journal because it is too modeling oriented.

Many stakeholders recommended either increased pages or shorter papers, with some stakeholders (12%) expressing a fear that the journal would not have enough capacity. The more important capacity constraint was editorial resources, with a recognition that more desk rejects may be necessary and that *Marketing Science* may need a copy editor to address issues of English as a second language. A small number of stakeholders (4%) recommended regional journals such as *Marketing Science*-China, *Marketing Science*-India, *Marketing Science*-South America, etc.

We endorse the opinion that *Marketing Science* continue on its path of international preeminence. We also encourage the ISMS board to provide the necessary resources to make this happen. Journal pages have never been a constraint at *Marketing Science* and should not become one. Editorial resources might become a constraint, hence we encourage the journal to help develop expertise throughout the world so that the journal may draw upon the best reviewers, regardless of the nationality of their institutions. We prefer one strong international journal rather than a strategy of many regional journals. We encourage the journal to continue to broaden its topics, foci, and methodologies so that we do not create incentives for regional fragmentation.

4. Allied Fields

Since its founding *Marketing Science* has benefitted from ideas and methods that originated in allied fields such as operations research, operations management, economics, econometrics, statistics, psychology, product engineering, and computer science. Stakeholders believe these trends will continue. The plurality (44%) believe we should learn from these methods, but focus on *substantive marketing problems* and/or *improving decision making* rather than on the methods *per se*. Another strong contingent (30%) encouraged the journal to continue to publish interdisciplinary papers and be open to different methods. The theme of quality and rigor continued, but there was a recognition that, by drawing on diverse fields, it may be difficult to appreciate the differing perspectives of the new disciplines.

We believe that *Marketing Science* has grown over thirty years because it has embraced new methods and research philosophies, even if they came from allied fields. We encourage the review board to continue that trend, with the caution that papers based on new disciplines may require review teams to “cut the authors some slack.” By this we mean that every discipline makes tradeoffs and no discipline can claim to have found the only path to truth. This will become particularly important as the journal seeks research on important trends (because data may be hard to obtain) and research using big data (because computational issues may require tradeoffs in modeling). ISMS should encourage the adoption of new ideas by ensuring that its doctoral consortium brings together faculty with multiple perspectives, by supporting focused conferences, and by having special sessions at the annual conference. ISMS may also facilitate PhD camps to teach students new methods and perspectives. We consider the Summer Institutes funded by the Max Planck Institute and the Summer camps on different quantitative methods sponsored in part by Columbia, Duke, and UCLA and taught by ISMS members to be representative models.

5. Breadth versus Research Silos

While expressing a desire for openness, almost three-quarters of the stakeholders were concerned about whether reviewers at *Marketing Science* were open to new topics, methods, and philosophies. Only 27% believed that *Marketing Science* was sufficiently open; a majority (57%) believed the journal was not. The biggest concerns were the need for the acceptance of a broader range of methods (31%) and a need for a focus on substance over methodology (29%). Many stakeholders felt that *Marketing Science* should weigh managerial relevance more highly and look for "correctness rather than perfectness or over-sophistication." On the other hand, a few stakeholders (4%) recommended a narrow focus on rigorous quantitative papers.

While concerned with the perception of insufficient openness, we are optimistic about the ability of *Marketing Science* to avoid silos. The Editor has been encouraging openness and is working with the Associate Editors to achieve that openness. The field has benefitted tremendously from new methods, but these methods have not always entered the field easily. We can cite many trends where new ideas entered the field and became topics *du jour* but evolved to become basic knowledge. Early papers on formal models, quantal-choice models, Bayesian methods, and others struggled in the review process because the papers represented new worldviews (at the time). Even the original conjoint analysis papers were only published because the editor overruled the reviewers. As the research base broadened, researchers began to recognize both the strengths and weaknesses of the methods.

Seminal papers are often the most difficult to publish precisely because they challenge existing paradigms. This is an issue with science in general and not marketing science specifically (e.g., Kuhn 1970). We encourage the Editor to continue his outreach and we encourage all reviewers to be open minded. We encourage Associate Editors to look closely at papers where the reviewers' opinions diverge. If one reviewer is enthusiastic and the other reviewer rejects the paper for what it does not accomplish, then the submission may warrant an additional look to see what it does accomplish and whether it contains new ideas that challenge an existing paradigm.

Kuhn (1970) cautions that, very often, new topics, methods, and philosophies require new trade-offs. Initially, new paradigms rarely solve all problems and may not solve problems as well as the paradigms they replace. But we must incubate these paradigms. We want *Marketing Science* to be a journal that encourages new perspectives, not one that accepts only one "correct" path. We hope that *Marketing Science* is inclusive rather than compartmentalized into silos.

For example, we hope that *Marketing Science* is open to models that do not require consumers or managers to act rationally with foresight. More nuanced reviews ask that rationality (or simplified decision making) be defended when critical, but not when there is evidence that an alternative perspective represents real decisions. Similarly as the field tackles big data and social media, heuristic solutions may represent the best tradeoffs when we scale methods to these new domains.

6. Practice and Research Tradeoffs

Perhaps the most controversial question addressed whether or not we should embrace relevance if relevance required a perceived sacrifice in rigor. A large number of stakeholders expressed detailed views on this topic, often providing substantial and constructive recommendations. Among those expressing opinions, about 80% desire more relevance and practice in the journal, but about 20% view the journal's mission as "rigor trumps all." The 80% were split among “more practice” (31%), “rigor and relevance with tradeoffs” (21%), “need to strive for balance” (7%), and “the current definition of rigor should be changed” (21%). This diversity represents both a problem and an opportunity.

While 80% of the stakeholders desire a greater focus on practice, it is the nature of a peer-review system that the 20% “rigor no matter what (RNMW)” reviewers wield a disproportionate influence. Suppose that two reviewers and the Associate Editor are drawn randomly from the population and the authors of a paper are asked to address all issues highlighted by the review team. Then there is an almost 50% chance that at least one of the review-team members is RNMW. [$48.8\% = 1 - (1 - .2)^3$] If the reviewer or AE is sufficiently passionate, he or she might force the authors to revise toward excessive rigor. Furthermore, prolific authors (opinion leaders) encounter RNMW reviewers or AEs more often. With two submitted papers the probability of an RNMW review increases to 74%, with three papers to 87%, and with four papers to 93%. Thus when RNMW reviewers are drawn from a narrow field, the journal itself becomes narrow.

RNMW is a real concern. Many stakeholders believe that new topics, new methods, and new principles are driven by data and applications. Relevance without sufficient rigor can lead to the downfall of a journal, but so can rigor without sufficient relevance. We need to embrace both rigor and relevance, but recognize when tradeoffs need to be made. As one stakeholder said, rigor may mean a simple method executed extremely well, rather than the latest method that may not be appropriate. Other stakeholders recommended that we focus on the validity of the research rather than on all of the “bells and whistles.” For example, stakeholders articulated that there are times when endogeneity, heterogeneity, time-varying parameters, dynamic effects, non-parametric analysis, etc. are critical to the problem being studied and there are times when they are not. We must learn to recognize when hot-button issues are relevant and when they are not.

The RNMW phenomenon is more a function of peer-review processes than it is unique to *Marketing Science*. Nonetheless, we encourage all reviewers and authors to avoid a RNMW perspective and be open to new paradigms.

7. Assessing the Journal's Impact

You are what you measure. Many stakeholders suggested that we augment current metrics (publications, citations) with metrics that broaden topics, reach outside the marketing academy to other disciplines, reach out to industry, and track substantive findings and applications. We should attempt to impact researchers, educators, and practitioners.

Among the recommendations were asking authors to provide online summaries of their articles, perhaps in PowerPoint form. The summaries could be used in the classroom or by practitioners to encourage the diffusion of the new ideas. This Science-to-Practice initiative has already been implemented (http://www.informs.org/Pubs/MktSci/Science-to-Practice2). See Desai, et al. (2012).

Other recommendations include increasing readability and transparency to enhance application and replication, encouraging comments on papers by talented individuals outside of marketing (within the academy and outside the academy), encouraging press releases and media relationships, linking to textbook writers, and encouraging practitioner-relevant conferences. We might include metrics for downloads of papers, syllabi or textbooks in which *Marketing Science* articles are used, and citations by discipline. The bottom line is to think broadly about the impact of the journal and develop both metrics and programs to enhance that broad impact.

8. Summary

The inputs we received from our stakeholders were enthusiastic and constructive. It is these stakeholders upon whom the future of the journal rests. While there are challenges ahead, we are optimistic and believe these challenges will be met.

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