

Editorial

Broadening the Scope of Consumer Research

In analyzing the types of submissions we receive, it is clear that the majority fall into one of two bins. The first category of papers consists of psychological pieces that offer theoretical advances with empirical support. These papers sometimes propose a new phenomenon and the process by which it occurs, or they dig deeper into the process underlying an established phenomenon. They provide evidence for the relation between putative causes and observed effects (the theorized process) by testing for mediation, moderation, and boundary conditions. Such papers commonly present several experiments to provide evidence for the underlying process and to rule out alternative process accounts. For example, as a consequence of this detail, the average number of studies reported in the *Journal of Consumer Research (JCR)* papers in the last year is 3.5. The second category of papers consists of qualitative research, much of it conducted within the consumer culture theory paradigm. These papers put the disembodied heads of consumers, which are the focus of the psychological studies, back on their bodies, situate them in a culture and moment, and so provide a rich contextual understanding of consumer behavior. Despite some chafing, these fields work as a team to advance the study of consumer behavior, coming at our understanding from high to low, from big picture to thin slices. Missing from these sets are at least two types of papers that we would be pleased to receive and that we highlight in this essay. The first set is findings papers (heavy on effects, light on theory). The second is conceptual contributions (heavy on idea, light on data). Both types of papers are important means by which a field moves forward and are highly appropriate for *JCR*. Each has distinctive criteria by which its contribution is evaluated. We briefly discuss these criteria below.

Findings papers are distinct from the more common articles because their contributions would be judged on the nature of the effect, not the establishment of the underlying process. Only a small number of papers would make the grade in this category as the effect would have to be new, important, and provocative. Such novel effects would not be common, but when they are found, we want to know about them right away. The findings would be interesting because they run counter to established theory, conventional wisdom, or lay beliefs (Brendl, Markman, and Messner 2003; Van Den Bergh, Dewitte, and Warlop 2008); open new avenues of study about important areas of consumer research that the field has not yet pioneered (Peck and Childers 2003); or suggest ways in which consumers are made better or worse off because of surprising ways in which they think or behave (Hsee et al. 2003). The goal in these papers is to establish the effect credibly, to ensure it is not some better-known effect in superficially unfamiliar guise, and, if possible, to point the field in a direction for future study by highlighting moderators or boundary conditions or by suggesting the general direction of an underlying process. However, these papers would not be required to nail down the underlying process, although some of the articles cited as examples above do go a long way in this regard. Authors might not yet know what is producing a new effect. Holding up publication of the phenomenon while the authors try to figure it out fails to use the talents of the field. By publishing the effect, the authors turn it over to the community with its portfolio of skills for further exploration. In other words, send us your "cool ideas," in appropriately short, to-the-point papers, quite possibly with a single study. Our reviewers are skilled in judging both the quality of the effect and the establishment of process, and they can advise the editors of the contribution on each path. While our reviewers might commonly emphasize process evidence, particularly for longer papers that are intended

to explore underlying mechanisms, these reviewers have the ability and our editorial encouragement to judge contributions considering effects alone. Our turnaround time is fast, and the editors are supportive. We want to see this work.

Conceptual contributions are also distinct from the more common articles because these contributions would be judged on making breakthrough ideas or providing new ways of thinking about an important aspect of consumer behavior. Only a small number of these papers would make the grade here, as well, because the idea would need to be breakthrough, interesting, theoretically grounded, clarifying, and generative (capable of stimulating research). Whereas we anticipate that “effect” type papers might be shorter than the typical *JCR* paper, conceptual contributions may be longer than the traditional paper since they reflect “big” ideas that may take considerable space to articulate. Two categories of these articles are called “new perspectives” and “integrative frameworks.”

New perspectives introduce a new construct, theory, or domain that is important but has not been considered in our field despite its clear potential for generating new insights. In some cases these articles are particularly important because they illuminate an idea that rings true, even though it may run counter to a prevailing paradigm, worldview, or metaphorical lens for viewing consumer behavior. Such is true with Holbrook and Hirschman’s (1982) paper on experiential consumption. In other cases, articles make us consider ideas that have been considered elsewhere (e.g., gift giving, Sherry 1983; family identity, Epp and Price 2008; sharing, Belk 2010) but not in our field, despite their clear potential for adding insight. These papers would not merely introduce an idea that has been studied elsewhere. Instead, they would show how our understanding of consumers and consumer behavior may be enhanced or changed by its study. The goal of both sets of papers is to introduce the new idea, show why it is important, articulate how it differs from the prevailing idea or what gaps it fills, and show what new ideas its study can bring about. Often, these papers provide organizing frameworks, visual devices, or comparative charts that visually depict the idea and what new things it might explain. They may offer suggestions on how to study this construct, theory, or domain or develop explicit hypotheses that can be tested in future research (Alba and Hutchinson 1987).

A second category of conceptual contribution is the integrative framework. These articles organize a large body of consumer research studies (and perhaps studies from adjacent fields as well) into a new perspective. Papers that make the grade here do not merely review or summarize what is known about a construct, theory, or domain. They develop an elegant higher-order parsimonious perspective that both accommodates past findings and accounts for anomalous ones. Such is true with Petty and Cacioppo’s (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion, Cohen and Reed’s (2006) Multiple Pathway Anchoring and Adjustment Model of attitude recruitment and adjustment, or Bettman, Luce, and Payne’s (1998) model of constructive choice. Novelty here comes from organizing existing findings into a powerful yet simplified view that adds clarity and reduces complexity. Novelty also comes from articulating new ideas that derive from the framework that other researchers can test empirically. Here too, we would not hold authors responsible for testing new ideas from their integrative perspective. Instead, we would expect that these ideas would be followed up by other researchers. In sum, we are delighted with the quality of submissions to the journal, but we encourage authors currently working on or contemplating effects articles or conceptual pieces to consider *JCR* a welcoming outlet for their contributions.

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