Editorial: A New Chapter or a New Page for Marketing Science?

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Editorial: A New Chapter or a New Page for Marketing Science?

Olivier Toubia*

*Columbia Business School, Columbia University, New York, New York 10027

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Abstract. Marketing Science authors are facing challenging times, in which we have no monopoly over any topic. Yet we must produce original and relevant research in a timely manner. We are also living through an emerging era in which many constituencies in other academic fields, industry, and public policy are interested in our research and we have the opportunity to have significant impact. The continued success of Marketing Science over the next few years will be the result of the creativity and rigor of authors and the diligence and insight of reviewers, associate editors, and senior editors. The result will be a secured place both among the top business journals and the top social science journals. I plan to do my part by helping to reduce the “time to market” of our research (time from initial submission to acceptance) without compromising on quality and by continuing to invest in Frontiers in Marketing Science.

Introduction

When I submitted my first paper to Marketing Science 20 years ago, I would not have imagined that one day I would be writing an editorial as incoming editor-in-chief (EiC) of the journal. I am honored and humbled to serve in this role, continuing the work of Donald G. Morrison, Subrata Sen, John R. Hauser, Richard Staelin, Brian Ratchford, Steven Shugan, Eric Bradlow, Preyas Desai, and most recently K. Sudhir.

I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to K. Sudhir for leading the journal over the past six years. I have had the privilege of interacting with and learning from him, first as one of his associate editors (AEs) and then as one of his senior editors (SEs). His commitment to maintaining a review process that is at the same time rigorous and inclusive has been exemplary. He has made a deliberate effort to give all authors a fair chance at Marketing Science, irrespective of their background, status, or the prestige of their institution. He has spearheaded the creation of a new section, Frontiers in Marketing Science, that has become a major presence in our field. He has managed and enabled several special issues on cutting-edge topics. The field of marketing will continue to enjoy the fruits of his efforts for many years to come.

I would also like to express gratitude to the team of senior editors who have served the journal in the last six years (Yuxin Chen, Avi Goldfarb, Ganesh Iyer, Puneet Manchanda, and Peter Rossi). Thankfully, Puneet Manchanda has agreed to continue serving as SE, which will be a great source of continuity for the journal. Finally, on behalf of all authors at Marketing Science, I would like to thank the members of our editorial review board (ERB) and our associate editors for their service and commitment to the journal.

The new SE team (in alphabetical order) consists of Tat Chan, Anthony Dukes, Puneet Manchanda, and Catherine Tucker. Puneet has served as SE for the past four years, and we will all rely on his experience. Tat, Anthony, and Catherine have been among our most prolific AEs; I am glad they agreed to transition to the role of SE. Their extensive experience with the journal and its review process promises to make the transition seamless. As EiC, I will also act as one of the SEs. I expect that one or more SE may join the team within a year, depending on the journal’s needs. Eric Bradlow, Preyas Desai, Tulin Erdem, John Hauser, and K. Sudhir have agreed to serve on the journal’s advisory board. Their wisdom and perspective will be invaluable assets for the journal.

According to INFORMS policies, the overlap between the previous and the new editorial boards (editorial review board and associate editors) should be no more than 50%. Given the high quality of the current boards, I have invited as many as possible to join the new boards; but some of the members who had already served for several years had to step down. The composition of the new boards is included in the appendix. All new members of both boards have a track record of contributing high-quality, timely reports. All new AEs have been dependable and thoughtful reviewers. I do not want to reduce any of these wonderful scholars to statistics; but I hope readers will agree that the ERB and AE boards reflect and promote the diversity of our field in terms of size and location of school, topics, methods, and gender. The composition of our editorial boards signals that all authors are welcome at Marketing Science.
In the remainder of this editorial, I offer a few thoughts on the state of *Marketing Science*, some of the challenges that it faces, and some of the opportunities that lie ahead of us. I then lay out my plans to continue investing in the *Frontiers in Marketing Science* section and to continue reducing our “time to market” (time from first submission to acceptance). More information about *Frontiers* will come in a future editorial, after a thorough audit of the section. The reduction of time to market requires constantly improving the efficiency of our review process. I end by highlighting a few simple ideas and guidelines toward this goal.

As Mark Twain famously said, “History doesn’t repeat itself, but if often rhymes.” Sure enough, this editorial rhymes with those of my predecessors. I cannot claim to introduce any major new insight here. I mostly reiterate some points that I think are worth reiterating and propose a few ways to implement these points in practice.

**Subjective Assessment of the Current State of Marketing Science**

I have not conducted a systematic or rigorous audit of the journal at this point. But I can share my subjective, informal assessment. Much of the information about the history and status of *Marketing Science* contained in Sudhir’s first editorial (Sudhir 2016) is still very much relevant today and will not be repeated here. To the extent possible, I refrain from discussing specific research topics or methods that have gained popularity in the journal over the past six years or on which I think we should focus in the future. I fear that in doing so I would leave out important areas, and I would not want these omissions to be interpreted as a signal that I (or worse, the journal) favor certain types of research. The future of the field and the journal is completely endogenous; it is up to all contributors to *Marketing Science* to come to realize that we underestimate how widely our research is read and impacts audiences in the tech, regulatory, and legal communities. Although the contributors to *Marketing Science* are primarily marketing academics, we need to keep in mind that our audience is broader. One challenge here is that papers are evaluated by fellow marketing academics, for whom it is not easy to judge relevance from the perspective of a different stakeholder. It is sometimes irritating to see marketing academics argue about managerial relevance, which often amounts to speculating about how a proverbial “manager” would or would not use the research proposed in a paper. I realize that it is not practical or feasible to systematically involve people outside of the marketing academic community in our review process (yet it is exciting to do so when appropriate). But I think we should adopt a broad view of relevance and appreciate that a paper can be relevant not only to a manager but also to a policy maker, an individual customer, an academic from another field, an engineer, a lawyer, etc.

This echoes Preyas Desai who suggested in his first editorial that “one possible way to think about a paper’s contribution is to ask: *Who can do what better after reading the paper*” (Desai 2011, p. 2). Steven M. Shugan, in his first editorial, also noted that the most impactful papers published in *Marketing Science* tend to have an audience beyond *Marketing Science* and that “our goal must be to reach a wider audience” (Shugan 2002, p. 5).

The third question (Is it useful?) speaks to relevance. I believe that many of our papers are probably more relevant than we give ourselves credit for. I have recently come to realize that we underestimate how widely *Marketing Science* is read outside of marketing academia. *Marketing Science* is read and impacts audiences in the tech, regulatory, and legal communities. Although the contributors to *Marketing Science* are primarily marketing academics, we need to keep in mind that our audience is broader. One challenge here is that papers are evaluated by fellow marketing academics, for whom it is not easy to judge relevance from the perspective of a different stakeholder. It is sometimes irritating to see marketing academics argue about managerial relevance, which often amounts to speculating about how a proverbial “manager” would or would not use the research proposed in a paper. I realize that it is not practical or feasible to systematically involve people outside of the marketing academic community in our review process (yet it is exciting to do so when appropriate). But I think we should adopt a broad view of relevance and appreciate that a paper can be relevant not only to a manager but also to a policy maker, an individual customer, an academic from another field, an engineer, a lawyer, etc.

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One Challenge and One Opportunity for Marketing Science

I think a key challenge for Marketing Science, and for the field of marketing in general, is that we do not “own” the four P’s anymore (I am not sure we ever owned the five C’s). We see researchers in economics, computer science, information systems, etc. studying topics like advertising, innovation, pricing, and channels. This is not a new phenomenon, as Preyas Desai, again in his introductory editorial, already noted that “some papers from other business areas look indistinguishable from marketing papers” (Desai 2011, p. 1). This quote is still relevant today, but the qualifier of “other business areas” is no longer necessary. Fields outside of the business areas, where some papers also look more and more indistinguishable from marketing papers, tend to be larger than ours in terms of people and to have shorter review cycles. This makes it very hard for marketing to produce research at the same pace as these other fields (more people, less time spent per paper). Because of that, it is becoming increasingly challenging for quantitative marketing journals to publish research that is “new to the world.” We often see papers in our field that present direct applications to marketing topics of methods developed in other fields. But because of the issues highlighted above, (i) the methods might already be obsolete by the time the paper is published and (ii) the domains of applications are not necessarily novel and may have already been addressed in other fields.

One major opportunity for Marketing Science is that, compared with many journals (particularly in other fields), the review process at our journal (i) holds very high standards of rigor and quality and (ii) is fair and transparent. I can safely say that I have not yet encountered a journal that has higher standards of rigor and quality compared with Marketing Science (some have similarly high standards). I firmly believe that Marketing Science gives all authors a fair chance and that it welcomes authors from all backgrounds. The journal is open to all types of research using all types of methods and welcomes ideas outside of the mainstream. As academia becomes more diverse, this creates an opportunity for Marketing Science to become the outlet of choice for emerging scholars who are still establishing their reputations. More generally, I think we should thrive to cement Marketing Science’s position not only as a top business journal but also as a top social science journal. By that, I do not mean that all papers in Marketing Science should be social science papers but rather that social scientists should recognize Marketing Science as a premier outlet for publishing their research and for finding cutting-edge research relevant to social science.

Moving Forward

Reinforcing our reputation as a top business journal and a top social science journal will be the result of a collective effort from all of the journal’s stakeholders. As editor-in-chief, I plan to amplify, validate, and positively reinforce efforts in this direction. I hope to contribute to this goal in at least two specific ways: by continuing to grow and develop the Frontiers in Marketing Science section and by participating in the continued reduction of the time to market of our research (from initial submission to acceptance).

Frontiers

The Frontiers in Marketing Science is a great initiative to increase the impact of Marketing Science by enabling us to be part of active, ongoing debates with key stakeholders whose agenda is not compatible with our standard cycle times. These stakeholders include business, policy makers, and other academic fields. I hope to continue Sudhir’s pioneering work with this section. A special committee consisting of Anocha Aribarg, Tat Chan, Preyas Desai (who will serve as chair), Nitin Mehta, Subramanian Upender, and Ken Wilbur has kindly agreed to conduct a thorough audit of the Frontiers section. They will report their findings and recommendations in the spring of 2022. I do not expect any major overhaul of the section. Rather, we might see changes aimed at further reducing cycle times and further increasing the impact of Frontiers papers. But I expect the positioning and goals of the section to remain the same.

Time to Market

In order to maintain and improve the relevance of our papers and be active participants in debates with other academic fields and nonacademic constituencies, we must keep the time to market of our research to a minimum, of course without sacrificing the rigor and quality of our papers. There are at least three factors that influence this metric: the number of revision rounds per paper, the time taken by authors to revise their paper, and the time taken by the journal to reach a decision on a paper.

The first two factors are intricately related. Currently, authors have one year to revise papers. I have reduced this to nine months. I plan to enforce this deadline with rigor, while of course granting extensions when appropriate (e.g., medical or parental leaves). I see at least two benefits to tighter, perhaps stricter revision deadlines. One obvious benefit is that these deadlines directly reduce the time to final decision. Another important benefit is that they provide a useful yardstick to guide editorial decisions. Given the reports from the review team, the senior editor needs to decide whether the extent of the revisions is such that they are feasible within the allotted time. If the answer is no, this means the paper is too far away from being ready and it should be rejected (of course there will always be exceptions). This also naturally decreases the number of rounds required for convergence: if only
papers with a manageable list of revisions are allowed to proceed, fewer rounds should be necessary for convergence. As noted in the next section, I am encouraging SEs to provide clear revision contracts to authors, including a list of “must haves” and “nice to haves.”

The third factor is the time taken by the journal to reach decisions on manuscripts. I will carefully study the time currently taken at each step of the process and look for areas of potential improvement (e.g., reviewer assignment by the SE). When selecting members of the ERB and AEs, one of the criteria I have used is each person’s track record of writing high-quality reports in a timely manner (consistent with Hauser 1989). Our average time to first decision was 95.3 days in 2020 (median 90.0 days). We need to work hard on eliminating outliers that are significantly delayed.

Maximizing the Efficiency of The Review Process
In this section, I offer a few simple guidelines for all stakeholders (including authors) with the goal of continuously improving the efficiency of the review process. Before sharing any new information about the review process, I highlight what is not new here. The structure of the review process and the role of each participant (reviewers, AE, SE) remains unchanged. The idea of asking ourselves whether a paper is methodologically sound, novel, and useful is hardly new and relates to criteria articulated by past editors. The importance of clear revision contracts was stressed by Eric Bradlow in his first editorial (Bradlow 2008, p. 4). The idea of separating comments into must haves and nice to haves was expressed by Preyas Desai in his 2011 editorial (Desai 2011, p. 2). Sudhir (2016) similarly proposed to distinguish between critical and minor potential improvements of papers. John Hauser famously introduced a “2-2-2” guideline in Marketing Science in his 1989 editorial: two reviewers, two rounds of review, two pages per review (Hauser 1989). I do not claim any credit for these ideas. But these ideas remain merely ideas if they do not materialize in the way in which we review papers and in turn influence the way we write papers. Hence, I propose to infuse these ideas, and perhaps institutionalize them, into our review process to ensure that they remain top of mind for all participants in the review process and hence for all authors.

Guidelines for Reviewers
In the spirit of transparency, I am sharing here the guidelines that I sent to the members of the ERB when I invited them to serve. It is important to note that I am not asking reviewers or AEs to structure their reports around the three questions of correctness, novelty, and usefulness. Rather, the answers to these questions should transpire in their reports. Also note that these guidelines are not “set in stone” and they may be revised and updated.

Your report on a paper should inform the following three key questions:
1. Is the paper correct? (e.g., Are there technical mistakes or conceptual mistakes?)
2. Is the paper novel? (e.g., How does it contribute to the existing literature? Is it sufficiently differentiated from established knowledge and practice?)
3. Is the paper useful? (Note: A paper could be useful to various groups, including academics in marketing or other fields, managers, policy makers, and customers. A paper could be useful because it provides new insights, new methods, new ideas, new frameworks, etc.)

In the portion of your report seen by the authors, please
- Write at least one positive thing about the paper.
- Number the points in your report (1., 1.1., 1.1.1, etc.).
- When possible, state what would be needed for the paper to satisfy your concerns.
- Keep a constructive tone, even if you feel the paper won’t make it.
- Keep your report to approximately two pages.
- Do not reveal your recommendation in your report.

In the portion of your report seen only by the associate editor and senior editor,
- Indicate which comments you think would absolutely need to be addressed if the paper were to be revised for Marketing Science (must haves) and which comments would help the paper but are not as crucial (nice to haves).

Guidelines for Associate Editors
Similarly, I am sharing the guidelines that I sent when inviting colleagues to join the board of associate editors.

Your AE report on a paper should inform the following three key questions:
1. Is the paper correct?
2. Is the paper novel?
3. Is the paper useful? (Note: a paper could be useful to various groups, including other academics in marketing or other fields, managers, policy makers, and customers. A paper could be useful because it provides new insights, new methods, new ideas, new frameworks, etc.)

In the portion of your report seen by the authors, please
- Write at least one positive thing about the paper.
- Show appreciation and respect for the efforts made by the reviewers.
- Summarize and synthesize the reviewers’ comments. You may add your own perspective, reactions, and comments.
- You may lay out one or a few potential paths forward for the paper.
- Number the points in your report (1., 1.1., 1.1.1, etc.).
- Keep your report to approximately two pages.
- Do not reveal the reviewers’ recommendations or your recommendation in your report.

In the portion of your report seen only by the senior editor,
- Let the senior editor know which of the comments you think would absolutely need to be addressed if the paper were to be revised for Marketing Science (must-haves) and which comments would help the paper but are not be as crucial (nice to haves).

Guidelines for Senior Editors
Once a paper is assigned to a senior editor, she or he has full control over the review process and is responsible for making a final decision. Hence, the role of the SE should not be underestimated. As mentioned above, I am encouraging SEs to give clear revision contracts to authors when offering the opportunity to revise a manuscript. This is a challenging task, as it is often very hard to prioritize the many useful and insightful comments made by reviewers and AEs. I encourage SEs to categorize potential changes as must haves versus nice to haves. I also encourage them to think about whether the paper is correct, novel, and useful when reaching a decision.

Guidelines for Authors
I have shared the above guidelines in the hope that they will help authors calibrate their submissions to Marketing Science. I have some simple additional advice for authors. First, please make sure, when submitting the paper, to list recommended reviewers and associate editors in addition to listing your preferred senior editor. At least some of the recommended reviewers should be on the journal’s ERB, and all the recommended AEs should be standing AEs at the journal. Such recommendations are very helpful to the SE who needs to find the best scholars to evaluate your work. Second, I encourage authors to ask themselves the same three questions about their own research: Is it correct? Is it novel? Is it useful? The exposition of the paper should make the answers to these questions clear by (i) providing all necessary details related to assumptions, data, methods, and all other aspects necessary to evaluate the research; (ii) clearly establishing how the paper relates to extant work in marketing and other fields; and (iii) clearly articulating the paper’s target audience and how they may derive value from the paper. To echo John Hauser’s advice in his first editorial of 1989, “Good ideas are often simple. When you prepare a paper for submission, please try to make it as readable as possible to as broad an audience as is feasible” (Hauser 1989).

Conclusions
I believe Marketing Science is in great shape. We have a fair and efficient review process; and we typically publish high-quality, novel, relevant research. As the saying goes, “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Hence, to answer the question in the title of this editorial, in my view, this change in EiC merely marks a new page for the journal, not a new chapter. I will endeavor to continue the work started by my predecessors. Of course, we do face challenges, in particular competition from other fields. This is not a new phenomenon, but competition has intensified and broadened in the past few years. By tackling this competition head-on, we can cement our position both as a top business journal and as a top social science journal. To that end, we should continue to improve our time to market (time from submission to acceptance) without compromising on quality and continue to invest in Frontiers in Marketing Science. I am proud to be part of the Marketing Science community, and I will do my best to help it flourish.

Acknowledgments
This editorial has greatly benefited from comments by Eric Bradlow, Tat Chan, Preyas Desai, Anthony Dukes, Tulin Erden, John Hauser, K. Sudhir, and Catherine Tucker.

Appendix
Associate Editors as of January 1, 2022:

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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Anocha Aribarg</td>
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<td>Daria Dzyabura</td>
<td>New Economic School</td>
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<td>Paul Ellickson</td>
<td>University of Rochester</td>
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<td>Pedro Gardete</td>
<td>Universidade Nova de Lisboa Nova School of Business and Economics</td>
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<td>Ayelet Gneezy</td>
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<td>Laura Kornish</td>
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<td>Krista Li</td>
<td>Indiana University</td>
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<td>Lan Luo</td>
<td>University of Southern California</td>
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<td>Dina Mayzlin</td>
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<td>Hema Yoganarasimhan</td>
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<td>JuanJuan Zhang</td>
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Endnote

1 Technically, inventions must be both novel (i.e., not previously known or used by others) and nonobvious (i.e., not an obvious variation or combination of prior art). For simplicity, I combine these two criteria as “novelty.”

References