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Editorial

Understanding the *JR* Heritage, Publishing in *JR*, and the Evolving Retail Field

We are honored to serve as co-editors of the *Journal of Retailing*. Ostensibly the oldest academic marketing journal, it launched in April 1925 as a quarterly publication out of New York University's School of Retailing. We are proud to have the opportunity to continue its rich tradition of publishing relevant, high quality articles in the area of retailing, as well as to carve out some new directions through our stewardship of the journal.

To understand the rich heritage of the journal, we undertook the pleasurable task of reading the opening and closing editorials of all previous editors since 1980: Beth Hirschman, Bill Darden, Avijit Ghosh, Chuck Ingene, Pete Bucklin, Dhruv Grewal, Michael Levy, Jim Brown, Rajiv Dant, Shankar Ganesan, Steve Brown, and Murali Mantrala. We also benefited from the perspectives of many of these editors, as published in the 2009 *JR* Special Section dedicated to "Editorial Reflections" from the past quarter century. Here, we offer our own reflection on *JR*'s heritage, which provides the backdrop for our exposition on what we believe makes a good *JR* manuscript, how the review process works, and how the retail field is evolving.

Looking Back: Understanding JR's Heritage

Two traditions have remained steadfast in the nearly century-long history of the journal: a clear focus on retailing and a keen desire to publish high-quality research. These two traditions have become especially prominent in the past 30 years, marked by increased rigor in theory and methodology and expanded scopes that include various aspects of the exchange of goods and services between providers and customers. Today's *Journal of Retailing* embraces a wide range of theories and methodologies to address relevant retailing-related research questions. It also covers not only traditional brick-and-mortar stores but also online auctions and the various channels available to support omnichannel marketing. As a result, *JR* is one of the leading international, academic journals in the field of marketing.

Hirschman (1980) was perhaps the first editor to propose that retailing should draw from a variety of behavioral sciences as a conceptual backdrop, moving the journal in a direction that was more consistent with the general fields of marketing and consumer behavior. Darden (1983) continued this tradition of drawing from theories that can contribute to the marketing discipline, as well as ensuring the application of scientific methods. From this vantage point, Ghosh encouraged "articles focusing on some aspect of the retailing phenomenon that were grounded in strong theoretical and conceptual frameworks, had analytical and methodological rigor and made a significant contribution to the academic marketing literature" Ghosh (2009, p. 507). During Ghosh's tenure, three recurring themes prominent in the journal were retail pricing and promotion, store choice and location models, and store patronage and shopping behavior.

Chuck Ingene continued to broaden *JR*'s scope while maintaining the focus on the substantive domain of retailing. Specifically, his editorship reflected the view that the scope of retailing should include not only selling to consumers but also phenomena associated with the transactions that take place among various channel members (Ingene 2009). He also continued expanding the theoretical scope of *JR* to include economic models and draw from a variety of conceptual and methodological domains.

Bucklin recognized several trends that were reshaping retailing at the time, including the expansion of the Internet and increased globalization of retailing. He strived to make *JR* a premier journal for consumer goods marketing and continued to encourage a "focus upon the development of new insights into the theory of retail marketing supported by empirical research which test these ideas" (Bucklin 1997, p. 2). Around this time, *JR*'s evolution from a journal that published research linked to the functioning of a retail institution to a comprehensive marketing journal was more widely recognized among academics and practitioners (Bucklin 2001).

Under Levy and Grewal, *JR* continued publishing articles that made substantive and conceptual contributions. They focused on publishing quality works on relevant retailing topics including price, promotion, brands/products, service, loyalty, consumer behavior, channels, organizational behavior, and the Internet (Grewal and Levy 2007). They also brought together thought leaders to create a 2009 special issue on "Enhancing the Retail Customer Experience", which spurred significant research in

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customer experience management. Brown and Dant (2006, p. 273) in turn viewed *JR* as "a multi-disciplinary forum which brings together scholarly writings from a variety of business disciplines phenomenologically united by the subject matter." Recognizing the importance of social media, Ganesan (2012) encouraged research into its impacts on the consumer decision-making process, customer relationship management programs, pricing strategies, and service failures/recoveries, as well as better understanding of the impact of innovative solutions in a global marketplace. Brown and Mantrala (2015, p. 171) more broadly called for "state of the art research with implications for any aspect of retailing, from any research paradigm."

Understanding this extensive, impressive heritage of *JR* provides a rich backdrop for realizing what the journal is today and how it can continue evolving. What is clear from reviewing the work of past editors is the strong and positive trajectory of the journal in its efforts to publish rigorous academic research. It is also clear that the nature of research related to retailing has broadened dramatically since the journal first started publishing. Today's *Journal of Retailing* is well positioned as a mainstream journal in the marketing field. What sets it apart from other journals is the substantive focus of the papers it publishes: All of them pertain to the practice of retailing. However, the conceptual and methodological bases for these papers vary widely. In the next sections, we provide some insights about what makes a good *JR* manuscript, detail how the review process works, and conclude with some recommended, promising directions for the retailing field.

What Makes a Good JR Manuscript?

Journal of Retailing welcomes manuscripts that draw on a wide range of conceptual foundations, including but not limited to behavioral, economic, management, sociological, and psychological domains. Manuscripts must use appropriate methodologies to investigate their research questions, but these approaches also are varied, spanning for example the use of experiments, ethnographies, surveys, analytical and empirical models, or panel or secondary data. But across concepts and methods, what is essential for any manuscript to be published in *JR* is that it makes a contribution, by addressing interesting and important issues relevant to retailing, and adds new insights for theory, methods, or the practice of retailing. Levy and Grewal (2007) referred to this stipulation as being able to answer the "so what" question: "So what? Why does this work matter?" Is the research question interesting and important? Does the research help shed light on an unresolved managerial issue? Will the findings add theoretically or conceptually to extant literature?

Thus a starting point for developing a good *JR* manuscript is an investigation of interesting research questions that contribute to advancing retail thought and practice. Brown and Dant (2008) laid out four ways papers can make significant contributions:

1. Adding new knowledge by applying new theories to existing problems, filling in knowledge gaps, or clarifying antecedent, consequent, or mediating variables that have been overlooked or ignored.
2. Enhancing existing knowledge by identifying boundary conditions or reconciling contradictory findings.
3. Demonstrating unexpected results.
4. Addressing new problems that challenge conventional managerial practices or beliefs.

However, the key to a successful article is not just making the contribution but also clearly articulating that contribution to readers. A good test of whether the results are clear and focused is whether the author can summarize the key points qualitatively in a single paragraph or 30-second talk.

The entire paper establishes the promised contributions. The title should convey what the research is doing. Then the abstract and introduction of any paper must explain the contribution. The abstract should anchor the reader, by describing what the researchers have done and found, in addition to citing the contributions. The introduction must motivate and detail the importance of the research, position it within extant literature, specify the research objectives, and establish the contribution. It may be useful to weave in a real-world example or vignette to help motivate the need for the research.

A good *JR* paper also has a strong theoretical and conceptual foundation, which can come from virtually any social science field: psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, or other fields. The conceptual development should go beyond summarizing prior literature and provide a theoretical backdrop for the specific research being described. In some instances, an organizing framework, conceptual figure, or model is useful to convey the story of the manuscript visually.

The methods should be rigorous and appropriate for the research questions being investigated. Similar to the previous editors, we are method-agnostic: We accept experimental, survey, econometric, and other methods, and we welcome research that employs multiple methods to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the results. Finally, *JR* manuscripts should conclude by reiterating the findings and explaining the results, specifying the theoretical and managerial contributions, and discussing any limitations and directions for research. Authors also should keep in mind the need for the results to be generalizable and replicable.

Before submitting a manuscript for formal review in *JR*, we encourage authors to have the paper peer-reviewed. This step will help make sure the paper is clear and easily understood; it also may help identify issues, prior to the paper being sent out for formal review. Furthermore, authors should check to ensure their manuscript fits with *JR*'s scope and positioning, as detailed herein, and follows the journal's formatting (available on *JR*'s submission website). It might be useful to examine other manuscripts recently published in the journal to note their structuring.

Understanding the Review Process

As co-editors, we will divide our responsibilities: Anne Roggeveen will handle manuscripts in behavioral/strategic domains, and Raj Sethuraman will deal with papers in quantitative/strategic domains. After a paper is submitted, the corresponding editor will read it to determine if it should be sent out for review. We will desk reject any manuscripts that do not fit with the journal's scope or standards of rigor. We consider it critical to avoid overburdening the reviewers. The feedback we have received from other editors leads us to anticipate that a primary reason for desk rejections will be the lack of clarity of the contribution, which is why we have strived to provide guidance along those lines in the previous section. If a paper is sent out for review, the assigned reviewers will be familiar with the topic area covered by the paper. To facilitate reviewer selections, authors may suggest reviewers, along with a brief rationale for their choices. We do not guarantee that the manuscript will be sent to these suggested reviewers, but we will use the suggestions as a reference point.

As co-editors, we view the review process as one of constructive collaboration among authors, reviewers, and the editor. We want the review process to be friendly and helpful but also rigorous. Such a process can ensure that the best manuscripts get published. Most papers improve substantially as they go through the review process. But we also know that it is never fun to receive any decision other than a straightforward acceptance letter. If the paper is rejected, authors may think, "But I could have fixed that!" or "The reviewers just don't know what they are talking about." A revision request may lead authors to dismiss the reviewers as being nitpicky. We hope though that colleagues submitting to *JR* will recognize the goal of the review process: to provide feedback that improves their papers. Authors should take a few days after receiving the feedback to digest it, then consider carefully what the reviewers are saying. When granted a revision opportunity, they should devote sufficient time and effort to writing clear responses. They do not have to agree with everything the reviewers say, but if they do not, it is up to the authors to provide the justification. Even if the paper is rejected, the authors should read the reviews carefully. Each reviewer provides comments and suggestions, to authors as well as to the editors. Our job as editors is not simply to count ballots but to take the comments of all the reviewers into consideration and decide the best course forward. The reviewers (and editors) invest substantial time in each reviewed paper, and the insights provided likely will be helpful for any scholars as they continue their work.

Armstrong (1982) lists some criteria that editors and reviewers tend to use when making publication decisions, namely, that the research is objective, replicable, competently executed (in terms of using prior research, appropriate research methods, and correct analyses), is well written, and that it makes a contribution. To help keep these criteria in mind, prior to submitting the paper, an outside perspective (e.g., peer review) can be particularly beneficial. We plan to mimic our predecessors in evaluating manuscripts and contributions. For example, Brown and Mantrala (2017, p. iv–v) consistently considered "(1) the significance of the topic for retail theory and practice, (2) how interesting and informative the hypotheses and motivating questions are, (3) the strength and cohesiveness of the conceptualizations or problem formulations, (4) the quality of the data and/or model assumptions, (5) how interesting and useful a story emerges from the combination of conceptualizations and findings, (6) how solidly grounded and valid the conclusions and implications appear to be, and . . . (7) the clarity in exposition and readability of the paper."

Looking Forward: The Evolving Retail Field

Retailing is in the midst of a great overhaul as omnichannel shopping continues to grow, brick-and-mortar retailers yield to demands for online retailing (e.g., Walmart), and online retailers enter brick-and-mortar channels (e.g., Amazon). Consumers obtain information from and shop in multiple channels, blurring the distinction between channels of communication and channels of distribution. They increasingly can participate in global marketplaces too. In this changing world, retailing scholars must address broad substantive topics, using strong conceptualizations and empirical designs, as well as develop comprehensive conceptual frameworks.

In addition, we need research to understand how new technologies, such as the Internet of Things, augmented reality, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and robots, are determining different aspects of retail. Grewal, Roggeveen, and Nordfalt (2017) highlight the importance of technology in their recent article, "The Future of Retailing." The Internet of Things allows retailers to integrate in-store customer touchpoint technologies (e.g., digital signage, beacons, mobile, points of sale, face recognition, product triggers, near-field communications, radio frequency identifiers, LinkRay). With artificial intelligence, natural language processing, and data mining, retailers can create seamless conversations across channels in real time. The combination of artificial intelligence with 3D scanning can produce a customized experience, ensuring customers get exactly the product they want. Augmented reality enables retailers to expand the real-world, physical environment with computer-generated perceptual information, leveraging visual, auditory, haptic, somatosensory, and olfactory modalities. Robotics, in combination with RFID technology, help retailers manage their inventories more quickly and efficiently—a capacity that is critical to fulfill the promise of omnichannel retailing. New delivery options, such as drones, robots, and unmanned fleets, also are being implemented to enhance customer service.

Such technology advances, accompanied by big data and analytics, are also providing retailers with novel abilities to grant frontline employees detailed information about each customer's journey, at multiple touchpoints, which enables them to offer more customized experiences for their customers. These data can be turned into actionable customer insights and leveraged in real time to provide customized service; however, such efforts also threaten to compromise customer privacy. As retailers continue to collect and apply big data to understand existing and potential customers, greater focus should be placed on customer privacy and data security. There is a clear need to understand privacy concerns in the retail environment and manage privacy threats, for both retailers and customers.

Understanding the implications of these changes is of utmost importance to retailers. We view *JR* as the premier and most appropriate outlet to publish research that advances retail thought and practice, in both traditional and evolving retail spaces, in meaningful, applicable ways. We encourage researchers to submit their best retailing papers to *Journal of Retailing*.

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