

Comment by Shelby D. Hunt

THE scope and depth of the Task Force report are impressive. Indeed, the breadth of the report is such that no brief commentary could begin to address all its issues adequately. Therefore, this commentary focuses only on those issues pertaining to AMA journals in general and the *Journal of Marketing* in particular. The report states that its purpose is to "foster discussion and debate among marketing professionals interested in the advancement of marketing knowledge." Likewise, this commentary is not meant to be critical, but to provide additional information to assist in the discussion and debate.

Positioning the *Journal of Marketing*

The content of *JM* since its inaugural issue in 1936 can be aptly characterized as schizophrenic. To appreciate the sources of this schizophrenia one must consider that a central characteristic of all university disciplines is the presumed existence of a "body of knowledge" (if there were no body of knowledge, what

would professors teach?) Most of a discipline's extant body of knowledge resides in its journals (both scholarly and trade), monographs, and books. A discipline's scholarly journals differ from its trade journals on their criteria for publication and review procedures. Manuscripts accepted for the former must make some new contribution to the extant body of knowledge as judged by a jury of peers; manuscripts accepted for the latter need not make a contribution to knowledge nor pass a rigorous review by experts in the field. Editors of trade journals use any of a wide variety of criteria for acceptance, such as timeliness, usefulness, novelty, or provocativeness.

Over its first four decades, *JM*'s positioning shifted schizophrenically between scholarly and trade. Many *JM* articles were truly scholarly in the best sense of the word. Indeed, articles from *JM*'s early years are heavily represented in collections of major contributions to marketing knowledge and in lists of "classic" articles (O'Connor 1982). Nevertheless, many early *JM* articles more closely resembled those in trade journals, appearing neither to have significantly advanced marketing knowledge nor to have undergone a rigorous peer-review process. Thus, *JM*'s content was highly uneven, resulting (as the Task Force notes) in a perception of "lower quality."

JM's schizophrenic situation changed with the ap-

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pointment of Jerry Wind as editor in 1978. With the support (or at least the acquiescence) of the AMA Policy Board, Wind emphatically (and somewhat controversially) positioned *JM* as a *scholarly* journal: “. . . the only acceptable articles will be those that provide a *new* theoretical, methodological, or substantive contribution to the field. This criterion places a strong emphasis on truly *scholarly* work . . .” (1979, p. 9). After clearly positioning *JM* as the premier, broad-based scholarly journal in marketing with a special emphasis on issues in marketing management, he noted that the primary responsibility of the peer review process was “to provide constructive feedback aimed at the improvement of manuscripts and the long-term development of authors.”

Since Wind’s editorship, all *JM* editors have substantially followed his positioning. Thus, Cunningham noted that “if a manuscript does not develop new theoretical material, suggest new concepts or methods, or help advance the current level of marketing practice, it will not be published” (1982, p. 8). My own initial editorial indicated that “the fundamental question to be asked in the review of any manuscript is *Does this manuscript contribute significantly to marketing knowledge?*” (Hunt 1985, p. 11). Most recently, Kerin states his “sincere intention to fulfill the editorial promise of *JM* by publishing scholarly research articles that advance the science and practice of marketing” (1988, p. 3). The only significant change in the positioning of *JM* since Wind’s editorship has been that, given the heavy attention devoted to “pure research methods” by *JMR*, the AMA has specifically directed *JM* to publish no “methods” articles.

Positioning *JM* as the premier, broad-based, *scholarly* journal focusing on “substantive” (in contrast to “methods”) issues in marketing and marketing management has had the desired consequences envisioned by Wind. Though the Task Force anecdotally notes that “many academicians perceive *JM* as a lower quality” journal than *JMR*, several empirical studies indicate otherwise. For example, Coe and Weinstock (1983) repeated their 1969 survey of departmental chairpersons (that found *JM* to be “lower quality”) and found the quality ratings of *JMR* and *JM* to be about the same. Similar findings are reported by Fry, Walters, and Scheuermann (1985). The most recent study found *JM* to be rated even higher than *JMR* (Luke and Doke 1987). By clearly and consistently positioning *JM* as a scholarly journal in recent years and by adopting the criteria for publication and rigorous peer-review procedures implied by the term “scholarly,” the AMA now has *two* high quality, scholarly journals.

The Task Force identifies numerous problems in developing and disseminating marketing knowledge,

leading them to recommend that *JM* be repositioned as a purely conceptual/theoretical journal with “originality, conceptual rigor, and provocativeness” as criteria for accepting manuscripts. *JMR* would then concentrate on “theory testing and methodological development” and *Marketing Management*, the proposed new journal, would focus on “application of knowledge.” All the problems leading to their recommendations warrant extensive discussion, but because of page limitations I make only a few brief observations on each.

Marketing is Inefficient

The Task Force finds that “the efficiency or productivity of [knowledge] development efforts appears low.” As evidence, it notes that “a journal acceptance rate of 15 to 20% may suggest high quality standards, but it also means that 80 to 85 of every 100 submissions are rejected as not providing sufficient contribution to warrant publication.” However, a rejection rate of 80 to 85% (common among “major” journals) implies no such thing because the rejection rate (at least for *JM* and *JMR*) is purely a residual statistic. That is, given the very high production costs for *JM*, the AMA places *strict* limitations on its size. The page-limit stricture *necessarily* implies that *JM* will accept only 30 to 40 articles per year and the rest will be rejected. In other words, if the manuscript flow to *JM* were to double, the rejection rate would increase but the rise would not imply that marketing scholars are being “inefficient” in the sense implied by the Task Force. The marketing discipline may possibly be “inefficient” in the sense that “the degree of activity devoted to knowledge development in marketing appears to be high in relation to the actual level of contribution,” but rejection rates do not *imply* such inefficiency. However, even if the marketing discipline is not inefficient in some objective sense, we can all favor increased efficiency.

The Review Process is Adversarial

The Task Force finds a major impediment to knowledge development to be the “multiple revision” process turning what should “essentially be a cooperative and supportive process” into “adversarial relations” between authors and reviewers. As a partial solution, they recommend that when a reviewer strongly disagrees with the views of an author, “the reviewer should be invited to provide his or her brief commentary to be run in conjunction with the article itself.” Unquestionably, the Task Force has broached a significant and difficult problem confronting our major journals in marketing (as well as in many other disciplines). All who are intimately familiar with reviewing manu-

scripts can cite instances in which the process has had *destructive*, as well as the intended *constructive*, consequences. Nevertheless, the report's "solution" might well create more problems than it solves.

For the peer-review process to work well, it is *absolutely essential* that authors have confidence in the system's integrity. Authors have a right to expect that no ulterior motives underlie the reviewers' comments. Adopting the Task Force's "solution" might well result in authors perceiving a conflict of interest between reviewers' *designated role* as providing constructive comments for the author and their *potential role* as "commentators" on the manuscript. This is not to say that negative reviewers cannot submit a comment on any manuscript they review. Rather, such comments should not have "invited" status, but should go through the normal review process in order to maintain the integrity of the journal—which, like Caesar's wife, must be above suspicion.

If adopting a policy of inviting comments from reviewers is not the solution, what is? The responsibility for decreasing the number of revisions and making the review process less adversarial must ultimately rest with the editors. After all, editors choose the members of the editorial review boards, assign reviewers for each manuscript, and give (or do not give, as the case may be) specific guidance to reviewers on criteria for review. Further, editors may intervene in the review process on a manuscript at any time *should they choose to do so*.

In recent years *JM* has adopted specific guidelines for selecting reviewers. According to these guidelines, a good reviewer:

1. Has a deep knowledge of the marketing literature in his or her chosen fields of expertise and insists that manuscripts contribute to that literature. However, if a manuscript has genuine insights, and is not positioned in the literature, the reviewer can counsel the author on how to build a literature base for the manuscript.
2. Is willing to devote the time necessary to give thoughtful reviews and to return the reviews promptly.
3. Adopts a critical/analytical approach to reviewing manuscripts—that is, does not simply express a "global liking/disliking" evaluation.
4. Is tactful and professional. Does not engage in sarcasm and *ad hominem* comments.
5. Sees the good in a manuscript as well as the bad—that is, uses a compensatory model in evaluating each manuscript.
6. Has a value system that recognizes and can separate truly important topics and contribu-

tions from less important topics and contributions.

7. Can play the role of "manuscript doctor"—that is, has a value system that recognizes significant contributions in a manuscript and can help make the manuscript "academically acceptable."
8. Gives detailed reviews, but not overly detailed! Does not "miss the forest for the trees" in attempting to give detailed reviews.
9. Resists "showing off." Resists the temptation to introduce a large number of obscure and miscellaneous citations in order to display a breadth of knowledge.

The preceding guidelines can help reduce the adversarial nature of the process, but eliminating the problem of "multiple revisions" requires the active intervention of the editor. In degree of intervention, editors can be positioned along a continuum from "pure administrator" at one extreme to "dominant intervenor" at the other. The pure administrator chooses the initial reviewers and *never* intervenes in the process thereafter, leaving authors and reviewers to "fight it out" through multiple revisions. At the other extreme, the dominant editor intervenes in the reviewing process on *all* manuscripts and serves as a kind of "super-reviewer." Somewhere between these extremes is the "referee editor" who intervenes in the process by giving specific guidelines to authors for revising their manuscripts when strong disagreements occur between the authors and reviewers and/or among the reviewers themselves. A referee editor can effectively reduce the number of manuscripts that undergo multiple revisions and temper the adversarial nature of the process. Marketing has a right to expect its editors to maintain the integrity of the review process and, if it chooses to do so, can appoint editors who adopt a "referee" posture in that process.

Four Major Problems

The Task Force identifies four issues that "may be responsible for the low circulation of *JM* and *JMR*, even among academic AMA members." Before discussing the four issues, some comments on the circulation of *JM* and *JMR* are in order. *JM*'s subscription base exceeds 16,000 and *JMR*'s exceeds 10,000. By scholarly journal standards, both are *extraordinarily* large. For example, *JM* has more than twice as many subscribers as the *Journal of Finance* or the *Academy of Management Journal* and more than three times as many as the *Journal of Business*, the *Journal of Accounting Research*, *Marketing Science*, the *Journal of Retailing*, or the *Journal of Advertising*. *JM*

cannot be “all things to all people.” In a zealous quest for ever more subscribers, marketing should be careful not to destroy the “fit” between *JM* and its present subscribers. Note that the Task Force identifies three groups of academicians (market segments) that have very different needs for marketing knowledge: researcher-academicians, teacher-academicians, and consulting academicians. Just attempting to satisfy well the desires of these three groups alone (not to mention the other constituencies for marketing knowledge identified in the report) poses significant editorial challenges.

Lack of “Bridge” Articles

The Task Force identifies a lack of “bridge” articles describing “state-of-the-art marketing research written in a form accessible to marketing undergraduates, MBA students, and thoughtful marketing executives. . . .” Presumably, the new journal recommended by the Task Force would be positioned as the “bridge” journal. As is well known, the AMA has conducted extensive research on the desirability/feasibility of introducing such a journal. Space limitations leave room for only one observation here: my discussions with marketing practitioners while I was editor lead me to question seriously whether there is a large market for a *general*, practitioner-oriented, AMA journal. Rather, practitioners in large numbers would be more likely to subscribe to highly focused journals (like the *Journal of Health Care Marketing*). In other words, should we attempt to have one large “general purpose” bridge to the practitioner market or a series of smaller, highly focused bridges?

Lack of Integrative Articles

The Task Force identifies “a lack of published journal articles that review past research and integrate this research to provide new conceptualizations of marketing issues.” Every *JM* editor in recent history has put out “calls” for such manuscripts. (See the inaugural editorial of Kerin in January 1988 for the most recent plea). Unfortunately, *JM* receives few “integrative” review articles and those it does receive often seem little more than annotated bibliographies drawn from doctoral dissertations. Integrative articles are important to the development of the marketing discipline and additional “calls” are welcome.

Lack of New Ideas

The Task Force identifies “a lack of articles proposing new ideas and approaches to marketing problems.” They imply that the lack of such articles results from (1) a seeming “lack of receptivity to innovative ideas on the part of marketing academia,” (2) the fact that “no journal emphasizes creativity, novelty, or poten-

tial theoretical impact of an idea in its review process,” and (3) “the bias in the present review criteria for *JM* and *JMR* articles toward empirical rather than conceptual articles.” Therefore, the Task Force recommends that *JM* be positioned as an exclusively conceptual/theoretical journal using “originality, conceptual rigor, and provocativeness” as the criteria for review.

Is marketing academia unreceptive to “innovative ideas”? Readers should recognize that this very serious charge contradicts most historical condemnations of marketing academia. Going back at least as far as Halbert’s (1965) classic work, studies have routinely shown marketing to be guilty of hastily, noncritically, and indiscriminately accepting new concepts and theories into its body of knowledge (many of which are “borrowed” from other disciplines). Thus, for example, Jacoby (1978, p. 89) claimed that marketing knowledge was dominated by the “theory of the month club.”

Substantiating the claim that the pendulum has swung from “overly receptive” to “unreceptive” would be difficult, but not impossible. Researchers of academic disciplines would examine several indicants as evidence of a discipline becoming closed to new ideas, including the age and tenure of its journal editors and reviewers and the procedures used by the discipline in choosing them. For example, a discipline may become closed to new ideas when its journal editors and reviewers retain their positions for many years and the process for selecting editors favors the maintenance of an insider clique consisting of a ruling octogenarian oligarchy. However, marketing seems to fare well on such criteria, because its editors have relatively short, three-year, *nonrenewable* terms and incumbent editors are not members of the selection committees that choose their successors. Further, the policy of gradually turning over the membership of the editorial review boards and regularly using *ad hoc* reviewers brings “new blood” to the review process (85% of *JM*’s current review board has a tenure of less than 10 years). Finally, most active marketing authors, reviewers, and editors are relatively “young.” Most curiously, the Task Force itself notes (and laments) that marketing has been so receptive to new ideas that many senior marketing faculty have become “burnouts” in part because they fail “to keep up with the latest theories or methods and eventually become conceptually or technically obsolete.”

The Empirical “Bias”

Is there a “bias” in the present review criteria toward “empirical rather than conceptual” articles? In contrast to the difficulty of substantiating or refuting such sweeping charges as “unreceptivity to new ideas,” empirical research on the “bias” charge is readily

available. For example, Wahlers and Dunn (1986, p. 41) analyzed 10 years of *JM* articles, dividing them into "conceptual" and "empirical" (defined as "those articles incorporating findings based upon some form of quantitative data analysis"). They found 47% conceptual articles and 53% empirical. Their conclusion of a "fairly equal distribution of conceptual and empirical articles" (p. 42) would have been even more heavily weighted toward "conceptual" had they not excluded commentaries in their study. Further, the last three complete volumes of *JM* contain 53% conceptual articles and 47% empirical. Because many of the "empirical" articles contain significant amounts of original theoretical contribution, *even an arguably too-inclusive specification of what constitutes an "empirical article" results in a fairly even distribution between conceptual and empirical articles.* This even distribution was not a policy decision; it just "worked out" that way. Finally, given that *JM* in most years receives slightly more empirical manuscripts than conceptual ones, the acceptance rate for conceptual manuscripts is higher, *usually resulting in an unplanned positive "bias" toward conceptual manuscripts in the review process.*

Does *JMR* have a bias toward empirical papers? One research report on the content of *JMR* from 1970 through 1983 categorized articles into "purely methodological" versus "other" and showed that, though in the early 1970s the proportion of "purely methodological" articles in *JMR* was less than 50%, such articles exceeded 60% in every year from 1979 through 1983 (Hunt 1984). Therefore, rather than an "empirical bias" in published articles, the bias of *JMR* would be better described as "research methods." Unlike the *unintended* "bias" toward conceptual articles in *JM*, the research methods "bias" of *JMR* appears to be a reflection of its positioning strategy. In fact, the well-known bias of *JMR* was a major consideration when the AMA Policy Board established the guideline that

JM should publish no "purely" research methods articles.

Repositioning the Journal of Marketing

Neither the fact that the Task Force's claim of marketing being unreceptive to new ideas is curiously inconsistent with certain objective characteristics of our discipline, nor the fact that *JM* and *JMR* are not empirically biased, *necessarily* implies that the Task Force's repositioning recommendations would be disastrous. However, given that theory development and theory testing are equally essential for the development of marketing science, and given that (if anything) *JM* has a conceptual "bias," and given that *less* than 40% of *JMR* has been devoted to empirical articles in recent years, should we arbitrarily prohibit *JM* from publishing empirical tests of our theories?

Concerning criteria for reviewing manuscripts, the Task Force recommends that *JM* use "originality, conceptual rigor, and provocativeness." It is unclear whether they mean *instead of* or *in addition to* the criterion of "contribution of marketing knowledge." If they mean *in addition to* "contribution," then the criteria are innocuously noncontroversial (who is opposed to "originality"?). If they mean *instead of* "contribution," then adopting such criteria would entail the risk of returning *JM* to its former schizophrenic self. Should we do this?

The AMA Task Force on the Development of Marketing Thought has conducted a massive investigation with commendable skill and great ingenuity. Its report should neither be summarily dismissed by perennial "naysayers" nor blindly accepted by "yea-sayers." Rather, it fully deserves the careful attention and consideration of all marketing professionals interested in knowledge advancement. I sincerely hope that the observations in this short commentary will provide additional input for the discussion.

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