

From the Editor-Elect

Dawn Iacobucci's term as *Journal of Consumer Research* editor is ending, and all those who contribute to and benefit from the journal will, I am sure, join me in thanking her for a term of remarkable service. Under her leadership the journal continued to grow in strength and standing. She possessed in abundance the many skills needed to do the job, and one skill often bred out of editors—warmth. Her letters were remarkable inversions of the genre, including empathic rejections and calls for revision that made authors want to get to work. She made the job seem like humane employment.

And so she was able to lure someone to replace her, and an editor-elect statement is needed. I want in this editorial to explain why not much will change with a change in editor and then, as some change is inevitable, to describe the criteria to be used to select manuscripts for publication.

STAYING THE COURSE

In most respects, *JCR* is run like any other scholarly journal. One difference, however, has had large consequences. The difference is that *JCR* is published not by one professional or scholarly association, as almost all academic journals are, but by twelve. Their names are on the inside cover of the journal, and their breadth, from statistics through economics to anthropology, is some measure of the vision and audacity of the venture that was embarked on 30 years ago.

JCR does not ask what a single perspective can say about many topics, as social science scholarship tends to do, but what many perspectives can say about a single topic. Its readers are united by common interest in a slice of life, not a slice of science. *JCR* is held to that task by a Policy Board of 12. It would be overstatement to say that 12 different disciplines are represented, and hard to miss the fact that almost every member of the board now and over the past 30 years has been employed in the marketing department of a business school, but for all that, and indeed probably because of that, a certain idealism permeates the mission of the journal.

The idealism takes the form of a principled wish not to be a marketing journal. Why? Because, apparently, that's been tried. When we read the founding texts of *JCR* and its various histories (Kernan 1995 is an excellent compendium) it seems that *JCR* was born from the belief that to study consumption with fidelity it helps to be free of the prejudice that the consumer is a form of prey and the scholar an agent of the predators.

The ideal of an interdisciplinary approach to studying people engaged in consumption has worked well for *JCR*. It dominates the market in top-quality consumer research, and careers in business schools of scholars from diverse backgrounds who have published in it have flourished. Whether the ideal has been realized is another question. Jerry Wind (1977, 59) as Policy Board president, noted at the journal's third anniversary, "An examination of published *JCR* articles suggests that most of them are heavily oriented toward marketing and, to a lesser extent, toward social psychology. Articles in consumer behavior from the perspective of the other disciplines are missing, and even more noticeable by their absence are truly interdisciplinary papers." Since then not much has changed. A reference analysis by Tellis, Chandy, and Ackerman (1999) found that *JCR* fell short of achieving its goal of diversity. A reanalysis by Bettencourt and Houston (2001) found that while *JCR* drew more from outside marketing and business, and from more conceptually distant disciplines, than two leading marketing journals, reference diversity among the three was similar. It appears

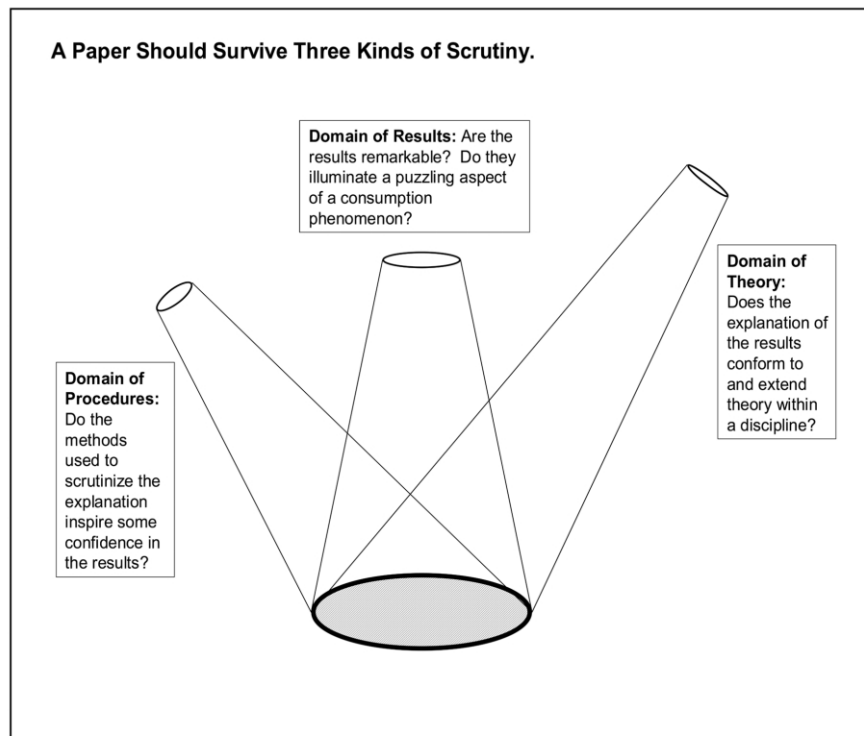
that consumer research is not yet a field in which many disciplines play, let alone play interactively.

Nevertheless the Policy Board holds *JCR* to its vision of multidisciplinary and is an important reason why changes in editors have less potential to disrupt than might be imagined. There is another force for editorial stability, and that is the body of authors, reviewers, editorial review board members, and associate editors who do the work of *JCR*. This community, numbering perhaps a thousand people in any 5-year period, conserves the culture of *JCR* in so many heads that no mere editor can tamper with it. Readers and potential authors can be assured that the mission of *JCR* and the criteria that will be applied to articles are matters of culture, not of individual editor taste.

SHAPING THE COURSE

Figure 1 illustrates schematically how I believe manuscripts should be reviewed. Three viewpoints should be applied: one looking for a contribution to the solving of a substantive problem, one looking for a contribution to discipline-based or conceptual understanding, and the third verifying that the manuscript draws valid inferences from its evidence. They need not be applied by three different reviewers, and in general each reviewer is capable of all three perspectives, although reviewers will be selected to ensure that each perspective is represented by at least one.

FIGURE 1



THE DOMAIN OF RESULTS

Papers suitable for *JCR* should contain results that are useful in understanding a consumption phenomenon.¹ The usefulness of a paper's results has always been an important review criterion, but I would like in my editorship to make this scrutiny more deliberate. Usefulness cannot be disembodied. Who finds something useful? To what end? These questions bring us from passive-voice abstractions to the concrete questions of who reads *JCR* and what makes a result useful to them.

My answer is that *JCR* is written for scholarly practitioners of consumer research and a result is useful if it makes progress on solving a problem of practice. (Readers certainly also read the articles for consumption theory, but that criterion is explored in the next section.) Papers are examined under the "results" spotlight to see whether they have what holds an interdisciplinary journal together, something to feed the common interest in making consumption phenomena tractable. The practitioners whose actions are informed by the articles in *JCR* are of many kinds—professionals in marketing undeniably, professionals in law or health care perhaps, even accounting occasionally, advocates for public policy, designers of public policy, advisors to consumers, and even consumers themselves—but they all come to the journal to find progress on a problem of practice. They want to know how they might act differently if what is claimed in the article is so. Correctly, because it is a social science journal not a management journal, *JCR* says in its submission guidelines that papers need not necessarily incorporate managerial implications of the findings, and indeed important papers often do not draw implications at all, because their implications are obvious. But explicitly drawn or not, articles must have implications for practice.

The "results" bar is comfortably cleared if a reviewer, both expert in and familiar with the problem of practice addressed in the paper, finds that the result is novel and useful. Papers that make method contributions can pass the test if they can satisfy a reviewer who is expert in the methods of the practice area that the contribution is useful to practice. Papers that are not immediately useful but lay out ideas or review topics in a way that may lead to useful subsequent research may also pass the test. Papers do not buy a pass on this criterion by a tangential allusion to a term of practitioner art or by loosely citing the popular press. Papers whose problem domain is intradisciplinary, and which do not illuminate a real-world consumption phenomenon, belong in a single-discipline journal.

But it is not enough to pass the "results" scrutiny. *JCR* does not publish papers whose only contribution is to shine light on a problem of practice. The paper must also make a theoretical contribution. Papers that apply existing theory to practice without extending the theory belong in a practitioner journal.

DOMAIN OF THEORY

Papers are therefore reviewed to see if they make a theoretical contribution within a disciplinary domain. This is a familiar criterion, and not much needs to be said about it except to offer a point of view on what "disciplinary" means in the context of a self-styled "interdisciplinary" journal.

Theory lives within a single discipline, because theories are networks of terms used to mean what earlier workers in that discipline have used them to mean. Indeed the linguistic community constitutes the discipline. A theoretical contribution is a new result predicted

¹It may help some readers to say what I mean by a phenomenon. I like Toulmin's (1965, 110) usage (gender specificity aside): "For the scientist a phenomenon is not just *any* event of the sort he is interested in—it is (as the lexicographers rightly say) 'an event . . . whose cause is in question,' and particularly one which is 'highly unexpected.' Further, if a phenomenon is an unexpected event, that indicates, not that the scientist has neglected or simply failed to predict it, but rather that he had certain prior expectations, which *made* the event unexpected. . . . The scientist is . . . on the lookout for events which are not yet *quite* intelligible, but which could probably be mastered as a result of some intellectual step which he has the power to take."

and explained in an internally coherent fashion using the terms of a discipline with a few carefully chosen neologisms, or a known result explained with fewer of the discipline's terms.

I want to be clear that there will not be any new test of interdisciplinary conceptual contribution for *JCR* submissions, despite the prominence of interdisciplinarity in its mission and governance and my respect for the principle. Across papers, many disciplines will be represented. Within a paper, authors will make a theoretical contribution within a single discipline. While we are united by a slice of life that any discipline can illuminate, while contributions to problems of practice may come from interdisciplinary efforts across articles, and while *JCR* hopes to report multiple lines of inquiry into the same substantive problem by multiple disciplines, I take it that contributions to theory occur, definitionally, within one discipline, namely, the one that houses the theory.

At least one reviewer of *JCR* submissions should therefore be expert in the discipline whose terms are employed and be able to judge whether the theoretical innovation or extension is novel and is likely to have impact on members of the discipline.

DOMAIN OF PROCEDURES

Finally, as authors know well, papers are reviewed to see if the theoretical explanation for the results is supported by the methodological procedures used. Do the data, obtained in the realm of procedure and observation, comport with the results, derived from theory, so as to illuminate the problem, occurring in the realm of practice?

It is in scrutiny of procedures and measures that reviewers put most of their effort. While no one would have reviewers do less, nor would want to see results published that were unconvincing, it is worth observing that there is subjectivity in procedural scrutiny. Where one reviewer sees a fatal flaw, another with equal learning may detect a heartbeat. Even Campbell and Stanley's (1963, 5) dictum that "internal validity is the sine qua non" had become, by 2002, "Internal validity is not the sine qua non of all research. It does have a special (but not inviolate) place in cause-probing research, and especially in experimental research, by encouraging critical thinking about descriptive causal claims" (Shadish, Cook, and Campbell 2002, 98). There is no place for dogma in procedural scrutiny. It is, just as are the other two areas of scrutiny, a matter for expert opinion in which reviewers supply reasoned argument, associate editors assess the arguments, and editors make the final decision and absorb the discontent.

JCR is open to many procedures. While randomized experiments have tended to dominate, *JCR* encourages quasi experiments, natural experiments, correlational studies, econometric analyses, long interviews, ethnography, archival studies, and many more.

JCR will also consider papers that have no data-generating procedures because they have no new data. The journal is open to integrative review articles, meta-analyses, and, to some extent, conceptual or policy prescription articles. There is a tradition of such papers in *JCR*, and they are among the most highly cited, although the number has fallen off in the past decade. Manuscripts in this category should review and make sense of a number of studies by the same or more commonly different researchers, either by narrative or quantitative meta-analysis. The generalizations will be given the first two scrutinies described above—that they illuminate a substantive phenomenon and that they make a theoretical contribution.

CONCLUSION

I hope these comments make clear my conviction that *JCR* needs to be edited with a steady, relatively light hand. The journal is mature and successful, and its established character, rather than the character of any particular editor, must predominate. It must be careful to act as a social science journal, not a management journal, despite the institutional affiliations of most of its contributors, because that positioning respects the autonomy of its subject matter. It must remain the outlet of first choice for research on consumption, whatever its

disciplinary roots or its method. Modelers, experimentalists, and ethnographers are all welcome under *JCR*'s broad tent.

I shall try to be pragmatic about the quest for truth, and the following words seem to do a good job of articulating pragmatism and unpacking the tension between it and doctrinaire truth seeking: "[Pragmatism's] animating principle is that truth is social and constructed rather than transparent and objective. It holds that ideas prove their worth in action, and that the results of an idea are the best criteria by which to judge its merit. And since what works for me might not work for you, pragmatism advocates a strenuous openness to all perspectives. With its insistence on the fusion of being and doing, thought and action, pragmatism has one foot in academe and the other in everyday life" (Siegel 2001, 85).

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