Intellectual contributions and 'gap-spotting'

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For this editorial, we would like to discuss the framing of intellectual contributions. High-quality research, we argue, needs to be interesting, surprising, and compelling (Hubbard & Lindsay, 2002; Johnson, 2003; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011; Stewart, 2009). It must revise and refine our conceptual and theoretical vocabularies, offering the potential to enrich marketing practices of all types. Whilst marketing has traditionally been associated with logical empiricist-based research, we wish to see contributions from across the research spectrum. As well as being interested in the production of knowledge *for* marketing management, we hope to see submissions that take marketing management as an object for analysis, where marketing practices and knowledge are subjected to the academic gaze for new insights to emerge.

Academics work within a context where the traffic of publications shows no clear signs of slowing or reducing speed, only accelerating to meet the needs of an ever-expanding range of stakeholders and gatekeepers. Our environment is increasingly characterised by the idea that, for academic survival, they must 'publish or perish'; not only this, our work now has to have that illusive characteristic of 'impact' to matter. Rejection rates for top-tier journals are often very high, with over 85–95% of papers rejected. Indeed, some rejection rates mean that nearly all papers fail to meet the criteria provided by editors, editorial boards, and reviewers. Macdonald and Kam (2007), for instance, point out that nearly 99% of papers sent to the *Harvard Business Review* are returned to authors as unsuitable for publication.

However, the pressure to start publishing quickly and consistently is a highly stressful exercise. Stress may, of course, stimulate writing, making us read work that we would rather avoid. Even so, the obvious benefit is that it enables us to expand our disciplinary knowledge, which, in turn, contributes to improved research and teaching practices. For others, engaging in research is an interesting activity in its own right, a 'fun' activity they would pursue even without the encouragement of the extant reward system (De Rond & Miller, 2005); for others, it may have the characteristics of a 'calling' (Weber, 2007, orig. 1905); while, for others still, it may be an act of 'making do' (De Certeau, 1988).

Before we sketch out what we think constitute appropriate contributions to the *JMM*, it is worth calling attention to the common reasons why manuscripts are rejected. Whilst Summers (2001, pp. 405–406) is writing in a traditional 'marketing science' vein, his reasons are consistent with the problems papers have confronted in the review process at the *JMM*:

1. The research questions being investigated are not very interesting (e.g. studies that are mainly descriptive and lack theoretical implications).

2. The research, although well executed, does not appear to make a sufficiently large contribution to the literature (e.g. the study largely replicates past research with minor modifications).

3. The conceptual framework is not well developed . . .

4. The methodology is seriously flawed . . . .

5. The writing is so confused that an invitation to revise and resubmit is considered unlikely to result in an acceptable manuscript.

It is almost inevitable that, at some point, we all have to deal with a rejection letter from a journal editor if we work in higher education. In some circumstances, pursuing a highly novel programme of research may win the author applause for taking risks and being innovative (Guetzkow, Lamont, & Mallard, 2004). In equal measure, it can lead to a given contribution to knowledge being so far out of the norm that the target audience fails to 'understand' and 'appreciate' the work (Rindova, 2008). As such, research has to contain elements of novelty and continuity with the existing literature (see Easley, Madden, & Dunn, 2000; Hubbard & Lindsay, 2002; McKinley, Mone, & Moon, 1999; Ofori-Dankwa & Julien, 2005; Sivadas & Johnson, 2005). Yet, it also has to demonstrate its originality, worth, and value to warrant publication.

Embedding your research within the existing literature is a must and allows editors, reviewers, and readers to orient themselves. It makes it easier for a contribution to be understood and staged. Scholars have to lead the reader through the rationale for the study and state why their research is important. An argument should not, however, stay too close to disciplinary consensus or appear obvious. Other scholars have developed these ideas further, highlighting the use of certain rhetorical tactics to ensure that an argument remains within the bounds of what is considered 'polite' (Johnson, 2003). For Johnson, this entails avoiding direct critique of another scholar's research stream. A more appropriate tactic, by contrast, involves focusing upon 'a taken-for-granted assumption as the opponent, rather than implicating another researcher or article. Authors may also use a non-adversarial strategy in which no opponent is defined' (Johnson, 2003, p. 482). Via a detailed reading of a prominent journal, Johnson (2003) avers that the majority of studies try to convince the reader that their research is 'interesting'. The implication of this is that academics should be enthusiastic about their work and its potential contribution to the discipline. At the same time, tempered rhetoric is more likely to help a contribution effectively negotiate gatekeepers (Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Smith, 2008).

Further discussion of the role of rhetoric in the research-question framing process is provided by Sandberg and Alvesson (2011). They distinguish between the ways scholars underscore current limitations in the literature, following this up with the proposition that there are areas that need further theoretical, conceptual, or empirical study. This process of 'gap-spotting' is a dominant way of saying to reviewers that your work deserves consideration. On the other hand, academics can gesture to the 'neglect' of a research domain and make a compelling case for why it should be remedied. Indeed, an interesting example of such a justification comes in the form of the upsurge in interest in studying marketing, advertising (Drumwright & Murphy, 2004, 2009; Hackley, 2000; Hackley & Kover, 2007; McLeod, O'Donohoe, & Townley, 2009), service-management practices (DeBerry-Spence, 2010; Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander, & Laine, in press; Simakova, 2010; Skålén, 2009; Svensson, 2007; von Koskull & Fougère, in press), and consumer-brand practices in their everyday or organisational environment (Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009).

Still, we submit that this literature is only a starting point and that there needs to a concerted effort in understanding how practitioners engage in marketing activities. In major corporations such as General Electric, they already attempt to determine the 'DNA' of successful marketing actors (e.g. Comstock, Gulati, & Liguori, 2010), and scholarly observers continue to lament the lack of understanding of how practitioners adopt, apply, invoke, and modify marketing theory and knowledge in their organisational lives (e.g. Cornelissen & Lock, 2005; Uncles, 2002). Taking this point further, Wierenga (2002, p. 359) suggests that scholars should explore 'the overlap . . . between academic marketing knowledge and the marketing knowledge used by practitioners'. Cornelissen and Lock (2005) offer conceptual, construct, and methodological guidance on this matter, proposing that participant observation inside organisations offers one fruitful means of advancing this research agenda.

Alternatively, a case can be made that the literature is characterised by 'confusion' (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). Perhaps there have been multiple studies that deal with a given phenomenon, but as yet there is little agreement about the most important factors that influence the marketplace practice. But research can be more radical than this in terms of its implications for the field. Rather than engaging in 'gap-spotting', which Sandberg and Alvesson consider a potentially conservative approach and not likely to lead to fundamental contributions to knowledge, they call for studies that 'problematise' the foundations of the discipline. What this means is that scholars and practitioners must strive to question key assumptions embedded within marketing theory and practice, juxtaposing these with socially constructed marketplace reality. Such a process is not likely to be a comfortable experience; it may even be 'quite upsetting' and raise the hackles of 'colleagues, reviewers and editors' (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). We see nothing essentially wrong with this. It is only when we feel completely comfortable with certain ways of thinking, theorising, and engaging in practice that there is a potential problem. As such, we welcome all efforts at 'problematisation' and wish to 'actively promote the development of approaches that focus carefully and critically on assumptions, worldviews, perspectives, conventions, [and] selective language' that pepper our research (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011).

So, in short, the existence of a 'gap' in the literature does not mean that it requires further investigation; a gap might exist because responding to it would produce a negligible or largely redundant contribution to marketing knowledge. Of course, what constitutes a 'contribution' may mean very different things depending on the paradigmatic tradition in which a paper is located. While we have our own particular interests, the *JMM* has always and will continue to be an outlet for the wide variety of paradigms, theoretical and empirical themes characteristic of the marketing academy and practitioner communities today. These range from quantitative modelling approaches, through to ethnomethodology and subjective personal introspection. Comprehensive literature reviews that summarise and critique the development of a topical area in a novel and theoretically rigorous way are welcome (see Kilbourne & Beckman, 1998; O'Malley & Tynan, 1999). Through reinterpretation, meta-analysis, or some form of empirical research, we expect to see a growth in the number of submissions that revise, extend, critique, and 'disrupt' (Brownlie & Saren, 1995) the way a given topic is understood (Johnson, 2003). Noting the caveat made above about 'gap-spotting' as a justification for further research, papers that deal with a salient topic that has hitherto remained understudied also fall under the definition of originality that undergirds our editorial policy (see Guetzkow et al., 2004). In equal measure, of course, research that provides a radical departure from currently

accepted wisdom is highly desirable. Irrespective of the likely impact of a given research paper on knowledge and practice, in all contributions authors must pre-empt the 'so what' question that reviewers frequently pose in their assessments of the merits of scholarly work. That is, how does a piece of research transform the intellectual and practical landscape once completed? How does work published serve to disturb and unsettle our ways of thinking within marketing? How does it produce new horizons for interpretation, new contexts for exploration and analysis?

On a practical front, the arguments for intellectual pluralism articulated above will be supported with a concomitant growth in the representation of scholars from around the world on the editorial board and among our associate editors. We have already started doing this, bringing in people at the forefront of their respective research areas. Our system of associate editors includes some of the most exciting new and established scholars. Their guidance, commitment, and talent are invaluable to the processes of publication. Finally, our network of reviewers devotes considerable time and effort to reviewing in the name of producing work that is stronger in contribution and tone. We have been privileged to see reviewers who disagree with manuscripts that are thoroughly researched, rigorous, appropriately justified, yet can still appreciate the viewpoint being put forward and subsequently recommend publication.

More than this, we firmly believe that intellectual pluralism will benefit marketing theory and practice. As a former editor of the *Journal of Marketing* and *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* no less has stated:

> Our mode of inquiry influences our results. Our theories and assumptions, whether explicit or implicit, influence where we look, how we look and how we interpret what we see . . . What consumers tell us in a long, open-ended interview is often different from what we learn in a structured survey. Observation of behavior may reveal things about a consumer that neither an interview or survey reveals. Such differences do not suggest that any method is better or worse than another. (Stewart, 2009, p. 381)

We very much agree and hope that the comments in this editorial will encourage all those who study marketing for the sake of producing knowledge to inform marketing practice, as well as those who study marketing or consumer practice as an object itself, continue to see the *JMM* as the premier outlet for their endeavours.

In the first paper of this issue, Hanna and Rowley accept the difficult challenge of constructing a conceptual model of the strategic place-brand management (SPBM) process. If brands are one of the key social facts of our contemporary consumer culture, it is also the case that places and spaces from themed retail outlets like Apple with its 'play' aesthetic, to entertainment–tourist–marketing venues such as Legoland, Kidzonia, and Disneyland are all competing for our attention on their ability to deliver on the brand-experience promise. Through a careful examination of the literature around place branding, their model encompasses a range of components that are critical to this place-branding process. These include the significance of previously well-researched concepts within branding, such as brand communications, brand evaluation, brand identity, and brand architecture, coupled with the turn to brand experiences. But the trick, as always, is to treat such components in a holistic fashion without losing sight of the value of the particular, that is, to demonstrate how the branding process is not simply one for the construction of a brand image or

a set of branded signs but rather to attend to how branding cultivates and nourishes a particular experiencing of places and spaces – an experiencing that the firms that deliver on most can be seen to profit from most. Here, we guess we have moved from an era of 'Sign Wars' (Goldman & Papson, 1996) to that of *Experience Wars* in the name of the brand.

The work of Harris, Harris, Elliott, and Baron carries on this theme of challenging our ways of thinking through their offering of what they term a theatrical approach towards the evaluation of service delivery as performance. The theatrical approach considers customers not as simply passive receptors but as productive and emancipated critical spectators of the service performance. The shift to experiential consumption is part and parcel of this shift in emphasis within contemporary consumer culture. Harris et al. suggest that we must start thinking of customers in new ways and through different methodological principles. The language of critique as expressed through customers' tacit sense-making activities in their case around the consumption of a celebrity-chef restaurant brings to the fore notions of aesthetic knowledge such as sensory stimuli and scenography, but also through their ability to unpack the unspoken elements of such a performance, namely through its cultivation of an unspoken 'snob' appeal.

Harrigan, Ramsey, and Ibbotson seek to contribute to theory and practice through their attention to the use of electronic-CRM by SMEs. They offer a warning to practitioners against treating e-CRM as a substitute for face-to-face contact, as such informal and open communication is essential to the competitive advantage offered by SMEs. However, based on the findings of a questionnaire instrument with results from 1445 SMEs operating in Ireland, Harrigan et al. found that such firms typically employ e-CRM on an ad hoc rather than a strategic basis. Instead, they suggest that e-CRM is more than simply a technological tool; rather it must be employed as a business philosophy to enable and facilitate the firm by enhancing the efficiency and personalisation of all communications with customers. If employed effectively Harrigan et al. suggest that e-CRM activities can enhance customer loyalty and strengthen the bonds between a firm and its clients. Here, SMEs are advised to explore the possibilities of using log-in facilities on websites and personalised e-mails alongside database technology to facilitate e-CRM. Finally, more research is needed on the possibilities of Web 2.0 and mobile technologies for enhancing and facilitating e-CRM relationships.

Yannopoulou, Koronis, and Elliott take seriously the social theory of Ulrich Beck (1992), which suggests that the worlds we inhabit are increasingly mediatised around the amplification of all manner of risks – something of which many a practitioner or brand manager is always aware. Within such worlds, notions of trust and loyalty become ever elusive and uncertain, especially when we consider the role of the mass media in amplifying and dramatising risks, since the market for risks and drama, or even spectacle, is ever increasing. Based around interviews in Greece, their study suggests that consumers are increasingly prone to such feelings of risk, but moreover that such crises (in their case, surrounding the recall of a yoghurt product due to the discovery of traces of mould) can quickly spread and amplify from that affecting a single brand to that affecting and bringing into question the whole (food) industry, raising doubts over inspection facilities and governmental responsibility. Here, the media plays a critical role in impinging upon and destabilising the trusted relationships that may occur between consumers and their favoured brands.

We are indebted to the work of Max Weber (2007, orig. 1905) for tracing the particular relationship that exists between religion and capitalism in the modern world. Veer and Shankar likewise turn our attention to the fact that global consumer culture is increasingly religious in character and orientation. Based on a quantitative study in a south-western city in the UK, the authors focused upon the Anglican faith with its disavowal of materialism. Drawing upon the work of Crandall and Eshleman (2003) and their 'justification-suppression' model, Veer and Shankar seek to unpack the ways that highly religious consumers alleviate the conflict they may feel between their faith and suppressing the materialistic aspects of the luxury items that they possess. Their results suggest that, contrary to our expectations, products reflective of high material wealth can be marketed to high-religiosity consumers so long as sufficient justification is provided. In this case, marketing to such consumers demands a sensibility to the issues involved, and a changing focus around the tangible and intangible benefits associated with the purchase of particular items. If you like, you can consider it as taking the materialistic connotations out of advertising, and relying upon the denotative power of functional, hard-wearing characteristics of objects, rather than their symbolic appeals to success and attainment to counter potential dissonance amongst highly religious consumer segments.

In their critical study of the notion of 'pester power', whereby children stimulated by advertising, other marketing media, and their peers ask their parents for items ranging from confectionary through to the latest games console, Lawlor and Prothero undertake an exemplary 'gap-spotting' study that is anything but conservative. In a meticulously worked-through account, they highlight key problems with the existing literature on this topic, especially the focus on one actor's voice over other relevant groups (i.e. parents rather than children). Such a means of justification has been utilised in other important studies (O'Malley & Prothero, 2004) and serves to vindicate appropriately their research strategy.

When children ask their parents for desirable items, the resulting parent–child interaction is viewed in negative terms, since it is assumed to lead to conflict between both parties, with the child frequently unhappy with the response to their request. But, as Lawlor and Prothero point out, much of the extant literature is somewhat dated, failing to take account of the child–parent relationship today. Specifically, they refer to the fact that children now have access to funds of their own, which they use to purchase products and services deemed desirable. Importantly, via an interpretive study based in Ireland, they reveal how interaction previously characterised as antagonistic serves as a useful socialisation mechanism, teaching young children how to be reflective actors in the marketplace.

Munnukka and Järvi, by contrast, undertake a very sophisticated logical empiricist study. They draw attention to the increasing importance that marketing scholars have accorded to the idea that product or service value is essentially determined by consumers, not simply by marketers. The problem that scholars and practitioners have confronted so far has been that it is extremely difficult to study how certain products are attributed with value. What, in short, are the key factors that consumers are likely to value when making purchasing decisions? Via examples of high-tech products, they draw out a range of pertinent implications for marketing managers interested in understanding this complex phenomena in an effort to use the insights generated to produce marketing communications likely to speak to a given audience.

Our next contribution to this issue is another prime example of 'gap-spotting' inasmuch as it argues that the literature is characterised by conceptual confusion and

thus further research is appropriate. Sharma and Chan use this strategy in relation to a highly contemporary topic and one that is of relevance for marketing managers worldwide. Increasingly, they assert, counterfeit products make up a substantial share of sales in many markets across the globe, especially in Asia. The problem with our existing knowledge of this topic, however, is that the theoretical literature is highly fragmented, with no definition of 'counterfeiting proneness' shared by the multiple academic constituencies that have touched upon this domain. After a comprehensive review of the literature, the authors develop a scale that is able to measure and identify the individuals most likely to be willing to engage in counterfeit product consumption. What is insightful about their paper – above and beyond the literature survey and scale development – are the managerial implications provided. Much like Monieson (1975), they realise that marketers have a responsibility for encouraging materialist views among those exposed to their communications, especially in nations where consumers are unable as yet to purchase the highly desirable luxury commodities that are widely advertised. In a turn that places the onus on marketers to help consumers in such nations satisfy their consumption desires, Sharma and Chan state:

> . . . companies suffering from the problem of counterfeiting of their luxury brands should spend more effort on educating these consumers about the negative effects and risks of buying counterfeit products. *Moreover, these companies could open more factory-second outlets in lower-income markets to enable those consumers to buy their brands at a lower price that they can afford.* [Emphases added]

In our final contribution, O'Cass and Voola provide a theoretically adept extension of the existing political marketing literature. They draw upon a wide range of what we can call 'traditional' marketing ideas like the resource-based view of the firm, market-sensing tactics, and brand management. These are used to illustrate the importance of political parties thinking through their election policies and electoral management practices along the lines of contemporary marketing thought. These ideas, they assert, offer the political community a means to develop long-term competitive strategies that identify and engage with latent and extant political needs, wants, and desires among the electorate, ultimately in the interest of maximising votes and winning power for the party concerned.

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