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My Reflections on Publishing in *Journal of Marketing*

My term as the Editor in Chief (EIC) of *Journal of Marketing* (*JM*) has thus far been highly rewarding. The full gamut of papers I have processed assures me that *JM* continues to attract the best and brightest research studies. The strides *JM* has been making are impressive: the 2014 InCites Journal Citation Reports rank *JM* as the top journal in marketing, with a total citation count of 14,741 and a journal impact factor of 3.938. This coveted position places the journal in good stead. In this regard, I thank the authors, the previous EICs, the area editors (AEs), the editorial review board (ERB) members, and the ad hoc reviewers for contributing to *JM*'s success. Furthermore, I am of the opinion that the sheer variety of high-quality articles and their contributions have added much prestige to *JM*. I am confident that this trend is only going to continue and will take *JM* to greater heights. In this regard, serving as EIC for *JM* is an honor and privilege that I truly cherish.

As with previous EICs, I am frequently asked two key questions by members of the research community at various conferences and symposia: (1) What type of articles does *JM* publish? and (2) Why do articles get rejected? I take this opportunity to answer these questions and provide my thoughts on publishing in *JM*. Then, I reflect on how a review team should evaluate a manuscript.

I answer the first question by discussing the type and nature of articles that *JM* publishes. Specifically, I present the popular domains of study and the classification of articles published in *JM* and note a few of my observations regarding these subjects, including the balance between rigor and relevance in research. I answer the second question by providing an overview of the review process and highlighting the reasons for rejection. In addition, I also bring to attention some pointers that will be helpful to researchers in navigating the review process. I conclude this editorial by providing a few actionable items that will be helpful to authors in developing significant and relevant articles that will be of greater appeal to the review team at *JM*.

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What Type of Articles Does *JM* Publish?

The short answer to this question is that *JM* articles should have actionable managerial implications. Irrespective of the focal area of the article or the type of methodology used, articles published in *JM* typically are rigorous and have meaningful, generalizable, and managerially relevant implications. To further elaborate on this answer, I delve into the following three perspectives: (1) the domains of knowledge, (2) the classification of articles in terms of study focus, and (3) the critical nature of rigorous and relevant research. These three aspects, in my opinion, provide a succinct understanding of this frequently asked question.

Domains of Knowledge

With regard to the domains of knowledge, all articles published in *JM* can be broadly classified into marketing management and strategy (MM&S) or consumer behavior (CB). For the years 2013–2015, a total of 132 articles were published in *JM*. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the domains and the year-wise publication record.

As Table 1 shows, there is a 60–40 split between the MM&S and CB domains in terms of articles published in *JM* in the last three years. This assortment of articles was processed by a healthy mix of AEs, ERB members, and ad hoc reviewers from both the MM&S and the CB domains, which should indicate that *JM* is open to all research domains. Furthermore, in recognition of the American Marketing Association policy that an article offering primarily modeling contributions cannot be published in *JM*, the journal is broad based. For articles in the MM&S domain, *JM* is usually the first journal where authors submit (and publish) their research. However, for articles with a CB focus, authors often submit articles to *JM* that were rejected by other journals. Furthermore, *JM* reviewers who already evaluated articles and rejected them when they were submitted to other journals (e.g., *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Marketing Research*) often have reservations about reviewing them again. This creates unique challenges in the review process and in manuscript processing. Despite this issue, the fact that nearly 40% of the articles published in *JM* are in the CB domain speaks only toward the exceptional quality of the authors and the cooperation of the review team. However, the challenge that *JM* faces going forward is to become the journal of choice for articles from all domains, and not just the MM&S domain.

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TABLE 1
Domain-Specific Publications in *JM* Between 2013 and 2015 (18 Issues)

Year	MM&S Domain		CB Domain		Total Articles
	Number of Articles	% of Total	Number of Articles	% of Total	
2013	26	54%	22	46%	48
2014	32	67%	16	33%	48
2015	22	61%	14	39%	36
2013–2015	80	61%	52	39%	132

Classification of Articles

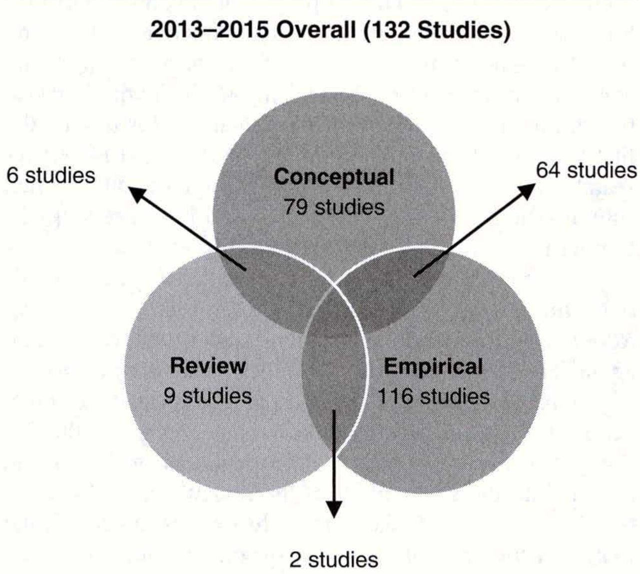
Figure 1 illustrates the classification of articles based on conceptual, empirical, and review foci. As Figure 1 shows, the articles may have overlapping foci. Typically, articles concentrate on two of the three foci. Expectedly, conceptual and empirical articles form the majority of the articles from 2013 through 2015. Figure 2 provides a breakdown of the classification of articles across the three years.

In terms of overall numbers, the journal has received nearly 1,650 submissions (an average of 550 submissions per year) between 2013 and 2015. Of these, nearly 65% (or approximately 1,075) of the submissions went through the review process, with the remaining submissions being desk rejected. Of the articles that were reviewed, nearly 12%, or 132 articles, were published. This translates to an overall article acceptance rate of 8%.

Rigor Versus Relevance

This issue has surfaced in several scholarly discussions over the past few years and attains prominence especially during efforts to bridge the academic–practitioner divide. When scholars try to understand this dichotomy, the debate quickly reaches a point of determining the trade-off between rigor and relevance. In other words, the thought process of "Does having more of one mean less of another?" emerges. There is also belief among scholars that marketing journals' tendency to lean toward rigor is a cause for this situation (Ellison 2002; Lehmann, McAlister, and Staelin 2011). I believe that the marketing community will be better served if we adopt a rigor *and* relevance approach as opposed to a rigor *versus* relevance approach.

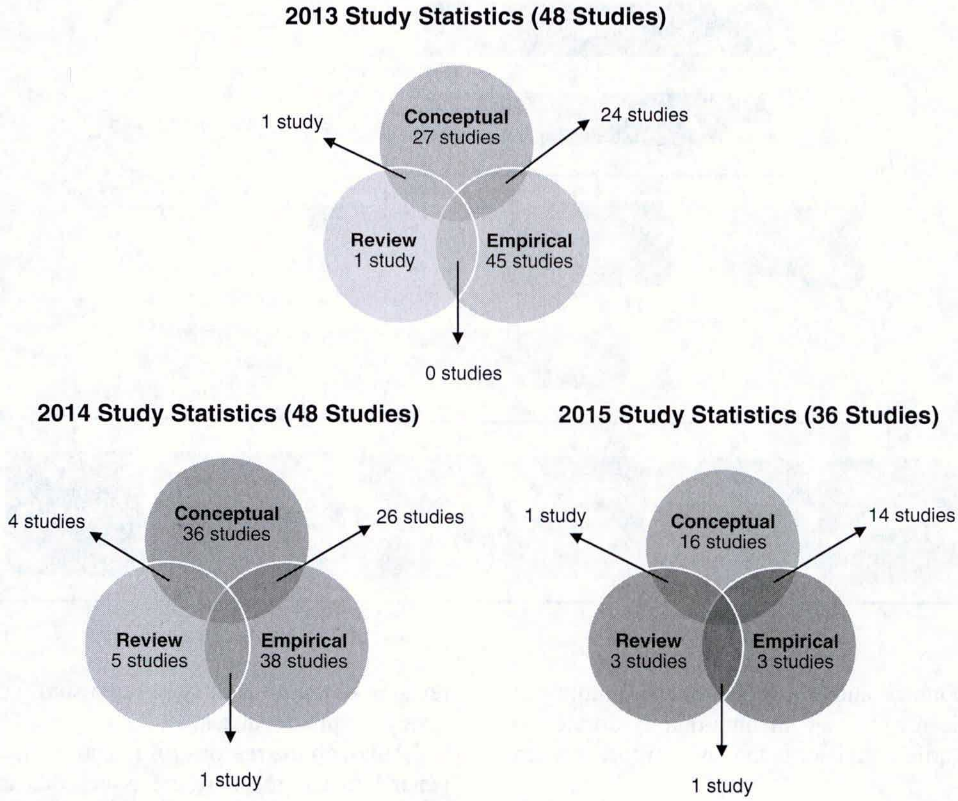
FIGURE 1
Classification of Articles (2013–2015)



So, how can we achieve rigor and relevance in research? I offer a few pointers here that I hope will provide direction in achieving this goal. First, we need to identify the sources of rigor. Although many in the academic community area are aware of (and even focus too much on) empirical rigor, theoretical and analytical rigor also exist and are often ignored. Rigor thus should not be limited to study methodologies but should also be applied to articles' conceptual and analytical frameworks. Authors can incorporate rigor into articles by (1) reviewing published articles in scholarly journals such as *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, and *Marketing Science*; (2) introducing concepts from other disciplines such as economics, statistics, and psychology; and (3) interacting with peers in academia. Furthermore, reviewers cite "insufficient rigor" as a reason for rejecting articles during the review process. However, reviewers must also specify from which applicable areas of the article the rigor (empirical, conceptual, or analytical research) is missing. To do so, instead of rejecting an article on the grounds of insufficient rigor (as a blanket condition), reviewers can (1) evaluate whether the article is rigorous in all applicable areas of contribution and (2) indicate how the authors could be more rigorous and how this would improve the study of interest and the findings (for more discussion, see Ellison 2002).

Second, ensuring relevance assists in making the research more accessible to the practitioner community. Establishing relevance in articles begins with solving a problem of potential managerial interest. Authors can identify such problems by interacting with practitioners and decision makers. A notable benefit of this approach is the possibility of getting data from the firm itself. Field experiments and pilot studies are often a good way to showcase managerial potential and to enthuse managers. Implementing the research in an organization goes even further in demonstrating the validity and applicability of the proposed solution. Essentially, when research articles comprehensively answer the question "What's in it for me?" (as viewed from the

FIGURE 2
Year-Wise Classification of Articles



practitioners' perspective), they address the relevance issue and should secure the attention of the practitioner audience. From a reviewer perspective, one way to elicit relevance from articles would be to pose the question "Yeah ... so what?" Such a line of questioning would ensure that managerially relevant issues come to the forefront and receive sufficient coverage.

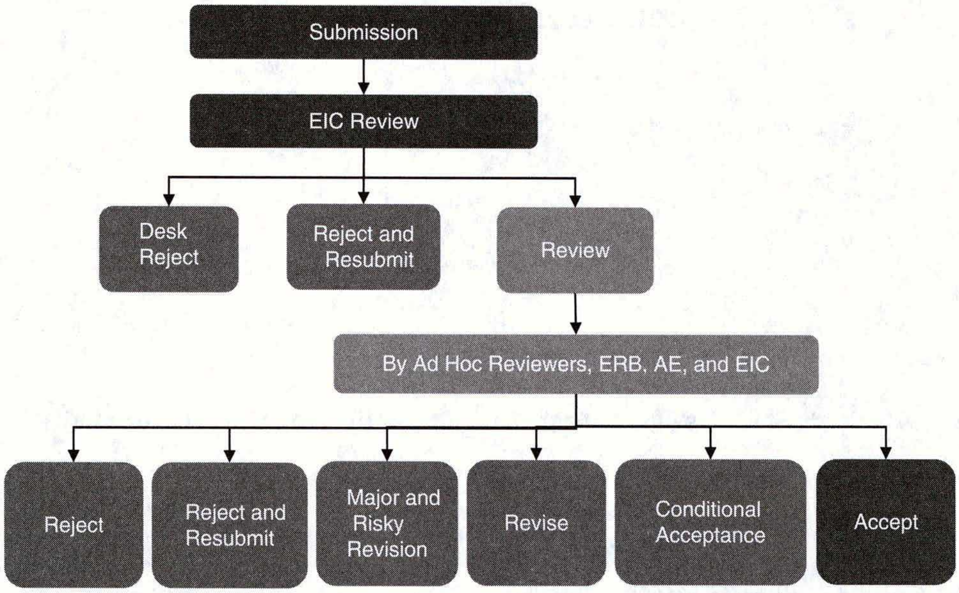
Why Do Articles Get Rejected from *JM*?

To provide a better exposition of the reasons for rejection, let us consider the review process at *JM*, as illustrated in Figure 3. At the desk-reject stage, articles are rejected for several reasons, foremost being the lack of generalizability. This applies to a large number of desk-rejected articles. When authors submit articles that focus on a very specific topic that applies to a particular industry in a specific market, the study does very little to advance the literature. An (extreme) example of this would be a study titled "Understanding Company ABC's Mobile Telephony Market Potential in Country X for the Millennials Segment." The issue with such an article is that we would be able to understand only Company ABC's market potential in Country X with respect to a particular product as it applies to a particular demographic. The insights from such a study cannot be used to understand either mobile telephone usage for various consumer segments in Country X for Company ABC or all of Country X's mobile telephony market potential for other firms in the country. Such a niche study approach curtails rather than enhances its chances of publication.

This is not to say that studies focusing on country or market potential are not welcome in *JM*. If these studies also generate a theory and a formal study structure, they stand a better chance in the review process. In the aforementioned example study, the authors should have created a general theory to shed light on the mobile telephony market potential both in Country X's geographic region and for a growing relevant consumer segment. If the study had used Country X and its millenials segment to demonstrate the usefulness of the proposed theory, it would have attempted to offer a substantive contribution. Furthermore, such a study would provide an opportunity for other studies to use/extend the proposed framework to examine other markets and demographics in neighboring regions. As a result, this study would have inspired a stream of studies in a particular area. This is the type of article I want to nurture in *JM*.

The journal also recommends a "reject and resubmit" for some studies even at the desk-rejection stage. This happens when studies show potential to be considered for publication but require substantial reworking to get to that level. Reviewers may make such a recommendation if a study shows promise for (1) the generation of new theory, (2) the generalization of new results, and/or (3) the ability to open new lines of research. The reject and resubmit initiative is

FIGURE 3
Review Process at *JM*



undertaken to encourage authors to continue submitting to *JM* and to provide reviewers with high-quality articles to review, should the article advance to the review process when it is resubmitted.

Once an article goes through the review process, a rejection may come in either of two forms: "reject" or "reject and resubmit." In the case of a reject decision, the reasons typically include one or more of the following: (1) lack of a theoretical approach, or an ineffectively argued theoretical basis; (2) conceptual issues arising from the study approach; (3) insufficient coverage of the literature; (4) methodological issues that diminish the study's rigor; (5) definition of a construct that does not match the equation for that construct; (6) contributions that are not significant enough to warrant publication in *JM*; (7) minimal incremental contribution to the literature; (8) absence of or insufficient managerial implications; (9) lack of relevance of the focal variable to real-life applications; and (10) proposed hypotheses that suffer from improper theoretical grounding. Typically, the decision letters sent out following the review process capture the review team's response in great detail and clearly state the case for rejection and possible ways to address the article's problematic issues, if the authors wish to rework them.

With respect to the "reject and resubmit" decision, the reasons for rejection are essentially the same as for the "reject" decision. However, the difference is that the former includes an invitation to the authors to resubmit the article after fixing the issues highlighted by the review team. In effect, such decisions are made when the promise an article shows outweighs its problems. Here, too, the directions by the review team are precise to aid authors in their resubmission. The idea is that the author(s) can revisit the rejected article and eventually create a new manuscript (and not a revision of the previously rejected study) on the basis of the review team's feedback.

Although the reasons for rejection discussed thus far are general in nature, there are issues that are specific to the domain areas and the areas of classification. Next, I provide the major issues that fall into these categories. For articles in the MM&S and CB domains, some of the major issues include (1) lack of theoretical explanation; (2) absence of a strong conceptual framework; (3) use of only a student sample; (4) failure to establish external validity, especially when using data from sources such as Amazon Mechanical Turk; (5) manipulating only a few constructs while ignoring other relevant constructs, thus generating confounded results; (6) failure to account for statistical significance; (7) little attention to the use and implementation of the findings; and (8) lack of insights.

With respect to conceptual, empirical, and review articles, some of the major issues include (1) lack of novelty in conceptualization; (2) improperly or inadequately defined constructs; (3) lack of a theoretical rationale; (4) insufficient coverage of prior literature; (5) lack of an integrative framework for the study; (6) lack of empirical rigor; and (7) lack of relevance to real-world applications. Although the existence of the aforementioned issues mentioned does not automatically indicate a rejection, reviewers will look into these areas during their review before recommending a decision. Therefore, authors should evaluate their study with these issues in mind before submitting their article.

Evaluation of Manuscripts

In this editorial, I have presented my thoughts and observations on publishing in *JM*. Next, I offer a few general and specific pointers to the AEs, the ERB members, the ad hoc reviewers, and the authors on making the review process at *JM* a more fruitful venture.

General Message to the AEs, the ERB, and the Ad Hoc Reviewers

The reviewers (both ERB and ad hoc reviewers) and the AEs of *JM* are adept at providing insightful comments for the submissions. They have performed a commendable job thus far, and I am positive they will continue to do so. The opportunity to be involved in the *JM* review system (as AEs or reviewers) is an earned privilege in recognition of a scholar's reputation. Therefore, it is imperative that the AEs and the reviewers honor their commitment to serving *JM*. In this regard, I place before them three requests that I think are important in the smooth functioning of *JM*. First, the goal of the review process is to provide authors with an objective review. In other words, emotions should not find a place in this process. Situations may arise in which I may have to overrule reviewer recommendations. Although I do recognize the hard work my colleagues have expended in providing the review, my act of overruling their recommendation should be considered from various aspects, which include (but are not limited to) manuscript contribution potential, rigor and relevance, and journal production schedules. In this regard, an emotional appeal from the AEs/reviewers regarding my action is only going to prolong the review and publication process.

Second, I am particularly concerned about the steady increase in time that reviewers have been taking during the review process. Although the longer duration to review may be justified in some cases, this cannot become a standard practice. Indeed, in some cases, there have been reviewers who, by holding out on a review, have caused delays in journal production. In such cases, I have to bypass that reviewer and make decisions in a timely manner. In effect, it is important that articles not spend more time in the review process than necessary. This holds both for articles that are not a good fit for *JM* and for articles that align with *JM*'s editorial objectives.

Finally, declining to review revised manuscripts is not in congruence with the American Marketing Association's policy for *JM* to advance the science and practice of marketing. All submissions (original or revised) should have a fair chance in the review process. Because reviewers have declined to review revised manuscripts in the past, I am sensitive to this issue and would like all submissions to be evaluated on their merit for possible publication in *JM*. Furthermore, declining to review is unfair not only to the authors who contribute to the journal but also to the journal itself.

Message to the AEs

With the best interests of the journal in mind and with the aim of advancing the field of marketing, I am requesting support from the AEs in the following two areas. First, when compiling the AE report, I ask AEs not merely to summarize the reviewers' comments but rather to focus on synthesizing them, adding their own unique insights, and providing guidance to improve the contribution. This is in the interest of articles' impactfulness and value and provides the authors a clear and precise evaluation by a scholar (the AE) in the focal area of contribution.

Second, I am requesting that the AEs refrain from offering their own disposition or the reviewers' disposition (accept/revise/reject) toward the article in the AE report. In other words, I would like the AEs to focus on what needs to be done to improve the contribution or what needs to be fixed/enhanced in the article. When AEs provide a detailed analysis of the reviews of the submitted articles, it will help me, as the EIC, to make a more informed decision regarding the article(s) under evaluation.

Message to the Review Team

My request to the ERB is twofold. First, with respect to the reviewer comments, it is important to arrive at the decision after carefully considering all the comments related to the manuscript. More than 97% of reviewers' recommendations are "reject." Although this may be for a valid reason, I observe that in some cases, the issues referenced in the reviewers' comments can be fixed quickly, yet the article is recommended for rejection. In effect, the ideal article does not exist. The review process should direct authors in developing an article that makes a significant contribution while ensuring rigor and relevance.

Second, the nature of the reviews has also been quite critical. If the reviewers (who may also be authors of manuscripts submitted to *JM*) would not appreciate receiving harsh criticism on their submissions, they should understand the importance of providing noncritical, yet precise reviews. In this peer-review process, constructive criticism goes a long way in fostering research productivity and helping authors produce meaningful research, which ultimately improves the discipline as a whole. As the EIC, I recognize that all feedback/input from the review team is advisory in nature. If I occasionally disagree with the review team's decision on a submission, it is only in the interest of maintaining both the absolute and relative quality of the accepted articles and the journal publication deadlines. I assure reviewers that the sanctity of the review team's comments will be preserved as the authors revise a manuscript.

It will be of benefit to *JM* if the review team looks at each manuscript with a mind-set of what is good in the manuscript as opposed to what are the flaws. Because this mind-set produces different types of reviews, I am requesting that the review team take the "what is good and what can be done to improve" approach, to ensure that the reviews will be constructive. The manuscript may be rejected eventually at *JM* due to a lack of significant contribution, but we strive for a positive atmosphere in the review process. Of course, if there are flaws, they must be pointed out, but let the review be a balanced one.

Message to the Authors

Getting an article published is not an easy task, especially in a premier journal such as *JM*. However, the highest of publishing standards that *JM* sets forth make the trials and tribulations worth the effort. In conclusion, I would like to leave you with an observation that I have made during my academic research and publishing career: there is no "final draft," only a "penultimate draft." Research articles always have a scope for improvement, and the more they are read and reviewed, the better they can get. The points highlighted in this editorial are intended to inform authors on how to navigate the review process. Authors must be open to review and reassessment, as this is designed only to make the contribution more valuable.

Actionable Items for Authors

Thus far, I have focused on the reasons for rejecting an article and the overall functioning of the review process. This leaves authors with the following question: What type of article does *JM* publish? I conclude the editorial by providing the answer, which authors can use to develop articles that will interest the *JM* review team. My response is structured as follows: (1) types of articles that are of interest to *JM* review team, (2) suggested aims for articles published in *JM*, and (3) the general approach in the acceptance criteria for *JM*.

First, *JM* is positioned as the premier broad-based scholarly journal in the marketing discipline that focuses on substantive issues in marketing and marketing management. To complement such a positioning, the target audience for *JM* articles is "thoughtful" marketing academicians and practitioners. Such an audience would include any academician or practitioner who is interested and knowledgeable about the state of the art of the topic areas covered in *JM*. In light of this positioning and target audience, articles that typically interest *JM* review team contain (1) actionable implications that would capture the attention of the practitioner community; (2) a study approach that involves all applicable forms of rigor (empirical, conceptual, and analytical); (3) conceptual/substantive insights and findings that will lead to an incremental addition to the existing knowledge base; (4) a sound theoretical basis and managerial relevance; and (5) any new investigation that would further the marketing discipline.

Second, articles published in *JM* typically address (1) problems or issues deemed significant by *JM*'s constituencies (e.g., business executives); (2) neglected areas of marketing; and (3) important forces, events, and trends that affect the present and future of marketing. In addition, articles published in *JM* typically consist of (1) critical syntheses and reviews of relevant areas within marketing and (2) critical reexaminations of existing concepts and substantive issues in marketing. Furthermore, articles published in *JM* typically present (1) generalizable empirical findings; (2) insights into emerging and evolving concepts in marketing; (3) opportunities for further research that alter the nature and scope of marketing's foundation; and (4) adapted/updated concepts from allied disciplines as they pertain to the marketing discipline.

Finally, as the article goes through the review process, the acceptance criteria broadly involve four questions. First, reviewers must answer the question "Is the article interesting?" This involves evaluating the novelty of the topic and whether it is nonobvious enough to generate interest. Furthermore, reviewers must determine whether the article brings about a change in thinking/action from the perspectives of study approach and managerial implementation. If the article is interesting, reviewers ask, "Is this study also valid?" This involves evaluating the nature of the rigor involved in the article. In effect, the article should be rigorous in all applicable areas of investigation (conceptual, empirical, and analytical). If reviewers find the article to be interesting and valid, they raise the question "Does this article also have broad appeal?" This involves identifying whether the article will be of interest to one or many reader communities such as scholars, managers, policy makers, and decision makers, among others. If the reviewers find the article to be interesting, valid, and broadly appealing, they must answer the question "Is this article also practical?" This involves providing actionable implications that will be of use to practitioners/managers. If all the questions raised here are answered in the affirmative, the article will stand a good chance of getting published in *JM*.

In summary, every article, across all study domains and types of study, possesses unique strengths and challenges. The review process is designed to cull out the best of the contributions in each submission and provide directions to authors on ways to improve the article. In this regard, I am looking forward to hearing from more scholars in our field who will agree to review for *JM*. In this editorial, I have provided some information on the causes of rejection in the review process and the type of contributions that *JM* is interested in publishing. I hope this piece will serve as a guideline for further research and will take *JM* and the marketing discipline to even greater heights.

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