

In search of meaning that matters

AUTHOR:

Ekant Veer, Department of Management, Marketing, and Entrepreneurship, University of Canterbury

A number of issues face academia that many of us struggle with on a daily basis. One issue in particular that faces research based journals is the notion of relevancy and impact. Many of the authors who publish in the JRC are under pressure to publish in the 'right' journals and demonstrate 'impact'. However, what constitutes these two concepts is not always clear – they're subjective terms whose criteria change almost every year. As an editor, it leaves me with a difficult task as I try to navigate the Journal of Research for Consumers in a direction that will benefit all stakeholders. Rather than 'play the game' and artificially exaggerate citations and third party verified impact factors, I feel that focusing on publishing relevant research that can have a direct impact on consumers' lives is a way forward that would have more integrity and longevity; but equally, it may take longer to see tangible results. Focusing on relevancy and consumers' needs is also very much in line with the ethos of the journal when it was founded and is still at the heart of what I would like to see from the journal.

After a year at the helm, I feel I am able to exchange some of the experiences I have gained, so as to aid potential authors considering a submission to JRC. This in no way mandates what *must* be submitted, but rather some guidelines that offer authors a greater clarity regarding the type of work that is most appropriate and has the highest chance of publication. Rather than focus on specific contexts, I see the broad areas that potential authors should focus on before submission is to ensure that your research has *Meaning* and that your research *Matters*. I expand my thinking below.

Does your research have meaning?

First, and foremost, research published in the JRC should offer some insight regarding *meaning*. In this sense, we are looking for research that explicates not just what is happening, but *why* something may be happening. We are not only looking for a description of behaviour or behaviours, but some explanation as to the meaning that drives behaviour or behaviours. Many potential authors have submitted work that is carried out in an admirable manner, but focuses so heavily on what has happened, that there is little to no scope to understand why the behaviour occurred or, if possible, what may occur in the future.

Understanding motivations and underlying drivers of behaviour is at the heart of developing meaning, regardless of the methodological perspective of the researcher. Too many manuscripts are submitted that do not add to our understanding of consumption practices, behaviour, social realities or relationships. Too many authors assume that carrying out a rigorous piece of work is sufficient to garner impact – unfortunately, in my mind, this is not the case. As editor, I'll be taking a much stronger stance on whether a piece of work reaches my reviewers (whom I value, greatly). This may mean more desk rejected manuscripts, but it also means that reviewers are not asked to evaluate pieces of work that may be conducted in a fine manner, but lack any meaning or development of our extant knowledge.

In order to develop meaning, I encourage authors to continually ask themselves *why* they have found the results they have – *why* do consumers respond the way they do – *why* do marketers need to pay attention to this work – *why* is it that we are now better informed about how consumers behave. Continuously asking *why*, especially in the discussion of the manuscript, makes it clearer that not only has an interesting behaviour been documented, but that the behaviour can be explained.

Does your research matter?

Secondly, research published in the JRC should offer results that *matter*. This harkens back to the ethos of the journal, that it is a journal that is *for* consumers and *for* the improvement

of their welfare. As such, research should make some contribution both to the academic knowledge *and* the consumer population who would benefit from the results. I know some authors find writing the consumer articles at JRC somewhat tiresome, but the reality is that unless we are able to frame our work in a manner that is both financially available, through continuing open access dissemination, and linguistically accessible to those who could benefit from the research, we are not able to fulfil JRC's commitment of being *for* consumers. JRC is a 'green' open access journal, which means we do not charge to submit to the journal nor charge readers to access published articles. We make no money from the publications. However, being freely available does not mean the knowledge contained within the journal is accessible. Accessibility is more than monetary cost, but also how easy it is to understand the research. The consumer articles, as one may expect, continue to be accessed far more than the academic articles, as they are accessible to a far wider population and not just the marketing academics or researchers who enjoy the full academic papers. Making knowledge affordable and accessible will always be a key motivator for the journal under my guidance.

However, whether a piece of research *matters* may be a source of contention; after all, every piece of research I carry out matters to me – why else would I do the research? One way that we can all improve our understanding of whether a piece of work matters or not, is by ensuring the research questions are 'interesting' or not. Voss (2003) describes how to write interesting research questions while equally describing what is not considered interesting and, in all probability, unlikely to be published in or cited by top marketing journals. If we concern ourselves solely with incremental additions to current knowledge, we are unlikely to produce work that's interesting and subsequently, unlikely to produce work that matters. The nudge-nudge model of research publication where tiny increments of knowledge are added to existing concepts is unlikely to draw a wide amount of attention from other academics and certainly won't receive praise from the consumer readers. Applying an existing framework or concept to a new context with no theoretical development is not to be considered as an advancement of the field, even if applied well.

It would naïve of me to demand all submissions to JRC contain some level of radicalism that fundamentally shifts the boundaries of our field (although, feel free to submit these papers, too!). Where we can work together to further the course of the journal is to look to move away from the model that a rigorous methodology that only yields an incremental increases in knowledge is sufficient, which some outlets seem to favour. In order to do this, I will likely be more forthright in my feedback to authors, especially at the submission stage. I see little reason sending a paper out to review when it contains little explication of meaning behind a behaviour or does not matter to consumers – these articles do not advance the field.

Finally, in searching for meaning that matters, we should concern ourselves more with discussing the hard topics that perhaps are not easily researched. Sometimes, my best engagements with researchers and consumers alike do not come from reading journal articles or interview transcripts, but simply chatting with people and asking them what they think. ‘Think Pieces’ are very much welcome in the JRC if they are able to show some clarity of thought regarding a topic or context that is of fundamental importance to consumers. What is it that consumers care about and why do they care about it? How can we learn more about these consumers that we engage with? What uses of technology exist that enable us to know more about their lives and their motivations? What is it that will be driving consumer choices in 2020? I want to know what you think. If you are able to express what you think about an important aspect of consumer life and welfare in a manner that is erudite, justified, and well-reasoned, I have no doubt it has a place in a future issue. After all, if we are to know what things mean and what matters, perhaps we need to begin by questioning what we know in a more open forum that allows greater expansion of the field.

Reference

Voss, G. B. (2003). Formulating Interesting Research Questions. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 31 (3), 356-359.