A Closer Look at Manuscript Reviewing in Marketing

Sharon E. Beatty, Soumava Bandyopadhyay, Myung-Su Chae, and Pola S. Tarasingh

This article examines the manuscript review process in marketing. For both empirical and nonempirical manuscripts, significance of contribution and conceptual rigor were found to be the most important criteria in the reviewing process. The most critical characteristic of a reviewer is the ability to recognize a manuscript's potential and suggest ways to maximize its contribution.

Marketing academicians and business schools are under attack from various fronts about the relevance of their published research (see AMA Task Force 1988; Porter and McKibron 1988), and scholars are being asked to account for the productivity of the dollars invested in research activity. At the center of this activity is the manuscript review process. Most marketing academicians' careers are influenced substantially by the quality of the journals in which they publish, as well as by the quality and quantity of manuscripts published. Academicians also frequently are called upon to act as manuscript reviewers. In light of the importance of these activities, the review process has received surprisingly little study.

The objective of this article is to examine several issues related to the review process that have not been empirically addressed in marketing research. These questions focus on reviewers' activities and on the criteria they use for publication decisions. Treatment of these topics in previous research efforts in related fields will be reviewed first. This study should provide some useful insights for authors, reviewers, and journal editors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brackbill and Korten (1970) compiled a list of 22 suggestions for revising the review process of the American Psychological Association and obtained comparative ratings of these items from a sample of psychologists. They concluded that: (1) publication criteria should emphasize more strongly the total significance of an article, rather than simply its technical soundness; (2) reviewers should be required to be familiar with articles or other materials cited as important background material in the manuscript being reviewed; (3) editors should develop a manual of procedures and evaluation criteria for reviewers; (4) reviewers should be rotated off the board of a journal every three or four years; and (5) reviewers should be asked to disqualify themselves if their own theoretical or methodological position is opposed to the position represented in the manuscript.

Kerr, Tbliver, and Petree (1977), in a survey of editors and advisory board members of 19 leading management and social science journals, found three characteristics of manuscripts that increased their likelihood of acceptance: (1) a strong author reputation, (2) a successful test of the author's own new theory, and (3) content

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different from that traditionally published by the journal. On the other hand, characteristics that impede publication were (1) statistically insignificant results; (2) mere replication of previous studies, (3) lack of new data, (4) topics highly represented in recent issues of the journal, (5) topics too far outside the discipline’s mainstream, and (6) previous presentation at professional association meetings and publication in proceedings.

Armstrong (1982) emphasized two criteria that should distinguish scientific papers from other nonfiction work—objectivity and replicability. He stressed importance, competence, intelligibility, and efficiency in nonfiction publication and made suggestions for improving the publication process, such as (1) structured guidelines for reviewers, (2) a blind review process, and (3) a full disclosure of research data and method.

Jauch and Wall (1989) surveyed the reviewers for the Academy of Management Journal (AMJ) and the Academy of Management Review (AMR). They found that the practices of individuals reviewing empirical manuscripts for the AMJ varied little from the practices of those reviewing nonempirical pieces for the AMR. Through factor analysis, three dimensions related to differences in reviewing practices were identified—thoroughness, guidance, and substance. Thoroughness reflects reviewers’ knowledge of the subject matter involved; guidance is the degree to which reviewers provide specific written comments about how to improve a manuscript; and substance relates to the specificity of comments and explanations about flaws in a manuscript.

Beyer (1978), studying the reviewing practices in scientific journals, ascertained the importance of 10 criteria across reviewers in four fields. The criteria included originality, logical rigor, math/statistical rigor, clarity and conciseness of writing style, theoretical significance, positive findings, relevance to current areas of research, replicability, coverage of literature, and applicability to practical or applied problems. Sociologists and political scientists (from the two social sciences studied) gave the highest ratings to logical rigor. Three criteria tied for second place in each of these two fields, two of which were the same for both: clarity and conciseness of writing style and theoretical significance. Sociologists also awarded high scores to originality, while political scientists gave high scores to math/statistical rigor. On the other hand, physicists ranked originality first and relevance to current areas of research and clarity and conciseness of writing style in a tie for second, while chemists ranked replicability first, logical rigor second, and coverage of the literature third. Armstrong (1982) bemoaned the universally low rank given to applicability to practical or applied problems, which he called importance. This criterion was ranked last by three groups and eighth by political scientists.

Sherrell, Hair, and Griffin (1989), in a study on marketing academicians’ perceptions of ethical practices in publishing, asked AMA members to rate questionable behaviors in terms of their ethicalness. They identified widely-agreed upon unethical practices (1) by authors, such as reciprocal authorships and multiple submissions of the same or similar manuscripts; (2) by editors, such as displaying favoritism and selecting reviewers to produce a particular desired outcome; and (3) by reviewers, such as stealing the ideas of manuscripts they reject or having graduate students do the reviews.

Although their means were on the unethical side, two reviewer practices were not viewed as unethical by all respondents, suggesting the need for common norms across reviewers. (The study used a rating scale of 1 = Unethical to 7 = Ethical.) The first practice involves a reviewer for a journal with a blind review policy who personally knows and can identify the author from references, topic, etc., yet reviews the manuscript (mean = 2.91; s.d. = 1.71). The second involves a reviewer who agrees to review for one journal a manuscript that he or she has already reviewed and rejected for another (mean = 3.33; s.d. = 2.00). The authors argued that a formal code with regard to publication practices is needed.

Thus, previous research efforts in related fields, although not providing uniform results, indicate the importance of the following issues:

1) A key criterion for manuscript acceptance is contribution to the discipline, but in many cases reviewers judge technical proficiency, rigor, or originality as more important.

2) Strict standards and guidelines for editors, reviewers, and authors are necessary to
maintain integrity and professionalism in the publishing process (although there is no uniform agreement on what these standards should be).

3) Reviewing practices do not appear to vary with regard to empirical/nonempirical reviewing but do vary on several dimensions (i.e., thoroughness, guidance, and substance), suggesting that different reviewers may view their roles and the importance of review criteria in the reviewing process differently.

Thus, our study objectives include (1) a description of reviewing practices in marketing; (2) an evaluation of the importance of criteria for the manuscript review process in marketing, for both empirical and nonempirical manuscript reviews; and (3) an assessment of the most critical and desirable characteristics of a reviewer.

METHODOLOGY

Procedure

For this study the full editorial review boards of six marketing journals were surveyed: the Journal of Marketing (JM), the Journal of Marketing Research (JMR), the Journal of Consumer Research (JCR), the Journal of Retailing (JR), the Journal of Business Research (JBR), and the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (JAMS). These journals were chosen because they publish mainstream manuscripts in marketing, are aimed primarily at academicians, and involve a double blind review process. Selection of these journals was based on a comparison of several available sources in which marketing-related journals were ranked (see Coe and Weinstock 1983; Fry, Walters, and Scheuermann 1985). (The Journal of Business Research was considered by Clark and Geisler [1986] to be one of the 10 journals that were of high perceived importance to the marketing field. An examination of the past three years of publications in that journal revealed that 71% of the articles were marketing related. Marketing Science was not included because it does not involve a blind review process.)

Initially, topic areas were developed based on a literature review and discussions among the authors and local colleagues. Then in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 highly qualified reviewers to solidify issues and questions, centering on the areas identified above.

To develop a reasonable set of evaluative criteria for a manuscript, the actual criteria listed on the review forms for the six journals were gathered. These criteria and their usage levels are presented in Table 1.

The terms shown in Table 1 were those terms that seem to best represent the meanings across the journals. For example, Conceptual Rigor was used when, in fact, the JM used “quality of conceptual evidence presented;” the JMR, “conceptual or theoretical framework;” the JCR, “conceptual rigor;” the JR, “theoretical framework;” and the JAMS, “quality of conceptual evidence presented.”

The most frequently used factors were selected for the study. All selected factors were used by at least three journals, except for Readability, which was included because it was identified as an important criterion in the in-depth interviews. Two items, Methodological Rigor and Adequacy of Data Analysis, are applicable only for empirical pieces, while the other seven items are applicable for both manuscript types.

Next, an initial questionnaire was pre-tested with 12 reviewers, similar to the final respondents. After responding by telephone, these individuals critiqued the questionnaire. Their comments were used to produce the final version.

The structured self-administered questionnaire was mailed to individuals who were members of at least one of the six review boards at the time of the study and had not partaken in an earlier stage of the research. Thus, the survey frame was a census of review board members of the six journals (n = 276). (In the case of the JBR, only reviewers in the buyer behavior and marketing sections were included.) Reminder letters were mailed three weeks after the original mailing.

Questionnaire

In the first section, respondents provided information regarding which journal(s) they were currently serving as review board members and/or ad hoc reviewers, their areas of specialization, and the total number of journal
TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF EVALUATIVE CRITERIA FOR EACH JOURNAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluative Criteria</th>
<th>JAMS</th>
<th>JBR</th>
<th>JCR</th>
<th>JM</th>
<th>JMR</th>
<th>JR</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant Contribution(^a)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Topic(^a)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Rigor(^a)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance to Target Audience(^a)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Rigor(^a),(^b)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequacy of Literature Review(^a)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequacy of Data Analysis(^a),(^b)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical Organization(^a)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of Objectives</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Results</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readability(^a)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length:Contribution Ratio</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment of Key Limitations/Qualifications</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical/Conceptual Evidence for Conclusion and Implications</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Items included in the current study.
\(^b\) Asked only in relation to empirical manuscripts.

manuscripts they had reviewed in the past 12 months (by journal).

In the second section, questions focused on elements of the review process. Respondents were queried on the length of time spent reviewing a typical manuscript, the average length of the comments, and other steps involved in the process.

Next, respondents rated a set of factors that might influence their acceptance of a manuscript on a 1 to 10 scale of importance. Respondents first rated the nine items for an empirically based manuscript and then the seven items for a nonempirically based manuscript (see Table 1). Respondents were asked to respond to the items with regard to the journal(s) for which they had done the most empirical/nonempirical reviews during the past 12 months.

Finally, respondents were asked to (1) outline the past actions they had taken when they received a manuscript that they had previously reviewed, (2) explain when and why they refused to review a manuscript in the past three years, and (3) rate the importance of five critical characteristics that an outstanding reviewer should have (these were derived from the exploratory interviews). Demographic characteristics were also gathered.

RESULTS

Sample Representativeness

The survey yielded 128 usable questionnaires, reflecting a response rate of 46.4%. Review board membership among the respondents was similar to the membership patterns in the actual population for the six journals (see Table 2).

A higher percentage of respondents served on two or more boards (37%) than in the actual population (24%). Thus, perhaps reviewers who were more interested or involved in reviewing were more likely to respond to the survey.
TABLE 2
REVIEW BOARD MEMBERSHIP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Memberships on Each Board</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JM</td>
<td>40 (21%)</td>
<td>79 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JMR</td>
<td>21 (11%)</td>
<td>52 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCR</td>
<td>38 (20%)</td>
<td>55 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>22 (12%)</td>
<td>41 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JBR</td>
<td>37 (20%)</td>
<td>74 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAMS</td>
<td>31 (16%)</td>
<td>60 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>189a (100%)</td>
<td>361a (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Because of multiple memberships, these numbers represent the total number of memberships, not the total number of respondents and the total number of reviewers, on the six review boards.

Respondents’ Profile

Of the respondents, 72% had majored in marketing in their doctoral work, followed by 12% in psychology, 6% in other business areas, and a final 10% in other areas combined. The “most senior” reviewer had received the terminal degree 38 years ago, while the “most junior” had graduated in the current year; the median for years since graduation was 15. More than half of the respondents were full professors (59%), while associate professors constituted 32% and assistant professors 7% of the respondents. The remaining 2% were nonacademicians. The gender breakdown was 88% male and 12% female, and 18% occupied endowed chairs or professorships.

Responses to the question, “In which areas do you typically review journal manuscripts?” were as follows: consumer behavior, 57%; marketing management or strategy, 41%; methodology, measurement, or mathematical modeling, 39%; channels or retailing, 28%; promotional strategy, 21%; marketing theory, 19%; sales management, 14%; and international marketing, 12%.

Reviewer Activities

Respondents were asked to indicate the approximate number of manuscripts they had reviewed per journal in the past twelve months. Most respondents (45%) had reviewed between 11 and 20 journal manuscripts in the previous year, while 22% reviewed 21 or more. The mean number of manuscripts reviewed was 15.4 (mode = 10, and median = 14). One respondent reported reviewing 39 manuscripts in the past year, and two others reported 38 each. These numbers obviously underrepresent total reviewing effort, since they do not include conference papers, books, or subsequent manuscript reviews.

Next, the number of reviews per journal (for the six journals of interest) were compared between editorial board members and ad hoc reviewers. As shown in Table 3, editorial review board members of all six journals reviewed a higher number of manuscripts for these journals in the previous year than did the ad hoc reviewers. (Although ad hoc reviewers were not directly sampled in this survey, many of the respondents were editorial board members on one journal and ad hoc members for other journals. Thus, although the ad hoc reviewers’ responses may not accurately represent the responses that would be obtained from the broader population of ad hoc reviewers, they still provide some interesting information.) The review board members of the JM, the JMR, and the JCR appear to have reviewed about three times as many manuscripts as either the ad hoc reviewers for these journals or the editorial board members of the other three journals.

The Review Process

Respondents also were queried regarding (1) how much time they spent on a typical manuscript review; (2) the average length of their comments; and (3) the number of times they read cited references, conducted analyses to verify the findings, or sought opinions from colleagues, doctoral students, or practitioners while reviewing a manuscript. The average time spent by a reviewer studying, analyzing, and preparing comments for a typical first-submission journal manuscript was 6.27 hours (s.d. = 3.40). The responses to this question varied widely, ranging from 1.5 to 16 hours. The mode was 4 hours (20 responses), while the median was 5.25. However, the distribution was bimodal, since 18 individuals reported that they spent 8 hours reviewing a manuscript on average. Over one-third of the sample said they spent 8 hours or more on this activity, while 40% said they spent 4 hours or less.
TABLE 3
MEAN NUMBER OF MANUSCRIPTS REVIEWED IN THE PREVIOUS YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Editorial Board Members</th>
<th>Ad Hoc Reviewers</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JM</td>
<td>8.70 (n = 40; s.d. = 3.20)</td>
<td>2.66 (n = 29; s.d. = 2.58)</td>
<td>8.67a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JMR</td>
<td>9.71 (n = 21; s.d. = 3.18)</td>
<td>2.39 (n = 27; s.d. = 1.33)</td>
<td>10.15a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCR</td>
<td>10.58 (n = 38; s.d. = 3.43)</td>
<td>2.93 (n = 27; s.d. = 1.33)</td>
<td>12.50a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>4.14 (n = 22; s.d. = 1.86)</td>
<td>.88 (n = 8; s.d. = .99)</td>
<td>6.16a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JBR</td>
<td>2.92 (n = 37; s.d. = 2.11)</td>
<td>1.50 (n = 12; s.d. = 1.00)</td>
<td>3.14a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAMS</td>
<td>3.13 (n = 32; s.d. = 1.76)</td>
<td>2.07 (n = 15; s.d. = 1.28)</td>
<td>2.33b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Significant at p ≤ .01.

The average length of reviewer comments for each manuscript reviewed was 2.58 single-spaced typed pages (s.d. = 1.08); the mode was 2 pages and the median, 2.5 pages. By multiplying the number of manuscripts reviewed by the number of hours typically spent reviewing a manuscript (per respondent), an effort variable was derived, representing total hours spent by an average reviewer (from our study) reviewing journal manuscripts for first-time submissions in the previous year. The mean effort calculated was 99.9 hours, or 8.33 hours per month.

Of the respondents, 21% did not read any of the references cited in a journal manuscript as part of the review process in the previous year, while 79% did read at least one reference. Some reviewers noted that they were already familiar with all of the references. In addition, 41% of the respondents reported conducting their own statistical analyses to verify or reaffirm the findings in a manuscript at least once in the past year. Furthermore, 75% of the respondents had sought opinions from colleagues in reference to a manuscript at least once in the past year, while 14% had sought opinions from doctoral students and 5.5% from practitioners.

Splitting the sample at the median in terms of average time spent reviewing a manuscript ("light" versus "heavy" reviewers), we found that the heavier reviewers were more likely to read references cited, talk to others about the manuscript before making final decisions, or rerun some analyses (p ≤ .05). In addition, although there were no differences in the number of manuscripts reviewed, we did find that 71% of the assistant/associate professors were in the heavy reviewer group, in contrast to 37% of the full professors (p ≤ .001). One other interesting difference was found, in the rating of one of the five critical characteristics of an outstanding reviewer: heavier reviewers rated willingness to carefully read, analyze, and make detailed comments as a more important reviewer characteristic than lighter reviewers (9.19 versus 8.81, p ≤ .07).

Another question of interest was how often and under what conditions reviewers refused to review manuscripts received; 81 respondents (63.3%) stated that they had refused to review at least one manuscript sent to them by a journal during the past three years. The most common reason for this refusal was lack of familiarity with the material (38.9% of the occurrences). Next in order of response frequencies were recognition of the author (21.6%), lack of time (18.3%), and having reviewed the same article for another journal (17.8%). These reasons were listed as options on the questionnaire; there were no consistent write-in responses.
Respondents were also asked whether they had received the same manuscript for review for different journals in the past three years; 75 respondents (58.6%) reported that this had happened to them at least once. They were also asked to indicate, from a series of choices, the action they had taken when asked to review the manuscript for the second journal. The most common response of reviewers upon receiving a manuscript for the second time was to review it again (31% of the occurrences). For almost 30% of the occurrences, however, respondents sent their previous reviews (with or without additional comments) to the second journal. Thus, in 61% of the occurrences, the same reviewer influenced the acceptance/rejection of a manuscript at two or more journals. In only 28% of the cases did a reviewer return the manuscript reviewed; consulting the editor was the least frequently chosen action (11%).

Criteria Priorities

Order Effects. For importance ratings of factors for empirical and nonempirical manuscripts, the first half of the factors presented in the first set of questionnaires appeared as the last half of the factors in the second set of questionnaires in reverse order in order to minimize and assess order effects. No consistent order effect was encountered and the two forms were combined for further analyses.

Evaluative Criteria. Table 4 presents the mean importances of the evaluative criteria for both empirical and nonempirical manuscripts. Significant Contribution and Conceptual Rigor received the highest importance scores. Relevance and Readability, while still receiving high scores, received the lowest relative scores. The top and bottom two criteria were the same for empirical and nonempirical pieces (indicating similar rank importance for these criteria), while Adequacy of Data Analysis was third for empirical pieces and Adequacy of Literature Review was third for nonempirical pieces. In fact, a Spearman rho comparison between the two sets of comparable criteria indicate a correlation of close to 1, suggesting the same relative priority of criteria (where comparable) for the two types of manuscripts.

A paired t-test comparison allowed us to ascertain the comparability of importance ratings for empirical versus nonempirical criteria on the seven common criteria. Six of the seven criteria differed at the .001 level, and Significant Contribution differed at the .05 level. In all cases, these criteria were rated as more important for a nonempirical manuscript than for an empirical manuscript. These differences may have occurred simply because seven criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluative Criteria</th>
<th>Empirical (n = 127)</th>
<th>Nonempirical (n = 122)</th>
<th>Paired t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant Contribution</td>
<td>9.03 (1.28)</td>
<td>9.26 (0.96)</td>
<td>2.09b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Rigor</td>
<td>8.66 (1.24)</td>
<td>9.12 (1.08)</td>
<td>4.28c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequacy of Data Analysis</td>
<td>8.46 (1.43)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Topic</td>
<td>8.36 (1.67)</td>
<td>8.80 (1.43)</td>
<td>3.76c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Rigor</td>
<td>8.36 (1.45)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequacy of Literature Review</td>
<td>7.69 (1.80)</td>
<td>8.90 (1.20)</td>
<td>7.99c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical Organization</td>
<td>7.60 (1.80)</td>
<td>8.22 (1.55)</td>
<td>5.22c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readability</td>
<td>7.48 (1.84)</td>
<td>8.08 (1.69)</td>
<td>5.31c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance to Target Audience</td>
<td>7.42 (1.93)</td>
<td>7.75 (1.75)</td>
<td>3.54c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a The mean of each evaluative criterion is the combined average of the two alternative forms. The scale ranges from 1 = Very Unimportant to 10 = Very Important.

b p < .05.

c p < .001.
were rated for nonempirical manuscripts in contrast to nine criteria for empirical manuscripts, or, as we believe, they may indicate the reality that these criteria are truly more important in the absolute sense for nonempirical manuscripts because of the nature of the contribution of these types of manuscripts.

Since respondents rated the criteria according to how they reviewed for the journal for which they did the most empirical/non-empirical reviews in the past twelve months, and since they identified that journal in their responses, criteria differences by journal could be assessed. Only those journals receiving fifteen or more responses were compared, to insure meaningfulness.

For empirical reviewing, the journals compared included the JM (n = 19), the JMR (n = 17), and the JCR (n = 32). Comparing mean ratings, two differences in the data were noted: JM reviewers rated Significant Contribution as more important than JCR reviewers (9.89 versus 9.06; p ≤ .05), while JCR reviewers rated Methodological Rigor as more important than did JM and JMR reviewers (9.16 versus 7.84 and 8.12; p ≤ .05).

For nonempirical reviewing, the JM (n = 23) and the JCR (n = 20) reviewer responses were compared. There was a strong similarity in the top three criteria across these journals, although JCR reviewers put more emphasis on Adequacy of Literature Review than did JM reviewers (9.55 versus 8.70; p ≤ .05).

**Critical Reviewer Characteristics**

Finally, reviewers were asked to rate five critical characteristics of an outstanding reviewer. As indicated in Table 5, the most important characteristic identified by reviewers is a reviewer's Ability to Recognize and Maximize a Manuscript's Contribution. Not surprisingly, this characteristic is consistent with the most important evaluative criterion—the Significant Contribution of the manuscript.

Reviewers also selected one of the five characteristics that they believed to be the most critical trait of an outstanding reviewer. The results were consistent with the mean ratings results, with over one-third of the respondents stressing Recognizing Potential Contribution as the most critical characteristic, followed by Careful, Detailed Reviews, while the least emphasized characteristic was a Positive Outlook perspective.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

**Reviewer Roles, Norms, and Guidelines**

Our findings indicate that reviewers' perceptions vary regarding their roles in the reviewing process. Of course, some manuscripts are more complex than others and require more extensive reviewing. Also, individuals reviewing for higher quality journals may find that these manuscripts require greater time and effort.

**TABLE 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean Importancea</th>
<th>(S.D.)</th>
<th>Most Critical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Recognize Potential Contribution and the Ability to Suggest Ways to Maximize That Contribution</td>
<td>9.14</td>
<td>(1.07)</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to Carefully Read, Analyze, and Make Detailed Comments</td>
<td>8.98</td>
<td>(1.18)</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent Conceptual and Analytical Skills</td>
<td>8.77</td>
<td>(1.15)</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-depth and Up-to-date Knowledge of Subject Matter</td>
<td>8.63</td>
<td>(1.38)</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Outlook Aimed at Saving Rather Than Rejecting Articles</td>
<td>7.57</td>
<td>(2.06)</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a The scale ranges from 1 = Very Unimportant to 10 = Very Important.
than those reviewed for other journals. (We found that heavier reviewers had reviewed more manuscripts for the *JMR* than had lighter reviewers [11.68 versus 7.43; *p* < .003] and were more likely to be on the review boards of these three journals.)

However, as noted in the findings, we found some substantial differences in average reviewing time. Some reviewers apparently read a manuscript and write their review in fairly short order (four hours or less), while others spend the equivalent of an entire day or more on the activity. For example, one reviewer in our in-depth interviews told us that she reads the manuscript once, then puts it down and does something else for a while, returning to the manuscript later for a second or even a third reading before writing her review. She almost always reads important references cited in the manuscript, spending an average of 18 hours on the review. We heard similar comments from others in our in-depth interviews, in which many reviewers said they regularly spend 8 to 16 hours reviewing a manuscript.

Reviewers devoting considerable time and effort to the process might be best characterized as careful and caring reviewers, although time spent reviewing certainly is not an assurance of these qualities. Our in-depth interviews seemed to be composed almost exclusively of careful reviewers, some of whom had specific descriptions of outstanding reviewers, for example, a reviewer who cares about the survival of the manuscript and looks for its merits, or one who takes the time to read manuscripts carefully and make detailed comments. One said that an outstanding reviewer is someone who looks positively at articles and believes in the principle of “innocent until proven guilty,” one who goes out of her or his way to help an article; this interviewee believes that 20% to 25% of reviewers are “negativists.” Finally, one reviewer talked about the need for reviewers to be more compassionate.

Although we do not fully understand the motivations of reviewers who are careful and caring, these may be related to the socialization process they experienced in their doctoral program or as an assistant professor. Other factors not analyzed here might also be related, such as their personality, values, or workloads (e.g., teaching loads, administrative duties, textbook writing, or other activities or commit-

ments). Or perhaps these reviewers simply enjoy the process for many complex reasons.

It would be useful to conduct a “naturalistic inquiry” in order to understand differences in reviewer role perceptions and behavioral norms, perhaps leading to a survey of role perceptions in the future. This type of knowledge could be useful in socializing new reviewers into the reviewing process, which seems to be needed in our field. In fact, one of the concerns raised by the AMA Task Force (1988) was the low degree of socialization occurring in doctoral programs regarding publishing activities.

We found varying opinions on some issues. For example, when faced with a request to review a manuscript they had already reviewed for another journal, the majority of respondents stated that they either reviewed it again or sent it in their previous reviews (with or without additional comments). As noted earlier, this practice was perceived as somewhat unethical in a study by Sherrell, Hair, and Griffin (1989). Reviewers should be clearly apprised of the editors’ desires in this regard. However, we could find no written policy on this issue in the information made available by the six journals at the time of this study. Thus, there is a need for clear standards regarding such situations.

Some ethical issues (but not the one above) are covered under the AMA’s new Editorial Policy Statement, which appeared in the January issue of the *Journal of Marketing* (1992). For example, the guidelines suggest that reviewers who recognize the author of a manuscript should consult with their editor. Also, the policy states that a reviewer may not show the manuscript to another person—the reviewer may seek advice from others but must insure that the author’s identity and intellectual property remain secure.

**Evaluative Criteria**

It is encouraging that Significant Contribution (which should provide relevant, meaningful findings for both academics and practitioners) was viewed as the most important criterion for both empirical and nonempirical pieces.

During our in-depth interviews, key reviewers in the field also reiterated the high priority of contribution to knowledge. Further, the *Journal of Marketing Research* (n.d.) stated in a recent manuscript guidelines that “all
submitted manuscripts are judged on their contribution to the advancement of the science and/or practices of marketing," while the Journal of Consumer Research (1988), in a recent "Statement of Review Philosophy," stated that "the overriding criterion for publication in JCR is knowledge gained about the behavior of consumers."

Further, the importance of Conceptual Rigor (which was ranked second) is consistent with earlier findings (Beyer 1978) in other social science areas, in which logical rigor received top priority. However, there is a concern in our findings—Relevance to the Target Audience received the lowest mean score for both empirical and nonempirical pieces. Apparently, the technical aspects of manuscripts are more important than the relevancy of the manuscript's topic—a somewhat disturbing finding. Beyer's (1978) study, in which physicists ranked originality first and relevance to current areas of research second, and Armstrong’s (1982) concern about the lack of importance as a criterion in publications suggest that relevancy to the target audience should be of greater importance. It is ironic that this criterion did not rank higher, given marketers' traditional focus on target marketing.

These issues deserve further attention, given the priority and emphasis placed on publishing in the academic community and the stress associated with this emphasis (Porter and McKibbon 1988). Additionally, there is a growing disillusionment about the relevancy of academic research efforts in marketing and in academic business research in general (Byrne 1990; Meyers, Massey, and Greyser 1980; Porter and McKibbon 1988). Thus, it seems incumbent upon the field to continue to address the issue of the relevancy of its published research, as well as to ask who the target audiences are and how journal acceptance criteria match the needs and expectations of those audiences.

Implications for Marketing Educators

In this article we examined the reviewing process from the perspective of reviewers. We believe this is such an important topic that many of the questions we addressed, as well as additional questions, need to be put to authors and editors as well.

Several implications for authors are suggested. First, there is reasonable likelihood that the same individual(s) may review a manuscript again or may submit their previous review to subsequent journals. Certainly, many of these reviewers expend a great deal of time and effort in these reviews, even when the article is ultimately rejected. It is thus important that authors and their manuscripts benefit from these reviews.

A poor author strategy is to ignore these reviews and resubmit the manuscript unchanged elsewhere! In this case the manuscript has not been improved based on the reviewers' efforts. Further, if reviewers see this piece again unchanged, they will believe that their efforts were in vain and will understandably react negatively to the manuscript.

Secondly, authors should keep the criteria outlined in this article clearly in mind and turn them into questions for themselves or colleagues whom they ask to critique the document. An author, for example, should be able to clearly articulate the article's contribution.

We asked reviewers in our interviews what would cause a manuscript to be accepted or rejected. Although they almost always talked about the need for the paper to make a contribution, they also talked about "offering new perspectives" and "being creative or unique"; thus, originality does seem important to many reviewers and should be recognized as an important criteria by our journals.

Reviewers also talked about the need for sound theory. One reviewer said that poor theory is the most crucial factor leading to rejection. Another reviewer said three critical elements determine acceptance or rejection: (1) how well-written it is, (2) how well it fits a segment of the journal's audience, and (3) whether it contains a fatal flaw. Another reviewer talked about the need to proofread the manuscript carefully before submission; it is amazing how much impact careless presentation has on the reviewers' reactions to a manuscript.

Finally, our findings suggest that, while there was a similar ranking between the two sets of comparable criteria for the two types of manuscripts, the higher ratings given to all seven attributes with the nonempirical manuscripts suggest the need to be cognizant of the reviewers' sensitivities to these aspects. A
nonempirical piece, by its very nature, must excel on these attributes in order to succeed, while empirical manuscripts often stand or fall based on the methodology employed.

For reviewers, we have several suggestions. First, being a good reviewer is a time-consuming, high commitment process (especially for those on the editorial board of one of the top three journals) with little tangible reward. Although we do not fully understand the motivations for reviewers’ efforts, much of the effort seems to be aimed at altruistically helping others to advance the field. Other, more selfish, motivations might include current with research in the field and learning more about what it takes to get published.

How does the field foster and reward careful and caring reviewers? The skills and subtleties of good reviewing need more emphasis in doctoral courses, where assignments might involve actual reviewing of articles. Also, special sessions at conferences could be devoted to reviewing skills. Less skilled reviewers need to be exposed to the ideas and skills of more experienced reviewers, who should serve as active role models in this process. Reviewers who have become less careful or caring need to reevaluate their efforts and perhaps, seek fresh inspiration.

Secondly, reviewers should be comfortable with refusing to review a manuscript. As noted in this article, refusals occur regularly, most often because of lack of familiarity with or skills in the area of the manuscript. Newer, less experienced reviewers may be reluctant to refuse to review manuscripts, believing such actions will reflect poorly on themselves. Reviewers should not hesitate to refuse to review a manuscript and/or to contact the editor if they are unsure about how to proceed. The new AMA editorial policy is aimed at expressing how authors and reviewers should behave. Also, the current editor of Journal of Marketing makes the following point: “However, many situations are likely to arise in which an interpretation of the policy is needed. It is the editor’s task to discuss those situations with authors and reviewers. If you have a question, please call the editor” (Journal of Marketing 1992, p. 1).

Finally, we have several suggestions for editors. In our interviews, reviewers suggested that an editor’s greatest influence is in the selection of reviewers. Our reviewers thought that editors, in general, do a good job of matching reviewers with manuscripts, and it seems to be a decision of extreme importance to our editors. For example, the current editor of the Journal of Marketing says that he personally reads all submitted manuscripts in order to select the reviewers (Journal of Marketing 1992). Further, editors need to strongly encourage reviewers to return manuscripts they do not feel qualified to review.

Additionally, editors need to reward careful and caring reviewing, constantly recognizing the contributions made by their hard-working reviewers. Some journals, such as the Journal of Consumer Research, recognize outstanding reviewers; this should be standard for all journals. If being appointed to an editorial review board is a promotion based on merit (i.e., being a faithful ad hoc reviewer), then editors should publicize this so reviewers may clearly see the potential for positive rewards.

The converse is true also. When their reviews are late, of poor quality, or hurriedly done, are reviewers reprimanded or encouraged to improve? Are they removed from ad hoc status or the review board when problems persist? Is their weak performance reported to future or other editors? Certainly if good reviewing is a goal to strive for, then poor or careless reviewing cannot be ignored.

Perhaps editors or other organizational leaders could take the lead in organizing workshops given by editors and reviewers of note on the review process. More dialogue is needed between reviewers, authors, and editors on important issues in reviewing and between these parties and deans of business colleges regarding ways to better reward good reviewing.

Given the importance of the reviewing process and its influence on the careers of academicians and the future of our field, we believe there are many important questions yet to be addressed. For example, how do reviewers recognize that a manuscript does or does not have the potential to make a contribution? What critical suggestions could reviewers give to authors to increase the acceptance of their manuscripts? What are the dimensions underlying each of the evaluative criteria identified in this study? How do reviewers change hats when reviewing for different journals? Hopefully, our efforts will encourage others to study these issues further.
REFERENCES


