

Editorial:

Why Empirical Generalizations Matter

GEOFFREY PRECOURT

Editor in Chief

geoffrey.precourt@

warc.com

THERE NEVER CAN BE TOO much information.

But data that comes from a variety of new sources in a wealth of new forms can be intimidating. What works? What's reliable? What needs some more time simmering on the stove before we can feast on its informational nutrition?

Never have market researchers been so overwhelmed by data and opportunities. And never has there been a need so acute to pause—just for a moment or two—and take stock.

With the powerful guidance of Dr. Jerry Wind, the Lauder Professor and director of the SEI Center for Advanced Studies in Management at the The Wharton School, and Dr. Byron Sharp, director of the Ehrenburg-Bass Institute and professor of marketing science at the University of South Australia, that's just what we're doing with this issue of the *Journal of Advertising Research (JAR)*.

"Things were complicated enough for advertisers and advertising researchers when, almost overnight, we found ourselves in the middle of a digital revolution. The fragmentation of traditional media is a great challenge for advertisers," our two guest editors write. "On top of this, we have a range of new media, and, just as importantly, we are seeing radical new models of advertising—different ways that consumers can interact with advertising, new targeting opportunities, delivery of totally different audience profiles, different capacities for reach in both time and space, and so on. . . .

"These changes bring opportunities. But, in doing so, they put incredible pressure on advertisers. It is so much easier to get things wrong now; the risks of what senior managers call 'losing money on advertising' are climbing . . . even when advertising productivity was not high to start with. We can either stumble blindly into this brave new world, or we can take stock of what we really know and seek to apply this knowledge to the changes we see around us."

In other words, what better time to pause and document our knowledge? In the pages that follow, you will find 21 papers that fully and richly articulate what we know about advertising. "In this special issue," Drs. Wind and Sharp write, "our focus is on fundamental knowledge—empirical generalizations with long 'use-by' dates that hold across a wide range of known conditions. Our aim is to collect a list of what is currently known with some certainty."

The utility of the papers is fourfold:

- as a starting point in the development of an advertising strategy;
- as an initial set of tentative rules that management can follow;
- as a benchmark that provides insight into the consequences of economic change or a change in marketing plans; and
- as a guide for a future research agenda.

There is a focus here on traditional television advertising, highlighting the fact that experiments and studies are necessary for identifying similar benchmarks for digital and social media strategies.

Robert Barocci, president/CEO of the Advertising Research Foundation, calls this special edition of *JAR* "a landmark issue . . . especially considering that we are facing the most difficult economic climate since the Great Depression. Never, in recent history," Barocci continued, "has marketing decision making been filled with so much uncertainty. The 21 papers in this special edition are a strong reminder that we do indeed know much about advertising, and in these times it is more important than ever to reduce your risk by basing decisions on what is known to the greatest extent possible. This issue makes the stand 'Data 21, Mythology 0,' and should find a permanent place on the desk of all decision-makers."

We expect this special issue on Empirical Generalizations is one that our readers will want to keep on hand as a vital resource for both historical insight as well as planning for the future.

In the meantime, our *JAR* editorial team is fully immersed in our upcoming issues.

- In September, we will be pulling together an “Innovation in Research” special package that will complement the academic thought leadership that is the backbone of this publication.
- And, come December, we plan to take a look at the tangled web of metrics

that support different media and try to discover some common grounds that can be useful in cross-metric analysis.

As always, we welcome your reactions and your contributions. 