

Editorial – What is an interactive marketing perspective and what are emerging research areas?

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Like most journals having specific scope and unique positioning, *Journal of Research In Interactive Marketing* aims to publish manuscripts with relevance to interactive marketing perspective. With the fast growing of reputations and impacts, JRIM has recently attracted a significantly higher number of submissions and consequently a higher reject rate. Quite a number of manuscripts submitted to the JRIM have been rejected or unsubmitted due to their not fitting to the theme of the journal.

In a nutshell, interactive marketing, as one of the fastest growing fields in contemporary business world, is a multi-directional value creation and mutual-influence marketing process through active customer connection, engagement, participation and interaction (Wang, 2021, 2023). Platform-orchestrated multi-sided network interactions reshape the retail and advertising industry by prioritizing consumers' needs and source sharing through data-driven matchmaking. The process of value creation is rapidly shifting from the product- and firm-centric view to personalized and interactive customer experience. Accordingly, interactive marketing refers to a bilateral communication that emphasizes consumer active participation in the marketing process. While it has a relatively short history, emerged in the internet and digital age with a wide application of e-commerce (Deighton, 1996), interactive marketing discipline has dramatically expanded its scale and scope thanks to the newly developed technologies and social media platforms (Verma *et al.*, 2023). As social media content is merging with online shopping, consumers are persistently browsing, exploring, sharing, and engaging with different forms of content, enhancing customer-brand engagement (Shen, 2023). Interactivity thus becomes an integral part of contemporary marketing practices from retailing, service, communication, to livestreaming and mobile marketing. Then what kind of research themes or manuscripts that we are looking for in the *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*?

First, JRIM is seeking for manuscripts that advance new theoretical frameworks addressing emerging marketing phenomena or provide insightful guidelines to interactive marketing practices. Spearheaded by industry-wide marketing strategic applications under various interactive innovations, the advent of interactive marketing has witnessed the declining effectiveness of passive broadcast advertising and one-way persuasive communication. Despite dramatic changes in marketplaces, academic inquiry of the mechanisms of interactive marketing strategies has largely lagged behind industry innovation and market practices. Many submissions did not meet the JRIM publication standard due to their weak theoretical foundation or inadequate theoretical conceptualization. Essentially, a theory in marketing is a well-substantiated explanation of a business phenomenon that often incorporate laws, hypotheses and facts. We observed that some manuscripts tend to use seemingly omnipotent theories, such as stimulus-organism-response (SOR), the theory of planned behavior (TPB), and technology acceptance model (TAM) in all kinds of research topics without looking at their relevance or applicability. However, such studies often come up with a list of hypotheses based on those long-established principles to describe simple relationship between variables that are largely intuitive and common knowledge, but do not add much new or interesting insights beyond what we have known from existing literature (c.f., Wang, 2022). It is important to note that simply applying a widely used theoretical model may not be relevant or helpful to



justify specific research hypotheses, because a theory not only explains known facts but also provides a foundation to making predictions beyond conventional wisdom. Thus we encourage authors to explore innovative theoretical perspectives as underlying mechanism to identify important research topics and explain trendy themes evolved from real world marketing phenomena, demonstrating unique contributions to theoretical advancement in interactive marketing.

Second, JRIM has a priority to publish cutting-edge research with innovative ideas and novel topics from multi-disciplines, including psychology, sociology, artificial intelligence, big data and predictive analytics, virtual and augmented reality, and new media technologies, etc. The wide application of artificial intelligence, machine learning, AI-enabled Chatbots and voice assistance have greatly changed the retailing and communication landscape, enhancing customer shopping experience and direct interaction with the firm or brand (Zeng *et al.*, 2023). For example, application of predictive analytics and smart recommendations via artificial intelligence and machine learning help marketers to measure user experience metrics; increase more accurate and personalized prediction and targeting; develop interactive campaign, content creation and generation; and design dynamic pricing and advertising (Liu *et al.*, 2023; Yu, 2023). Mobile devices further facilitate marketers to deliver convenience and personalized content in proximity marketing (Lin *et al.*, 2022). With location identification technology, firms engage with the customer at the right place and time via wireless transmitter (Lin *et al.*, 2023). Built-in interactive features of social media and mobile apps have facilitated the gamification and in-game advertising (Hussain *et al.*, 2023; Vashisht, 2023). The advent of Metaverse signals our life becoming a mix of physical and virtual worlds in socialization, play and work, dramatically changing retailing activities and shopping experience. Application of virtual reality and augmented reality allows customers to dive in a deep level with immersive experience and enjoy the seamless interactive shopping journey via the synchronization of digital and physical worlds through omni-channel marketing (Jasrotia, 2023). Consumers can either experience the product in the digital landscape by virtual fitting room or bring digital world to physical store where shoppers can experience every facet of the brand through multimedia content.

Third, JRIM welcomes empirical studies that revisit traditional research topics from an innovative perspective by integrating new academic inquiries and findings in the changing business situations. The new phenomenon in the interactive era calls for new research framework, new conceptualization and methodologies to examine those traditional marketing variables. However, it is not recommended to replicate those well-documented findings in the existing literature, such as the relationships between consumer attitude, perception, emotion, and brand love, etc., and outcome variables (i.e. customer loyalty, satisfaction and buying/retention/referring intention). Existing knowledge should be continuously updated by revealing new theoretical underpinning in the interactive marketing realm. Indeed, as contemporary interactive marketing has moved beyond the scope of direct marketing or traditional digital marketing paradigm, the market is becoming a forum for conversations and interactions among connected actors or participants in platform ecosystems. For instance, the growing number of research on the impact of live-streamers, short video influencers or virtual influencers should go beyond those long-established knowledge in the key opinion leader (KOL) and advertising literature, such as the characteristics of celebrity endorsement (e.g. similarity, attractiveness and expertise) without looking at the interactive features of new media, in which audience is not simply passive viewers but active participants engaging in the bilateral communication process. Participatory culture enabled by web technology, provides individuals new forms of expression, increasing consumer engagement in public discourse and user generated content (Wang, 2023). Fan culture and fandom behavior, in particular, have changed the

consumer-brand relationship as such consumers are also playing the roles as enthusiasts, hobbyists, reviewers, bloggers, live-streamers and influencers in various digital platforms and virtual brand community (Liao *et al.*, 2023; Wang, 2020). The fast development of social media are essentially interactive platforms with built-in interactive tools including hashtag (Kwon and Ha, 2023), emoji (Huang *et al.*, 2022; Wu, 2023; Valenzuela-Gálvez *et al.*, 2023) and video barrage (Wei, 2023), etc., allows consumers interact with live-streamers, influences and other consumers through direct and instant feedback. Moreover, the contemporary interactive marketing also transformed from mass-media digital marketing into the connected world, taking an “organic” or natural form that integrates shopping with daily live events through generating, disseminating and sharing news, new personal stories, creative works, photos and ideas (Güngör and Çadırcı, 2023; Rashidirad and Shahbaznezhad, 2023). Consequently, the advent of interactive marketing field opens an avenue to investigate varieties of traditional marketing subjects from new perspectives.

Finally, JRIM encourages research investigating controversial issues and intricate business ethics in interactive marketing practices. The rapid development and application of digital technologies, powerful AI tools and mobile devices greatly increased consumer connectivity and meanwhile intruding deeply into consumer lives, bringing various unanticipated consequences (Deighton and Kornfeld, 2009) and raising the potential risks and ethical considerations. Such considerations include consumer vulnerability, privacy and information security when interactive devices, big data, face recognition, mobile payment, and advanced AI technologies are used (e.g. location identification technology adopted in mobile device and geographic information systems). Business ethics in the digital age may differ from those in traditional marketing contexts because the digitalization enables companies, machines, employees, customers interact via digitalized and online devices from anywhere and anytime (Wang, 2021). Companies are able to track and analyze customers’ online browsing history data via accessing without consent and authority to implement personalized marketing. Meanwhile, moral agency is increasingly being transferred from humans to technologies, e.g. artificial intelligence, and automated systems, particularly the generative ChatGPT, which introduces ethical concerns when human interact with non-human but intelligent entities. Co-creation with AI, for instance, faces the issue of how to assess the ethicality of AI and ownership of the intellectual property. The hyper connections may also cause unethical or uncivil behaviors in interactive marketing applications, including gamification, addictive buying behavior, irrational and impulsive consumption (Al-Msallam *et al.*, 2023; Bhutani and Behl, 2023; Dineva, 2023). As multilateral interdependence is a characteristic that sets the digital business ecosystem apart from hierarchical organizations, researchers should focus on the ethical rules and design features through which the ecosystem practice that coordinates to build ecosystem social responsibility. Therefore, it is imperative to reconceptualize marketing ethics or ethical theories to guide business practices, such as organizational accountability for big data management to ensure legal and ethical implications of data ownership and data usage; governance of intellectual property in open innovation platforms; corporate social responsibility in avoiding unhealthy addiction among vulnerable groups and fandom behavior in consumer brand community.

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