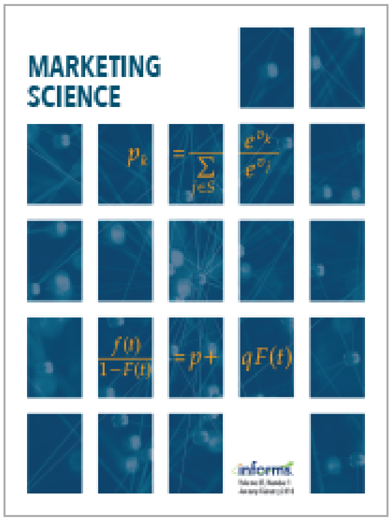

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Editorial

Introducing A New Section—*Marketing Science: Frontiers*

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Abstract. *Marketing Science* has introduced a new section "*Marketing Science: Frontiers*," focused on publishing timely research with high potential for impact. The section is positioned as "different, but equal" relative to regular *Marketing Science* with the same high quality standards, but differentiated contribution criteria and a shorter *Science*–like format to highlight the core contribution and maximize readability and impact. The section will encourage competition among authors for publishing timely and contemporaneously relevant research—undervalued attributes in traditional contribution evaluation—on topics with high impact potential. In exchange, it will accept papers that make major contributions on one "primary" dimension (methodological, modeling or substantive), with more relaxed thresholds on the non-primary dimensions compared to traditional top journals, and offer faster reviews and time to print. Authors benefit from the promise of first-mover impact rewards, while the field benefits from faster entry and a larger volume of novel, timely and relevant ideas. The section will have a distinct editorial structure and a one round conditional accept/out review process. The editorial elaborates on the purpose of the section, its editorial structure and publication process.

1. Introduction

Marketing Science is widely seen as the premier quantitative marketing journal; it attained its leadership status over the years by leading the charge to introduce new and innovative models, methods and data, while simultaneously expanding the field's substantive scope. In my editorial (Sudhir 2016), I outlined in detail the very admirable record of *Marketing Science* in pushing the boundaries of the field's leading edge. The journal should be proud of this heritage and will continue to strive on this dimension.

With new technologies and rapidly emerging business models and marketing practices disrupting the business world, traditional boundaries between marketing and adjacent fields are disappearing, and scholars in fields such as operations management, information science, computer science, statistics and economics are routinely writing articles on marketing topics. For marketing scholarship and *Marketing Science* to maintain its premier leadership status in this new and changing environment, the journal should not only continue to publish traditional papers that emphasize the depth and validity of the contributions, but also *timely* papers that drive the scholarship agenda on big, important questions—substantive and methodological. To this end, the journal has introduced a new section, *Marketing Science: Frontiers*.

Frontiers will focus on publishing timely research, that is contemporaneously relevant with the potential to maximize the impact of the field's scholarship. It is positioned as "different, but equal" relative to regular *Marketing Science* with the same high quality standards, but differentiated contribution criteria and a shorter *Science*–like format to highlight the core contribution and maximize readability and impact. The section's value proposition is simple. It will encourage competition among authors on publishing timely and contemporaneously relevant ideas—undervalued attributes in traditional contribution evaluation—on topics with high impact potential. In exchange, it would accept papers that make major contributions on one "primary" dimension (methodological, modeling or substantive), with more relaxed thresholds on the nonprimary dimensions compared to traditional top journals, fast reviews and time to print. Authors benefit from the promise of first-mover impact rewards, while the field benefits from faster entry and larger volume of novel, timely and relevant ideas. The section will deliver its value proposition with a distinct editorial structure and review process relative to regular *Marketing Science* articles.

The new section will allow the field to embrace new business problems, methods and paradigms early and also draw scholars interested in marketing problems from adjacent substantive and methodological disciplines. While regular papers at *Marketing Science* will continue to be the bedrock of the discipline's academic scholarship, the new section will ensure that marketing as a field will have a "seat at the table" when big, pressing and currently relevant issues are debated.

The rest of the editorial is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a brief background of the process that led to the launch of the new section. Section 3 explains the differentiated positioning of the section relative to regular *Marketing Science*. Section 4 describes the publication process. Section 5 discusses some frequently asked questions related to the new section including why a new section is needed. Section 6 concludes.

2. Background

Frontiers is the end-product of much discussion and thinking within ISMS and a broad set of scholars across the discipline. In March 2017, Mike Hanssens, ISMS President at the time, constituted an exploratory committee based on a vote from the ISMS board to consider alternatives (including a launch of a new journal) by which the marketing discipline can proactively respond to changes in the business and research environment that affects the relevance and impact of marketing scholarship. The exploratory committee was chaired by Preyas Desai and included Eric Bradlow, Jacob Goldenberg, and John Hauser. One of the recommendations in the committee's report was that the Editor-in-Chief of *Marketing Science* may consider launching a new section with a "Frontiers" positioning. This recommendation was also discussed at length in the ISMS board meeting in June 2017 during the *Marketing Science* Conference.

Since then, I have worked with members of the exploratory committee, the ISMS board, the advisory board at *Marketing Science* and a number of scholars representing various research traditions within the discipline in thinking through whether such a section should be launched and if yes, what would be the best way to both position the section and how its review process can be structured to best execute the positioning. The current positioning which emphasizes that the new section should welcome all sub-areas of our discipline and focus on a timely review process with differentiated contribution criteria is the outcome of a weighted synthesis of cumulative feedback generated from these conversations. I thank each one of you who so generously provided inputs, critically questioned assumptions and provided unvarnished feedback in helping refine various aspects of execution for the new section.

3. How the *Frontiers* Section Compares with *Marketing Science*

While *Frontiers* will be similar in scope to *Marketing Science* in that it will be open to all types of papers—theoretical and empirical, substantive and methodological, it will be differentiated in terms of contribution requirements and use a shorter article format. I elaborate on the "different but equal" positioning below.

The "early to market" focus means that incremental contribution will be evaluated not only relative to the current marketing literature, but also based on the age of business practice or method developed in adjacent disciplines. Critically and by necessity, the acceptable threshold for validation of the paper's claims will be based on both the reality of available data and business applications at the time of submission, and the importance of timely publication. Substantively focused *Frontiers* papers will focus more on generating early insights about novel business practices, even as data quality and/or institutional practices around them are still evolving; while methodologically focused *Frontiers* papers will introduce new ideas from new paradigms that are relevant for marketing, even as practical applications are still being developed, and/or relevant data is still not available.

Currently, *Marketing Science* and all of the field's top journals typically expect that our papers meet contribution thresholds on multiple dimensions. For example, a cutting edge empirical method often also needs a sufficiently interesting empirical application. A cutting edge theoretical method often requires evidence of a business model that is consistent with the predictions of the model in order to demonstrate relevance. A substantively interesting paper on a new and emerging topic that could move the literature forward and draw other scholars to answer more in-depth questions may be rejected in the review process because the current state of the data available would not warrant "water tight" empirical proof. In contrast, *Frontiers* will prioritize large and modular incremental contributions on one "primary" dimension as long as it meets the timeliness criterion.

Given the focused nature of the expected contributions, and to keep the writing sharp and clear, *Frontiers* submissions will be restricted not to exceed 6,000 words including figures, tables, references and appendices. All relevant details and additional analysis, that are not central to the main message but are important for assessing the validity of the results should be presented for review in an online appendix and will be published by the journal for readers. In essence, we are restricting length to highlight the core contributions and make it more readable and widely accessible to maximize impact, but this should not compromise the quality of the analysis or insights. Authors are recommended to use a *Science*-like writing style in both motivating the paper and presenting the results. The papers will be reviewed using an accelerated conditional accept/out based process in the first round and faster time to print allowing for timely dissemination of ideas.

In summary, *Frontiers* papers will value timeliness and contemporaneous relevance of contributions, much more than traditional top journals including *Marketing Science*. In exchange, it would accept papers with important, but more modular contributions along a "primary" dimension and more relaxed thresholds on the nonprimary dimensions than at traditional top journals and have fast reviews and time to print.

3.1. Exemplars

In discussing the *Frontiers* positioning with various scholars, a consistent request was for examples of articles that would help illustrate the idea of timely, contemporaneously relevant, focused papers with clear contributions along a "primary" dimension with high impact. I was initially wary of providing examples of papers for multiple reasons. First, there are no clear-cut existing examples of *Frontiers* style papers in top marketing journals, as we have not published papers in such a format. I also did not want to pick articles from only journals like *Science* or *PNAS*, which are close to the desired *Frontiers* format because they do not easily correspond to marketing-style research questions. Finally, there is the concern that examples constrain imagination and creativity. But conversations with many scholars convinced me that there is a net benefit in highlighting some papers from the marketing literature and from *Science*/*PNAS* that address marketing-relevant issues, to help a reader visualize the "timely, focused and high impact" positioning.

Godes and Mayzlin (2004) is a good example of a timely empirical paper that used online conversations to understand word of mouth and had large impact because access to online conversations was just becoming available. Khan et al. (2016)'s analysis of the "fat tax" is an example of a timely assessment of a contemporaneously relevant policy question relevant to consumers and marketing. A *Frontiers* version of these papers would of course have a shorter, briefer "to the main contribution point" introduction and literature review with much of the validation and robustness analysis in a supplemental online appendix. Illustrative of marketing-relevant papers from *Science* and *PNAS* that would be a good fit with *Frontiers* is Catalini and Tucker (2017), who study the adoption of Bitcoin, a contemporaneously relevant issue of general interest, though framed as a "timeless" question of the effects of nonadoption by traditionally early adopters, and Boxell et al. (2017), who investigate the role of the Internet on polarization.

Fay and Xie (2008) is a good example of a timely theoretical paper that provided an analytical framework for selling "probabilistic" goods, as emerging technologies began to make such goods feasible over the last decade. It is generally recognized that the theoretical literature has been productive in terms of modeling new institutions and markets, but slower in introducing new tools and methods for analysis. The hope is that *Frontiers* can serve as a valuable gateway to the introduction of new and promising analytical tools for analyzing marketing problems, due to its modular contribution criterion, by helping marketing scholars refine their skills in using the novel methods over time into full-fledged applications as regular papers.

With the explosion of "big data," timely and innovative methods papers that allow us to tackle new and emerging sources of data are increasingly needed. The field has traditionally been very good in producing and refining methods papers for new, but standardized "data structures" (e.g., scanner data, online and mobile data). Regular papers are quite appropriate for such methods that become building blocks and stand the test of time. However, as new technologies/data generating apps/business models are being developed at an unusually fast pace, there is an explosion of new marketing problems with unstructured data (text, pictures, video), and many types of "big data" challenges that require a variety of creative methodological solutions. The special issues in *Marketing Science* around User Generated Content and Big Data have catalyzed the entry of specialized and focused contributions into marketing, but *Frontiers* papers with modular contributions can be a powerful complement to knowledge production in traditional journals and serve to accelerate the entry and development of new methods that both adapt ideas from adjacent disciplines like computer science, statistics and econometrics for marketing, but also contribute to them.

4. Publication Process

After desk rejects based on initial screening for fit and quality, the Editor-in-Chief (EIC) of *Marketing Science* will choose an Associate Editor (AE). The plan is that *Frontiers* will be managed by a small team of dedicated AEs, who work directly with the EIC, and focus on a short and speedy review process. The AEs will have autonomy to choose reviewers and make the "in/out" recommendation to facilitate risk taking. The EIC will make the final decision. In the early stages, reviewers will be briefed about *Frontiers*' goals and review criteria.

Initially, the EIC will choose guest Associate Editors (authors can make suggestions) to preserve flexibility based on expertise required for the submission. However, as the flow of manuscripts and expertise needed becomes clear, the journal will announce a dedicated *Frontiers* Associate Editors team.

At the time of submission, authors will designate papers as *Frontiers* submissions. To facilitate speed to publication, the paper will be either conditionally accepted or rejected after the first round. While the section will take some risk in favor of accelerating knowledge production, the review process will have a high bar in the assessment of what is truly novel or timely. The "in/out" approach guarantees speed to publication, but also requires authors to submit as polished a work as possible in their initial submission. The AE will make the final decision without additional reviewer input after the authors revise the conditionally accepted paper.

All papers published in the section will have "*Frontiers:*" prefixed on the title for identification. The prefix should be included in references and author CVs. The goal is to build *Frontiers* into a strong sub-brand of *Marketing Science* that signals leading edge, timely and contemporaneously relevant research.

5. Why is a New Section Needed?

A natural question to ask is why *Frontiers* style papers cannot be accepted at *Marketing Science* by editors using the same differentiated criteria without explicitly launching a new section. In fact, I alluded to this possibility in Sudhir (2016) in suggesting that editors should consider the exploration-exploitation trade-off to balance knowledge production across established and emerging areas and use differentiated evaluation criteria for the two types of papers. While this is potentially feasible, I believe that a streamlined *Frontiers* style review process that explicitly acknowledges the importance of major, timely, contributions on one dimension can be more effective in accomplishing the goal for the field for multiple reasons.

First, a fast-track review process with a conditional accept/out decision after the first submission ensures timely publication. The current review process with multiple rounds of review has evolved as a means to generate "timeless" knowledge, but is not as effective in driving new research agendas and timely, contemporaneously relevant scholarship. Second, when we explicitly acknowledge that modular contributions along one "primary" dimension (method, topic, findings) will be acceptable for publication in *Frontiers* as long as it is major, timely and relevant, we will increase the supply of such papers by encouraging greater entrepreneurship and competition on the timeliness and relevance dimensions—which the field widely acknowledges is undervalued. Third, publishing papers ahead of others on contemporaneously relevant topics will help the field and the authors to internalize credit for the topic, rather than be seen as "followers" of papers published elsewhere.

Overall, *Frontiers* will increase and accelerate the field's aggregate knowledge production even as it makes our research more relevant in the timely debates around the big issues. Specialized contributions by an author along one dimension, can help other authors with a different set of skills to produce contributions along complementary dimensions. The new section can also speed up development of full-fledged regular *Marketing Science* papers by ideas introduced into the field by *Frontiers* papers.

One question that arose in discussions is whether *Frontiers* will shift the center of gravity of the discipline by moving credit towards the "fashionable" at the expense of the "timeless" and how this may impact the field in the long run. I do not expect this to be a major concern as I believe that *Frontiers* publications will not be "easy," as being consistently timely and cutting edge even if on any one dimension is a scarce skill. The critical equalizing factor is that editors will use a high threshold for what is novel or timely on any dimension for *Frontiers* articles. If on the chosen dimension, the contribution threshold is not high enough, the paper will be rejected. When the contribution is not contemporaneously relevant or timely, a traditional *Marketing Science* paper that covers multiple bases of contribution will remain the most viable approach to publication.

6. Conclusion

With a distinct review process and differentiated contribution criteria, the goal is for *Frontiers* to accelerate knowledge production at the cutting edge in marketing, especially as traditional functional silos break down and greater cross-functional topics and interdisciplinary methods become the norm. Timely publication of our scholarship at these leading edges should ensure that marketing as a field remains relevant and has a "seat at the table" when big pressing business issues are being addressed by decision makers, and novel interdisciplinary methods are being generated.

I hope the competition for pushing the boundaries of marketing science in a timely manner and the associated recognition rewards from follow-up work by others will draw top scholars across marketing and related disciplines to participate in *Frontiers*. The ambition for the section is that every marketing science scholar would aspire to have a small proportion of their papers to be *Frontiers* publications, to reflect their stature of being at the cutting edge along methodological, modeling or substantive dimensions. In the same spirit, I hope all young scholars will strive for a portfolio of top publications that includes at least one or two *Frontiers* publications by tenure and this will be seen as a strength of the vita by letter writers.

Marketing Science is accepting submissions to *Frontiers* as of January 1, 2018. The journal looks forward to submissions from scholars across marketing and related fields.

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