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## Editorial

## The *International Journal of Research in Marketing (IJRM)*: Its conception and early years

by Berend Wierenga (Founding Editor of IJRM)

### 1. Motivation and start

*IJRM* originated from the European Marketing Academy (EMAC) and it is its official journal. Since 1972, the Academy has organized annual marketing conferences in Europe, and, in 1981, it was decided that it was time for a journal.

There were several motives for starting *IJRM*:

1. Research in marketing in Europe had grown rapidly and was at a stage that it could support its own academic journal.
2. It was felt that a European tradition in research in marketing was emerging (see below) that did not receive sufficient attention in the existing academic journals on marketing.
3. The emerging common European market created many joint research interests among marketing academics across different European countries.
4. A scientific journal would enhance the identity and the visibility of the Academy.

A task force for a new journal was appointed during the Copenhagen EMAC Conference of 1981; a discussion was started with North-Holland/Elsevier about publishing the new journal, and a survey was organized to gauge the demand. The results of all these actions were positive, so, at the 1982 Conference in Antwerp, EMAC decided to proceed with the journal. From that moment on, the acquisition process for papers started (flyers, letters, word-of-mouth communication, speeches at conferences, etc.). In the spring of 1984, the first issue of *IJRM* was published, containing 6 articles and 3 book reviews.

I was a member of the task force, and was subsequently appointed the first Editor of *IJRM*. It took about one-and-a-half years to build a sufficient supply of accepted papers, after which I was responsible for the first three volumes of the journal. For this short note, I have looked at documents from the founding period of *IJRM* and also at the issues of the first three volumes. It was interesting to re-read my editorials from those years. Most of them had completely left my memory.

### 2. The positioning of *IJRM*

The original idea was to create a truly *European* journal. Recognizing the general principles of marketing, it was thought that Europe had something special to offer because of its greater emphasis on the social and welfare aspects of marketing, a greater attention to different philosophical viewpoints and paradigms, and a specific interest in marketing systems besides the marketing problems of individual firms. Also, European researchers needed a medium for

the active interchange of marketing ideas, for the communication of research results, and for the stimulation of joint projects by researchers from different European countries. At that moment, European researchers in marketing mainly operated within the geographical and language space of their own countries. They were more familiar with the work of their American colleagues than with colleagues from other European countries or even from their own country. The European orientation of the new journal is also reflected in its original title, which was *European Journal of Research in Marketing (EJRM)*.

However, the results from the survey made clear that this perspective was too narrow and that it would discourage researchers from outside Europe from submitting their work. Therefore, the name was changed to *International Journal of Research in Marketing (IJRM)*, and it was decided that, although its base was Europe, the journal would take a global perspective.

Still *IJRM* wanted to be different (especially from its American counterparts) and to put a lot of emphasis on its integrative function (work from different geographical origins, work with different disciplinary approaches, profit and non-profit, qualitative and quantitative work). *IJRM* also wanted to cover under-exposed topics such as comparative marketing, cross-cultural aspects of marketing, marketing and government, and marketing and society. Interestingly, these topics are still mentioned in the current Aims and Scope of *IJRM*, which are the same as those in the first issue of 1984.

For topics such as cross-cultural differences in consumer behavior and comparative marketing systems, Europe offered a natural laboratory, especially at that time (in the early years of the European Community), with heavily fragmented markets and the capitalist–communist divide still completely intact. It was also thought that Europeans had much to offer in terms of philosophy of science, epistemology, and different values and norms with respect to consumption. In its first volumes, *IJRM* did publish a few articles along these lines, for example, about consumer behavior in centrally planned economies (Dietl, 1984), and about the theory of Jürgen Habermas, applied to marketing techniques (Van Toledo, 1986). We also had a Special Issue on Marketing Systems (Volume 3, #4 edited by David Gautschi). However, it was much easier to acquire high-quality “conventional” marketing papers than the type of papers that would enhance *IJRM*'s unique positioning as described before.

### 3. The state of research in marketing in Europe

In the second volume of *IJRM*, Lars-Gunnar Mattson and Philippe Naert (1985) wrote an interesting article in which they compared

research in marketing in Europe with the United States. They mention a number of differences (in Europe — a broader approach to marketing problems, less developed doctoral education, weakness in methodological skills, and a publication culture and incentive system more directed to books than to high-quality journal articles). The strong point of European researchers is a less narrow focus and a good insight into real-world problems. Mattson and Naert mention language problems as important barrier for bringing research results to the international forum of researchers in marketing. For example, the action parameter theory of Rasmussen (1955) can be considered as a predecessor of the marketing mix concept, but this was not known to people outside the Nordic countries. Interestingly, language problems are less problematic for smaller countries because they have always been forced to look outwards. There are definitely areas where Europe has made unique contributions; for example, it has its own breed of industrial marketing, with an emphasis on interaction and networks around the IMP group (Hakannsson, 1982).

Mattson and Naert also observe that quantitative research is the least culturally bound research, and, maybe for this reason, the best-known European work in marketing in North America is model building research. Compared to 1985, a number of European countries (especially the Netherlands) have become very productive in terms of contributions to the major marketing journals of the world (Stremersch and Verhoef, 2005). In agreement with Mattson and Naert's observation, this prominence is predominantly due to quantitative work.

The factors mentioned by Mattson and Naert had a limiting effect on the number of high high-quality submissions from Europe to *IJRM* in the early years. And, although much has changed, many of them still are in force. For example, there remains a big gap between the methodology of "thick case studies" published in monograph form in Sweden (Mattson, 2007) and more mainstream research methodologies such as models, surveys, and experiments. Yet it remains worthwhile to study interesting, typically European topics, for example, marketing in transitional societies and the large cross-cultural differences among consumers within one European community. But, of course, in other parts of the world, for example China, India, and Korea, very interesting changes are taking place in marketing as well. Marketing is a generic field (there is not something like European or Chinese marketing). Nevertheless, studying marketing phenomena in a large variety of environments can only enrich our insights. The challenge for dealing with the diversity of marketing is how to combine rich phenomena with sound methodology. Given its history, *IJRM* is best positioned as the first outlet for this type of work. Of the five major journals in marketing, *IJRM* is by far the most globally diversified, in terms of the national origins of its authors (Stremersch and Verhoef, 2005).

#### 4. Paper flow and acceptance rate

In my period as Editor, we processed 240 papers. During the first three years, Europe and North America supplied each about 45% of the

manuscripts, with the remainder coming from the rest or the world. This latter category was growing towards the end of my period, which enhanced the international character of the journal. The acceptance rate was slightly under 30% in this first period. Interestingly, the acceptance rate for North American papers was significantly lower than for European papers. The reason probably is that, for most European authors, *IJRM* was a first choice, whereas American authors would first consider the U.S. options, such as the *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, and *Marketing Science*. In those early years, there were not always enough accepted papers to fill an issue when the time came to publish. Guided by the *irreversible bookshelf principle*, I have never accepted a paper of below-standard quality just to make an issue complete. Rather, I waited because I figured that, while a bad article can never be erased, nobody can tell from the bookshelf that a particular issue arrived late. To increase the flow of papers I also started Special Issues, the first ones on Marketing systems, Marketing and Semiotics, and Marketing and Micro-economics. This strategy turned out to work very well, and Special Issues still form an element of the *IJRM* editorial policy.

Though a lot of work, getting *IJRM* off the ground was a very rewarding task. Nevertheless, I was also relieved to hand over the editorship to Gilles Laurent (HEC, France) as of January 1, 1987. I am very pleased that he and a succession of other highly capable editors after him have helped to get *IJRM* where it is today: a top academic journal in marketing.

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