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## Green Grass, High Cotton: Reflections on the Evolution of the Journal of Advertising

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**Green Grass, High Cotton: Reflections on the Evolution of the *Journal of Advertising***

Leonard N. Reid

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## **About the Author**

Leonard N. Reid (Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) is professor emeritus of advertising in the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Advertising and a recipient of the Academy's Outstanding Contribution to Research in Advertising Award. His research has appeared in numerous journals, including the *Journal of Advertising*, *International Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, *Health Communication*, *Journal of Health Communication*, *Health Marketing Quarterly*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, *Journal of Communication*, *Communication Research*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Psychology & Marketing*, and *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*.

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## **Green Grass, High Cotton: Reflections on the Evolution of the *Journal of Advertising***

### **ABSTRACT**

This essay reflects on my time as the fifth editor of the *Journal of Advertising*, makes observations about the evolution of scholarship in the *Journal* over the past decades, offers suggestions for how *JA* might advance in the coming years, and provides some “words of wisdom” to advertising researchers. Since it is the first in a series of editor reflections, a bit of historical context is provided.

The first issue of the *Journal of Advertising* appeared (hereafter *JA*) in 1972. Forty-two years later, there is ample evidence *JA* is the world's most prestigious outlet for conceptually sound, theoretically-grounded, and methodologically rigorous reports of high quality advertising research and scholarship. To paraphrase what my grandfather, who farmed the southern Virginia soil, would say about a year's especially high-yielding crop, today is most certainly a time of "green grass, high cotton" for the journal (i.e., a high point in the life of the family, be it the Reid clan or the *JA* family).

In this essay, I have been asked to reflect on my time as editor, make observations about the evolution of scholarship in the *Journal* over the past decades, offer suggestions for how *JA* might advance in the coming years, and finally provide some "words of wisdom" to advertising researchers. I have organized my thoughts here around those tasks; however, because this is the first in a series of editor reflections, I will begin by providing a bit of historical context.

### **A BIT OF JOURNAL HISTORY**

*JA* is the result of the collective efforts of the pioneers of advertising education (see Barban, 2011; Ross and Richards, 2008; Rotzoll and Barban, 1984). Working primarily through the 1950s and 1960s, they took it upon themselves to champion advertising as a legitimate academic enterprise within the university setting. In 1958, their efforts coalesced in the formation of the American Academy of Advertising.

The first official publication of the Academy, *Occasional Papers in Advertising*, appeared on the academic scene eight years later, in 1966. *Occasional Papers* was premised on a simple, but powerful idea – to give attention to the production and dissemination of

knowledge unique to advertising as an institution and professional practice (Barban, 2011; *Occasional Papers in Advertising*, 1966; Russell, 2011). More specifically, *Occasional Papers* was launched to achieve two basic goals: (1) to advance the Academy's self-designated responsibility for increasing and storing the body of knowledge upon which the field rests and (2) to take a first step toward establishing what would be the second journal in the field of advertising, following on the heels of the Advertising Research Foundation's *Journal of Advertising Research* (i.e., *JAR* being the first). As the title suggests, issues of *Occasional Papers* appeared 'occasionally: four issues were published between 1966 and 1971 (Barban, 2011). Six years later, in 1972, *JA* was launched as the official journal of the Academy with the following stated purpose (Muncy, 1991):

"A discipline is measured in terms of its theoretical foundations in conjunction with their implied verifiable consequences. Therefore because advertising is, generically a communication industry, this journal aims to encourage the discovery and development of, (a) valid theory and relevant facts regarding the psychological and philosophical aspects of communication, and (b), the relationship between these and other components of the advertising process" (*Journal of Advertising*, 1972, iv)."

That first year, a single issue of *JA* was published. The following year two issues appeared. In 1974, *JA* began its current practice of publishing four issues per year. Though the "statement of purpose" has been amended through the years, the core values reflected in the original mission statement remain – the discovery and development of theoretically founded knowledge that is verified (i.e., either through empirical methods or critical

thinking and reason) within the communication context and considered in relation to its consequences for advertising theory and practice.

The first four editors of the *Journal* - Dan Stewart (1<sup>st</sup> editor, 1972-1975), Tom Russell (2<sup>nd</sup> editor, 1975-1978), Keith Hunt (3<sup>rd</sup> editor, 1979-1983), and Tony McGann (4<sup>th</sup> editor, 1983-1987) - deserve special credit for putting *JA* on the path to becoming the world's premier advertising journal (Muncy, 1991). They *took JA* from its infancy and maneuvered it through its formative years. Along the way, they dealt with financial uncertainty, limited operational support, and even a challenge to the journal's identity, the *Journal of Advertising* (the *International Journal of Advertising* was born out of the tussle) (Hunt, 2011).

In the early years, *JA* operated very differently than it does today. Initially, the *Journal* struggled financially (Hunt, 2011; Jugenheimer, 2011). Revenues flowed from various combinations of member dues, library subscriptions, sale of back issues and ad space, and donations from the editor's sponsoring university. The *Journal* lived on the financial edge. There was no professional publisher to sell and distribute issues and to handle the lion's share of publication operations. Instead, the *Journal* was essentially an on-site, one person operation. In addition to editorial responsibilities (e.g., assigning reviewers, making publication decisions, etc.), early editors were also responsible for finding a printer, managing production, maintaining subscription lists, mailing and distributing issues, inventory storage and control, back issue fulfillment, and handling various financial obligations, including such things as paying printing and mailing bills, balancing the journal's checkbook, and filing yearly income taxes. Outsourcing of some

these operational tasks occurred in 1991 when the late George Zinkhan became the 6<sup>th</sup> *JA* editor and the Academy entered into a contract with CTC, Inc. to handle production, mailing, inventory, and other services.

Each of us – former editors, Academy members, and journal users –owe a symbolic “tip of the cap” to Stewart, Russell, Hunt, and McGann for their contributions to the scholarly ascension of *JA*. As a result of their vision and hard work, when I began my four-year term as the *Journal's* 5<sup>th</sup> editor sixteen years after the first issue appeared (1987-1991), *JA* rested on a solid editorial and operational foundation.

Now on to the heart of the matter - my thoughts and observations on the *Journal's* development.

### **MEMORIES AND NOTEWORTHY EVENTS**

Memory is tricky. We tend to recall the good things and to forget the bad. As such, most of my editorship memories are good – interacting with some of the best advertising scholars on the planet, learning from Peggy Kreshel, a great writer who edited accepted manuscripts for me, and being at the cutting edge of advertising research and scholarship. Thinking back today, I cannot recall a single negative event worth mentioning. Then too, barring some catastrophic occurrence, events of note likewise tend to be positive. Two noteworthy events occurring during my editorship stand out:

- *JA's* Best Article Award was proposed and instituted in 1988. Since that year, the award has been given annually to authors of an article selected from issues of each



volume. The award is now regarded as a 'significant career' achievement by advertising researchers and scholars.

- It was also under my editorship that the physical appearance of *JA* first changed. Making an "executive' decision," I changed the cover colors from orange and blue to maroon and grey; modified article page layout; added pull quotes to articles; and discontinued the practice of publishing author photographs. I also altered the reference/citation style to bring it in line with most of the major marketing-related journals.

## **TRENDS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

*JA* has always been about the pursuit of theoretically and methodologically-sound knowledge about "all that is advertising." Based upon my reading of *JA* and forthcoming research (e.g., Kim et al., in press; Park et al., in press; Yoo et al. in press), I have observed several trends which have emerged in the collective work over the years.

Let me begin with what I would identify as "major trends." Beside each I have placed a mark in parentheses to reflect whether I see the trend as positive (+), negative (-) or having both positive and negative aspects (~). Following each trend I offer what I see happening in the near future.

### **Global Reach (+)**

*JA* has evolved from a primarily United States-centric journal to a global one. This is evident from a quick comparison of early and contemporary *JA* issues. The number of articles authored by individuals affiliated with non-U.S. institutions has increased

substantially; *JA*'s editorial board and ad hoc reviewers today include numerous scholars from abroad; 21 percent of the Academy's membership is now international (Rose, 2014); and the *JA* is now edited by its first non-US based editor (i.e., Madrid, Spain).

Future Direction. I expect *JA* will become even more global in scope in the coming years as the globalization of business, the advertising business, and media accelerates. This increasingly global focus will be reflective of a changing academic reality as the professorial ranks welcome scholars from Australia, China, the Netherlands, South Korea and other "faraway places."

### **Increased Competition for Submissions (+)**

*JA* now faces increased competition for advertising research from other journals. As noted earlier, when *JA* was first published in 1972, it was only the second journal dedicated to advertising research and scholarship. Today, it is one of four very good advertising journals: *JAR*, *IJA* and the reinvigorated *JCIRA*. In my estimation, *IJA*'s stock has risen tremendously since the turn of the century, and will continue to rise throughout the coming years. As for *JCIRA*, the outlook is "rosy" and is improving since the journal is now on solid footing as an additional official publication of the Academy.

Mirroring the complexity of advertising in today's media and business cultures, the breadth of advertising-related questions posed, and the variety of methodological approaches undertaken, competition for advertising research has increased dramatically, moving beyond journals specifically focused on advertising. The number of generalized and specialized journals in the fields of marketing and communication has grown significantly over the past twenty or so years. Once, the *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of*

*Marketing Research, Journal of Consumer Research, Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, Journal of Broadcasting, Communication Research, and Journal of Communication* were the primary competitors for submissions. Today, journals such *Marketing Letters, Marketing Science, Psychology & Marketing, Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, Journal of Marketing Communication, Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of Health Communication, Journal of Communication Management, and Health Communication* have arrived on the scene as outlets for advertising research.

Future Direction. Whether this trend is viewed as negative or positive is a matter of perspective. On one hand, increased competition for advertising research might be considered a negative for the *Journal* itself. On the other hand, the number of potential outlets for advertising scholarship signals the vibrancy of the discipline and certainly is positive for authors. Personally, I view competition as good and would argue that, even under increased competitive pressures, *JA* is in a strong position relative to other advertising journals and most marketing and communication journals. Journal quality factors heavily into individual submission decisions. A quality journal can maintain its quality only so long as it is viewed as the “premier destination” for researchers’ best work; *JA* is usually the top choice, or one of the top choices, when authors are making targeting decisions for their advertising studies.

The key is for *JA* to retain and grow its hard earned academic reputation. As I see it, the *Journal’s* reputation will be influenced significantly by one factor - a continued commitment to a rigorous review process, the primary mechanism of quality control.

## **Absence of Replications (-).**

In the early 1980s, I co-authored a study with Larry Soley and Roger Wimmer (1983) which empirically established a lack of replication in advertising research in general. More recent research provides evidence that replication studies have gained very little ground in the *Journal* in the intervening years. Only about 7 percent of all of the articles published in *JA* between 1980 and 2012 are replications. That percentage includes intra-study replications (also called with-in study replications). Some would argue within-study replications should be excluded because they do not meet the definitional criteria of true replicative research. If removed, the percentage of replications studies during the time period drops to only 2 percent. The problem is compounded further by the fact that over 90 percent of the published replications reported full or partial support for the original findings.

Future Direction. Two things stand out regarding this trend. First, after three decades and much scholarly commentary on the importance of replication, there is no replication tradition in the pages of *JA*. Second, when replications do appear in the *Journal*, they tend to reflect confirmation bias (the intentional or unintentional tendency to support assumed and known truths). These twin problems are especially troublesome to me. They indicate not only a lack of appreciation for the need for a sustained replication tradition to advance advertising knowledge, but also the failure to understand the replication process itself and the need to be especially wary of unreplicated research findings.

One might argue that this trend is symptomatic of a larger disciplinary neglect of replication studies. Certainly the *Journal* cannot publish replication studies if none are

submitted. While that is certainly true, editors and reviewers must remain reflective about any biases that might diminish evaluation of such studies, and as a premier journal in the discipline, *JA* should do all it can to encourage replicative research.

As advertising scholars, we should all stop talking about the need for replication and actually *do* something to correct the problem. That being said, I am encouraged by the special issue of *JA* on replicated studies currently being planned. I strongly favor an even more permanent solution: the introduction of a special section in each issue of *JA* dedicated to the publication of replication studies.

### **Special Issues and the Publication Opportunity (~)**

*JA* published its first special issue in 1994 (Volume 23, Number 1). That issue focused on international advertising. Since then, twelve other special issues have been published. At this moment, in addition to the special issue on replicative research mentioned earlier, another special issue on health advertising is planned for future publication. While the idea might have appeared novel twenty years ago, my box is filled with calls for papers for journal special issues in many other advertising-related publications. Obviously, there is a general trend here.

Future Direction. Though it might come as a surprise, I view this trend as more negative than positive. There is no question the publication of a special issue brings related work together in a single place, adds substantially to knowledge regarding a particular topic of advertising, and contributes to the collective good in other ways. However, any knowledge gain is offset by two related negatives: (1) the reality is that each time a special appears, a regular issue is eliminated from the specific volume and (2) elimination of a

regular issue reduces by one-fourth the publication opportunity for other articles in any given year. If the practice is to continue, I would like to see three things happen: (1) four regular issues should be published in every *JA* volume, (2) with the publication of each special issue not as a replacement for a regular issue, but as an additional issue of a specific volume; and (3) consideration given to replacing the focus from the publication of original research articles to substantive reviews of the literature on designated advertising topics. The field would be greatly served if *JA* special issues would periodically appear as a continuous archive for collective thought about advertising (*CIRA*, now *JCIRA*, published such volumes for a period of time).

### **Other Content Trends**

In addition to what I have identified as major trends, I have also observed other discernible trends in *JA* over the years. Among the most notable to have occurred between 1980 and 2010 are:

- Seven of every ten *JA* articles focus on one of three topics —advertising practice, advertising effects, and social aspects. (~)
- Research in *JA* is primarily theory driven (63% of articles) and is likely to become even more so in the future. Since 1985, the number of theory-driven articles has trended upward while non-theoretical articles have trended down. (+) In the future, greater focus will be placed on the development of advertising-centric theories, though theoretical borrowing from other disciplines and fields will remain important to the study of advertising phenomena.

- Research in *JA* is highly empirical. Between 1980 and 2010, fewer than two of every ten articles published in the *Journal* were non-empirical. (~)
- Quantitative research approaches dominate the *Journal*. Almost eight of every ten research articles published in *JA* between 1980 and 2010 reports numerical data generated through traditional social scientific methods such as laboratory experimentation (39.9%), survey research (14%), and content analysis (9.3%). The dominance of the quantitative research approach will not likely abate any time soon; *JA* research articles will remain firmly rooted in the quantitative orientation of the social and behavioral sciences. (~)
- The use of statistics has been remarkably consistent throughout *JA*'s history, with eight of every ten research articles reporting statistical analyses. Over the years, the use of different statistical techniques has evolved as statistical analysis has become more diverse and sophisticated.-(~)

I anticipate that *JA* will become even more statistically sophisticated as new statistical techniques are brought into the field from other disciplines. These new analytical tools will be used to address two issues of particular significance: (1) the pursuit of causality and (2) the analysis of "big data."

- The reporting of multiple experiments within a single *JA* article has become the norm. Articles reporting a single experiment are now rare and will likely disappear from the *Journal's* pages in the future. (~)
- Human subjects are the preferred unit of analysis. Students (34.4%) have served as subjects more often than adults (22.1%), women (1.2%) or children (3.1%) in *JA*

articles. (-). I suspect the use of student as subjects is likely to decline over the coming years. (+)

- In studies of advertising effects, cognitive outcomes (48.7%) are measured more frequently than affective (31.1%) or behavioral outcomes (7.8%). Social and economic effects appear in just over 5 percent of the *JA* articles. (-) I anticipate psychological reactions of individuals will continue to be emphasized in future effect studies.
- Print has been the most studied advertising medium in *JA* (36.3%), followed by television (16.6%), radio (3.1%), and the Internet (3.1%). I suspect studies of traditional advertising media will continue to populate the pages of *JA*, but will ebb and flow relative to changes in industry media mixes.

Studies of Internet advertising first appeared in *JA* in 2000. I anticipate that research on new and emerging message delivery mechanisms will expand exponentially as digital messaging platforms, virtual environments, and other technological developments become a larger part of the advertising media landscape. (+)

- Five types of implications have been drawn from research published in *JA*. Managerial implications (64.2%) have appeared most often, followed by theoretical (36.3%), methodological (15%), policy (12.4%), and educational (1%) implications. Since 2000, theoretical and policy implications have become more common while managerial implications have become less so. I anticipate that the increase in theory-driven studies will be accompanied by greater emphasis on theoretical implications. (+)



## Trends I Would Like to See

As I look ahead, I believe *JA* would benefit materially if other content developments occurred in future issues. Specially, I would like see:

- An increase in the number of systematic literature reviews.
- Greater focus on the production/source side of advertising communication to augment research on advertising content and effects.
- More research on historical, cultural, social and economic issues to better understand the larger, institutional aspects of advertising.
- A significant increase in the publication of qualitative research as the result of the increasing submissions of high-quality qualitative studies which remain within the *Journal's* page limitations.
- Greater emphasis on replication and publication of larger numbers of replicative studies. To qualify as true replication, these studies should be conducted by individuals other than the original researchers or by the original researchers in time-separated and independent settings, meaning within-study replications would be excluded from counts of replicative research.
- More comparative studies of new and traditional advertising media, with an emphasis on differences in such things as message engagement and behavioral effects.
- Increased use of actual behavioral-change measures following exposure to advertising.

- Research driven by substantive research questions and theory, rather than by the introduction and use of new and more sophisticated analytical tools.

From my perspective as one of the “old guard,” these trends would not only add to *JA*’s scholarly reputation, but also enhance its value to the community of advertising researchers.

### **ADVICE TO ADVERTISING RESEARCHERS**

Out of the box, let me confess that giving advice to researchers interested in publishing in *JA* is discomfoting for me. Surely, what I have to say is well understood and perhaps even mundane to most. Still, at the risk of being pretentious, here is what I see as “essential truths” associated with successful publishing in scholarly journals such as *JA*.

#### **Intellectual Curiosity**

Intellectual curiosity is the primary driver of publishing success. It is the “something” that separates the successful from the unsuccessful; the “force” that motivates the pursuit of answers to interesting and substantive questions; and the catalyst for the development and sustenance of a productive research career. When intellectual curiosity is recognized, embraced, and nurtured, it becomes a constant, a condition of “being” a researcher and the foundation for all other factors associated with publishing success.

#### **Research Perspective**

Treat research activity as a marathon, not a sprint. Okay, so I am paraphrasing a TV celebrity here, but this is solid advice for researchers. A successful researcher takes the long view, approaching research activity much like a marathon runner - sometimes you run

fast, sometimes you run slowly, but you always keep running. A key to publishing success is to always have things in what I call the “research pipeline” (i.e., papers in development, under review, and “in press”).

### **Literature Consumption**

Be a voracious consumer of both the research and the professional literature within the field of advertising and beyond. Reading supplies the raw materials for research productivity. Through reading, you learn about theoretical and methodological developments in advertising and related fields; are informed about emerging trends in the practice of advertising; discover new and interesting research questions; are moved to reconsider old questions from different angles and perspectives; and develop and refine your thinking about theoretical relationships among concepts and how they might reliably and validly be studied.

Reading led me to develop what became a highly productive habit. Over the years, I have created and maintained an accordion-style folder in which I have deposited thoughts spurred by my reading, thoughts about potential research projects for future reference and action. I borrowed the practice from a couple of industry friends who filed away useful life experiences and advertisements they came across for future inspiration. My advice to you – read, writes down your thoughts, and put the notes in a “research idea” folder. Revisit your thoughts on a regular basis.

### **Journal Style and Writing**

First impressions are important. Ignore at your peril how (1) failure to adhere to *JA* style requirements and (2) quality of writing influence editorial judgments of you and your work. Publishing in *JA* is difficult enough. Don't make it more difficult by submitting a manuscript which uses the wrong format style, exceeds page limits, or presents disjointed, poorly organized thoughts.

Style and writing matter. Two common negative reactions from editors and reviewers are: (1) "Obviously, this paper has been submitted elsewhere and rejected." (2) "There might be something worthwhile in this manuscript, but it is lost to me in poor and incoherent presentation." Attention to style and careful, logical development of your research eliminates reactions like these.

### **Author Partnerships**

Fortunately, authorship collaboration is welcomed in our field. Unless you work in a research tradition where single authorship is the norm (e.g., history, critical theory), consider forging research partnerships with others who share your interests. Working collaboratively not only encourages a dimensionality arising out of different perspectives, but also provides division of labor efficiencies, increases research productivity rates, and contributes significantly to individual growth and development (i.e., we learn from others).

Still, be aware that not all partnerships work out. In my collaborative experiences, I have learned that partnerships are most productive and enjoyable when individuals bring different skills to the work (e.g., conceptual ability, analytical sophistication, writing skills, etc.) and all actually "do the work" required in the production of a quality research report.

## **Persistence**

*JA*'s acceptance rate has always been relatively low, but I would wager that getting research published in the journal has become increasingly more difficult over the years. More often than I would like to admit, I have been humbled by *JA*. I suspect only the very few "infallibles" among us have escaped having our egos dashed by the rigors of the *JA*'s review process. In almost every case in which a review decision is rendered, you can expect to receive two of three items: (1) critical, but constructive reviewer comments, and either (2) a letter offering the opportunity to revise and resubmit for a second round of reviewing or (3) a letter of rejection. Of the three, only the rejection is bad news to me.

As I see it, the publication of a *JA* article is the product of two factors: (1) the ability to deal with negativity and (2) persistence. Rather than taking the stance of the "uncompromising" who would rather move on than yield to other viewpoints, the successful are only momentarily discouraged; they understand reviewers are expected to be critical; they see the opportunity to revise and resubmit as good news, not bad news; they accept the fact that the ultimate good news might only come after multiple rounds of revisions; and they understand the end result – a published *JA* article – is a negotiated product.

### **ALMOST THREE DECADES LATER**

Much has changed since my *JA* editorship ended. Beyond the obvious physical modifications (i.e., different binding, page formatting, type face), publication operations are now handled primarily by a professional publisher; all correspondence is electronically administered (with copying costs shifted from the journal to authors); a senior advisory

board has been added, the editorial review board has become more global and diverse; and the editor is now assisted by a bevy of associate editors.

Despite these changes, one thing has remained constant –*JA*'s firm commitment to the advancement of scholarly knowledge on the theory and practice of advertising. We all can be proud – we all *should* be proud - of how *JA* has evolved into what it is today, and looking into the future, we can be confident of its ability to lead the discipline and the profession.

Let me close by saying the thoughts and observations I have offered here represent imperfect recollections and selective experiences from my time as editor and as a dedicated and loyal *JA* reader and author. Because these thoughts are filtered through faulty memory and interpretive biases, I suspect editors who follow me in this series will have other things to say about *JA*'s evolution and future path. Having had the advantage of “first to market,” I encourage those who follow not only to offer their particular and quite likely different thoughts and observations, but also to expand upon what I have written, perhaps in agreement, perhaps in opposition. In the end, the essay series will be a useful historical narrative.

Introspection, reflection, and dialogue are essential to the long term well-being of any academic discipline or field. As caretakers of the field of advertising, it is imperative that we pause periodically to acknowledge the past, present, and future of the field's institutional development. The storage and retrieval of accumulated knowledge in *JA* rightfully are part of this discussion, at once heralding and nurturing the profession and the Academy.

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