



Editorial

## How the Explosion of Customer Data Has Redefined Interactive Marketing



Defining “Interactive Marketing” is becoming increasingly difficult as all of marketing now has the potential to be interactive. Technology is advancing at rapid rates, allowing business to collect data on virtually everything. We can now observe how people search for brands, what they say to peers, and how they interact with brands before, during, and after a purchase. We are now in a business environment where obtaining data is no longer the problem, but instead, our ability to process, analyze and derive insights from the data is.

The field of interactive marketing is in a unique position, one where academics and industry practitioners are working on similar problems and struggling with similar challenges. However, as academic researchers, we run the risk of industry specialists outpacing us with larger investments and a greater sense of urgency. Thus, it is critical for us to think about what the role of academic research is in this space and what academic researchers can bring to the table.

One area of comparative advantage for academics is our ability to frame problems based on theory and extant research. This is a particularly advantageous skill in an environment where we are drowning in data. Every interaction with the customer generates a data point. Every interaction between customers generates a data point. Customers even generate data when they are alone (think online browsing, watching videos, or geotracking). When there is so much data, it is tempting to mindlessly mine the data for whatever metrics you can think of constructing. However, this leads to a metrics overload, which is just marginally better than data overload. As interactive marketing researchers, we need to think about what the key decisions facing marketing managers are and what theories, frameworks, and models can best organize the data and aid in their decision making.

As we think about how to frame key problems, we also need to think carefully about the methods we are proposing for the large volumes of data available in interactive marketing contexts. Academic researchers comfortably work with small samples and complex methods, but practitioners prefer scale and simplicity. Thus, for our research to be impactful, the advances we make in interactive marketing must scale and

generalize, either the method can be applied to the data that interactive marketing managers are working with or the findings can be generalized to their contexts. That means that computationally intensive methods may need to give way to simpler analyses that can be applied at scale. That also means that substantive findings are related to fundamental behaviors such that there is an expectation that they will apply to contexts beyond the specific product category or country featured in the study.

What makes our job as interactive marketing researchers especially challenging is the fact that the environment in which we work is rapidly and dramatically changing as we develop our methods, theories, and frameworks. The technology industry is constantly finding new ways to collect data and inventing new platforms to engage consumers. While this can be exciting, it also means that research that takes years to conduct, and almost as long to get through the review process, can quickly become obsolete. What we don't want is a system where researchers overinvest in perfection at the cost of good research becoming obsolete before it is published. At times, that might mean that the research is not perfect. It can't be wrong, but it doesn't need to be perfect so long as it makes progress.

Finally, we need to consider new kinds of data. Quantitative data is relatively easy to work with, and recently, we've made great strides in our ability to analyze textual data. However, consumers' behaviors are evolving to generate data filled with images and videos; and data scientists are collecting all of it. With so much of the consumer's voice being expressed through memes, snapshots, selfies, and videos, marketing researchers need to figure out how to extract relevant insights from this type of data.

So how do we define “Interactive Marketing?” Interactive marketing is no longer just direct marketing or internet marketing. Interactive marketing permeates virtually every aspect of the marketing organization. Sales and advertising must now think about targeting algorithms and product recommendation engines. Pricing now involves dynamic and customized prices. Customer relationship marketing now tracks

and collects data along the entire customer journey from lead generation to post-purchase activities. And marketing research extends beyond conducting periodic surveys to monitoring the entire Internet for the voice of the customer. And all of this occurs in a context where content is customized by ad networks and social media platforms.

Before introducing the revised aims and scope of the journal, there is one more important issue we'd like to raise. As interactive marketers, we tend to focus on the individual customer and how we can best satisfy that individual's unique needs. However, this focus on the individual can sometimes impede our ability to consider how the tools and methods we develop affect the consumer population as a whole. For example, targeted advertisements and customized content feeds may maximize an individual's perceived (and short term) utility, but they may also create echo chambers or filter bubbles that isolate consumers from the larger population. Additionally, our drive to perfect the predictive ability of our models and algorithms should not have to come at the cost of sacrificing consumer privacy. In other words, as we further the field of interactive marketing, a parallel conversation on the ethics and impact on society of interactive marketing also needs to occur.

These are exciting times for interactive marketing marked by a lot of change. To help lead the way, the *Journal of Interactive Marketing* is revising its statement of Aims & Scope to accommodate a broader set of topics, extending beyond direct and internet marketing and acknowledging the new challenges associated with our new data environment:

The *Journal of Interactive Marketing* aims to identify issues and frame ideas associated with the rapidly expanding field of interactive marketing, which includes both online and offline topics related to the analysis, targeting and service of individual customers. We strive to publish leading-edge, high-quality and original research that presents results, methodologies, theories, concepts, models and applications on any aspect of interactive marketing. The journal has no preferred or disallowed methodologies but is open to conceptually rigorous approaches of any type. Manuscripts should address current or emerging managerial problems and have the potential to impact practice and theory in interactive marketing.

A partial list of topics suitable for publication in the journal might include, but not be limited to:

- Big data analytics
- Multichannel and online retail strategy
- Online advertising
- Web Analytics
- Browsing and buying behavior
- E-service and self-service technology
- Customer relationship management
- Strategic use of IT
- Social media marketing
- Social media monitoring
- Social network analysis
- Mobile marketing
- Search engine marketing
- Influence/viral marketing
- User-generated content
- Privacy, trust and ethical issues
- Dynamic pricing
- Recommendation systems
- Interactive B2B marketing
- Customer journey analysis and marketing
- Microtargeting
- Targeted advertising and promotions
- Content customization
- Content marketing
- Customer engagement
- Ratings/reviews
- Online customer behavior
- Text analytics of online content (both user and brand generated)
- Crowdsourcing
- Marketing analytics

Wendy W. Moe  
Co-Editor

E-mail address: [wendy\\_moe@rhsmith.umd.edu](mailto:wendy_moe@rhsmith.umd.edu)

Brian T. Ratchford  
Co-Editor