How to Publish Consumer Research based on Experiments in the Top Marketing Journals

Cornelia (Connie) Pechmann, University of California Irvine

Author Note: The author sincerely thanks David Stewart, Vicki Morwitz, and Jesse Catlin for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

Cite as: Pechmann, C. (2019). How to Publish Consumer Research based on Experiments in the Top Marketing Journals, in Stewart, David W. and Ladik, Daniel, How to Publish in the Best Marketing Journals, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, Chapter 5, forthcoming.

The book table of contents is below:

How to Publish Consumer Research based on Experiments in the Top Marketing Journals

Abstract

This chapter provides guidance about how to publish consumer research based on experiments in the top marketing journals. It stresses the importance of conveying a big picture idea, that is empirically supported, but that makes a fundamental theoretical advance. It describes three pathways to doing this, providing: (1) fundamental insights about humans that are demonstrated in a consumer context; (2) fundamental insights about consumers; or (3) fundamental insights about how marketers or policy makers may affect or be affected by consumers. The chapter first discusses the essential elements of any paper: a compelling storyline, fundamental contributions, multiple experiments, and transparent reporting. Next, it illustrates how to write the introduction, theory, methods and results sections. Examples demonstrate that the introduction and theory sections are used to build storylines based on the chosen pathway, but the same essential elements are included, and also the methods and results are fully reported and transparent.

Key words: consumer research, publication criteria, reproducibility, experimental methods, theoretical contributions, marketer and policy insights

How to Publish Consumer Research based on Experiments in the Top Marketing Journals

This book chapter is intended to provide guidance to junior academics in marketing and other fields about how to publish consumer research based on experiments in the top marketing journals. By the top marketing journals, I mean *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Marketing, Journal of Consumer Psychology* and *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. All of these are on the *Financial Times* list of leading business journals. Some of the information in this chapter is also relevant to publishing experiment-based consumer research in other marketing journals like the *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing, Journal of Internet Marketing*, *Journal of Advertising*, and *Marketing Letters,* because these journals are increasingly adopting the standards of the top journals. My goal is to provide guidance to consumer researchers who primarily use the experimental method. I will not be discussing research that adopts the CCT (consumer culture theory) paradigm or the modeling paradigm.

Researchers who use the experimental method and want to publish in a top marketing journal should strive to make a contribution to knowledge that is solidly grounded in empirical data, but also provides a big picture insight that is generalizable across different substantive contexts. In other words, what the top marketing journals seek is a big picture idea, that is empirically supported, but that makes a fundamental theoretical advance that contributes not only to marketing but to academia in general. It should be possible to summarize this insight in a single sentence, e.g., “savoring an upcoming consumption experience heightens later enjoyment of the experience, because savoring creates affective memory traces.” (Chun, Diehl, and MacInnis 2017). The big picture insight often derives from testing theory-based hypotheses that were identified at the onset using a deductive approach. Alternatively, the insight may bubble up inductively from studying consumers in action, but nonetheless the paper should highlight the theoretical insight, not the specific consumer context, and should stress that the context studied is just one example of a larger empirical phenomenon. Purely empirical papers as well as purely theoretical papers are difficult to publish in the top marketing journals. By purely empirical papers, I mean papers that report findings about a specific marketing, business, policy or consumer context, but provide little in the way of fundamental theoretical insights that allow for understanding and generalizability to other contexts. These papers are viewed as offering more limited contributions. Papers that develop a theoretical framework but do not provide empirical data to support the framework are also viewed as making more limited contributions; but meta-analyses are fine.

One main aim of this chapter is to highlight three distinct pathways to developing papers that make experiment-based big picture theoretical contributions to knowledge. The three pathways involve providing: (1) fundamental insights about humans that are demonstrated in a consumer context; (2) fundamental insights about consumers; or (3) fundamental insights about how marketers or policy makers may affect or be affected by consumers. The third type of paper may arguably seem the most suitable for the top marketing journals, but these papers have declined in prevalence, to such an extent that the *Journal of Marketing* now explicitly encourages them (Moorman et al. 2018). Based on my experience, consumer researchers that employ experiments and that want to publish in the top marketing journals should choose one of these pathways, at the time they write up their research, and ideally from the onset.

In this chapter I first discuss the essential elements of any consumer research paper that targets a top marketing journal. These essential elements include a compelling storyline, empirically-based theoretical contributions to knowledge, multiple complementary experiments, and full transparent reporting of methods and results. Next, I discuss the main sections of a paper: the introduction, the theory section, the methods, and the results. I differentiate between papers that are based on the three distinct research pathways, and I discuss both similarities and differences in how a paper should be written based on the chosen pathway. I illustrate my points about the three research pathways using three papers that were recently published in *Journal of Consumer Research*, which are summarized in a table (Table 1). In addition, I provide a checklist for researchers to facilitate manuscript preparation (Table 2). A main point I want to convey is that experiment-based consumer research papers in the top marketing journals should use the introduction and theory sections to build their storylines for making a fundamental contribution, based on their chosen pathway. However, all papers should include the essential elements, and all should convey their methods and results fully.

[INSERT TABLES 1 AND 2 HERE]

A Realistic Perspective about Publishing in a Top Marketing Journal

Authors should start with a realistic perspective about publishing in a top marketing journal. Most U.S. marketing journals report acceptance rates of 8% or less, meaning that 92% or more of the submissions are rejected, sometimes even after revisions. If a submission fits within the type of work the journal publishes and hence makes it past the desk rejection stage, acceptance rates are higher, but still surprisingly low. Solid research is routinely rejected at the top marketing journals due to a perceived lack of a big picture insight. Top marketing journals are highly selective because they receive a very large numbers of submissions from the U.S., Europe, Asia, and elsewhere; and also from other business or basic disciplines. In addition, U.S. marketing journals do not solely publish consumer research based on experiments, but also other types of research, and so a large pool of well-trained researchers have to compete for very scarce journal space. Consequently, consumer researchers should expect to receive at least some and perhaps many rejection decisions. Even in the best case scenario, researchers should be prepared to undertake major revisions that may involve new data collection and/or new theorizing. However, researchers who are responsive and persistent, and who try different journals if initially rejected, should be able to publish their work in respected marketing or business journals.

Consumer researchers should also be prepared to pursue a project possibly for many years before successfully publishing a paper in a top marketing journal. It often takes years to understand all relevant literatures, generate viable research ideas that are sufficiently path breaking, run pilot studies followed by numerous full-fledged studies, analyze the data, write up the results, submit to a journal, complete multiple revisions, and possibly submit to alternative journals with revisions there too. The process from beginning to end is typically very lengthy, despite the fact that a marketing journal will generally provide reviews within about 2-3 months of submission. To handle the extensive workload, and to ensure that the research team has the requisite skills and knowledge, it is common for consumer research papers to include three or more authors. Single authored papers, while they exist, are becoming rarer. Hence, many business schools no longer require faculty who are going up for tenure to produce single authored papers. However, they do expect these faculty to be the lead authors on some papers and to produce papers with junior colleagues.

Many junior academics assume that if they obtain interesting and consistent empirical results across numerous studies, including a behavioral study or a field study, they are virtually guaranteed publication in a top marketing journal. In reality, though, how well the paper is written is at least as important as the results that are reported. Therefore, it is important to understand what is expected in the write-up, as I explain below. It is also important to ask knowledgeable colleagues to provide honest comments on a paper before sending it out for formal review, make revisions based on their comments, and make additional revisions based on the reviewer and editor comments, even if the paper is rejected at that specific journal.

Essential Elements of a Consumer Research Paper for a Top Marketing Journal

An important element of a consumer research paper is that it should tell a clear, compelling and consistent story about the research contributions, one that even a causal reader can readily grasp. To tell the story well, the paper should include a plot overview in the abstract and introduction, a plot development in the theory section, and a plot resolution in the results section. As a journal editor, I found that a submission was ready for publication when I could skim through it and immediately appreciate the storyline, by reviewing the section headings, paragraph starts, and graphs. Skimming is common among reviewers, editors and readers. Hence, researchers should skim through their own papers before submission, as if they were busy reviewers or readers, to see if a clear and compelling storyline is conveyed, within these salient elements of the paper.

In addition, a consumer research paper that targets a top marketing journal should seek to delineate fundamental theoretical insights that can be appreciated by other disciplines, and by educated adults generally. By theoretical contribution, I do not mean that a specific theory must be tested and extended, e.g., Assimilation-Contrast Theory (Cunha and Shulman 2011) or the Question-Behavior Effect (Spangenberg et al. 2016). Most papers start with a focal theory or a defined research area, and this is important, but it is only a starting point. To be publishable in a top marketing journal, a paper should make a fundamental contribution to our body of knowledge broadly construed, i.e., provide a big picture insight, which I label and is often labeled a theoretical contribution. Identifying at least one major contribution is essential; and creating a laundry list of weaker contributions will not do it. The contribution should be understandable to any educated reader. The contribution should not be of the form that “past research studied X not Y, so we studied Y.” Top marketing journals are not looking for incremental work; they are looking for fundamental contributions to knowledge. These fundamental contributions should be emphasized throughout the paper, starting in the abstract, and in the contribution statement if one is required. Marketing journals do not expect researchers to be modest; instead, researchers should repeatedly highlight their contributions.

Typically, a consumer research paper that is targeted at a top marketing journal should include multiple empirical studies that are highly complementary. These studies will often have the same independent variables and outcome measures, but they will explore different mediators (process variables) and/or moderators (used to study boundary conditions and/or test mediating processes). Typically 3-6 studies are included in a single paper, and a few papers report 10 or more studies. A paper will rarely include just 1-2 studies, because this will not be sufficient to rule out rival explanations or to fully support one theory to the exclusion of others.

Consumer researchers most typically conduct carefully controlled lab experiments that factorally manipulate all predictor variables and randomly assign participants to condition. They also increasingly include at least one study that has greater realism, which perhaps measures a key construct, analyzes a real-world dataset, and/or studies consumers in the field, to demonstrate that the effects generalize outside the lab. Researchers at the top business schools are often given large research budgets, e.g., in the thousands or even tens of thousands of dollars annually, to pay for participants, equipment (e.g., eye tracking), field studies, and so forth. Therefore, consumer researchers from other schools should obtain whatever resources are needed to ensure high quantity and high quality empirical research.

Consumer researchers should ensure that their methods and results are fully reported and transparent, consistent with current top journal reporting standards, which are becoming increasingly rigorous (Pechmann 2014). Researchers should therefore ensure that they are up-to-date with the current transparency reporting requirements at the top journals, which most importantly seek to facilitate reproducibility. In order to provide full information and yet comply with a journal's page length limitations, researchers should generally use appendices to provide supplemental materials, e.g., the study manipulations and measures and non-critical analyses. In most top marketing journals, footnotes are discouraged; the information should be included in an appendix instead. Acronyms should be avoided meaning that words should be spelled out throughout the paper. Jargon should be minimized, with key jargon terms clearly defined at the onset. Renaming well-known constructs should be avoided. Before submitting a manuscript to any journal, researchers should ensure that it is in compliance with the journal’s style guide, and that it cites relevant literature from that journal. Furthermore, researchers should ensure there is no identifying information in any part of the submission including the methods. The specific data collection locations (e.g., university x) should not be identified.

Front End of the Paper: Delineating Fundamental Contributions

Writing the Introduction

A very important part of the write-up is the introduction, including but not limited to the title and abstract, because these set the stage for the entire paper. A consumer research paper should typically start by highlighting the consumer or marketing issue that it will address. This should be done in a way that accurately reflects the empirical methods and results that are to follow. In addition, researchers should highlight the importance of what they are studying, e.g., by talking about its prevalence, market value and/or impact on individual and/or societal wellbeing. Researchers should include citations that verify the importance of their topic, and sometimes real-world examples can help as well.

Furthermore, the introduction should clearly and convincingly state the various ways in which the research makes fundamental theoretical contributions to the literature, contributions that span multiple disciplines. Researchers should identify the specific literature or literatures to which they are making fundamental contributions, and then clearly and accurately delineate their contributions. It is not sufficient to say that the research addresses gaps in the literature; instead, fundamental new insights should be identified that are meaningful and worthy of attention at a top journal. The authors should also make it clear why their research is important: What did we learn that we did not know before, and why does it matter? Big picture ideas should be conveyed, that academics in other disciplines can appreciate, and even non-academics can appreciate. Some marketing papers also try to speak to marketing practitioners or policy makers, but it is becoming rarer for them to be the primary audience.

Typically at the end of the introduction to the paper, the research context, findings and implications are summarized in an easy-to-understand and yet technically accurate manner. If readers can quickly and accurately understand the main points of the paper, they will often have a more positive reaction to it. A common mistake researchers make is that they inadvertently set up the wrong expectations, so their studies do not meet expectations; and reviewers typically react harshly to this. For instance, researchers may describe their studies as addressing an important and prevalent phenomenon, but they actually study a lesser phenomenon. Or researchers may say they found certain results, but in reality they found different or weaker results. It is better to be honest and up-front from the onset. Examples of how strong introductions are written are provided below, using three papers that were published in top marketing journals, representing the three pathways to making fundamental contributions that I identified earlier: human insights, consumer insights, and marketer or policy insights.

Human Insights: Introductory Section. The human insights pathway to publishing in a top marketing journal involves providing fundamental insights about human behavior, and demonstrating these insights in a consumer context. This type of paper could be published in a psychology journal, but consumer researchers are increasingly writing such papers for top marketing journals. I will illustrate this pathway using Coleman, Williams, Morales, and White (2017), "Attention, attitudes, and action: When and why incidental fear increases consumer choice," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 283-312. This paper uses the human insights pathway because it focuses on how incidental fear may affect choice deferral, and then studies this behavior in a consumer context, by looking at product choice deferral. The use of a consumer or marketing context provides a differentiator relative to a pure psychology paper.

The introduction to Coleman et al. (2017) highlights the consumer context that is studied and its importance, noting that “closing the sale is the final and one of the most critical components of any consumer transaction,” but that situational factors can affect choice deferral, and “we propose that one such situational factor is the incidental emotion of fear” (p. 283). The introduction also makes clear and convincing statements about the paper’s fundamental contributions, stating that: “According to previous research, general feelings of negativity increase the likelihood that consumers will defer the decision (Luce 1998). Taking a functional approach, however, we suggest that under some circumstances, the negative emotion of fear may actually *reduce deferral* because of its specific set of associated psychology and behavioral responses” (p. 284). Moreover, this paper’s introduction discusses the relevant literature and research gaps to be filled: “no research to date has examined the consumer implications of the coordinated set of responses to fear on choice. Previous research has tended to consider how one isolated response associated with a given emotion might carry over and impact a subsequent decision” (p. 284). At the end of the introduction, the findings and implications are summarized: “we examine the effects of the responses associated with incidental fear, demonstrating how they collectively impact consumers’ willingness to choose now … by increasing attention to and liking of the current choice set, while concurrently compelling consumers to take action” (p. 284).

Consumer insights: Introductory Section. The consumer insights pathway to publishing in a top marketing journal involves contributing fundamental insights about consumers’ thoughts, feelings, perceptions, or behaviors, and when and why consumers might have these various reactions. These papers essentially help consumers learn about themselves. This is an increasingly common pathway to publishing in the top marketing journals. I will demonstrate this pathway using Bellezza, Paharia, and Keinan (2017), "Conspicuous consumption of time: When busyness and lack of leisure time become a status symbol," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44 (1), 118-138. This paper employs the consumer insights pathway because it focuses on consumers who assert to be busy, and how this affects how others perceive their status in today’s consumer culture. I use it as an example of the consumer insights pathway because, when consumers assert to be busy, they either purposefully or unintentionally “sell themselves” to others to enhance their status. As the authors argue, this moves the research into the realm of consumer culture and conspicuous consumption. However, the boundaries between a human insight and a consumer insight can be diffuse and are often determined by the write-up rather than the research per se.

In the introduction to Bellezza et al. (2017), the consumer context is explicitly identified and its importance is delineated: “In contemporary American culture, complaining about being busy and working all the time has become an increasingly widespread phenomenon. On Twitter, celebrities complain about ‘having no life’…” (p. 119). The introduction also makes clear and convincing statements about fundamental contributions: “we uncover an alternative kind of conspicuous consumption that operates by shifting the focus from the preciousness and scarcity of goods to the preciousness and scarcity of individuals” (p. 119). The introduction identifies relevant literatures, along with gaps it fills: “Research in economics, sociology, and consumer behavior on the consumption of time has focused on the antecedents of time allocation decisions (Becker 1965), examining how individuals divide their time … we examine how these time allocation decisions are perceived by others” (p. 119). The specific studies, findings and implications are summarized at the end of the introduction, for example: “We find that Americans, who perceive their society as particularly mobile and believe their work may lead to social affirmation, are very likely to interpret busyness as a positive signal of status” (p. 119).

Marketer or Policy Insights: Introductory Section. The marketer or policy insights pathway to publishing in a top marketing journal involves offering fundamental insights about how marketers, social marketers, or marketing-related policy makers may affect consumers, or how consumers may affect them. These insights are generally demonstrated in a marketing or policy context and are directly applicable to the focal stakeholder groups: marketers, social marketers and/or marketing-related policy makers. By social marketers I mean marketers who work in the nonprofit world or in non-governmental organizations (NGOs). I will discuss the marketer or policy insights pathway using Argo and Dahl (2018), "Standards of beauty: The impact of mannequins in the retail context," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44, 974-990. This research focuses explicitly on a marketing phenomenon: marketers use of mannequins in retail apparel stores, to display and promote apparel products. The research also directly studies the effects of the mannequins on consumers, by investigating whether, when and why the mannequins may inadvertently decrease consumers' evaluations of the promoted products.

The introduction to this paper states its importance: this is "the first academic investigation into the impact of female mannequins in the retail context" and that "the global apparel industry is valued at $3 trillion" (p. 974). Fundamental contributions to knowledge are delineated, by noting that it is shown that consumers are "impacted by a novel type of source – an inanimate object" and that such objects "are dissimilar from consumers because they are not real" and yet "they are capable of creating a global social threat through normative information they make salient and this can have a profound impact on individuals who are sensitive to appearance-related cues (i.e., those low in appearance self-esteem)" (p. 975). The relevant literature and novel contributions are highlighted: "Our finding that the social comparison is occurring at a global level departs from previous research, which has focused on social comparisons occurring at the individual level" (p. 975). At the end, the findings and implications are summarized: "we find that the use of female mannequins as a retail promotional tool is less effective for consumers low in appearance self-esteem" … "when the mannequin displays an appearance-related product" and this has "a detrimental impact on their product evaluations" (p. 975).

Writing about the Theory

The theory or conceptual framework section of a consumer research paper is generally divided into subsections that provide different literature reviews. Each subsection identifies one or more bodies of literature, and summarizes highly pertinent findings, to illustrate how past work is connected to the current work. Researchers should discuss all the work that is directly related to their storyline about fundamental contributions, regardless of the discipline in which it was published, rather than focusing solely on work on marketing or consumers. While researchers should read broadly, they should nonetheless be selective about what references they cite in the paper, and avoid the temptation to share all they know. Researchers should focus on work that is directly on point and tells a simple and coherent story about how they make fundamental contributions. The literature reviews should not be organized by article, nor should they be ordered chronologically; instead, they should be organized by topic. That is, the reviews should not discuss article 1, then article 2, and so forth. Instead, topic 1 should be presented, then topic 2, and so forth.

The theory section of the paper should lead into the study hypotheses, which may be stated informally within the text, or stated formally with consecutive numbering. The hypotheses should be derived from past literature, and yet make novel contributions. Hence, it is important to focus both on similarities with and differences from past work. Typically, a small number of hypotheses are tested in a single paper, e.g., from 2-5 hypotheses. A consumer research paper in a top marketing journal will rarely test a long list of hypotheses. In other words, the focus should be on identifying and testing a small number of highly interesting and important hypotheses, rather than a large number of less interesting ones. The theory section typically ends with an overview of the studies to follow, that illustrates how the studies build on one another to yield fundamental contributions.

Human insights: Theory Section. Coleman et al.'s 2017 paper shows how a theory section can be written if the human insights pathway is used. The first subsection discusses the literature on incidental fear and decision making, decision making (choice) deferral and its causes, and general negative emotions and choice deferral. The second subsection discusses the literature that suggests that the discrete negative emotion of incidental fear elicits attention, positive evaluations, and the desire to act. Hypotheses are stated: "we predict that incidental fear will narrow attention to the current choice set … result in higher memory for focal product information and lower memory for (peripheral) information … [and] more favorable evaluations … [and] a heightened desire to act … [and] prompt consumers to make a choice, rather than defer" (p. 286). Next, the six studies in the paper are outlined along with the hypotheses they will test. Then, the novelty of the research is re-stated, including its focus on one discrete negative emotion (fear), an entire suite of responses to this emotion, and a predicted reduction in choice deferral rather than an increase in deferral.

Consumer insights: Theory Section. Bellezza et al.'s 2017 paper illustrates how a theory section can be written if the consumer insights pathway is used. The first subsection defines busyness as time at work versus leisure, a definition that is confirmed in a pilot study. The next subsections discuss the literature on how leisure implies status, and the researcher's rival hypothesis that busyness may instead imply status due to perceptions of greater human capital (e.g., competence) and scarcity, similar to perceptions of luxury goods. The final subsection discusses the literature on social mobility, and hypothesizes that busyness only signals higher status when a busy person is perceived as socially mobile.

Marketer or Policy Insights: Theory Section. Argo and Dahl's (2018) paper demonstrates how a theory section can be written if the marketer or policy insights pathway is used. It addresses on how marketers may influence consumers, while still making fundamental contributions to knowledge. The conceptual background section starts with the literature on social norms and discusses how mannequins in retail apparel stores may convey a global social norm about beauty standards. The next subsection discusses the literature related to why consumers with low appearance self-esteem may be negatively influenced by retail mannequins. Three hypotheses are developed: That consumers with low appearance self-esteem will rate a product more negatively when it is displayed on a mannequin (vs. not), but only if the product is appearance related; and this will be because the mannequin will make salient a threatening normative beauty standard. The researchers stress that their prediction that the mannequin effects are caused by the conveyance of normative beauty standards is contrary to prior literature which would implicate comparisons to similar others instead.

Back End of the Paper: Full Reporting of Methods and Results

Writing about the Methods

The method section of a consumer research paper should be written to ensure full disclosure and reproducibility of the studies, and it should use appendices as needed to provide supplemental information, appendices which are increasingly online. Recently, researchers have been attempting to reproduce social science experiments, often with very disappointing results (Open Science Collaboration 2015), and so it is important to provide enough information to allow for reproducibility. The methods that should be fully disclosed include the experimental design (i.e., factors, levels, and if between-subjects or within-subjects), participants, manipulations, measures, analyses, and covariates, for each study that is reported. While full disclosure of stimulus materials and measures is not required at all marketing journals, it benefits the researchers to provide such materials, because a large number of papers are rejected due to a lack of information about the methods. In addition, providing a detailed description of all methods facilitates the review process and minimizes the number of review rounds. Some marketing journals go further and require that datasets and/or statistical models be provided, so it is important to check the journal's current disclosure requirements.

Consumer researchers typically recruit participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), undergraduate student subject pools or classes, or Qualtrics. In general, reviewers and editors expect larger sample sizes with MTurk studies than with studies involving undergraduate subjects, who are in shorter supply. For easy-to-recruit online samples like MTurk, it is typically recommended that at least 50 participants be included in each cell of the design. The number of participants in each study should be fully disclosed including the total number recruited, the number dropped by specific reason, and the final sample size. The final number of participants in each cell of the design should also be reported. Sample sizes should ideally be determined a priori, e.g., using power analyses.

Any methods of screening participants should be fully reported, and the demographics of the final sample of participants should be described. Studies conducted online, e.g., on MTurk, typically use a standard attention check to identify participants that did not pay attention to the survey questions, and these participants are dropped from the statistical analyses. If the prevalence of inattentive participants is very high, the study is typically redone with higher compensation and/or better screening (for further guidance on this, see Oppenheimer, Meyvis and Davidenko 2009). Participants are also dropped from the statistical analyses if they did not complete a dependent measure. This type of information should also be fully disclosed. Many reviewers require that the same criteria be used to drop participants across all studies. If participants are dropped after the data collection because it is decided post hoc that they did not qualify, e.g., were not interested in the focal product, it is often beneficial to provide analyses that include these participants in an appendix. In addition, the researchers should report whether the results change due to the inclusion or exclusion of these participants.

Consumer research papers typically use highly consistent methods across studies, e.g., the same manipulations and measures tend to be used repeatedly. Most commonly the independent variable is manipulated to enhance experimental control, but it may be measured in at least one study to examine generalizability. For instance, a consumer orientation or predisposition may be manipulated in most studies through an essay-writing task, but then measured in one study to ensure the results hold.

All stimulus materials (e.g., manipulations, instructions, and study setups) should be briefly described in the text, and then preferably provided in the appendix, e.g., using screen shots. Similarly, all measures should be briefly described in the text, with reliability statistics if applicable (e.g., coefficient alpha), and preferably provided verbatim in the appendix. If content coding is conducted, inter-rater reliability statistics should be reported in the text, and the coding scheme should preferably be included in the appendix. If the same manipulation, measure or coding scheme is used across multiple studies, the researchers should provide the details in the first study in which it was used. Manipulation checks should generally be reported for each manipulation that is used, in each study. Manipulations and measures should be drawn from previous published research, and multi-item measures should be used, whenever possible. If no directly suitable manipulations or measures are available, researchers should try to modify related ones. It important that researchers provide their stimuli, manipulations and measures in their papers, to allow future researchers to use or modify their materials.

Human insights: Methods Section. Coleman et al.'s 2017 paper illustrates how a methods section can be written for the human insights pathway. Six studies are reported, using either MTurk or student samples. The sample size is about 250 participants per study, except in a behavioral study of snack choice which includes 111 students. Cell sizes are reported, and dropped participants are disclosed. In virtually all studies, the independent variable is manipulated as the type of emotion induced (e.g., fear, sadness, or control). Manipulations from the literature are used, and manipulation checks are provided along with measurement reliabilities. In one study, emotion is measured as trait fear. Some studies include a manipulated moderator (e.g., time horizon: present versus future) to help understand the underlying processes. The dependent variable is a standard choice deferral task from the literature, except in the behavioral study where actual choice of snacks is assessed. Some studies measure a mediator, e.g., attention (via recall). Online appendices provide the stimulus materials.

Consumer insights: Methods Section. Bellezza et al.'s 2017 paper demonstrates how a methods section can be written for the consumer insights pathway. Six studies are reported that use either MTurk, Qualtrics or student samples. The sample size averages about 300 per study, but ranges from 112 for an initial two-condition study to 474 for a study of real brands. In virtually all studies, the independent variable is manipulated as a target person's level of business, and manipulation checks are reported. The dependent variable is the target person's perceived status, and virtually all studies also measure mediators (e.g., perceived competence and scarcity), with the measures derived from the literature. Two studies measure moderators: perceived social mobility and culture (Italian versus U.S.

participants). A pilot study serves as a field study; actual social media posts are content coded. An online appendix is used to provide the stimulus materials, and the results of the pilot study and several supplemental studies.

Marketer or Policy Insights: Methods Section. Argo and Dahl's 2018 paper shows how a methods section can be written for the marketer or policy insights pathway. Six studies are reported, all with undergraduate students, who see real retail mannequins. In the behavioral field study, students go to an actual retail store and try on clothing the mannequin is wearing. The sample size ranges from 75 to 193 participants per study, and dropped participants are disclosed. The studies generally manipulate mannequin (present or absent), and either the type of product on the mannequin (appearance-related or not, with a manipulation check), or mannequin completeness (e.g., with or without a head). The main moderator, appearance self-esteem, is measured across all studies. The dependent variable is product evaluation and/or willingness to pay for the product, and a mediator is sometimes measured as well (conveyance of beauty standards). The measures are provided, and are consistent across studies, and measurement reliabilities are reported. The mannequins are depicted in an appendix.

Writing about the Results

Consumer research papers should fully disclose the details of their statistical analyses, including all variables used in all models, and all empirical results. It is recommended that all p-values be reported out to two or three decimal places (see journal style sheets for more specific guidance) and marginal p-values should always be disclosed. Marketing journals have generally stopped mandating p-values of .05 or less, and will generally publish papers that include some studies with marginal p-values, as long as most of the hypothesized effects are statistically significant across studies. Consumer researchers most commonly report the results of ANOVA models, because their predictor variables are manipulated.

Then, relevant means are reported along with 1 degree-of-freedom (1df) t-tests or F-tests for pairwise comparisons of the means. Also, tables, bar graphs and/or line graphs provide the cell means.

If a predictor variable is measured on an interval scale, it is generally inappropriate to artificially dichotomize that variable, e.g., use a median split (Pham 2015). Researchers should instead make full use of the continuous nature of the data, through appropriate regression analyses. Instead of pairwise comparisons of means, typically spotlight analyses are reported that examine effects at +/- 1 standard deviation from the mean of the interval variable, or floodlight analyses are reported that examine effects at smaller intervals and show the turning point from non-significance to significance (Fitzsimons 2008, Spiller et al. 2013). Spotlight results are typically illustrated in a bar graph, while floodlight results are typically illustrated in a line graph. If an outcome is dichotomous, e.g., choice, logistic regression analyses are reported. In addition, relevant proportions are reported, along with pairwise comparisons using 1df chi-square tests or z-tests of proportions, and tables or bar graphs illustrate the proportions.

Consumer researchers generally hypothesize that an independent variable affects a process mediator and subsequently the dependent measure; and that these effects may be magnified or attenuated by a moderator or contingent factor. In such cases, researchers should report full-factor ANOVA models (or logistic regression models) that test the effects of the independent variable, along with the moderator if applicable, on (a) the mediator and (b) the dependent variable, along with means or proportions and follow-up pairwise comparisons. Then, researchers should report tests of mediation, typically using the appropriate Hayes (2013) model identified by number, and Hayes bootstrap analyses. Or researchers can use other bootstrap approaches for special cases like repeated-measures (within-subject) designs. Researchers could instead use structural equation modeling (SEM), but this approach has become less common in the top marketing journals. Mediation analyses and results are generally reported in the main text, often with a line graph (see Hayes 2013). Mediation may also be tested through moderators that manipulate the underlying processes, e.g., by manipulating an emotion that moderates an effect, rather than measuring the emotion.

Consumer researchers sometimes include covariates in their studies to control for extraneous variables, increase power and/or reduce sample sizes (see tutorial by Meyvis and Van Osselaer 2017). For instance, hunger may be used as a covariate in food consumption studies. A highly appropriate use of covariates is when a measured predictor variable (e.g., gender) is correlated with another variable (e.g., workplace tenure or product interest) which is included as a covariate because it poses a rival hypothesis for the results. Nevertheless, the use of covariates has become quite controversial in the consumer research field, due to concerns about the selective inclusion or exclusion of covariates in different studies to yield p-values at or below .05. In addition, in the past, some researchers did not report their covariates, arguing that this was an inconsequential and extraneous detail.

To avoid any problems regarding covariates, researchers should fully report any covariates that are used in their models, justify the use of these covariates, and use the covariates consistently across similar studies (even if the covariates are sometimes non-significant). In addition, researchers should try to choose their covariates at the onset of their research project, and they should state whether their covariates were chosen a priori or included post hoc. If there is a weak justification for the covariates and/or the covariates were included post hoc, researchers may want to reconsider using these covariates. If these covariates are retained, the researchers should report their results both with and without the covariates, e.g., with one set of results in the appendix, and state in the main text if the inclusion or exclusion of covariates changes their results. Note that covariates should generally be unnecessary if an experiment is conducted with manipulated variables, random assignment of individual participants to conditions, a large sample size, and adequate power overall, considering additional factors like manipulation strength. If covariates never attain statistical significance, and therefore do not affect the results, it is generally appropriate to state this and then drop them for parsimony.

Human insights: Results Section. As an example of a results section for a paper using the human insights pathway, we return to Coleman et al. (2017). This paper reports ANOVA results, followed by planned pairwise comparisons of means (t-tests), with p-values reported out to three decimal places. Tables provide cell means and standard deviations, and/or bar graphs illustrate the cell means. Mediation is tested using Hayes models (identified by model number) and bootstrapping analyses, and tables provide detailed mediation results. When the dependent variable is measured as dichotomous choice, logistic regression is used, followed by planned pairwise chi-square tests, and a bar graph depicts the cell proportions. When the independent variable is measured on an interval scale (trait fear), a spotlight analysis is conducted (+/- 1 SD), and a line graph depicts the results. In the trait fear study, because anger is a rival explanation for the results, it is appropriately included as a covariate.

Consumer insights: Results Section. As an example of a results section for a paper using the consumer insights pathway, we return to Bellezza et al. (2017). This paper reports ANOVA results, followed by planned pairwise comparisons of means (t-tests), with p-values reported out to three decimal places. Bar graphs typically illustrate the cell means and standard errors. Mediation is tested using Hayes models (identified by model number) and bootstrapping analyses, and line graphs provide detailed mediation results. Some mediation results are provided in the online appendix. When the moderator is measured on an interval scale (perceived social mobility), a floodlight analysis is conducted and a line graph depicts the results. One study includes covariates but reports that the same results obtain even without the covariates. Because mediators are extensively used, a correlation matrix of dependent measures and mediators is provided to demonstrate discriminant validity.

Marketer or Policy Insights: Results Section. As an example of a results section for a paper using the marketer or policy insights pathway, we return to Argo and Dahl (2018). Every study in this paper uses the measured predictor variable of appearance self-esteem, and so linear regression analyses are conducted that mean-center the variables. This is generally followed by spotlight analyses (+/- 1 SD) with bar graphs illustrating the results. Eight bar graphs are included to clearly convey the results. Mediation is tested using Hayes models (identified by model number) and bootstrapping analyses, and the results are reported in the text. No covariates are included in any analyses.

Summary and Conclusions

As this book chapter has discussed, to be publishable in a top marketing journal, consumer research based on experiments must generally make fundamental big picture theoretical contributions which have a solid empirical basis. However, there are three possible pathways to making such fundamental contributions; researchers can either: (1) provide fundamental insights about humans which are demonstrated in a consumer context; (2) provide fundamental insights about consumers themselves; or (3) provide fundamental insights about how marketers or policy makers influence consumers or vice versa. Two of these pathways do not directly address marketing stakeholders, which may be surprising to outside observers, but this has been the trend in the top marketing journals for a while.

It is sometimes possible to focus on practical marketing questions in an initial study, and then do additional studies to make more fundamental contributions. For instance, Kettle et al. (2016) analyzed a large dataset provided by the financial firm HelloWallet, and found that consumers who concentrated their debt repayments, i.e., paid off a few accounts first, ultimately reduced their debt faster. To publish their work in a top marketing journal, the researchers then conducted several additional experiments, testing three different process explanations for this effect. One process explanation was supported: Participants inferred progress from a proportional balance reduction. While the initial finding was not novel, the test of three process explanations was novel. As this example shows, there are several routes to making fundamental contributions.

In this book chapter, I also provide a checklist to help consumer researchers who conduct experiments to prepare their manuscripts for submission to top marketing journals. This checklist is applicable regardless of the specific pathway that is chosen for making fundamental contributions to the literature. While some researchers might view the current rather specific standards for top journal articles as constraining, these standards make the research production and evaluation processes more predictable and controllable, which benefits both younger and more senior scholars. While consumer researchers should be guided by their own knowledge and intuition, they should also take into account the standards and norms that influence top marketing journal reviewers and editors, and I hope this book chapter will help them do this.

Table 1. Examples of Three Pathways to Making Experiment-based Big-picture Theoretical Contributions

Pathway and Example	Introduction	Theory	Methods	Results
Human Insights Pathway: Coleman, Williams, Morales, and White (2017), Attention, attitudes, and action: When and why incidental fear increases consumer choice	**State big picture insight:** Negative feelings have been found to increase choice deferral, but we propose that fear will reduce choice deferral	**Build supportive theory:** The functional approach to discrete emotions indicates fear elicits attention, positive evaluations and a desire to act	**Use standard methods and report them fully:** 6 studies with MTurk or student samples, ave. 250/study, fear manipulated as the IV except once measured, time horizon manipulated as a moderator, choice deferral as the DV, attention as a mediator, 1 study of actual product choice	**Use standard analyses and report results fully:** ANOVA, t-tests, bar graphs; Hayes mediation, tables; logistic regression, chi-square, bar graphs; spotlight, line graphs
Consumer Insights Pathway: Bellezza, Paharia, and Keinan (2017), Conspicuous consumption of time: When busyness and lack of leisure time become a status symbol	**State big picture insight:** Conspicuous consumption has focused on the scarcity of goods, but we focus on the scarcity of individuals' time	**Build supportive theory:** Non-busyness used to signal status but, in today's consumer culture, busyness signals more human capital, scarcity, and greater status	**Use standard methods and report them fully:** 6 studies with MTurk, Qualtrics or student samples, ave. 300/study, busyness manipulated as the IV, social mobility both manipulated and measured as a moderator, perceived status as the DV, perceived scarcity as a mediator, 1 study of actual social media posts	**Use standard analyses and report results fully:** ANOVA, t-tests, bar graphs; Hayes mediation, line graphs; logistic regression, chi-square, bar graphs; spotlight, line graphs
Marketer or Policy Insights Pathway: Argo and Dahl (2018), Standards of beauty: The impact of mannequins in the retail context	**State big picture insight:** Social comparisons to similar others have been studied, but we focus on comparisons to global social norms	**Build supportive theory:** Mannequins convey a global social norm about beauty standards, threatening those with low self-esteem	**Use standard methods and fully them report:** 6 studies with student samples, ave. 125/study, mannequin presence manipulated as the IV, self-esteem measured as a moderator, product evaluation as the DV, conveyance of beauty standards as a mediator, 1 study of actual retail purchases	**Use standard analyses and report results fully:** Linear regression, spotlight analyses, bar graphs, Hayes mediation

Note – All examples are from *Journal of Consumer Research.*

Table 2.

Checklist for a Consumer Research Paper based on Experiments Aimed at a Top Marketing Journal

Essential Elements	Clear and compelling storyline; apparent in headings, paragraph starts, and graphs	
	Empirically-based theoretical contribution is delineated, i.e., a big picture insight	
	Multiple complementary studies, typically 4-7, sometimes more, rarely less	
	Primarily experiments, with at least one study measuring actual behavior	
	Appendices used to facilitate transparency and reproducibility	
	Jargon terms defined at the onset, minimal jargon used, and no acronyms	
	Compliant with journal style guide, and relevant articles from the journal cited	
Introduction	Focal consumer or marketing context identified and its importance delineated	
	Specific relevant literatures identified, along with gaps that are filled	
	Clear and convincing statements made about fundamental contributions	
	The research context, findings and implications are comprehensively summarized	
	The assertions clearly and accurately reflect the actual empirical work and results	
Theory	Subsections discuss each relevant topic and its connections to the current work	
	Pertinent work is included, that accurately conveys the story about contributions	
	Hypotheses stated informally in the text, or formally with numbering and indenting	
	Small number of interesting and important hypotheses, e.g., 2-5 hypotheses	
	Overview of studies linked to the fundamental contributions	
Methods	Design and sample sizes disclosed, typically 50+ per cell for online MTurk samples	
	Participants described including number recruited, and number dropped by reason	
	Participant screening methods disclosed, and demographics described, if applicable	
	Manipulations and measures from the literature used, and repeated across studies	
	Manipulation checks and measurement reliabilities provided	
Results	Details of all analyses and results disclosed, including all variables in all models	
	Spotlight or floodlight analyses used for interval predictor variables, if applicable	
	Logistic regression analyses used for dichotomous outcome variables	
	Tests of mediation mirror the hypotheses, e.g., using Hayes bootstrap analyses	
	P-values reported to 2-3 decimal places, and marginal p-values disclosed	
	Covariates identified ideally a priori, justified, and consistent across similar studies	

References

Argo, Jennifer J. and Darren W. Dahl (2018), "Standards of beauty: The impact of mannequins in the retail context," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44 (5), 974-990.

Bellezza, Silvia, Neeru Paharia, and Anat Keinan (2017), "Conspicuous consumption of time: When busyness and lack of leisure time become a status symbol," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44 (1), 118-138.

Chun, Hae Eun, Kristin Diehl, and Deborah J. MacInnis (2017), "Savoring an upcoming experience affects ongoing and remembered consumption enjoyment," *Journal of Marketing*, 81 (3), 96-110.

Coleman, Nicole Verrochi, Patti Williams, Andrea C. Morales, and Andrew Edward White (2017), "Attention, attitudes, and action: When and why incidental fear increases consumer choice," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44 (2), 283-312.

Cunha, Marcus and Jeffrey D. Shulman (2011), "Assimilation and contrast in price evaluations," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37 (5), 822-835.

Fitzsimons, Gavan J. (2008), "Death to dichotomizing," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35 (1), 9.

Hayes, Andrew, F. (2013), *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Kettle, Keri L., Remi Trudel, Simon J. Blanchard, and Gerald Häubl (2016), "Repayment concentration and consumer motivation to get out of debt," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43 (3), 460-477.

Moorman, Christine, Heerde, Harald van, Moreau, C. Page, and Palmatier, Robert W. (2018), Guiding Editorial Principles for the *Journal of Marketing*, accessed online at https://www.ama.org/academics/Pages/What-are-the-Guiding-Editorial-Principles-for-Journal-of-Marketing.aspx.

Meyvis, Tom and Stijn M.J. Van Osselaer (2017), "Increasing the power of your study by increasing the effect size," Journal of Consumer Research, 44, 1157-1173.

Oppenheimer, Daniel M., Tom Meyvis and Nicolas Davidenko (2009), “Instructional manipulation checks: Detecting satisficing to increase statistical power,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45 (4), 867-872.

Open Science Collaboration (2015), "Estimating the reproducibility of psychological science," *Science*, 349 (6251), aac4716.

Pechmann, Cornelia (2014), "Editorial regarding the new submission guidelines at the Journal of Consumer Psychology," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 24 (1), 1-3.

Pham, Michel Tuan (2015), "Is it OK to dichotomize? A research dialogue," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 25 (4), 650-551.

Spangenberg, Eric R., Ioannis Kareklas, Berna Devezer, and David E. Sprott (2016), "A meta-analytic synthesis of the question–behavior effect," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 26 (3), 441-458.

Spiller, Stephen A., Gavan J. Fitzsimons, John G. Lynch, and Gary H. McClelland (2013), "Spotlights, floodlights, and the magic number zero: Simple effects tests in moderated regression," Journal of Marketing Research, 50 (2), 277-288.