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Editorial

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DOI

[10.1080/02650487.2022.2131279](https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2022.2131279)

Publication date

2023

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

International Journal of Advertising

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[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

De Pelsmacker, P., Diehl, S., Neijens, P., & Terlutter, R. (2023). Editorial: Perspectives on advancing the advertising field for academics and practitioners. Celebrating 40 years of the International Journal of Advertising. *International Journal of Advertising*, 42(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2022.2131279>

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Editorial: Perspectives on advancing the advertising field for academics and practitioners. Celebrating 40 years of the International Journal of Advertising

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ABSTRACT

This special issue celebrates the 40th anniversary of the International Journal of Advertising. Nineteen articles from prominent authors cover advertising topics and look at the past, present and most importantly, the future of advertising research, offering extensive suggestions for future research. The issue covers four themes: Looking back at the advertising discipline through four decades, societal and policy issues in advertising, advertising in the digital age, and looking forward in search for future issues that should be studied. A broad variety of topics, theories and methods are covered, such as sustainability communication, diversity and inclusion, privacy issues, advertising ethics and surveillance, vulnerable target groups, CSR advertising, cause-related advertising, health care advertising, international advertising, the artificial intelligence ecosystem, branded content, influencer marketing, virtual, augmented and extended realities, gamification, the academic-practitioner divide, multidisciplinary research, setting up solid and relevant advertising research, and urgent topics for advertising research.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 September 2022

Accepted 27 September 2022

KEYWORDS

advertising research;
future research topics;
research history

Introduction

The International Journal of Advertising turns 40. To celebrate this landmark, this special anniversary issue looks back at IJA's track record, draws a picture of the state of the art in advertising research today, and most importantly, looks to the future. The issue consists of four themes: (1) Looking back – the advertising discipline through four decades, (2) societal and policy issues in advertising, (3) The digital revolution – advertising in the digital age, and (4) Looking forward – future issues.

The 40th anniversary of IJA is an excellent reason to look back on our contributions to the discipline and therefore the first theme reflects on developments in themes, topics, and methods in the past years. In line with IJA's focus, our second theme

covers nine societal and policy issues: sustainability communication, diversity and inclusion, privacy issues, advertising ethics and surveillance, vulnerable target groups, CSR advertising, cause-related advertising, health care advertising, and international advertising.

The third theme deals with one of the major paradigm shifts in advertising of the past decades: the digital revolution. Papers in this theme explore the nature and formats of advertising in the digital age: the artificial intelligence ecosystem, branded content, influencer marketing, virtual, augmented and extended realities, and gamification in advertising research. All papers in the second and third theme provide an overview of past and present research in advertising, and devote attention to the role of IJA. Additionally, they identify knowledge gaps and offer directions for further research.

The last theme of this issue consists of four more extensive papers that focus on the future. Two contributions deal with crucial considerations that advertising researchers should take into account. The first one studies the academic-practitioner divide. If academic advertising research wants to stay societally relevant, it has to pay more attention to closing this gap. Practitioners from seven different countries were interviewed to better understand the nature of this gap and, more importantly, how to close it. The second paper focuses on the need for multidisciplinary research. In a business environment that is increasingly multi-stakeholder and networked, advertising researchers need to team up with scholars from other disciplines to stay relevant. The third contribution in this section offers a comprehensive blueprint for setting up solid and relevant advertising research that takes these challenges into account. The last paper of this issue wraps it up by focussing on urgent topics for advertising research.

All papers in this special issue were written by prominent author teams that have a solid track record in advertising research, published extensively, also in IJA, and are active members of the American Academy of Advertising and the European Advertising Academy. In the following sections we give an overview of the contributions in each of the four themes.

Looking back: the evolution of advertising research through four decades

Royne Stafford et al. (2023) identify key developments in advertising research themes, topics, and methods over the last four decades (1980–2020). The authors examine the abstracts of all articles published in the leading advertising journals during that time ($N=6084$) and explain the evolution of the discipline by identifying trends and changes, areas with both growing and declining research emphasis in terms of theoretical and methodological foci over time. Four main themes are identified: Advertising effects, the advertising industry, the audience, and commentary. As several other contributors to this issue, the authors propose, for the advertising discipline to advance in a scholarly manner while addressing the needs of the industry, that academics and practitioners' partner together so that academics can contribute to the advertising industry itself. Advertising research has been hesitant to welcome machine learning

methods. However, the increased number of studies that used machine learning in the last couple of years suggests the discipline has learned to appreciate its great potential, and should continue doing so. The findings in this article also suggest future research to examine a more diverse spectrum of specific forms of advertising appeals. Finally, the numerous changes in the legalization, as well as the decriminalization of controversial products, along with increased interest in the topics of alcohol and tobacco over the years, signals a need for additional research in this area.

Societal and policy issues

Advertising sustainability

Sustainability is no doubt one of the most important focal areas of societal interest and, hence, of academic research today, covering issues, such as climate change, biodiversity, consumption, production, and mobility. Golob, Podnar, and Zabkar (2023) present a historical perspective and the current situation of sustainability communication (SC) research. Studies predominantly focus upon environmental (green) advertising, and there is a dominance of applied communication approaches, investigating sustainability messages and how these messages are communicated to specific audiences (mostly consumers, particularly in IJA), through the context of mass media and websites. The authors point at the need for advancing conceptual integration and clarity of definitions, developing other perspectives that would draw from a richer body of communication science theories (beyond applied communication approaches). They also advocate a more holistic perspective than the current environmental and green understanding of SC including social and economic aspects of sustainability.

Diversity and inclusion

In recent years, increasing attention is devoted to diversity and inclusion in society in general and advertising in particular. Diversity in advertising research refers to the representation of people with distinct attributes in advertising, such as race, gender, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and physical abilities. Inclusion refers to the valuation of their presence and perspectives in advertising. According to Eisend, Muldrow, and Rosengren (2022) research on diversity and inclusion has intensified over the years, and the International Journal of Advertising is the primary outlet for this research stream. The most commonly investigated diversity attributes in advertising research are gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age. Studies on other diversity attributes are rather scarce, for instance, disability images in advertising, transgender endorsers, religious minorities, interracial couples, and lifestyles. Opportunities for further studies are the impact of non-stereotypical portrayals of diversity on consumers, and the impact of several diversity attributes simultaneously. More research is also needed about the advertisers' responsibility regarding inclusion and diversity and the role of practitioners in making diversity and inclusion decisions. Finally, only recently have studies shifted their attention towards diversity in online media. More research is needed since both positive and

negative reactions are likely to multiply via comments and sharing of advertising content in online and social media.

Advertising and privacy

Another hot topic in advertising, especially given the increasing focus on digital media, is the role of privacy in advertising. Privacy is the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others. In the context of advertising, privacy relates to the use, collection and dissemination of information, also called information or data privacy. Mainly focussing on IJA, Boerman and Smit (2022) report an increase of attention to privacy in advertising research. The authors discuss the different advertising strategies privacy is connected to, and how privacy plays a role in advertising outcomes. With the continuous technological developments in data-driven personalization and computational advertising, consumer privacy will remain an important issue in future advertising research. More research is needed to understand how different stakeholders deal with personalization developments in the public domain (i.e. visible to others), such as programmatic TV advertising, in-store personalization, and digital out-of-home displays. Another area worth of further investigation is privacy fatigue or privacy cynicism amongst consumers (the feeling that they cannot control their personal information, feel powerless, and mistrust the platforms and companies handling their data), and how this influences trust and advertising outcomes. Finally, the authors state that more research is needed about constraints to personalized advertising, to the benefit of consumer privacy.

The ethical ramifications of surveillance

Related to the previous contribution, Segijn and Strycharz (2022) discuss the issue of advertising ethics and surveillance. Online infrastructure and technological advancements mark a change in the nature and the extent of surveillance practices. The surveillance involved in these practices raises a number of broader ethical issues. Advertising ethics is what is right and good in the conduct of the advertising function. From the industry perspective, surveillance comes with new responsibilities regarding data safety as well as ethical deployment of data-driven practices. From the consumer perspective, such surveillance can have (unintended) ethical side-effects, such as limiting consumers' autonomy online and creating new divides and vulnerabilities. From the regulators' perspective, surveillance poses new ethical challenges that require additional levels of protection for consumers. Future research should look into new technological developments and specifically the affordances related to these technologies that could raise new ethical questions. It also needs to investigate to what extent modern advertising and targeting practices contribute to reinforcing and even creating new types of digital vulnerabilities. To keep up with the industry, researchers have to intensify using digital analytics to move beyond measuring motivations and intentions. Finally, the authors call for international perspectives on the topic of ethics and surveillance.

Advertising to children

Another ethical issue is how advertisers treat vulnerable target groups. Especially children's vulnerability to advertising, due to the fact that advertising literacy has not fully developed in them, has been the subject of social and political debate for many years. Ester and Buijzen (2023) discuss the state of research on the effects of advertising on children's advertising literacy and defences. As artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies will play an increasingly important role in children's digital lives, it is important to understand the behaviours and actions that will help them engage critically and safely with the new forms of advertising and other commercial practices associated with those technologies. Research should also be conducted on which factors facilitate or hinder children to critically cope with advertising. Finally, the authors suggest more research into which intervention strategies and measures, such as disclosures and education, are successful in strengthening children's advertising coping behaviour.

Corporate social responsibility advertising

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to companies voluntarily contributing to social and environmental goals through minimizing environmental impacts, voluntarism, corporate philanthropy, and activism such as taking stance on equality, diversity, human rights, and education. Appropriately advertised, CSR engagement can enhance corporate and product brand associations, improving responses of customers and other stakeholders. The advertising literature has had a late start in taking notice of this topic. Hartmann, Marcos, and Apaolaza (2022) provide a historical perspective of how CSR advertising has been covered in the past and which topics are the ones being most intensively discussed at present. While there is an increasing interest in CSR advertising appeals, this is still an under-researched topic and the existing knowledge is fragmented. More particularly, there has been very little research on companies' support for controversial issues and its interplay with audiences' values. The authors also call for more research on authenticity in corporate social responsibility programs. Future research should also assess in more depth the effects of perceived greenwashing and corporate irresponsibility, and how these practices can be combated. Social media also allow for a new dimension of CSR co-creation and empowerment by letting consumers choose causes and participate in CSR activities. So far, most CSR research has focussed on consumers alone as the recipients of CSR advertising. Future research should include company employees, investors, special interest groups, politicians, legislators, and the wider society.

Cause-Related advertising

Another societally relevant research area is cause-related marketing (CRM). In a typical CRM campaign, a company donates a percentage of product sales to a charity or non-profit related to the chosen cause. Chang et al. (2023) present a comprehensive overview of extant CRM advertising, focussing upon emotional appeal, execution style,

and contextual elements such as cause factors, company factors, and factors related to CRM activities. Previous research predominantly measures how consumers respond to viewing CRM ads. Future studies might explore how CRM is related to the Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) movement that aims to use research to enhance consumer life quality and social welfare. Future research could also continue exploring what kinds of visuals enhance CRM advertising effectiveness and could explore how to leverage creativity in CRM activities. Relating to another contribution in this special issue, advertisers may, for instance, include gamification in their CRM and in that way increase consumer participation.

Advertising health issues

Another societal and policy issue that the IJA has addressed over the past 40 years is health (care). Koinig, Diegelmann, and Bidmon (2023) discuss how the field of health (care) advertising has developed in terms of topics and methodologies, and the relevance and importance of contributions. They conclude that the study of health (care) advertising has increased tremendously over the past four decades. Additionally, more than other advertising journals, IJA has been on the forefront of this research area. The authors develop a research agenda of important trends and topics ranging from identifying conditions under which disease appeals can be effectively utilized to reduce harmful behaviours, to examine moderators in health advertising, nudging, moral aspects, social media, influencer marketing, artificial intelligence agents, advergames, online conversations, and eHealth.

Cross-Cultural advertising

IJA always had the tradition to appeal to an international audience of authors and readers. Ford, Mueller, and Mueller (2023) track developments in cross-cultural advertising research published over the past forty years in IJA, exploring the topics addressed, theories relied upon, methodologies adopted, and countries examined. Although there is a variation in the topics addressed over the years, cross-cultural issues/differences and gender roles/issues were studied across the whole period. The most dominant theoretical frameworks are Global Consumer Culture/Positioning and theories pertaining to cross-cultural differences, such as those developed by Hofstede and GLOBE. In terms of countries examined, North America and Western Europe are well represented, as were the more advanced Asian markets. There continues to be a paucity of research examining Central and Eastern European countries, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa. The paper concludes with directions for future research.

The digital revolution

Artificial intelligence ecosystems for marketing communications

Indisputably, one of the key characteristics of today's digital advertising is the importance of artificial intelligence (AI) in leveraging customer data for more

effective targeting. Malthouse and Copulsky (2022) argue that to understand and anticipate the effects of AI and machine learning (ML) in marketing communications, one must consider the broader ecosystem in which these algorithms operate. They develop a comprehensive framework of the 'AI-Marcom ecosystem' and its outcomes, that consist of five interrelated components: algorithms and models, customer data, digital environments, digital content assets (e.g. images, videos, copy), and information technology infrastructure. Additionally, the ecosystem comprises a broad set of stakeholders: consumers, influencers, brands/advertisers, media and messaging platforms, data platforms, publishers and content creators, MarTech/AdTech vendors, AI/ML service providers, device manufacturers and regulators. The authors propose three main future research directions for advertising scholars, with many concrete suggestions. First, scholars can help in translating business and customer needs to AI specialists. They can contribute by prioritizing research questions and understanding the different objectives and needs of the stakeholders in the ecosystem. Second, advertising scholars can help in the design of AI-enabled touchpoints that do not currently exist. They can help understand consumer responses to touchpoints and propose appropriate metrics. Third, future research should also look into what factors will affect the rate of change of the AI-Marcom ecosystem, and which components of the ecosystem can create value for brands.

Branded content in the digital media landscape

A second dramatic transformation that the advertising field has witnessed over the past decade, is the increasing use of (digital) branded content; advertising strategies that mimic user-generated or editorial content, such as native advertising and content marketing. Poels and Dens (2023) describe how the topic of branded content in the digital era has been covered in academic advertising research in the past decade. The authors offer an extensive future outlook for advertising research and practice. They state that we need alignment in the myriad of branded content formats and the sometimes overlapping terms to refer to them. Despite the plethora of formats and forms branded content comes in, there is a relatively narrow focus on native advertising in existing research, and the bulk of the work on branded content seems to disregard the actual content. The effectiveness of specific tools and formats, platforms/media, and message strategies (e.g. informative vs. entertaining) are under-researched. Much research has focussed on social media and Facebook in particular, but there is less research on differences between platforms or between marketers' 'owned' media (e.g. website and email), and we need better metrics that account for the quality of users' experiences. As several other contributors to this special issue, the authors signal the need for more research on new technologies such as augmented and virtual reality, and more focus on non-Western and cross-cultural perspectives. They also mention the lack of robust theoretical frameworks on the strategies and effects we can expect from branded content on various outcomes and urge for integrating perspectives from media psychology, media economics, journalism, and advertising. Finally, the authors reflect upon the future of digital branding by means of six themes.

Influencer marketing

Another major trend in online advertising is social media influencer marketing. Social media influencers are people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic and make regular posts about that topic on their social media channels. They can create trends and encourage their followers to buy products they promote. Therefore, brands increasingly use them as endorsers, a practice called influencer marketing. Hudders and Lou (2023) provide a historical overview of extant influencer research that mainly focuses on its bright side, and then highlight the dark side and ethicalities of influencer marketing. Influencers may harm followers' physical health and psychological well-being by flaunting idealized images, glamorous life styles, and unhealthy food choices, especially in young target audiences. There is also a lack of transparency (disclosure) as to the role of influencers in marketing campaigns. On the other hand, influencers may suffer from a continuous search for likes and followers, as well as giving up much of their privacy in return for commercial success. The authors propose to explore a new research track that focuses on these dark sides of influencer marketing.

Advertising in virtual, augmented, and extended realities

The digital revolution implies an ever-changing media environment fuelled by the constant advent of new technologies. In their contribution, Ahn, Kim, and Kim (2023) focus upon immersive technologies, including virtual and augmented reality. The authors conclude that advertising scholars have generally kept immersive technologies at arm's length. They speculate that this is due to the high learning curve and costs involved with conducting research on emerging technologies and the lack of interest in the interdisciplinary research needed to do these studies. They argue that, for advertising to remain relevant for professionals and the industry, it is imperative for scholars to examine emerging technologies' impact on advertising practices, psychosocial mechanisms, and outcomes. To that end, they propose four focal research areas: naturally mapped interactivity, context-on-demand in advertising, user experiences with immersive advertising, and the emerging media landscape associated with the metaverse. Like several other authors further in this special issue, they call on advertising scholars to develop multidisciplinary research efforts and syntheses of theories, methods, and knowledge.

Gamified advertising

The final contribution in this section deals with gamification in advertising research, i.e. the integration of brands in games as an advertising technique. There are two main types of advertising in games: In-game advertising (IGA) and advergames. IGA is placing one or more brands in marketed games (in particular video games), while advergames are games built with the purpose of conveying a brand message. van Berlo, van Reijmersdal and Waiguny (2023) find that gamified advertising has received considerable attention from advertising scholars over the last two decades. They notice a need for longitudinal studies, since the current body of literature mainly

used experiments or cross-sectional studies. In addition, they claim that qualitative studies on gaming and advertising are needed to gain more in-depth insights into people's considerations to play games with ads. Future research should also focus on the persuasive effects of the social contexts of gaming since, increasingly, games are played together online in larger communities. Also seeing others play games has rapidly gained popularity. The question is how seeing someone play games affects the persuasion process of the viewer. A new phenomenon that warrants investigation is advertising in the metaverse. This is a three-dimensional virtual world inhabited by avatars of real people. One of the key drivers of the metaverse is the gaming industry. Therefore, research is needed to develop theories on how gamified advertising in the metaverse affects its users.

Looking forward

The academic-practitioner divide

The issue of the academic-practitioner divide is a long-standing one. Ang et al. (2023) interviewed 41 high-profile advertising practitioners from seven different countries and four academic journal editors about the nature and causes of this divide. Their findings are worrying, especially for academics. The divide is larger than ever. Academics keep on focussing upon the solidness of their research at the expense of relevance, do not take the needs and the particular context of advertising practitioners into account, and therefore practitioners do not show any interest in academic work or in cooperating with academia. Society becomes increasingly more digitally complex and sophisticated at an increased speed of change. Industry knowledge outstrips academia's ability to keep up, and this is bound to widen the divide. The authors dig deeper into potential solutions to bridge the academic-practitioner divide. How can academia ensure that the knowledge they create is relevant and that they disseminate that knowledge such that it provides a direct benefit to practitioners? How can research collaboration be approached such that both sides can benefit from it? How can both sides learn to know each other's context such that collaboration is facilitated? The study offers a large number of tips and examples of best practice to accomplish this.

Communication in multidisciplinary stakeholder settings

The world becomes increasingly more multi-stakeholder networked, and hence there is an increasing need for scholarly research in which communication topics are studied by means of a multidisciplinary approach. Lievens and Moons (2023) adopt a systemic view to investigate the multidisciplinary challenges for managing communication in complex multistakeholder settings. They zoom in on communication challenges, distinguishing a macro level (the entire stakeholder network), a meso level (communication and media players connecting the macro – and micro level) and a micro level (the stakeholder engagement journey). They propose a more diversified and multidisciplinary approach in addressing future communication research in complex multistakeholder settings by means of a detailed agenda for future research. How can communication managers leverage the power of stakeholder networks in achieving

effective communication outcomes (macro)? How can communication and media players achieve effective communication outcomes through different communication channels, styles and messages (meso)? How should communication managers design stakeholder engagement journeys that include stakeholders' interactions with the company, its brands and other stakeholders (micro)? In each of these domains they suggest several topics for further research.

A comprehensive approach to the study of advertising and its effects

Building upon the issues discussed in the previous papers, Langner and Bergkvist (2023) call lack of practical relevance and robustness and generalizability of findings (replication) significant shortcomings of applied science intended to improve advertising practice. They develop an inspiring and detailed comprehensive methodological roadmap to address these current advertising research deficiencies. First, scholars should identify a relevant advertising phenomenon in the real world. Then, they must demonstrate the effects of the phenomenon by means of well-controlled experiments using internally valid and realistic stimuli and measure variables related to actual behaviour. Third, further studies have to dig deeper and include mediating or moderating variables. Finally, the effects of the advertising phenomenon should be replicated in field research.

Urgent topics for advertising research

Finally, in the last contribution, Huh (2023) sets out to identify urgent topics for future advertising research. The author approached this by systematically organizing and categorizing topical research areas, reviewing prior research in each of these areas, and identifying specific areas where research is lacking. They are organized in three categories: Issues at the connection between advertising industry/advertisers and non-government regulatory/watchdog organizations, issues at the connection between advertising industry/advertisers and the government, and macro environment issues, especially social and technology environment factors. For each of these areas, urgent topics for future advertising research and multiple example research questions are proposed.

Conclusion and most important directions for future research

The papers by the 19 author teams in this special issue look back to the evolutions and trends in advertising research topics, theories and methods, and the role the International Journal of Advertising has played in this journey, and look forward to the future and what future advertising research should pay attention to. There is a special focus on two broad areas in which IJA has tried to be cutting edge: societal and public policy, and the digital revolution. In the closing section, the current issue digs deeper into two fundamental focal points for the future, i.e. the need to close the academic-practitioner divide and for more multidisciplinary research. A blueprint for an 'ideal' advertising research project and urgent research topics are proposed.

This special issue is a fantastic resource for developing insights into what has been important in advertising research and how it has been studied in the past, and what is important today and will be in the future. The contributions in this issue are a rich resource and source for inspiration and ideas for advertising scholars developing or redirecting their own research.

Several directions for future research are outlined simultaneously by different authors: The need for further research in the areas of transformative consumer research aimed at improving the quality of life, health, and social welfare of consumers and protecting vulnerable groups. In addition, there are repeated calls for more diversity in advertising research, related to under-represented groups, minorities and under-researched countries in international research, as well as a call for more multidisciplinary and diverse perspectives, e.g. on influencer marketing. Many authors also urge for more research in the areas of new technologies and systems such as VR, AR, AI, and the Metaverse. A highly interesting and alarming finding is the growing gap between practitioners and academics. One way researchers could respond to this criticism, is to think of new formats to make their academic findings more accessible to practitioners and the general public. Options include graphical abstracts, podcasts and short videos to make journal articles and their main findings more appealing.

We sincerely hope that the recommendations and suggestions will not be taken for granted, but will actually contribute to future advertising research. This will probably require more than just publishing this special issue. After all, it is not easy to change existing practices and reward systems. But if this special issue makes even a small contribution to the further improvement of our field, the authors and editors have succeeded in their mission.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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