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Editor's Desk

What Do We Know about Corporate Social Responsibility Messaging?

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As the number of submissions to the *Journal of Advertising Research* (*JAR*) continues to increase, the time has come for us to step up our peer-review process with the addition of a group of Associate Editors (AEs), who will be given oversight of manuscripts that match their areas of expertise.

We fully expect that these experts not only will help us improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the review process, but at the same time represent the *Journal* in a variety of conference settings. Their presence also will help us continue to grow, as they bring new colleagues—passionate thought leaders who previously might not have considered submitting their work to *JAR*—even as they recruit a new series of reviewers. These AEs represent a variety of countries and research streams that, I believe, will improve the overall quality and impact of the *JAR* in the global advertising community.

The AEs are **Les Carlson** (University of Nebraska), **Albert Caruana** (University of Malta), **Micael Dahlén** (Stockholm School of Economics), **Jean-Luc Herrmann** (University of Lorraine), **Scott Koslow** (Macquarie University), **Altaf Merchant** (University of Washington Tacoma), **Magda Nenycz-Thiel** (Ehrenburg-Bass Institute, University of South Australia), **Leyland Pitt** (Simon Fraser University), and **M. Kim Saxton** (Indiana University). I look forward to working closely with these scholars, and I know that their involvement will be invaluable for the *Journal*.

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The current issue features a special section on corporate social responsibility messaging (CSR). Enterprises all over the world are realizing that being good community citizens not only is a profitable strategy but also a necessity. Being sensitive to the well-being of all stakeholders is vital for corporate success. Being concerned about the actions of the company and potential harm to consumers, employees, and the environment is good practice.

Dealing with the ways in which companies communicate these initiatives is an important topic in advertising.

Making these important perceptual connections with the publics that matter depends on advertising intensity. In **"Corporate Social Responsibility and Marketing Performance: The Moderating Role of Advertising Intensity"** (please see page 368), Mahabubur Rahman (Rennes School of Business), M. Ángeles Rodríguez-Serrano (University of Seville), and Mary Lambkin (Smurfit Business School, University College Dublin) examined the CSR programs of 264 S&P 500 companies. They found "the greater the advertising expenditure was, the stronger was the relationship between CSR activities and marketing performance."

The authors suggest that advertising can bridge the gap to the customer and makes them aware of not just the products but the CSR activities of the firm. They contend, however, that "companies do not have to advertise their environmental and community CSR activities. Even if they just advertise their products, the advertisements will create awareness about the company itself, which will encourage consumers to seek out more information about the company's other activities, including CSR."

Issues that are relevant when green-marketing advertisements are being created depend on the type of appeal in use (*e.g.*, fear or hope) and the type of framing (global versus local). In **"What Sells Better in Green Communications: Fear or Hope? It Depends on Whether the Issue Is Global or Local"** (please see page 379), Yu-Kang Lee, Chun-Tuan Chang, and Pei-Chi Chen (all from Taiwan's National Sun Yat-sen University) found that "when the environmental issue was framed as global, a fear appeal garnered more attention from the viewer, leading to a more favorable attitude toward the green issue, a stronger behavioral intention, and

more money being donated." Their study also showed that "when the environmental issue was framed as local, a hope appeal was more effective than a fear appeal, in terms of received attention, attitude, behavioral intention, and donation amount."

CSR initiatives can enhance connections that consumers develop with brands. Brand bonds are vital to keep a product or service top of mind for the consumer, but there are still questions about which particular types of CSR media and content can be communicated most effectively. An international team studied sustainability initiatives and present their findings in **"Improving the Effectiveness and Credibility of Corporate Social Responsibility Messaging: An Austrian Model Identifies Influential CSR Content and Communication Channels"** (please see page 397). Verena Gruber (HEC Montreal—coauthoring the research while at Vienna University of Economics and Business), Magdalena Kaliauer (GfK Austria), and Bodo B. Schlegelmilch (Vienna University of Economics and Business and Sun Yatsen University, China) find that there are two kinds of consumers that must be taken into consideration: those who already are interested in sustainability and those who are not, yet might be, if given appropriate information. "To reach the first group of consumers … use more subtle channels, such as their online home pages and online sustainability reports," the authors suggest. They further propose that for the other group, "large-scale communications—television, social media, and radio advertising, for example—can be viable means." One caveat: "Advertisers particularly should be careful with purely emotional approaches to CSR communication as such efforts may evoke skepticism," the authors warn.

Event sponsorship is one way to communicate a company's CSR efforts. In **"Communicating Corporate Responsibility to Fit Consumer Perceptions: How Sincerity Drives Event and Sponsor Outcomes"** (please see page 410), Angeline Close Scheinbaum (University of Texas at Austin), Russell Lacey (Xavier University in Cincinnati), and Ming-Ching Liang (Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, MN) conducted a field study at a sponsored sporting event. Their results: "Sponsors that are perceived as sincere in their sponsorship will achieve superior responses to their sponsorship, compared with sponsors that are viewed as insincere." The authors note that "sincerity may be at risk if the sponsor leverages or publicity highlights its commercial objectives. Consumers also may attribute sincerity to the sponsor's motives when they learn about its support of prosocial activities through a neutral source, rather than directly from the sponsor."

Advertising content can become more effective if its messages are seen as consistent with the motives and interests of the viewer. A test of the self-motives of consumers and CSR advertising by Yoon-Joo Lee (Washington State University) grounds "**How Do Self-Values Play a Role in Consumers' Perception of CSR Advertising? The Moderated Mediation Effect of Self-Referencing**" (please see page 422). Lee found that "congruent values between self-motive and perception of CSR initiatives can increase self-referencing, which can result in increased purchase intention." What this implies is that "consumers are able to utilize their own self-concept in processing [CSR] advertisements." The findings reflect that "consumers practice self-referencing when perceiving CSR advertising, which

implies that advertisers should pay attention to consumers' self-perceptions in order to create relevant messages." Strategically, Lee proposes, "If people respond that business should help society in an effort to obtain social approval, advertisers might want to employ a social norm strategy."

In **"Corporate Social Responsibility Communication Effects: A Comparison between Investor-Owned Banks and Member-Owned Banks"** (please see page 436), the University of Lyon's Charlotte Lecuyer, Sonia Capelli, and William Sabadie find that a difference in the effect of CSR communications depends on whether the businesses involved are member owned as opposed to investor owned. The issue seems to be that, when an industry has both member-owned and investor-owned businesses competing with each other, "investor-owned businesses should avoid CSR messages, because member-owned businesses possess an existing competitive advantage on this distinction, derived from their reputation for proximal CSR initiatives."

Since the nature of member-owned organizations more easily fits with the whole orientation toward localized social issues, they "should highlight their corporate governance in their communications [both CSR and non-CSR] to generate better attitudes toward the advertisement." Investor-owned businesses "should choose a quality-based claim or global CSR initiative." They should aim, therefore, at social initiatives on a global scale, where the member-owned businesses do not have the automatic perceptual advantage.

As the *Journal of Advertising Research* continues to grow and evolve, I welcome your feedback at jbford@odu.edu. **JAR**