Empirics-First Research

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New submissions to *JM* and acceptance rate 2014-2025

Country	Total # new submissions 2014-2025	CAGR 2014-2024	# accepted papers 2014-2025	Acceptance rate 2014-2025
USA	9546	3.7%	1201	12.6%
China	2071	19.7%	64	3.1%
Germany	1722	-2.8%	170	9.9%
UK	1089	7.5%	103	9.5%
Australia	823	6.2%	69	8.4%
Canada	756	7.7%	90	11.9%
Hong Kong	563	6.1%	41	7.3%
Netherlands	551	10.1%	89	16.2%
France	532	10.1%	34	6.4%
Belgium	157	4.1%	13	8.3%
Austria	185	3.1%	27	14.6%

Three Exciting New *Journal of Marketing* Special Issues

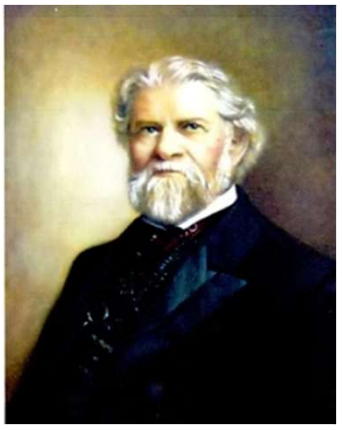
Empirics First

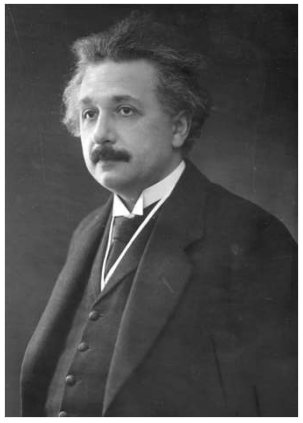
- Grounded in a real-world marketing phenomenon, involves obtaining and analyzing data and producing valid marketing-relevant insights without necessarily developing or testing theory (Golder et al. 2023).
- Empirics first does not mean empirics only. Starts with data in novel domains, domains untethered to existing theory, or domains with multiple relevant and possibly conflicting theories.
- Can apply to consumer behavior, strategy, and quantitative modeling research; also encourage papers that use multimethod approaches
- **Editors:** Marc Fischer, Kelly Haws, Jan-Benedict Steenkamp, Harald van Heerde
- Deadline **February 1, 2026**

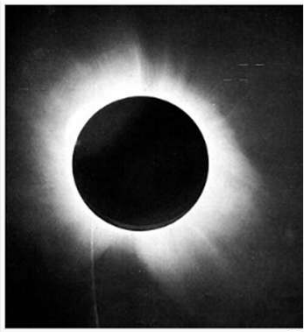
How to investigate this problem? Theory-First vs. Empirics First (Golder et al. 2023)

Steps in Research Process	TF Approach	EF Approach
Testing or developing theory	Primary objective	One of several potential outcomes
Determining research focus	Research revolves around hypothesized outcomes	Research is exploration-minded
Recognizing the nature of the research process	Linear	Iterative
Tolerating research messiness	Clean, internally consistent, and hypothesis-supportive outcomes are expected	Messiness is common, can be an asset, and should be fully exploited and reported
Reviewing the literature	Often provides a story line toward testable hypotheses	Comfortable with an absence of prior research but grateful for any literature that provides insight or inspiration
Searching for explanations	More focused	Multiple angles encouraged
Formulating priors	Tighter	More diffuse
Developing conceptual framework	Clearly specified constructs and relationships developed a priori	Loosely tied constructs and relationships; conceptual framework may develop along the way
Collecting data	Collect empirical evidence to test theory/hypotheses	Collect empirical observations to explore and understand the focal phenomenon
Analyzing data	Assess statistical support for hypothesized outcomes	Document the empirical outcomes, including null results
Checking robustness	Emphasis on ruling out alternative explanations; robustness is tested within the focal scope of investigation	Tolerance of (or desire for) multiple explanations and nuanced results
Dealing with failed robustness checks	Reduce confidence in core assertions	Viewed as learning opportunities
Writing the article	Standard template: literature review → hypotheses → clean and supportive data → theory and (sometimes) practical implications	Suggested template: Motivate the phenomenon, describe the various analyses, and end with insights gained; theoretical implications may (but need not) emerge

Example of EF research to scientific development







One of Eddington's photographs of the total solar eclipse of 29 May 1919, presented in his 1920 paper announcing its success, confirming Einstein's theory that light "bends"

Questions to ask when considering EF research

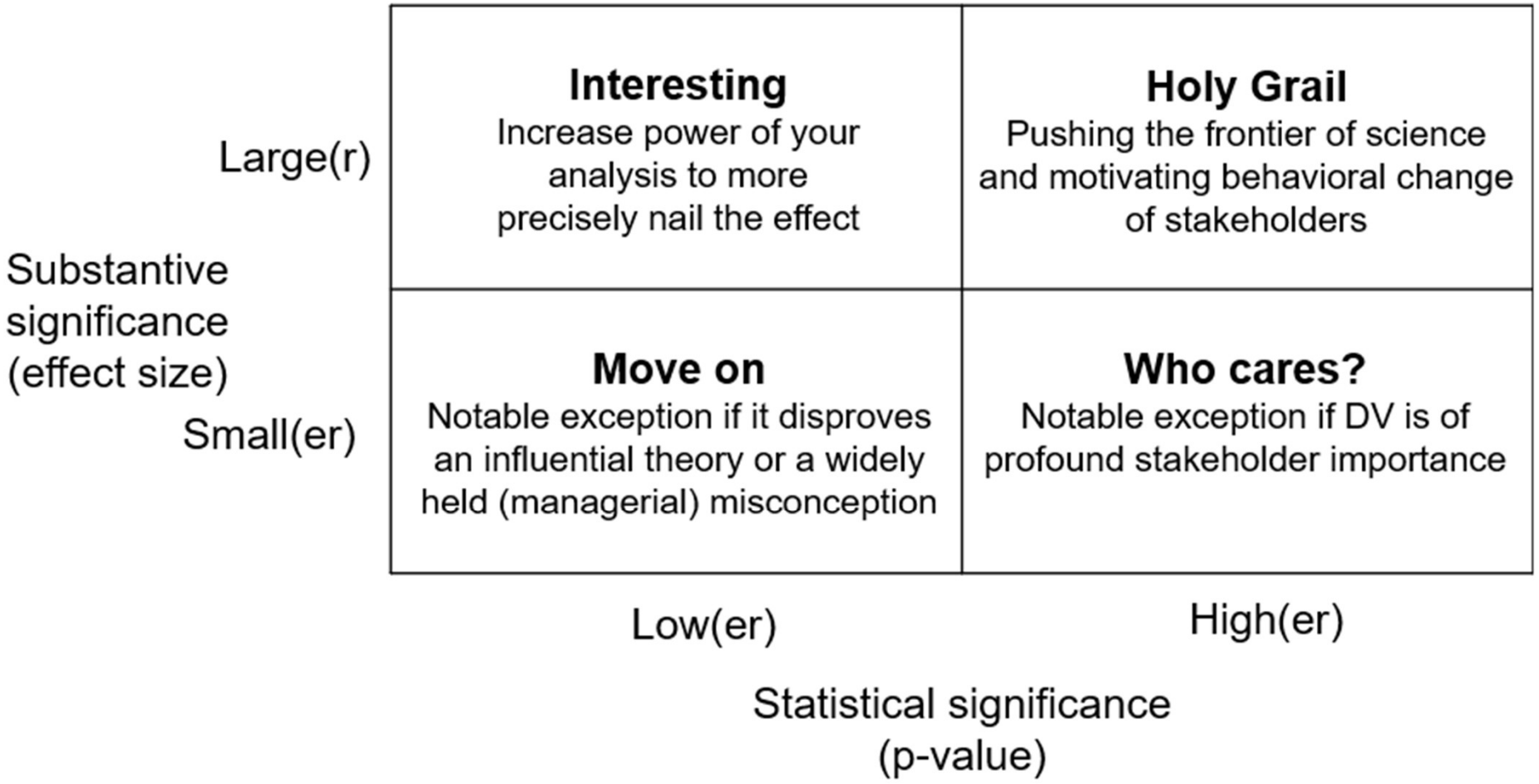
To sum up the most pertinent ones:

- ✓ Theory is incomplete and not in short supply
- ✓ Past findings are equivocal
- ✓ Intuition leads to multiple plausible yet conflicting outcomes
- ✓ Rich, high-quality data allow the researcher to probe unexamined relationships

Table 4. Questions for Interrogating EF Research.

Aspect	Questions
Real-world relevance	• Is the phenomenon a determinant of enduring stakeholder significance? • Does the research use new data on an important phenomenon? • Is current (social) media or business press coverage on this topic/phenomenon incomplete, contradictory, or wrong? • Is there potential to incorporate this research into teaching?
Literature	• Is the current literature thin, conflicting, unintuitive, and/or far afield from marketing? • Has the literature been consulted for potential duplication, inspiration, variables/factors to consider, and interpretation of the empirics?
Research process	• Is the research agenda-free (i.e., does it begin and proceed without fixed ideas about its outcomes)? • Has the investigation incorporated hunches based on marketing expertise and experience along with insights generated from the data itself? • Has research been deepened (e.g., additional DVs, IVs, control variables, mediators, moderators, boundary conditions)? • Has research been broadened (e.g., additional industries, organizations, categories, products)?
Research outcomes	• Is the phenomenon better understood empirically, conceptually, and/or theoretically? • Is there advice for marketing stakeholders based on causal effects? Can stakeholders act on this information? • Has the research discovered an empirical regularity? • Have the effect sizes received proper attention? Are they economically, managerially, or socially significant?
Robustness and generalizability	• Have failed robustness checks been interpreted as learning opportunities in current and/or future research? • Was there a real possibility for falsifying the findings? • Have both simpler models and more sophisticated models yielded consistent results? • Are findings generalizable to other contexts, and could they potentially spark follow-up research?
Presentation	• Does the article explain the discovery process in a clear, honest, and compelling way? • Can the results be incorporated into future meta-analyses? • Has the article closed the loop by presenting motivations for conducting the study in terms of relevance and impact for various stakeholders?
Theory	• Although theory testing and development are not required, have the following questions been considered? - Does the article offer plausible explanation(s) for the findings? - Have multiple potential explanations been considered and evaluated? - Have potential new theoretical relationships been proposed? - Have conflicting theories been resolved? • Have new frameworks been proposed? • Have new constructs and measures been developed?

Substantive significance is even more important in EF research



Common effect size metrics

Effect size metric	Formula	Effect size value		
		Small	Medium	Large
Strength of association of measures				
Categorical variables and group comparisons				
Cohen's d	$d = \lvert M_{G1} - M_{G2} \rvert / SD_{pooled}$	.20	.50	.80
Independent samples ($n_1 \neq n_2$)	$d = t\sqrt{\frac{n_1 + n_2}{n_1 n_2}}$	.20	.50	.80
Independent samples ($n_1 = n_2$)	$d = 2t/\sqrt{df}$	.20	.50	.80
Paired samples	$d = t/\sqrt{N}$			
η^2	$\eta^2 = ESS/TSS$	.01	.06	.14
Cohen's f	$f = \sqrt{\eta^2/(1-\eta^2)}$	.10	.25	.40
Odds ratio	$OR = \frac{\text{Group 1 odds of outcome}}{\text{Group 2 odds of outcome}}$	1.5	2	3
Contingency tables				
Φ (2 × 2 table)	$\Phi = \sqrt{\chi^2/N}$	.10	.30	.50
Cramer's V (k × r table)	$V = \sqrt{\Phi / \min(k-1, r-1)}$	.10	.30	.50
Continuous variables				
Pearson's correlation $r_{X,Y}$	$r_{X,Y} = \frac{Cov(X,Y)}{SD_X SD_Y}$	.10	.30	.50
Partial correlation coefficient $r_{XY,Z}$	$r_{XY,Z} = \frac{r_{XY} - r_{XZ} r_{ZY}}{\sqrt{1 - r_{XZ}^2}\sqrt{1 - r_{ZY}^2}}$	.14	.36	.51
Impact measures				
Standardized regression coefficient	$\beta = b\frac{SD_X}{SD_Y}$	.10	.30	.50
Incidence rate ratio	$IRR = e^{bX}$	No established benchmarks		
Elasticities				
Linear model	$\varepsilon_{Y,X} = b\, M_X / M_Y$	Depends on past research and received insight		
Log-log model	$\varepsilon_{Y,X} = b$			
Log-linear model	$\varepsilon_{Y,X} = bM_X$			
Semi-log model	$\varepsilon_{Y,X} = b/M_Y$			
Arc elasticity	$\varepsilon_Y^{arc} = (M_{G1} - M_{G2})/(M_{G1} + M_{G2})$			
Global fit measures				
Continuous variables				
Explained variance	$R^2 = 1 - (RSS/TSS)$	Depends on the nature of the dataset		

Example: The Evolution of Price, Assortment, and Distribution Effectiveness: An Empirics-First Approach

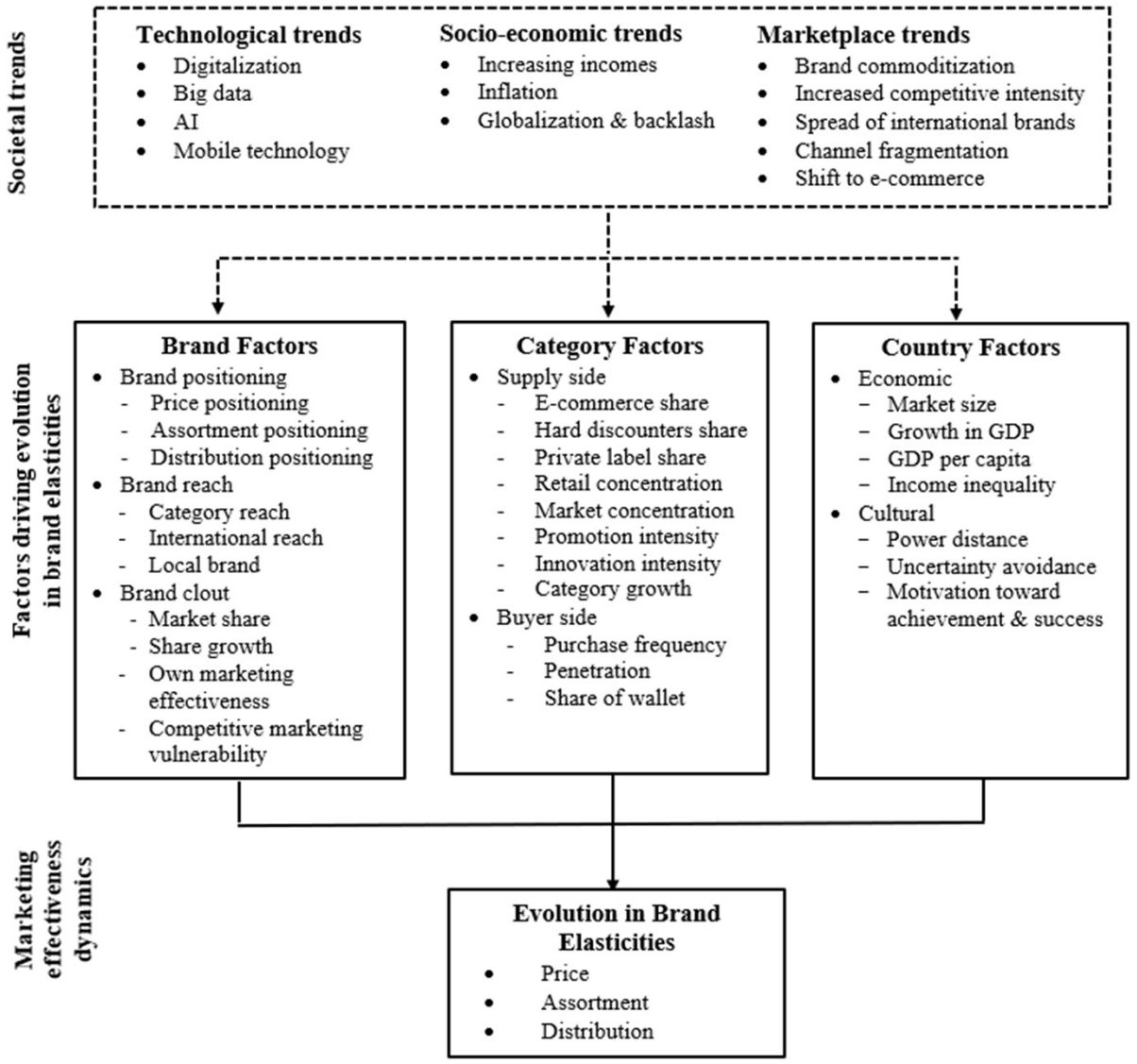
Brand reality--Accelerating rate of change over time:

- New technologies
- Rise of e-commerce
- Rise of emerging markets
- Changes in consumer preferences, economic conditions, and global competitive landscape
- Entry of no-frills retailers
- Rise of PLs
- ….

Gaps in our knowledge:

- Past research almost exclusively focused on change in price
- Little research on sources of heterogeneity in evolution of MM effectiveness, even for price
- Do results for one country hold globally? Where does it change? Why?

Framework for Analyzing Heterogeneity in the Evolution of Brand Elasticities: All but impossible to develop thoroughly motivated (rather than HARK-ed) hypotheses



Note: Solid lines refer to effects that are estimated in this paper. Dotted lines refer to societal trends that influence factors driving the evolution in brand elasticities but are not estimated.

Rich data

- 34 countries
- 16,000+ brands
- 85 CPG categories
- Household panel data for 5-15 years

Country	# Categories	# Brands	Average Windows
Argentina	54	499	82
Austria	78	401	119
Belgium	70	300	115
Bolivia	45	327	69
Brazil	46	631	87
Central American Countries	41	411	55
Chile	51	441	80
China	57	730	79
Colombia	47	483	63
Czech Republic	81	544	57
Germany	82	682	172
Denmark	62	329	121
Ecuador	44	311	59
Spain	75	550	120
France	78	583	136
Hungary	76	577	81
Indonesia	46	341	43
Ireland	73	382	32
India	30	151	71
Italy	73	800	84
Mexico	50	445	73
Netherlands	83	588	118
Peru	50	334	59
Poland	74	357	93
Romania	74	521	61
Russia	75	1141	83
Sweden	61	325	105
Slovakia	73	324	48
Thailand	52	377	62
Turkey	5	464	20
Taiwan	54	431	51
UK	78	638	162
USA	76	793	106
Vietnam	54	431	51

Detailed rationale for adopting the EF approach

Aspect/Questions	Our study
Real-world relevance	
Is the phenomenon a determinant of enduring stakeholder significance?	The evolution in the effectiveness of marketing instruments is key to managerial decision-making.
Does the research use new data on an important phenomenon?	Yes, the long time series (on average ten years) and the international coverage (34 countries) are new and allow for generalizations.
Literature	
Is the current literature thin, conflicting, unintuitive, and/or far afield from marketing?	Yes, few moderators of the evolution of price, and even more so for assortment and distribution have been studied (Table 2).
Has the literature been consulted for potential inspiration, variables/factors to consider, and interpretation of the empirics?	Yes, where possible, the literature has been used
Research process	
Is the research agenda-free (i.e., does it begin and proceed without fixed ideas about its outcomes)?	Yes, we did not have fixed ideas about the outcome, even about the amount of change per se.
Has the investigation incorporated hunches based on marketing expertise and experience?	Where appropriate, plausible hunches are offered.
Has research been deepened with additional variables?	We purposefully cast a wide net by including 28 potential moderators of the evolution of marketing elasticities
Has research been broadened (e.g., additional industries, organizations, categories, products)?	Broadened by examining 85 categories in 34 countries
Research outcomes	
Is the phenomenon better understood empirically, conceptually, and/or theoretically?	The moderator analysis (Table 7) adds understanding to an underexplored issue of drivers of change in marketing effectiveness
Is there advice for marketing stakeholders based on causal effects?	Yes, in the Managerial Implications section, we show how the optimal allocation of marketing efforts across instruments or countries changes over time, using our empirical findings
Has the research discovered empirical regularities?	Yes, these are summarized in the final section.
Have the effect sizes received proper attention?	Yes, see Tables 7 and 8.
Robustness and generalizability	
Was there a real possibility for falsifying the findings?	Yes, this is exemplified by a number of weak/null results for positioning and retail category factors
Have both simpler models and more sophisticated models yielded consistent results?	Extended models (adding advertising and coupon usage in the U.S.) and more sophisticated models (Kalman filter model) yielded essentially the same estimates
Are findings generalizable to other contexts, and could they potentially spark follow-up research?	Given the global scope and broad coverage, results from this study are likely to be generalizable to other contexts.
Presentation	
Can the results be incorporated into future meta-analyses?	Yes, the number of elasticities reported in this paper 8-10x larger than that of any previous primary study or meta-analysis
Theory	
Have the following questions been considered? (i) Does the article offer plausible explanation(s) for the findings? (ii) Have multiple potential explanations been considered and evaluated? (iii) Have potential new theoretical relationships been proposed? (iv) Have conflicting theories been resolved?	(i)-(ii) Where applicable (e.g., for positioning, international brands, e-commerce, category concentration, market size), multiple lausible explanations have been offered and empirically evaluated (iii) We have proposed new theoretical relations for e.g., own instrument effectiveness and category buyer behavior (iv) Our empirical findings resolve certain conflicting explanations e.g., for product lifecycle, market size
Have new frameworks been proposed?	Our research framework (Fig. 1) is new.

Note: The column Aspects/Questions is taken from Golder et al. (2023, Table 4). We only include the questions that are features of our research. As stated by Golder et al. (p. 330): It is unreasonable to expect EF articles to answer all questions in the affirmative".