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Author:

e-mail:

MktgSci@notes.cba.ufl.edu

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Editorial: A Discussion of Bait and Switch

Richard Staelin

The Fuqua School of Business, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina 27708-0120

rstaelin@mail.duke.edu

The next three papers on bait and switch represent something new for the journal. Not since Subrata Sen was Editor has this journal published papers that commented directly on others' work, and even then, the commentaries were solicited by the Editor.

One of the major responsibilities of the Editor and the Area Editor is to decide on the appropriateness of a submitted paper. As stated in prior editorials (Staelin 1996, 1997), four major criteria are used in making this determination:

- (1) Will the paper be of interest to our readers?
- (2) Is it readable?
- (3) Is it not wrong?
- (4) Does it make a contribution to the field?

Assuming the determination is positive, it is the job of the Editor, with the help of the review team, to specify a course of action that he believes will lead to a publishable paper. What then leads the review team to encourage the publishing of three papers that directly comment on each other's work and, in the process, alter the existing practice of this journal?

As pointed out by Wilkie, Mela, and Gundlach (WMG), the original Gerstner and Hess (GH) paper has garnered little attention from others in our field even though it reached the very provocative conclusion that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) should investigate legitimizing the practice of bait and switch. One might ask why no one responded to this conclusion. Clearly the topic is important and of interest to a substantial subset of our readers. Also, the methodology used was "standard", i.e., GH used an economically based model of pure competition and full information. Yet, for eight years, no one publicly challenged GH's conclusions. Was this because our profession doesn't like public debates, the journals don't support

(Modeling; Editorial Guidelines.)

such debates, or we are too busy doing our own work and, thus, are not concerned about others' work unless it has a direct impact on ours?

With this as the background, WMG first submitted their manuscript to *Marketing Science* in June of 1997. After two rounds of peer review, we (the Editor and Area Editor) decided to accept the paper. In a letter to WMG, I (Rick Staelin) wrote

Given the review team's recommendations, I spent considerable time debating on whether or not I should publish the paper. Clearly, your paper is not technically wrong. However, the question boils down to how one should "correct" the literature. One way is to have GH write a short (one page) technical note. Another way is to just let the field put it to rest via "benign neglect." A third way is to publish a rejoinder or an extension. Up until now, Marketing Science has not used the third option often. With all this said, I believe the issue of bait and switch and GH's conclusions are important enough that option 2 is not viable. Since GH did not come forward, this leaves me option 3. Still, I do not want to set the precedent of publishing rejoinders unless the issues are very important (i.e., could alter the field, conclusions are major, etc.) and the rejoinder goes further by providing some extensions/insights, etc., of its own. Since I believe your paper meets this hurdle, I am . . . conditionally accepting your paper for publication.

Do I expect the journal to publish other such comments and rejoinders? The answer is still open. Clearly, such a practice encourages an open dialog and lets the field (versus the review team) decide on merits of a particular paper. Still, it also encourages minor extensions and a tendency to be overly critical without being constructive. This is not what we want and, in fact, the Area Editor and I explicitly discussed this prior to accepting the papers. Thus, in the letter to WMG, I said

I want to congratulate you on addressing this important problem, writing a clear (and in my mind) nonvicious note, and being responsive to the reviewers. I believe the final product will be a useful illustration of how models can be thought of as experiments and how one can use this approach to unconfound issues.

Similarly, to Gerstner and Hess (GH), I said

First, I want to thank you for your well-thought-out reply to the WMG paper. It is a pleasure to see two research teams approach a