

**Product Design since Bloch (1995):
Analysis of 14 Years of Research and the
Emergence of Product Design as a Field of Marketing Inquiry**

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The authors present findings from a comprehensive analysis of the articles from eight premier journals (in alphabetical order: *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, *Management Science* and *Marketing Science*) important to marketing thought that have addressed product design over the fourteen year period from 1995-2008. Based on this analysis, the authors propose a new conceptual model of product design and offer a new definition of product design intended to reflect the full breadth of product design as it has been addressed within the literature. Based on the analysis, we propose the following definition of product design:

Product design refers to the set of activities, integral to the development and realization of firm strategy, that achieve a product through a process that includes analysis of the internal and external context, development of the product strategy, and the definition and realization of the finished product - where “product” refers to the product form, i.e., its physical manifestation, the product’s function, i.e., its capabilities, and the integrative properties of the combination of both form and function.

In addition, the authors provide insights into the nature of product design research during this time period including analyses of publication trends and the relationship of product design research to related marketing topics. The *Journal of Consumer Research* is responsible for 3 of the 121 articles, or less than 3%. Indeed, the three journals

typically cited as the most influential within marketing, the *Journal of Marketing* (with 9 articles), the *Journal of Marketing Research* (with 14 articles) and the *Journal of Consumer Research* (with 3 articles), were collectively responsible for only 26 of the 121 articles, or just under 22%. This is less than the *Journal of Product Innovation Management* which published the greatest number of articles on product design during this time period, with 44 of the 121 articles, or over 1/3rd. In addition, *Management Science* published a substantial number of articles on product design during this time period (with 36 articles). We are not able to conclude that there has been a change in the frequency of articles on product design in marketing relevant journals during this time period.

Research on product design within the field of marketing has broadened significantly since Bloch's (1995) article in which he proposed a conceptual model and definition of product design. However, while Bloch's seminal article catalyzed the work of many researchers interested in product design – especially those focused on the product form, it is apparent from our analysis that product design research has progressed along two relatively disparate paths including one focused more on product function and “engineering design.” While both orientations are important, we believe that an integrated perspective is needed to both align research with emerging industry practice as well as to enable the next generation of research on product design. An integrated perspective can, for example, encourage researchers to simultaneously address both product form and function – and their integrative properties, in their research. The authors conclude with suggestions on how the field can promote research on product design.