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Introduction to the Special Section on Mobile Technologies

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Introduction to the Special Section on Mobile Technologies

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It is an understatement to say that mobile has revolutionized marketing. Mobile's portability allows customers and firms to reach out to each other anytime, anywhere. The information about customer and firm location in real time not only facilitates context-specific marketing to consumers, but consumers in turn demand and expect context specific information from marketers. Further, the small size and the quick, frequent real-time nature of engagement with the mobile device have substantial impact on consumer behavior.

This special section showcases research that highlights the impact of mobile in marketing with three papers accepted from 19 submissions. Each paper addresses distinct aspects of how mobile enables and impacts consumers and marketers, using novel and rich data made available by mobile technologies. The distinctiveness of the research questions and the data used illustrates the potential richness of scholarship around mobile technologies.

"Mobile Hailing Technology and Taxi Driving Behaviors" by Yanwen Wang, Chunhua Wu, and Ting Zhu addresses a rich set of questions about how mobile platforms can impact the supply of services to consumers. They study how driving behavior of taxi drivers in Beijing change upon adoption of a mobile taxi hailing app using rich minute by minute, geo-location data of taxis. While at first glance the app improves efficiency by helping increase driver incomes, detailed analysis shows that the income gain comes not by reducing driver intertrip (idle) times, but at the expense of short-trip riders, who are avoided in favor of longer trips. The analysis suggests that simple platform design decisions such as revealing destination information only after the rider has been picked up (as done by Uber) can potentially be welfare enhancing for both drivers and riders.

"Mobile App Introduction and Online and Offline Purchases and Product Returns" by Unnati Narang and Venkatesh Shankar investigates how the introduction of a mobile app impacts the customer journey both online and offline and thus contributes to our understanding of omni-channel retailing. They find that not only does the mobile increase online purchases, but also increases offline purchases. In fact, they find that apps are often used in the vicinity of the stores and such use is followed by not only an increased likelihood of purchase, but also by purchase of a more diverse set of products. Thus the evidence suggests that a mobile app serves as a complement to the offline purchase journey.

"Creation and Consumption of Mobile Word of Mouth: How Are Mobile Reviews Different?" by Sam Ransbotham, Nicholas H. Lurie, and Hongju Liu addresses the question of how word of mouth (WOM) generated in real-time on mobile devices differ from those written on other devices in terms of the nature of content and how they are consumed by readers. Using data on restaurant reviews, they find that reviews on mobile are more concrete, more emotional and less extreme, reflecting their immediacy. However, reviews created on other devices that are not immediate are often liked and found to be more useful over the long-run. Their analysis reveals interesting tradeoffs in terms of content creation and consumption on mobile.

Marketing Science has and will continue to publish papers on how mobile technologies impact the leading edge of marketing. I hope the three papers in this section inspire novel research on substantive questions and methods involving unique real time, location data generated through mobile, mobile generated content (text, images, audio and video), and, more generally, consumer behavior on mobile devices.