

Anatomy of a Censorship

A cautionary tale in 28 email fragments

By Chuck Chakrapani

“THE BEST MAGAZINE IN THE WORLD”

One of the first things I did when I took over as the editor of *Marketing Research* in the year 2000 was to make it an open intellectual forum for professionals to express their views, a privilege not generally accorded to them in journals. Professionals took this opportunity to express their views freely. Others took notice.

- Eminent academics and well-known scholars such as Paul Green, Yoram Wind, Brian Wansink, Greg Allenby, Andrew Ehrenberg, Peter Fader, Naresh Malhotra, Bruce Hardie, V. Kumar, to name just a few, had their articles published in *MR*. So did distinguished practitioners such as Steve Cohen, Rich Johnson, Howard Moskowitz, Nigel Hollis, Marco Vriens, Bill Neal and others.
- In 2003, the venerable *JMR* wrote that “under the current stewardship of Chuck Chakrapani, *Marketing Research* has a lively (and sometimes irreverent) group of authors that often holds strong opinions ... various researchers can challenge, bicker, and otherwise excoriate fellow researchers in spirited debate. Such feedback is useful for researchers and practitioners alike.”
- In 2004 the UK-based Emerald, publisher of the world’s widest range of management and library and information services journals, after reviewing 400 professional magazines, chose *Marketing Research* to be the best magazine in the world.

A lively magazine was born.

A few years later came severe budget cuts. We went from five feature articles per issue to three or less. Columns such as Book Reviews were cut. Retiring columnists were not replaced. Managing editors and designers kept changing at a frenetic pace, disrupting continuity. I continued being the editor, hoping that some day we would return to our glory days, even though I had to work under less than optimal conditions. Through it all I tried to remain true to my original vision of keeping *Marketing Research* an open forum for intellectual discussion.

Yet, after 12 years at the helm through good times and bad, I decided to resign on September 24, 2012. My resignation was accepted without question on the next day. The facts leading up to my resignation were as follows. Paul Richard “Dick” McCullough wrote a column that was critical of the ART Forum, the high level AMA methodology conference. I invited Bill Neal (co-founder of the ART Forum), Greg Allenby (past chair of the ART Forum) and Bruce Hardie (2013 chair of the ART Forum) to comment on the column. Bill Neal and Greg Allenby accepted the invitation and provided their comments. I submitted them for publication. You can find them on the next several pages.

What happened next is a story of how “the best magazine in the world,” the publication whose authors were hailed as “lively (and sometimes irreverent),” came painfully close to losing its independence.

In telling the story, I mostly stand aside letting the email extracts speak for themselves. Readers can decide for themselves if this was censorship, as we believe it is, or not, as Dennis Dunlap, CEO of the AMA, contends.

WHO IS WHO

Bill

Bill Neal, Responder to the controversial article

Chuck

Chuck Chakrapani, Editor-in Chief (2000-2012), *Marketing Research*

Dave

David Reibstein, Chairman, AMA

Dennis

Dennis Dunlap, CEO of AMA, AMA staff

Dick

Paul Richard “Dick” McCullough, MR Columnist, Author of the controversial article

Doug

Doug Bowman, Current President of Market Research

Council

Greg
Greg Allenby, Responder to the Controversial article

Mary
Mary Flory, Managing Editor, AMA staff

THE INCIDENT

August 24, 2012. Chuck to Mary

Here's Dick McCullough's column along with two Backtalk responses to it.

September 17, 2012 [three weeks later]. Mary to Chuck.

Just wanted to give you a heads up that I don't know if we'll be able to run McCullough's column and the two related Backtalks. The magazines are not and will not be a vehicle for promoting AMA events with articles and columns, but they are also not a forum in which individuals can simply bash AMA events.

September 17, 2012 [same day]. Chuck to Mary

I'd be extremely disappointed if these articles are censored. These are NOT written by some disgruntled people who try to unfairly attack the AMA for their own purposes. Bill Neal is actually the founder and supporter of ART forum. Greg Allenby has been the organizer of these conferences and is the winner of this year's Parlin Award, the most prestigious MR award. It would be a shame if AMA decides to muzzle the voices of honest dissent of its supporters.

September 19, 2012 [two days later]. Mary to Chuck

I've spent the past few days speaking with several individuals here at the AMA, as well as some Market Research Council voices, including Doug Bowman. Bottom line is, we can't run this column or the two related backtalks.

September 24, 2012 [five days later]. Chuck to Mary cc. Dennis

Please accept my resignation forthwith as the editor of the *Marketing Research*. I do not agree with censorship in intellectual matters and, ... I cannot lend support to it. ... People like Bill Neal, Greg Allenby, and Dick McCullough are strong supporters of the AMA and the ART Forum. It is my understanding that Bill was instrumental in starting the ART Forum as well as *Marketing Research*. Is it not ironic that he's not allowed to say what he thinks about ART Forum in *Marketing Research*? ... I cannot, in good conscience, lend tacit support for suppressing their views... the only honorable course left for me is to resign. If the purpose of *Marketing Research* is to be a pamphlet for the

AMA, I am certainly the wrong editor.

September 25, 2012 [next day]. Mary to Chuck

I don't view this as a censorship issue. Rather, I see this as a question of what's appropriate to publish in a particular medium. ... I contend that *Marketing Research* is not the right channel to publish it. *Marketing Research* is not a mouthpiece for the AMA. Furthermore, Doug Bowman, the current president of the Market Research Council and a past Council liaison to the ART Forum, agrees that such coverage is outside the scope of *Marketing Research*'s editorial mission.

September 25, 2012 [same day]. Chuck to Mary cc. Dennis

If the article is "outside the scope of *Marketing Research*'s editorial mission", then the fault is mine for straying from the mission and the AMA should have discussed it with me first rather than handing me its decision as if it is all I needed to know... I am also baffled by the mention of names like Doug Bowman... as though they had no opportunity to have an input on this...Mary, either this is censorship or I am a bad editor. Either way, I'm out. But it would be nice to know which one it is: bad editorship or unacceptable articles.

September 26, 2012 [next day]. Chuck to Mary cc. Dennis

I would like to further expound on why I was baffled by Doug Bowman's private response to you In his emails [see below], Doug Bowman not only applauds Greg's response, but asks me to add Parlin Award to Greg's credentials when the article is published. If he had any concerns about these articles, he kept them to himself.

August 21. Doug to Greg

Thanks for sharing. This is excellent.

[Same email]. Doug to Chuck

I assume you list Greg's title before/after his remarks. If feasible, and you're willing, it would be nice to also get a mention for the Parlin Award in that listing

You know Mary, the irony of it all is that I wanted someone to challenge Dick so I invited people I expected would contradict Dick. We chose a few long-term supporters of the ART Forum ... They ended up supporting Dick's main criticism. I couldn't change that.

[No immediate response from Mary or from Dennis to my previous two emails.]

THE FALLOUT

Dick McCullough resigns as columnist. September 24, 2012.

Dick to Mary

By limiting the discussion to only those topics with which the AMA is comfortable, the integrity of the column is permanently damaged ... Regardless of the correctness of your position, my column can no longer continue. Please accept my

resignation, effective immediately.

Ken Deal resigns as columnist. September 26, 2012. Ken to Mary

Due to the unfortunate incidence of censorship of the article by Dick McCullough and the replies by Greg Allenby and Bill Neal, I will no longer be writing my software review column for *Marketing Research*.

Dave Lyon resigns as Editorial Review Board member. October 1, 2012. Dave to Mary

In view of the situation surrounding Chuck Chakrapani's resignation, I wish to resign any connection I have with the magazine as well.

Larry Gibson resigns as Editorial Review Board member [?]. October 2, 2012. Larry to "Methodologists"

I will be sending a similar E Mail to Ms Flory today.
[No immediate reply from Mary or Dennis to the resignation of Dave, Ken or Larry.]

September 25, 2012 [next day], Mary to Dick

I see this as a question of what's appropriate to publish in a particular medium...*Marketing News* ... is a more appropriate channel for this AMA-specific content. We can also create a forum thread in our social networking community, AMACONnect, so other readers can weigh in.

September 26, 2012 [next day], Dick to Mary

Researchers who attend, or no longer attend, the ART Forum read *Marketing Research*, not *Marketing News*...I remain disappointed in the AMA's decision but appreciate your email.

The matter would have ended there but for the fact that it was picked up by a group of many long-term AMA members loyal to the AMA and to the ART Forum [whom I collectively call "methodologists"] who exchanged scores of emails in which they expressed deep concern about what they saw as censorship by the AMA. While all this was happening, some senior members of the AMA tried to resolve this issue quietly by reaching out to Dennis and reported back as follows.

September 22, 2012. Bill Neal to "Methodologists"

I talked briefly with Dennis Dunlap yesterday afternoon and expressed my extreme disappointment with the situation. He said that he approved the action. I asked if he had read the article and the replies. He said "no."

October 2, 2012. Diane Schmalensee to "Methodologists"

Sigh. I was hoping that the calls with Dennis would help. He thanked me for the call and appeared to have listened. This is a real shame.

October 3, 2012. Larry Gibson to "Methodologists"

Dennis ... promptly corrected me when I said I was a Board

member. I've forgotten his exact words but it was something like, "...of course that Board no longer exists".

All this had a big ripple effect. Industry insider publication *Inside Research* published the news of my resignation in its October issue. *Greenbook* published the offending articles online. Readers weighed in. More people joined the email stream of the "methodologists" group. The tone of the emails was one of outrage against what the members saw as heavy-handed censorship by the AMA staff.

THE RESOLUTION

When all this came to the attention of Dennis and Dave Reibstein, more than three weeks after the main event, they invited me to have a conference call with them on October 16th to resolve the issues. I had a potentially productive discussion with Dennis and Dave. Here is what I wrote to them.

October 17, 2012. Chuck to Dennis cc. Dave [Condensed and edited for length]

- I think the discussion was productive and useful and I would like to summarize my understanding.
- You [Dennis] offered many constructive suggestions ... [which] if implemented, will improve the quality of ARTEF.
 - You offered to state explicitly in MR the limits of a staff editor in deciding unilaterally what should be published. I offered my opinion that unilateral decisions (also called censorship) can be justified in specific circumstances such as libel, plagiarism etc., but not in [deciding] ... the scope and content of the publication.
 - You suggested that an article could be written about me in MR recognizing my contributions. [I suggested that, while I appreciate the gesture,] whether you acknowledge me or not, my position on censorship and dedication to the objectives of AMA will not change.
 - You invited me to come back. You agreed to write an apology in MR.

October 17, 2012. Chuck to Dennis cc. Dave [continuation of the previous email]

Here is what I propose. Let me write a documented article in MR detailing why I felt what happened was censorship and you can respond (a la *Marketing Research* style over the years) why I, and many others including people like Greg Allenby, are mistaken about this. You agree to publish both articles uncensored.

[No immediate response from Dave or Dennis for my proposal to write an article.]

October 19, 2012 [two days later], Chuck to Dave cc. Dennis

[My offer is for me] to write my views and Dennis to write his. It has the added benefit of confirming that *Marketing Research* will continue to be the forum for open discussion it has always been, and not an inconsequential mouthpiece of the AMA.

[No immediate response from Dave or Dennis for my proposal to write an article.]

November 16, 2012. [one month later], Dennis to “Editorial Review Board”

Both Mary Flory, the Managing Editor, and I sincerely believe ... that the Editorial Review Board is an important strategic resource for the editorial leadership of the magazines. I also want you to know how much we appreciate your past efforts and contributions as review board members, and we hope that all of you will consider remaining on the Editorial Review Board as we move ahead.

November 16, 2012 [same day], Larry to Dennis

I was really surprised to read of your “appreciation” of the work of the Editorial Review Board of *Marketing Research* and your, “...hope that all of you will consider remaining on the Editorial Review Board as we move ahead.” Don’t you remember our telephone conversation a few days before your AMA Board meeting? I had started by saying, “As a member of the Editorial Review Board of *Marketing Research*...” when you stopped me saying that the Editorial Review Board no longer existed, that it had been dropped sometime ago.

[No response from Dennis.]

November 12, 2012. Dennis to Dick, Bill, and Greg

I wrote a column that will appear in the next issue of *Marketing Research* magazine coming out around the end of the month. It ... recaps specific actions that we have taken or will be taking including publishing your original columns in *Marketing Research* magazine if that is agreeable.

November 14, 2012 [two days later], Dick to Dennis

I do appreciate the efforts you have made to resolve this situation. I think your editorial has many positive elements. In the interest of fairness, I hope you will allow Chuck to share an alternative perspective. ... I would be honored to have the column published in MR as you so generously offered. However, I cannot agree to do so if your editorial remains the only comment on what has transpired.

November 19, 2012 [five days later], Dennis to Chuck cc. Dave

[You] didn’t express a desire to write a final column or

editorial with your account or view of the MR magazine issues. Since Dick McCullough and maybe others have suggested that you do this, I just wanted to let you know that is fine with us. Just let us know if you decide that you want to write something.

November 20, 2012 [next day], Chuck to Dennis cc. Dave

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to write my point of view on the events. I accept your offer and I will have my article ready for the next issue....I genuinely think that this a big step in the right direction. It will be a concrete demonstration that AMA does not censor views that are uncomfortable to it. I also think that that the majority of “dissidents” who still are not convinced -- even after reading your editorial -- will have less room to feel that they have not been really heard.

November 20, 2012 [same day], Dennis to Chuck cc. Dave
Great!

November 20, 2012 [same day], Dave to Chuck cc Dennis

That is great news. Thanks, Chuck, for working with us on this.

SO WAS THERE CENSORSHIP?

Now you have heard both sides of the story, I leave it up to you to decide what transpired. Even if there was no censorship as Dennis claims, the lesson of this cautionary tale is that no one should assume unilateral decisions could be imposed on the Editor-in-Chief of a publication without consultation. I firmly believe that a membership organization should be organized and run to serve its membership and should consult with those members when an issue of utmost importance as this occurs.

For the moment, I believe that both sides had their say. What needs to be said has been said. It’s my hope that we can all put this matter behind us and move forward.

I’m delighted to have served as the Editor of *MR* for so many years and I am proud of the many things we have accomplished over the years. Farewell to my friends and colleagues. **MR**

❖ **CHUCK CHAKRAPANI**, president of Leger Analytics, was the editor-in-chief of *Marketing Research* between 2000 and 2012. He can be reached at Chuck@ChuckChakrapani.com.

ⁱ Paul E. Green, Richard M. Johnson, William D. Neal (2003). *The Journal of Marketing Research: Its Initiation, Growth, and Knowledge Dissemination. Journal of Marketing Research*: Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 1-9.