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Boundary research: Tools and rules to impact emerging fields

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ABSTRACT

Boundary research can be risky, but it can also move academic disciplines into wider areas of influence. To help reduce the risk and increase the reward, this article describes new tools that boundary researchers can use to get started, published, and promoted. These include writing for surprising impact, positioning their research against a larger theme, developing a research impact matrix for promotion, and estimating a 10-year citation record. These tools can help move a boundary research area from fringe to focus. © 2016 The Authors. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* published by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

Most traditional research in academic disciplines is centrist. It focuses on research questions that are central to the evolution of a field. In the behavioral sciences, research areas such as attribution theory, behavioral decision theory, diffusion theory, and regulatory focus are just a few centrist topics that spawned hundreds of field-changing dissertations and articles. Yet not all started out as centrist. Many started on the periphery or boundary of what was then fashionable in their fields. Over time, however, they moved from idiosyncratic to impactful, from fringe to focus.

Boundary research exists on the fringes of all fields and

this article offers tools that boundary researchers can use to help them move from being tentative to tenacious. It addresses the following issues:

- How many studies are enough?
- Writing for surprising impact
- Positioning alongside a larger theme
- Developing a research impact matrix for promotion
- Using the 3-year citation test to estimate a 10-year citation record
- Getting started in boundary research
- Avoiding career regrets

This begins with the encouraging history of how bound-