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Olympic Champions and Successful Scholars

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Olympic Champions and Successful Scholars

The winter issue is a time for reflection. While watching the Olympic Games and writing this editorial essay, I couldn’t help relating how similar our academic research is to the Olympics, especially in sports that require judging such as gymnastics and diving. We are both in a highly competitive business and compete on a global level. We follow the standards set by our peers in the field through a refereed process.

The success metrics in the Olympics are getting the gold medal and the most medal counts. All athletes strive to get the highest score or fastest speed at the moment of the race. Among the many good athletes qualified for the Games, only the ones who had the best performance at the time of the Olympic Games got the glory and media attention. The emphasis of one country competing against another rather than sportsmanship is disturbing. But such simple country rivalries appeal to people’s national pride. It’s definitely better than real wars between countries.

More touching stories cover the athletes as human beings and individuals: how their talents were discovered by their coaches or parents, how they struggled, overcame difficulties, achieved and maintained their success.

The success metrics for scholars are typically research publication citations, research awards, fellowships, and productivity ranking. Recently, altmetrics such as news media coverage and social media mention of research are also gaining importance. Similarly, published works or research award glamor only represent a small portion of the researcher’s work. Many behind-the-scene revisions, coordination, failed projects, prior rejections, labor in data collection and analysis, background research that culminates many years, and many more other things are not known to the public. In refereed journal publications, how authors survive through the review process and improving their manuscript, how reviewers act as the anonymous coaches, and how the editor helps authors to get the best out of the manuscript are all a story of its own. As the editor, I have the fortune to witness the entire process and put those authors on the podium by publishing their manuscripts. Some authors are luckier to get the right reviewers and editors who can appreciate their work right away. Other authors need several attempts at different journals to get their works published. The best manuscript may not be the one that gets accepted most quickly.

If research is untangled from one’s academic career and not seen as an enterprise, then we may return to the genuine principles of self-fulfillment, inspiring colleagues in our field and other fields, advancing knowledge of the field, and finding the truth as the ultimate metric of academic success.

This winter issue is a double size issue. To fully utilize the annual page budget we were given for the journal and to move accepted articles much faster in print, we have an unprecedented 20 research articles in this issue to round up the year.

Enjoy the competition of these fabulous articles from around the world!


Highlights of Articles in This Issue

We begin this issue with a bibliometric study of social capital research in communication by Chul-joo Lee and Dongyoung Sohn. Their study of 171 research articles shows how communication scholars have incorporated the concept of social capital originating from other disciplines, their favor of communitarian approach over network approach, and the domination of political communication scholars. A full list of the 171 articles is available online as supplementary material.

We then present three articles that examine the business models of online news in the form of civic news web sites, independent web native sites, and news aggregators. Nakho Kim, Magda Konieczna, Ho Young Yoon, and Lewis A. Friedland used a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) approach to show how local university and existing news network support are crucial to sustain the civic news sites’ ventures in four U.S. cities. Brian L. Massey employed the resource-based approach to analyze the longevity of independent online native news sites and found product reputation is more important for commercial news sites than non-profit news sites. Hsiang Iris Chyi, Seth Lewis, and Nan Zheng’s content analysis comparing newspapers, trade publications, and wire services’ coverage of Google News, the online news aggregator, showed how its image ranged from a parasite to a partner of newspapers.

Audiences are confronted with increasing opportunities for more content choices and sharing of news on social media. Jihyang Choi’s survey of U.S. adults shows the relationships between the two dimensions of social media news consumption: reading as browsing, and personalizing, and the two dimensions of social media news sharing: re-contextualizing and endorsing. Elliot Panek’s experiment of media choice environment shows that more choice is not conducive to the use of serious content. Hard news is more likely to be chosen in a more constricted choice environment than a high choice environment. Sylvia Chan-Olmsted and Ronen Shay’s study of tablet owners and non-owners shows the importance of perceived tablet usefulness, microblogging social media usage, and online commerce in tablet, iPad, and dual mobile device ownership.

Reputation of companies can be affected by media coverage. Xiaoqun Zhang’s comparison of the construct validity and predictive power of seven measures of corporation’s media reputation found measures combining media favorability and media visibility had a higher predictive power on corporate reputation than other measures which only focused on media favorability. Brett Sherrick’s study shows how consumers’ belief in harmful media effects is connected to negative evaluations of the media companies if they are seen as responsible for those effects.

We also have a collection of four papers on framing Muslims, comfort women, terrorism, and social issues using different perspectives and in different countries. Brian J. Bowe and Jennifer Hoewe’s study analyzes letters to the editor in two Oklahoma newspapers during the debate over a constitutional amendment banning judicial use of the Islamic moral code called “Shariah Law.” Using Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) to explain the relationship between framing and political ideology and voting outcome, they identify three morality-based frames: a Patriot frame emphasizing Shariah’s harms, a Heritage frame advocating loyalty to the American Way, and a Golden Rule frame promoting equal treatment of Muslims. Hyeong-Jun Pak’s comparison of the Japanese and Korean’s newspaper coverage of Comfort Women as an international
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controversy from 1998 to 2013 shows how changes in the conflict, responsibility, human interest, and morality frames closely align with the relationships between the two countries. Aysel Morin identifies seven rhetorical strategies that three major U.S. newspapers use to frame acts of violence as terrorism or crime by comparatively analyzing the news coverage of the Fort Hood and the Washington, DC, Navy Yard shootings and media’s contribution in the discourse of terror. Yan Yan and Jun Liu’s experiment on the framing of a socially controversial issue with strong prior beliefs in China shows the limitation of media’s exemplification effect when people have strong existing beliefs on the issue and the implications for future media exemplification effects research.

On the media regulations side, we have a pair of articles on the three transitional democracies in Eastern Europe: Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro and Israel. Lindita Camaj’s study of government’s use of Freedom of Information laws through interviews with journalists shows that instead of increasing journalists’ access to information, the three governments use the laws to control information access and set the news agenda. Avshalom Ginosar and Or Krispil’s study compared the policy decision-making process of an Independent Regulatory Agency (IRA) and a governmental agency in Israel and found that that an IRA can represent and protect public interests better than a governmental agency in broadcast regulations.

U.S. political campaigns research has increasingly considered the role of public skepticism of political candidates. Myiah J. Hutchens, Jay D. Hmielowski, Bruce E. Pinkleton, and Michael A. Beam’s three-wave national study shows that political skepticism is beneficial to democracy by facilitating information seeking which resulted in increased factual political knowledge at the end of the election. Lindsey Meeks’ study of partisan candidates’ Twitter campaigns in 2012 revealed that although most candidates aligned their tweets with party-owned issues, those who trespassed to the other party’s owned issues were more likely to win in the election than those who did not.

The adoption of new technologies can negatively affect access to news sources and news practices. Meily M. F. Cheung and Tin Chi Wong’s study shows how Hong Kong police’s use of digital radio communications blocks the access of firsthand non-official news sources for journalists and reduces the amount of non-routine news coverage. Vera Slavtcheva-Petkova’s study of the postings of newspapers’ online discussion boards in Bulgaria shows that the online space provides an arena for democratic conversations on a variety of topics although the discussion quality is not as desirable.

Concluding the issue is Jennette Lovejoy, Brendan R. Watson, Stephen Lacy, and Daniel Riffe’s study of inter-coder reliability coefficients reporting in 672 content analysis articles in three top communication journals from 1985 to 2014. It shows that the use of chance-corrected reliability coefficients increased over time, especially in Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, but many still did not report reliability of individual variables. Krippendorff’s Alpha was the most used coefficient in the latest study period.

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