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Manuscript Review and Journal Publication Ethics

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This issue marks the “APA” (American Psychological Association) era of *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly (JMCQ)*. At the same time, I am pleased to announce that *JMCQ* is the first communication journal published by SAGE to become a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). The AEJMC Publications Committee had approved all AEJMC flagship journals to become member of COPE. But *JMCQ* is the first one to implement all the standards and carry the COPE logo on its cover. Our COPE membership means that we comply with the highest ethical standards set on the academic refereed journal review process as in other fields of research. I will use this essay to highlight some of the COPE standards and our journal’s practices, focusing on those that would be of interest to our readers, authors, and reviewers.

**Reviewer Ethics**

Reviewing is a privilege and a service to the scholarly community. As COPE states, “Peer review in all its forms plays an important role in ensuring the integrity of the scholarly record. The process depends to a large extent on trust, and requires that everyone involved behaves responsibly and ethically” (Hames, 2013). Some of the important principles of reviewing ethics stated in COPE are that peer reviewers should

1. Only agree to review manuscripts for which they have the subject expertise required to carry out a proper assessment and which they can assess in a timely manner

2. Respect the confidentiality of peer review and not reveal any details of a manuscript or its review, during or after the peer-review process, beyond those that are released by the journal

3. Not use information obtained during the peer-review process for their own or any other person’s or organization’s advantage, or to disadvantage or discredit others

4. Declare all potential conflicting interests, seeking advice from the journal if they are unsure whether something constitutes a relevant interest

5. Not allow their reviews to be influenced by the origins of a manuscript, by the nationality, religious or political beliefs, gender or other characteristics of the authors, or by commercial considerations
6. Be objective and constructive in their reviews, refraining from being hostile or inflammatory and from making libelous or derogatory personal comments

7. Acknowledge that peer review is largely a reciprocal endeavor and undertake to carry out their fair share of reviewing and in a timely manner

8. Provide journals with personal and professional information that is accurate and a true representation of their expertise

9. Recognize that impersonation of another individual during the review process is considered serious misconduct. (Hames, 2013, p. 1)

Before accepting the review invitations from our journal, our reviewers are requested to read the COPE reviewer guidelines and agree to the standards.

**Fairness in Handling Submissions**

Our journal is committed to fair treatment of all submissions as part of the editorial code of conduct of COPE, which means that editorial decisions are not determined by origins of the submissions such as race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or gender of the authors, but by their appropriateness for the journal.

Authors whose writings need help are strongly recommended to hire professional editing service or seek help from proficient English writers to edit their work, prior to submission. A well-written manuscript is much easier to follow for our busy reviewers. It lets them focus on the substance of the manuscript, rather than trying to second-guess what the author means. In fact, both Riffe’s (2006) and Neuman, Davidson, Joo, Park, and Williams’s (2008) studies of reviewers found that poor writing of the manuscripts is a common concern of reviewers. Yet, good writing is a necessary but not sufficient condition for acceptance. Originality of research ideas with evidence and significant contribution to the field of journalism and mass communication are the two main criteria of acceptance we tell our reviewers to focus on, in giving us publication recommendation.

In addition, we have a process to ensure equal treatment of board members’ and associate editors’ submissions to the journal. The editor of the journal is not allowed to publish her own research articles, other than *JMCQ* in-house studies in the journal. Submissions from board members and associate editors are subject to the same double-blind review process as any other manuscript. Submissions by associate editors are handled by another associate editor or the editor, whoever is more knowledgeable about the topic (we added this information to our FAQ section of the *JMCQ* website). Manuscript submissions to the journal by both associate editors and board members have been rejected in the past. To avoid conflict of interest, submissions by students or faculty from the same institution as the editor or associate editors will be handled by an editor who is not from that institution.

We use the following procedures in handling manuscripts, which are in compliance with the COPE standards:
1. **Desk Rejections:** As a general interest mass communication journal, *JMCQ* probably has fewer desk rejections than other specialized journals, because we want to give submissions that meet basic academic quality and within the journal’s scope a fair chance to be reviewed by qualified reviewers. By minimizing desk rejection, we ensure that manuscripts from authors whose opinions differ with the editor or topics that none of the editorial team members specialize in, are still given equal opportunity for review. The editor’s role is that of a gatekeeper with regard to the scope of the journal and academic standards. I desk-reject manuscripts that do not meet the scope of the journal, such as pure speech communication or interpersonal communication topics and topics unrelated to media; or those manuscripts that do not meet the standard requirement for a journal article, such as a press commentary, being disorganized, scant literature review, incomprehensible writing, and so on.

2. **Transparency of editorial decisions:** Our entire editorial team follows the same COPE standards in making decisions. We share with our reviewers our editorial decision letter, blind the author’s identity and other reviewers’ comments on the manuscript, so that they know how their inputs are being used.

3. **Disclosure of the nature of the articles:** There are three types of research articles we publish in the journal. Almost all of them are double blind-refereed articles. We have up to one invited review essay in each issue, which is also blind-refereed, but its invited status is clearly labeled both in the Table of Contents and on the first page of the article. Non-refereed research articles are rare. They are either in-house research articles using *JMCQ* as the subject or the review essay for *JMCQ* virtual theme collections. These non-refereed articles are also clearly labeled in a footnote of the first page or next to the title of the article. Book review essays are by default non-refereed, so we do not add any label to it.

4. **Ensuring that all published reports and reviews of research have been reviewed by suitably qualified reviewers:** *JMCQ* is one of the few journals that still employs three reviewers because of the wide range of interests of the journal. We maintain a large pool of reviewer database to identify qualified reviewers and also add other qualified experts in a manuscript topic to the database, through various sources. Our 80 editorial board members provide consistency in reviewing standards and perspectives from different countries and institutions. All reviewers are rated on their timeliness and comprehensiveness in their reviews by the editorial team.

5. **Processes that encourage accuracy, completeness, and clarity of research reporting:** We ask authors to follow the APA style not just for the citation, but in the reporting of the results. For content analysis, we ask authors to report inter-coder reliability. For experiments, we ask authors to report their manipulation checks. For surveys, we ask authors to provide response rates, if applicable, sampling methods, sample size, and recruitment procedures. Our authors are advised to refer to our invited review essays on the standards expected in specific types of research.
6. **Adopting authorship or contributorship systems that promote good practice:** In our information for contributors, we clearly state that we do not accept authorship change after issuing acceptance, and we encourage authors to notify the editor and make the change in authorship as necessary in the submission or revision process. We ask authors to distinguish authors from individuals to be acknowledged. Authors are also asked to certify that the listed authors contribute to the write-up of the submitted manuscript.

There are many more provisions in COPE for journal editors and reviewers. Readers are encouraged to go to the COPE website to learn more at http://publicationethics.org. Embracing high ethical standards in our journal review process further distinguishes our journal from other communication journals that do not have such rigorous standards.

In this issue, we feature the Virtual Theme Collection review essay by Seihill Kim on responsibility attribution in framing. Seihill Kim introduces the contribution of seven *JMCQ* articles on this topic by examining (a) whether media focus more on individual- or societal-level responsibilities, (b) the internal and external factors of news organizations that can affect the way responsibility is framed in the news, and (c) the effects responsibility framing have on the audiences. Full access to the *JMCQ* articles reviewed in this essay is available online for our subscribers.

**Highlights of Original Research Articles**

The use of technology and narrative in news reporting can affect how crime news is being perceived by the audience. This issue features a pair of articles based on experimental studies that confirm the effects of engagement and presence on perception of crime news across media. Cheng and Lo’s experiment explains how a Hong Kong newspaper’s use of melodramatic animation in its online crime news video affect the audience’s perception of the suspect by adding the presence. Van Krieken, Hoeken, and Sanders’ study on newspapers in Belgium provides evidence for a mediated witness experience: Readers of the narrative identified more strongly with eyewitnesses of the crime and had a stronger sense of being present at the shooting than readers of the non-narrative article.

Science news serves as an important source for public knowledge about the advancement in sciences. Su, Akin, Brossard, Scheufele, and Xenos’s national U.S. online survey analyzes audiences’ repertoires of science media consumption and the effect of these consumption patterns on public understanding of science. They found that respondents who primarily rely on online-only sources are more likely to have a higher understanding of science.

Turning to political news, does the press hold politicians accountable for their ad claims? Using Semantic Network Analysis, Amazeen’s article proposes a typology of how the press reports political campaign ads, based on whether and how ad claims are being checked.

Collins’s history article explains the power of hero myth with the French press coverage of U.S. volunteers in France during World War I as a war narrative for propaganda purposes.
The experiment of Banjo, Appiah, Wang, Brown, and Walther shows different in-group effects of co-viewing of Black and White audiences on Black racial stereotypes with the other ethnic group. Black audiences are much more excited and identified with the characters in a Black-oriented comedy when co-viewing with Black audiences than with White audiences. But White audiences do not show such difference, whether co-viewing with Black or White audiences.

Using secondary panel survey data, York and Scholl found latent and lagged effect of parent news use on their children, with such effects persisting over time. Parent newspaper reading exerted a stronger overall influence on kids’ long-term news behavior than news discussion.

Maier’s article tracks readers’ online responses in social media of New York Times columnist Kristof’s column to examine whether storytelling techniques can overcome compassion fatigue of readers. He shows that proximity and story topic were found to be stronger predictors of reader response than the storytelling techniques based on social psychology theories.

The study of Watson, Zamith, Cavanah, and Lewis on the bias in cellular phone–only household in media use telephone surveys is useful to survey researchers. It shows that because of these households’ high use of social media and online media, controlling demographic variables, which is a common practice of researchers, is not adequate to address the bias in media use studies.

Enjoy the articles!

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References