A PEER-REVIEW OF PEER-REVIEW: ANALYZING DIFFERING METHODOLOGIES ACROSS MEDIA STUDIES AND COMMUNICATION JOURNALS

by

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The academic disciplines of media studies and communication broadly analyze media's social, political, cultural, and industrial effects – both practically and theoretically. While many media studies and communication scholars discuss their research in mainstream media, scholarly publications are the primary mechanism used to disseminate academic research findings. This project analyzes the journal publishing ecosystem in media studies and communication, focusing on journals' peer-review methods and relationships with governing entities (i.e. corporate publishers, learned societies, etc.). Semi-structured, phenomenological interviews are the main method of investigation for this project, followed by thematic coding using the qualitative data analysis platform, Dedoose. Eleven, 60–90-minute interviews were conducted between November 2023 and February 2024, yielding ten transcripts (one interviewee declined to be recorded) and extensive field notes. Participants are editors at generalized and specialized journals in media studies and communication; 73% of journals interviewed are owned by corporate publishers, while 27% are owned by not-for-profit publishing entities. Additionally, of the 73% of journals owned by corporate publishers, half were affiliated with learned societies, while the other half were not. Of the 23% of journals owned by not-for-profit publishing entities, 18% were affiliated with learned societies, while 9% were not. The associative demographics of

project participants informs the results of the investigation; although many journals rely on the 'traditional' double-anonymous peer-review method, journals in media studies and communication are experimenting with open-review and triple-anonymous alternatives. Other journals combat industry norms through mentorship and organizational process – prioritizing publication timeline, author growth, manuscript quality, and transparency. Many journals expressed noticeable resistance against these initiatives from their corporate publishers, which begs the question – are scholarly publishing practices in media studies and communication ideologically at-odds with the profit-orientation of corporate publishers?

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Introduction

Much of the modern discourse surrounding the peer-review process in media studies emerged at the start of the 21st century. At the turn of the century, the academy was forced to adapt to online forms of scholarly publishing. Until recently, academic publishing was a somewhat reclusive industry – gatekept by doctoral degrees. The primary mechanism for selection in academic publishing is peer-review, primarily using the double-blind review process in which neither the author nor reviewer are aware of each other's identities. This process supposedly ensures that the reviewer can be as open and honest as they wish without facing retribution. Richard Snodgrass examines the values and assumed positive outcomes associated with double blind review—

> The judgment of whether a paper should be accepted for publication should be made on the basis of the paper alone: is what the submission states correct, insightful, and an advancement of the state-of-the-art? The editorial judgment should not be made on extenuating circumstances such as who wrote the paper or the professional affiliations of the authors. By blinding the submission, the reviewers cannot take these peripheral aspects, which are not relevant, into account in their review.[1]

Further, In the handbook, *Scientific Peer Review*, J.M. Starck remarks that "the sheer number of manuscript submissions makes it necessary to recognize studies by their quality, i.e., their potential to contribute to the scientific process."[2] As explored by Snodgrass and Starck, double- blind peer-review attempts to remove subjectivity from the review process, while serving as the 'invisible hand' of the academic publishing industry by only promoting work that meets industry standards of quality and originality.

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[1] Snodgrass, Richard. 2006. "Single-Versus Double-Blind Reviewing: An Analysis of the Literature." *ACM SIGMOD Record* 35 (3): 8–21. http://www.acm.org/pubs/prepub. Pg. 10.

[2] Starck, J Matthias. 2017. "Why Peer Review?" In *Scientific Peer Review: Guidelines for Informative Peer Review*, edited by J Matthias Starck, 11–14. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-19915-9_4. Pg. 11.

On the other hand, double-blind peer-review leaves little place for the author to defend themselves if the piece gets rejected. Additionally, by excluding author identity from the review process, authors in less economically developed regions (where English is a second language) may face adverse challenges when publishing in Western journals. In media studies and emerging media, numerous scholars have rejected the traditional review process for more transparent mechanisms. My investigation examines peer-review methods with varying degrees of anonymity at journals in media studies and communication. Further, this project attempts to understand the levels of ownership and control inherent to media studies and communication journal publishing. This research relies on a critical political economy approach. Through semi-structured, phenomenological interviews and qualitative data analysis, this project analyzes the effectiveness of untraditional review mechanisms on desired publishing and career outcomes and compares these results to field-specific pedagogical impact and overall reach. This investigation attempts to grasp the breadth of the industry and evaluate individual journals' approaches to the peer-review process.

Literature Review

Specific Sources

In "Open Peer-Review As Multimodal Scholarship," Shane Denson, describes the conflicts associated with reviewing emerging forms of media with the double-blind review process. Utilizing what Denson calls "disciplinary validation," an open peer-review process not only increases transparency between the author and reviewer, but it makes the entire procedure clearer to the ultimate 'consumer' of the literature – the scholarly community. Denson writes that "[t]he open review, and the experience of writing one, sits somewhere between the 'private' existence of the traditional peer review and the public performance of a commissioned book review -- or even original scholarship itself."[3] Denson's article was published by University of Texas Press on behalf of the Society for Cinema & Media Studies – which utilizes *Media Commons*, an open-source database for media studies scholarship. One of *[in]Transition*'s main objectives is validating work that's produced by academics at non-elite universities.

In the article, "Peer-to-Peer Review and the Future of Scholarly Authority," Kathleen Fitzpatrick examines the transition of the peer-review editorial process from analog to digital. In her assessment, Fitzpatrick discusses the contradictory nature of online academic repositories, "[i]mposing traditional methods of peer review on digital publishing might help a transition to digital publishing in the short term, enabling more traditionally minded scholars to see electronic and print scholarship as equivalent in value; but it will hobble us in the long term, as we employ outdated methods in a public space that operates under radically different systems of

[3] Denson, Shane. 2017. "Open Peer-Review as Multimodal Scholarship." *Cinema Journal* 56 (4): 141–43. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44867846.

authorization."[4] Further, Fitzpatrick suggests that there is little historical discourse justifying the application of peer-review to research in the humanities, a flaw she contributes to academia's reluctance to challenge established procedural norms. Academic literature's internet adaptation is an opportunity to change preconceived methodologies that define intellectual rigor in the modern age. Fitzpatrick situates this conversation by comparing *Wikipedia* with open access intellectual works; she claims, "first, the wiki is in its very architecture a mode of ongoing peer review, and second, that not only the results of that review, but the records of its process are available for critical scrutiny."[5]

Existing Themes

Fitzpatrick builds off the aforementioned article in her book, *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy.*[6] In this book, Fitzpatrick suggests an alternative to the traditional double-blind review process when approaching digital scholarship. Her methods are currently being mimicked by numerous journals in media studies and communication.

Like Fitzpatrick's endeavors, Daniel Cohen and Tom Scheinfeldt co-created a project entitled "Hacking the Academy," collecting over three-hundred articles from academics, which all detail opportunities for growth and expansion within the academic publishing world – specifically in the context of its digital transition. Cohen and Scheinfeldt turned this project into

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[4] Fitzpatrick, Kathleen. 2009. "Peer-to-Peer Review and the Future of Scholarly Authority." *Cinema Journal* 48 (2): 124–29. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20484453.
[5] Ibid, pg. 125.
[6] Fitzpatrick, Kathleen, 2011. *Planned Obsolescence*. New York University Press. https://doi.org/10.18574/NYU/9780814728963.001.0001.

a book, called, *Hacking the Academy: New Approaches to Scholarship and Teaching from Digital Humanities*.[7]

These two pieces of literature, Fitzpatrick's *Planned Obsolescence* and Cohen and Scheinfeldt's *Hacking the Academy* serve as the primary texts informing my understanding of academic publishing methodologies as they stand. Although both texts provide a clear analysis of the industry at large – seeing as all authors are scholars within the digital humanities field – neither take a critical political economy lens to the issue of peer-review and digital scholarship practices. My work approaches these previously explored ideas with attention to journal ownership (i.e. for-profit or not-for-profit), learned society affiliation, editorial scope and size, and the use of software. I'm curious what about the industry is problematic, how journals aim to combat publishing disparities through alternative or traditional peer-review methodologies, and the efficacy of alternative publishing practices with regards to credibility in the scholarly community.

Numerous theoretical frameworks will be used to address these questions and thoughtfully approach the discussion. Primary to this investigation is the concept of the public sphere, coined by theorist Jürgen Habermas. In the book, *Discourse Theory and Critical Media Politics*,[8] authors analyze the efficacy of counter-hegemonic media channels in stimulating political and social change. This is the first source I've found that uses a media specific lens to approach tangible outcomes of non-traditional media channels. Further, Mike Wayne's *Marxism and Media Studies: Key Concepts and Contemporary Trends*,[9] is used to inform my

[7] Cohen, Daniel J., and Tom Scheinfeldt. 2013. *Hacking the Academy*. *Hacking the Academy*. University of Michigan Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/J.CTV65SWJ3.
[8] Dahlberg, Lincoln, and Sean Phelan. 2011. *Discourse Theory and Critical Media Politics*. *Discourse Theory and Critical Media Politics*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230343511/COVER.
[9] Wayne, Mike. 2003. *Marxism and Media Studies Key Concepts and Contemporary Trends. Marxism and Media Studies Key Concepts and Contemporary Trends*. Marxism and Culture. London; Pluto Press.

understanding of the theoretical media landscape as it relates to industry specific inquiries. Theories touched on within this book include, but are not limited to, the concept of technological determinism, Marx's mode of production theory, and the base–superstructure analogy.

The term 'technological determinism' must be considered in the context with which 'technology' became integral to the knowledge production process. While academic publishing is not *new*, as the first academic publication came out in the late eighteenth century, the use of digital media to facilitate business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) transactions within this industry was popularized within the last twenty years. Considering the rise of digital media infrastructure, Wayne explains—

> The common feature of technological determinism is that it [removes] technology, its development, implementation, and effects out of the social relations in which they are embedded, thus a) marginalizing or removing the social relations from analysis, and b) ascribing powers and characteristics to technology which are the result of social relations between people, rather than properties intrinsic to things.[10]

Applying this description to the academic publishing industry, major commercial publishers consider themselves 'external' to the effects of using digital media and the internet for connecting universities and scholars with academic literature. For example, consider a university which once budgeted library funds for print editions of each periodical it regularly procures. When transitioning to digital access, many commercial publishers raised the price of individual journal subscriptions and instead, offered 'big deals' for large collections of the publishers' holdings. Applying Wayne's description of technological determinism to this example, publishers see the adverse budgetary impact on universities as a consequence of *technology* rather than the publishers' intentional restructuring, and universities' resistance to this change as apathetic to digital media's inevitable infiltration of the industry. As such, commercial publishers

[10] Ibid. Pg. 40.

consider themselves blameless to the adverse effect on consumers (i.e. university libraries and scholars).

Mode of production, on the other hand, must be considered in the context of Marx' conception of 'fixed capital,' which refers to industrial technology which enables mass production, maximizing output and expediting economic growth. In the context of academic publishing, digital media is reduced to a form of 'fixed capital,' as the platforms facilitating relations between editors and authors perform many of the tasks once done by real people. These platforms are transformed into weapons of mass production, further removing producers (authors) from the product of their labor (manuscripts, which become articles after a lengthy review process facilitated by digital publishing platforms). The technology itself then reduces labor opportunities for knowledge workers, and surplus value margins are increased.[11]

The base-superstructure model contextualizes the aforementioned concepts within the broader socio-economic hierarchy. This model relies on a 'superstructure,' comprised of social ideologies, values, and structures, to reinforce the 'base,' which encapsulates the tenets of production (i.e. fixed capital such as industrial machinery, raw materials, and land) and so-called relations of production that characterize social stratification.[12]

Previously produced texts, such as Mike Wayne's *Marxism and Media Studies Key Concepts and Contemporary Trends,* are used to inform and legitimize my investigation, but the bulk of my understanding on this topic will come from my investigation itself. While I rely on a critical political economy framework, phenomenological interviews are used as my primary

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[11] Surplus value is defined as the 'leftover' value (usually monetary) produced from the exchange of capital. This term can be thought of as the 'profit' or difference between a business' revenue and expenses.
[12] Ibid. Pg. 44-50.

method to explore the current industry. I turn to experts in the field to inform my knowledge, legitimize my claims, and reinforce the necessity of this research.

Research Questions

How do the peer-review processes of academic journals in media studies and communication differ from each other? How do these differences affect emerging contributions to the media studies field? Does journal affiliation, ownership, and editorial size and scope contribute to disciplinary impact? What does compensation look like at journals operating under contrasting ownership orientations (i.e. for-profit or not-for-profit)? How do editors, authors, and reviewers feel about the existing system?

Methodology

Research Paradigm

My personal epistemological and ontological beliefs align closely with critical theory and constructivist paradigms, which abide by the belief that the construction of knowledge is relative to the historical, social, and cultural context at hand.[13] Unlike positivism and post-positivism, which seek generalizable knowledge that is objective and verifiable, critical theory and constructivism are best utilized for specialized topics that impact one demographic or sector of society. The primary aim of my research endeavor is to critically analyze the impact of peer-review processes on the media studies and communication scholarly industry. Further, my desired outcome is to understand, analyze, and draw correlations between peer-review methodologies and the political economy of the academic publishing industry – with an emphasis on journal publishing and scholarly article peer-review.

Data Collection/ Recruitment

This investigation is largely exploratory, serving as a gateway into the scholarly publishing industry. Phenomenological interviews[14] will be conducted with editorial team members from scholarly journals. Editorial boards are comprised of academics from a variety of higher institutions. Academic journal editorial board members – and more specifically editors in chief – can shed light on both the production of academic literature from a pedagogical and experience perspective, and from the institutional and peer-review side.

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[13] Guba, Egon G, and Yvonna S Lincoln. 2000. "Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences." In *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Second Edition:163–88.
[14] Cote, Amanda, and Julia G. Raz. n.d. "In Depth Interviews for Games Research." In *Game Research Methods: An Overview*, edited by Petri Lankoski and Staffan Bjork, 93–116.

Participants are recruited via emails sent to a variety of traditional and oppositional media studies journals. An ‘oppositional journal’ utilizes peer-review practices that deviate from the status quo or publishes counter-hegemonic content when producing new knowledge. Further, I classify ‘oppositional journals’ as those with not-for-profit ownership orientations. The inclusion of both oppositional and traditional journals is imperative to the aim of this investigation, as it could inform my understanding of the distinct variations in peer-review processes between journals. Traditional journals serve as the ‘control group’ in this investigation, establishing the existing conditions of the industry. Traditional journals are owned and operated by one or more for-profit entities. Oppositional journals peer-review methodologies will be compared to traditional journals to understand how differing review methodologies and ownership orientations effect publishing outcomes (such as h-index classification, tenure and hiring decisions, and broader media prospects). Interviews with participants include interviews with editorial board directors and managing editors for the journals included in this investigation. My aim is to meet with at least **ten** journals.

Interview Format

Interviews are roughly one hour in length, beginning with a brief introduction to the investigation where I field any relevant questions. Next, participants are asked a series of ‘warm-up questions’ aimed at identifying more concrete ‘facts’ about the participants’ positions and the industries in which they work. The following series of questions are ‘substantive questions’ categorized as descriptive and comparative. These questions attempt to understand the context, history, financial, and social considerations associated with publishing in media studies and communication. Further questions ask about participants’ personal experience and beliefs pertaining to their journal and others in the field. The goal of these questions is to gather an understanding of the shared cultural and social beliefs within and about the industry. The interviews conclude with questions to gauge compensatory and workload similarities and differences within the field.

Informed Consent Process

Participant's identity and affiliating journal is pseudonymized for the purposes of protecting their identity and further contributions to academia. The informed consent form was be sent to participants over email upon informal agreement to take place in the study. To conceal participant's identities, the informed consent form was be signed digitally through Qualtrics. Participants were not be asked to identify themselves, and the primary investigator sorted informed consent responses by the order in which they were received. Participants must provide consent to participate given the known considerations and risks identified in the key-facts section AND to the use of audio recording. The participant may still participate in the study without authorizing the use of audio recording. After authorizing consent to participate in the study, interviews were be coordinated via email and held via Zoom or over the phone in a private, secure location utilizing a secure browser and private wireless connection. Before data analysis, the primary investigator gave each participant a chance to review their transcript to either alter or redact statements. Participants may ask to be removed from the study at any point prior to the start of data analysis.

Provisions for Participant Privacy and Data Confidentiality

Participants were identified through publicly available information about editorial board membership for each journal within this investigation. This information can be found on the journals' webpages, and contact information is often found on the websites of editors' institutions. Participants were contacted via email (uoregon.edu address).

Research participants interacted with the primary investigator via email for interview scheduling, and subsequently, via Zoom or phone for interviews. Unless other parties were requested by the faculty advisor or research participant, participants interviewed with the primary investigator. Outside of preliminary participant identification through journal and institutional websites, information about participants was be obtained through self-disclosure during interviews.

No existing studies exist utilizing the same or similar research methodologies within my specific subfield; accordingly, it's vital that pseudonymization and anonymization were utilized to garner trust and render truthful responses. The information requested during interviews is otherwise private in that it relates to the procedural structure of peer-review and solicits the nuances of corporate oversight in the academic journal industry. Participants identities were *all* pseudonymized along with their institutional affiliations (higher education occupation and journal editorial board membership).

The primary investigator keeps all information associated with the study on an encrypted SanDisk External Hard Drive. Information pertaining to the study itself is held in a password protected folder within the hard drive, and information pertaining to each participant (i.e. email correspondence, confirmation of informed consent, interview audio recording, interview transcript, and field notes etc.) is likewise be held in separate, password protected folders. The folders are titled according to their assigned pseudonym. The encryption code for the hard drive itself, along with the password for each encrypted folder will be recorded in an analog notebook at the investigator's private residence. A key linking the pseudonyms to their identifiers is held alongside the encryption information in an analog notebook and stored at the primary investigator's private residence. The professional and personal repercussions of ***not*** anonymizing data collection and storage could include reputational disenfranchisement, pushback from superiors and peers in the field, threats to job security, and more. Although this study does not intend to threaten participants, it is safest to completely pseudonymize participants identities and restrict access exclusively to the primary investigator. All information pertaining to the study will be destroyed following the presentation of research findings in June 2024 (specific date to be determined).

Given the exploratory nature of this study, interview questions are comprehensive. The questions are not intended to exploit, jeopardize the occupational security of participants, or make participants feel uncomfortable. Participants were encouraged to decline to answer questions at their discretion. Information obtained through target participants *about* extraneous individuals will be noted if participant recommends that the extraneous individual would be a beneficial contribution to the study. Extraneous individuals were noted within the field notes, and further pseudonymized during research analysis.

The *personal* or *identifiable* information sought within this investigation pertains to participants' institutional and corporate affiliations (higher education and corporate publishing conglomerates) and their attitudes and experiences with these affiliations. Although these attitudes and experiences are not explicitly sought through interview questions, they were implied through tone of voice and word choice.

Data Storage

Interviews were conducted via Zoom with the option for phone interviews as well. Considering the geographic variation between participants, remote interviews increased the variation in my participant pool. The Zoom interviews were recorded with participants' consent, and in the instance in which the participant declined to have the interview audio recorded, substantial field notes were recorded. The Zoom transcription feature was utilized when the interviews were recorded to expedite the data analysis process. Interview data will be held on a password protected external hard drive to ensure participant privacy.

Data Analysis

The process of analysis was conducted using qualitative data analysis services on Dedoose, a qualitative analysis service. The general process is paraphrased below.[15]

1. Phenomenological Derivation – Researcher (I) uses their own subjective knowledge to interpret and understand the data, ensuring that they "bracket out" their subjective interpretation as different from the participant's contribution.

2. Determining Meaningful Units – Researcher extracts "units of meaning" (Groenewald, 2004) or meaningful observations (phrases and terms) from the data (transcript) that could contribute to overall themes.

3. Cultivate Themes – Clustering meaningful units to determine numerous overall themes will be done using qualitative "coding,"[16] which assigns a value to each "unit" and attributes it to a specific theme surmised from the data.

4. Interview Summaries and Thematic Integration – Along with numerous interview quotes and evidentiary attributions throughout, a summary and description of how the themes will contribute to the overall differentiation/ determination of themes.

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[15] Groenewald, Thomas. 2016. "A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated." *Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1177/160940690400300104* 3 (1): 42–55. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690400300104.

[16] Saldaña, Johnny. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013.

Potential Research Risks or Discomforts to Participants

Potential risks and discomforts to participants within this study pertain to occupational security, scholarly reputation, academic disenfranchisement, and potential discomfort with sharing personal, identifiable demographic information.

Potential Benefits of the Research

This investigation ascertains procedural differences within peer-review practices to improve the overall process. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of differing approaches, the primary investigator may discover what scholarly demographics, methodologies, concepts, and institutional affiliations are preferred by the overseeing corporate body. This information can be used to generate recommendations for improvement within the peer-review process, to make future contributions to media studies more diverse and representative of the growing academic community. Peer-review is utilized by many academic disciplines. Although my investigation is specific to media studies, the opportunities for improvement could extend beyond the field.

Industry Overview & Participant Affiliations

Academic publishing grew out of scholars' desire to share research findings with interested populations. As early as the seventeenth century, profit-seeking publishers capitalized on this new medium; one of the first academic periodicals, *Philosophical Transactions*, originated in 1665 as the Royal Society of London's scientific journal. Later, in 1824, Richard Taylor's printing press (the future publishing conglomerate, Taylor & Francis) began publishing *Philosophical Transactions* for the Royal Society, among similar periodicals for other learned societies in England. *Philosophical Transactions* was published by Richard Taylor's enterprise for fifty years.[17] The Royal Society's choice to outsource periodical publishing informed the creation of today's academic publishing industry.

The industry model that informed Taylor & Francis' first holdings relied on learned societies to connect scholars from disparate geographic regions, and to bring reliable information to the public. Academic publishing has grown into a lucrative business; publishers once served as brokers for learned societies, but have now expanded by offering additional journals proposed by scholars within a particular discipline. The exponential growth of academic journal publishing, largely guided by commercial publishers, complicates the task of cataloging all journals in a particular discipline. In line with the historical progression of scholarly publishing, media studies and communication journals once arose as subsidiaries of learned societies. Now, commercial publishers and not-for-profit organizations[18] have yielded extensive journal collections, accounting for nearly every imaginable subfield.

[17] Gupta, Sunetra. 2016. "How Has Publishing Changed in the Last Twenty Years?" *Notes and Records* 70 (4): 391–92. https://doi.org/10.1098/RSNR.2016.0035.
[18] In this context, 'not-for-profit organization' refers to scholarly publishing entities unmotivated by disciplinary objectives (i.e. *not* learned societies).

This study accounts for a small portion of journals in media studies and communication, while attempting to survey a representative demographic. Eleven journals were interviewed for this study – the makeup and affiliations of each journal are displayed in the Table 1.[19]

Table 1: Journal Affiliations With Learned Societies and/or Commercial Publishers

Journal Pseudonym	**Corporate Publisher**	**Learned Society**	**Learned Society + Corporate Publisher**	**Learned Society + Non-profit Publisher**	**Non-Profit Publisher + No Learned Society**	**Corporate Publisher + No Learned Society**
Journal A	No	Yes		1		
Journal B	Yes	Yes	1			
Journal C	Yes	No				1
Journal D	Yes	Yes	1			
Journal E	Yes	No				1
Journal F	No	Yes		1		
Journal G	Yes	Yes	1			
Journal H	Yes	No				1
Journal I	No	No			1	
Journal J	Yes	No				1
Journal K	Yes	Yes	1			
Totals			4	2	1	4
% of Participants			36%	18%	9%	36%

Table 1 describes each journal interviewed for this study's affiliation with learned societies and commercial publishers, listing if the combination of affiliations and each category's % of the overall participant pool.

[19] Note that the journal title, journal editor's identity, and each journal's affiliation with learned societies and/or commercial publishers are anonymized/ pseudonymized.

Figure 1: Journal Funding Sources

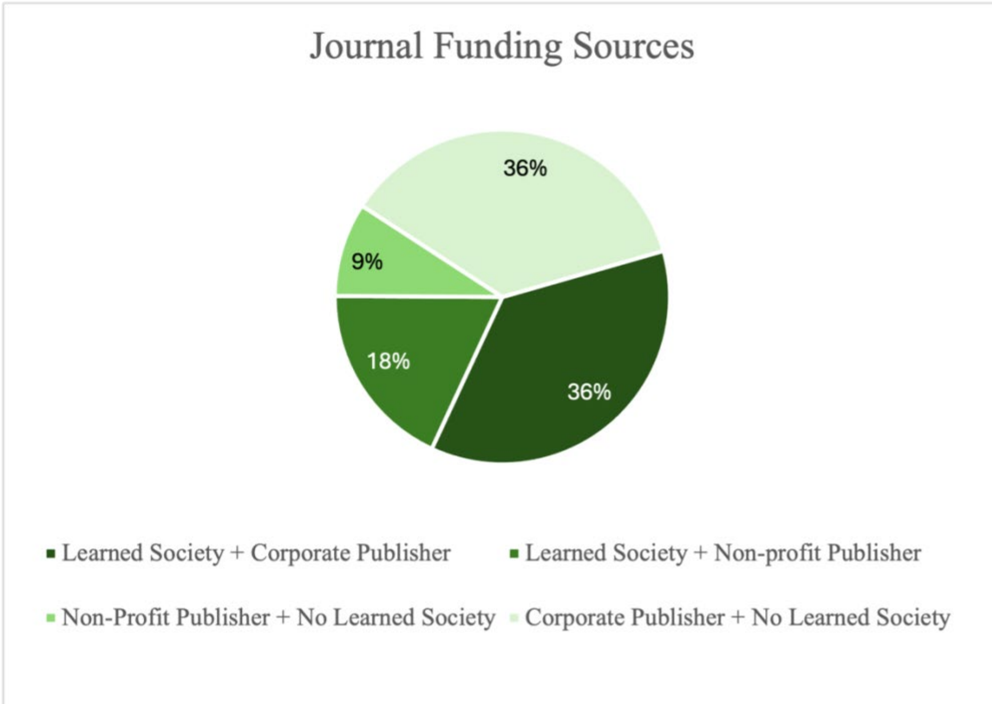


Figure 1 builds on Table 1, by specifying the ascertained percentage values as journal funding sources.

The makeup and affiliations of journals interviewed for this study also account for journals' primary funding. Apart from one journal, the remaining ten rely on the publishers and/or learned societies that govern their operations for compensation.

Learned societies such as the Royal Society of London, which focuses on the history of science and published the first known scholarly periodical, operate on behalf of specific sub-fields. Learned societies often publish research thought to be of interest to society members. The journals interviewed for this study account for a representative sample of the subdisciplinary makeup of journals in media studies and communication. The specific 'specializations' of each journal will not be described, so as not to jeopardize the anonymity of participants.

Table 2: Composition of Journal Specialization

Journal Pseudonym	Specialized	Generalized
Journal A		1
Journal B	1	
Journal C	1	
Journal D		1
Journal E	1	
Journal F		1
Journal G	1	
Journal H		1
Journal I		1
Journal J		1
Journal K		1
Totals	4	7
% of Participants	**36%**	**64%**

Table 2 describes the composition of journals interviewed for this study. Generalized journals publish research pertaining to entire disciplines. Specialized journals publish research that falls under a particular subdiscipline.

The specializations of journals included in this study have disparate theoretical approaches, which in many cases, informed journal editorial procedures, values, and journals' intended audiences. For example, numerous journals self-described as 'feminist.' Feminist journals are specialized, meaning journal content is intended for an audience with specialized knowledge of and interest in feminist media research. Alternatively, generalized journals do not base manuscript decisions (i.e. whether to desk reject a submission or send it through peer-review) on alignment with subdisciplinary theoretical approaches. Instead, generalized journals consider whether a submission is relevant to the overall discipline (in this case, media studies and communication).

Figure 2: Journal Acceptance Rates

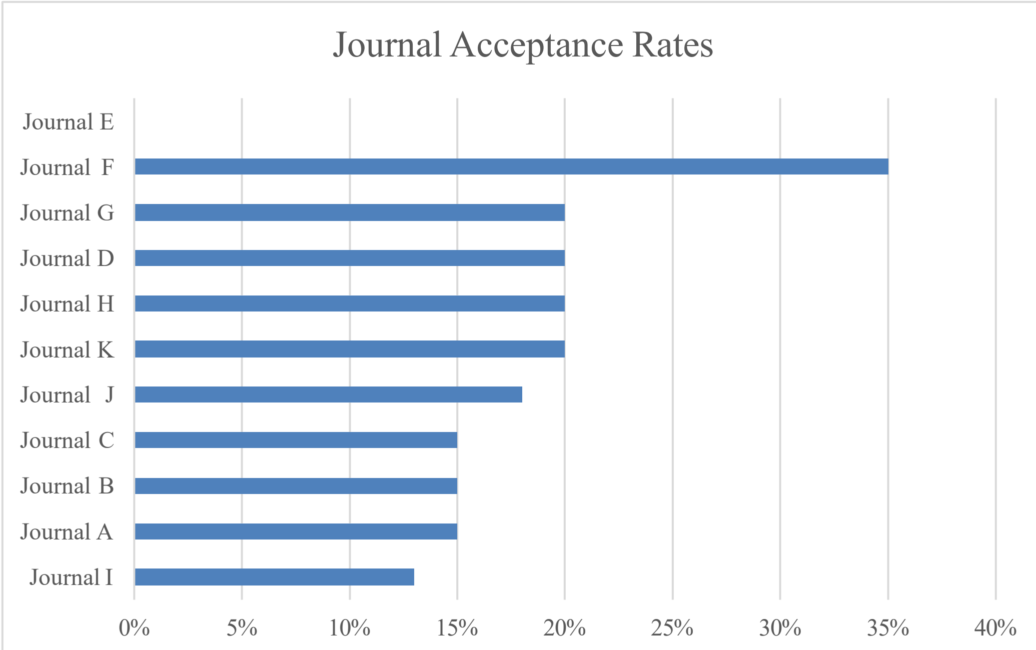


Figure 2 displays the range of acceptance rates at journals participating in this study.

Figure 2 visually displays the acceptance rates of journals participating in this study. These values are further explored in Table 3, which lists each journals' acceptance rate and the number of submissions it receives annually. Acceptance rates and annual submissions are merely one indication of the value a journal brings to its academic discipline; h-index scores and quartile rankings (available from Scimago Journal Rankings)[20] are likewise used to measure journals against each other and rank journals based on citations per publication.

[20] SJR. "Scimago Journal and Country Ranking." Scopus, n.d. http://www.scimagojr.org/.

Table 3: Journal Acceptance Rates and Annual Submissions

Journal Pseudonym	Acceptance Rate	Number of Submissions
Journal I	13%	1300
Journal A	15%	276
Journal B	15%	329
Journal C	15%	1800
Journal J	18%	N/A
Journal K	20%	100
Journal H	20%	300
Journal D	20%	400
Journal G	20%	N/A
Journal F	35%	100
Journal E	N/A	400

Table 3 associates each journal with the number of manuscript submissions it receives annually, alongside each journals' corresponding acceptance rate. "N/A" indicates that the numerical value was not easily accessible to the interviewee, and therefore was not shared during our interview.

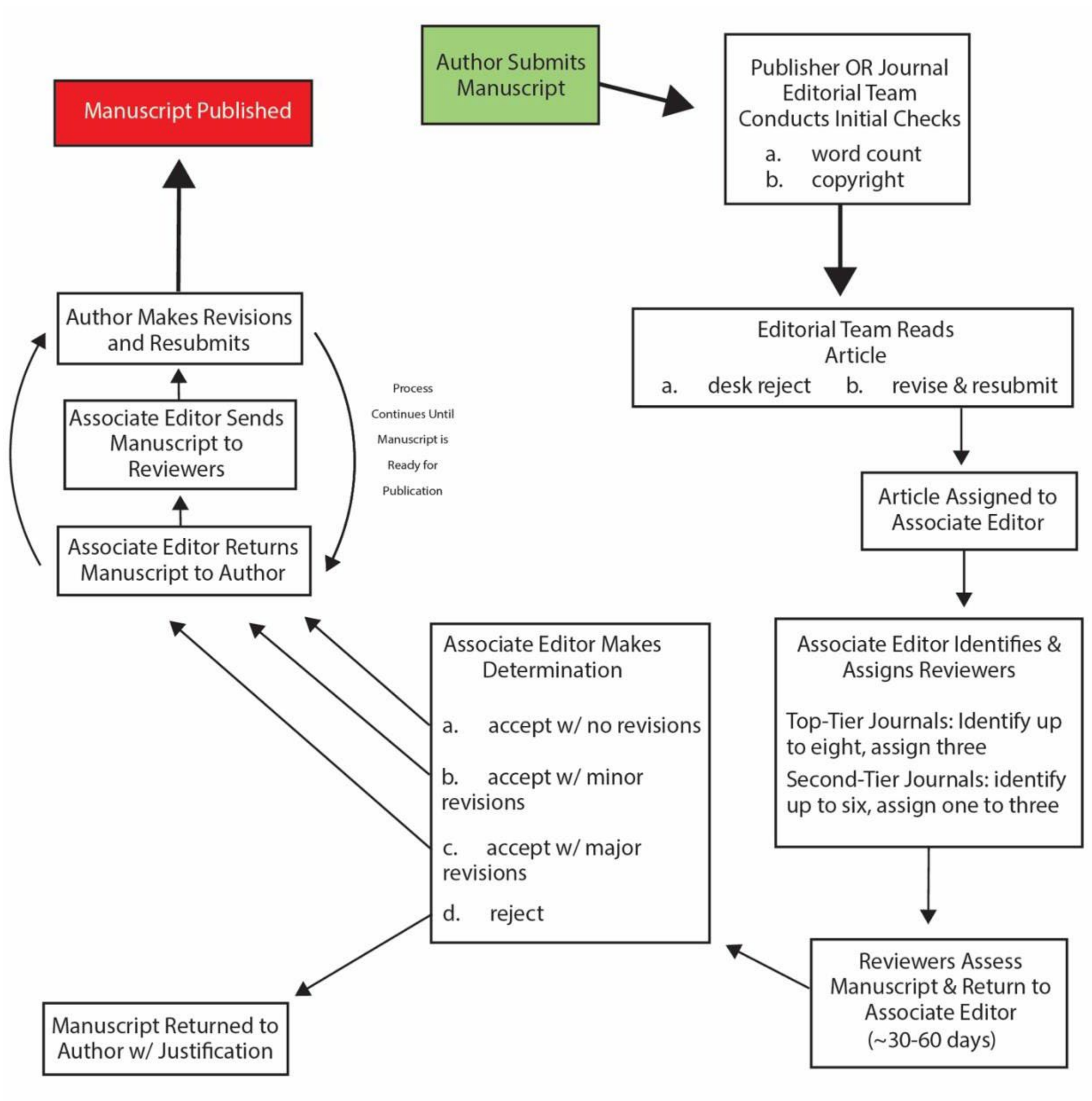
The Traditional Peer Review Process

Many participants proclaimed their journals' peer-review processes as "pretty traditional,"[21] or "pretty standard,"[22] when asked '[d]o you think your journals' peer-review process is similar to or different from other journals in media studies and communication?' These responses indicate that double-blind review is the norm within the academic publishing industry, even in a discipline like media studies and communication, which promotes critical analysis of media production strategies. Nonetheless, not all double-blind peer-review processes are the same.

While double-blind review is built on the ethical premise that authors and reviewers' identities are 'blind' to each other (hence the use of the term 'double'), anonymity is enforced at varying levels of production. Some editors working with commercial publishers receive manuscripts without identifiers (author name, institution, etc.), as proprietary platforms pre-screen articles for these attributes. At other journals, editors-in-chief delegate this task to editorial assistants or associate editors. Journal size and affiliation with learned societies or publishing conglomerates dictate the size of editorial teams at journals in media studies and communication; journals affiliated with multiple governing entities (i.e. learned societies and/or commercial publishers) are typically well resourced, while journals affiliated with one or the other, or none are less resourced. The following graphic portrays a generalized version of the 'traditional' or 'standard' double-blind peer-review process, as deduced from participant interviews.

[21] Alec (Journal C, CP2), Zoom interview with author, January 11, 2024, Interview 3, transcript.
[22] Larry Gross, (International Journal of Communication, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 26, 2024, Interview 9, transcript.

Figure 3: The Traditional Peer-Review Process



The above figure (Figure 3), outlines the traditional double-blind peer-review process at journals in media studies and communication. This figure is *generalized*, in that some stages of the process may look different across journals. This flow is merely an overview, and should not be applied to all journals since only media studies and communication journals were interviewed for this study.

Just as the ownership orientation and associated organizations contribute to journal editorial team size, these affiliations also contribute to the article publication timeline. Journals are increasingly criticized for lengthily publication timelines, which is problematic in an industry where the number of publications and quality of the journal being published in (usually indicated by h-index scores and rankings) serve as important considerations for tenure-track decisions.

Bill, the founding editor of Journal I, describes that “delays in the process come in two obvious places. One is reviewers taking longer than they are supposed to to provide a review. The second is authors taking longer than they should to provide revisions, which then go back to the reviewers.”[23] Another editor-in-chief, Judith of Journal B, claims that “the review process can happen all in six weeks for one manuscript and take six months or more for others (…) I wouldn't feel comfortable publishing something in print when others have been waiting. So for print issues, I almost always favor the articles that have been in the queue the longest.”[24] Historically, delays in the publication timeline resulted from the budgetary constraints of print publishing. Now, in an era of declining print publication sales, delays in the publication timeline arise from the disproportionate relationship between journal editorial labor and the rising number of manuscript submissions. Another editor-in-chief, Carter of Journal H, explains “we have no page budget, which means we can publish more articles per issue. This change helps to manage the backlog. We try to reduce that backlog to about six months to a year. Most journals work chronologically, and so do we, trying to keep a manageable gap between acceptance and print publication.”[25]

[23] Larry Gross, (International Journal of Communication, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 26, 2024, Interview 9, transcript.
[24] Judith (Journal B, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 5, 2024, Interview 2, transcript.
[25] Carter (Journal H, CP2), Zoom interview with author, January 18, 2024, Interview 8, transcript.

Although print periodical publishing may seem archaic to students studying at Western institutions, whose libraries possess massive online repositories of previously print-only texts, some scholars at institutions in less economically developed countries still only consider a manuscript 'published' once it appears in print. Carrie, of Journal E (an internationally focused journal) explains this phenomenon from her observations—

> "But strangely, there are certain parts of the world where a colleague can't count [that] a publication is published until it comes out in print. One of the countries that does that is Spain. I don't know why, because I've told scholars in Spain, it's been published, it's online, and they say, 'oh, but my university doesn't recognize that, it has to come out in print.' So I think that's perhaps another reason why [Corporate Publisher 1] hasn't got rid of print editions just yet…"[26]

Further, Carrie explains that, "the other issue we've had is, we had a really big backlog of about two or two and a half years from acceptance to publication in the print issue."[27] Carrie's insights echo pre-existing geographic disparities in academic publishing. In a similar study from 2018, Dr. Collyer suggests that "publishing is of central importance to the creation and sustenance of global inequalities in academic knowledge production (…), [s]ome of the mechanisms associated with publishing, and which sustain these global inequalities (…) allow knowledges produced in the global South to be systematically marginalised, dismissed, under-valued or simply not made accessible to other researchers."[28] The findings from this investigation build on Dr. Collyer's analysis by suggesting that publication modality (i.e. print versus digital publication) likewise contributes to inequalities between authors in the global South and authors in the global North. Authors from the global South face adverse publication delays due to their required print

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[26] Carrie (Journal E, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 12, 2024, Interview 5, transcript.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Collyer, Fran M. 2018. "Global Patterns in the Publishing of Academic Knowledge: Global North, Global South." *Current Sociology* 66 (1): 56–73. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116680020/FORMAT/EPUB.

modality, while authors in the global North benefit from the technological advantages (and the privilege of digital publication) caused by economic prosperity.

For some journals, drawn-out publication timelines cause tension between editors, authors, and reviewers. As such, some journals have altered their procedures to be more equitable towards all parties involved in the publication process. The following section, ‘Combatting Norms,’ explores how various journals in media studies and communication resist industry norms through untraditional procedures, value-informed interactions, and by inclusive publishing services.

Combatting Norms

Procedural Byproducts

Increasing Collaboration Through Open-Review

As described in the previous section, the traditional peer-review model is "double-blind," indicating that the reviewer and authors' identities are anonymous to one another. This model dominates the academic publishing market and is colloquially referred to as the ‘traditional model.’ The advent of digital academic publishing challenged the traditional model by enabling multi-modal representation. No matter the discipline, academic research (and in turn, academic publishing) is displayed primarily through research articles, which include an abstract, introduction, literature review, explanation of methods, results, analysis, and conclusion. While the universality of this modality ensures reliability and cohesion, it likewise discourages the use of non-traditional mediums for distributing knowledge.

The journal, *[in]Transition,* founded in 2014 (Journal F – interviewee declined anonymity and pseudonymization) publishes openly reviewed video essays related to media studies, film, and communication. *[in]Transition* opposes traditional peer-review through its open-review model; *[in]Transition* does not anonymize the author or reviewers’ names. Instead, all reviews are published alongside the author’s video essay. Managing editor, Jason Mittell, remarks, "we just came to believe that the blind part of peer review is not a solution to most of the problems and it causes other problems…”[29] Mittell and other scholars advocating for greater transparency in the peer-review process believe that blind review can weaken scholarly

[29] Jason Mittell ([in]Transition, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 23, 2024, Interview 6, transcript.

contributions and negatively impact scholars' reputations. Mittell describes an example from his own experience—

> "[T]here was a solid book that came out decades ago now. I read it and thought it was lackluster, by a prominent scholar writing outside of their specialty. I thought this person should stick to their specialty; that it was not very good. There was a blurb on the back of the book from another scholar who I know quite well and respect, that was very positive. I was really disappointed because I felt like my friend's reputation would suffer from having a positive review of a subpar book. I'm sure that [they] felt an obligation to give a good review to this other colleague, who [they'd] probably known for twenty years, [but] it just felt like this is a poor book that really should not have been published, yet here [they] are endorsing it. I feel like when you sign a review, what you're saying should represent your true thoughts, and you should be able to stand behind it." [30]

The example described above illustrates a concern with the traditional publishing model; corporate ownership and double-blind review uplift scholarship by prominent authors while disregarding potential faults in their work. Although journals may not *intend* to maintain the hierarchical structure of academia, professional outcomes often hinge on publishing in reputable journals.

Mittell's anecdote, while clearly informed by concern for his colleague and the industry at large, pertains to book publishing—not periodical publishing. While book and periodical publishing are related, each industry functions uniquely, and 'blurbing' a book follows an entirely different process. As such, the quote was included to underscore Mittell's statement about the value and power of peer-to-peer endorsements. In the situation Mittell describes, their colleague's professional status[31] is unclear, which complicates the structure of the argument. To speak democratically, blind review is not *intended* to limit the representation of junior scholars,

[30] Jason Mittell ([in]Transition, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 23, 2024, Interview 6, transcript.
[31] By 'professional status,' I refer to a scholars' tenure-track status, their prominence in a particular subfield, and/or the rank of the university they are employed by.

rather, it is meant to protect junior scholars from their identity playing an exclusionary role in the review process – especially if they recommend against a more senior scholar.

However, it is unclear whether the underlying intention of blind review translates to the publishing process in practice. Snodgrass describes that, "[a]ny benefits ascribed to double-blind reviewing assume that the blinding of the submitted manuscript has been successful, that reviewers cannot in fact identify the author(s) nor their institutions."[32] Upon conducting a meta-analysis of related studies analyzing the efficacy of 'blinding tactics,' Snodgrass deduced, "studies across a wide range of disciplines observed that blinding achieved success rates of 53% to 79%."[33] When discussing the practical efficacy of blind review, Snodgrass analyzed a range of studies concerned with 'status-bias,' which is the primary form of bias described in Mittell's excerpt. Snodgrass explains that—

> Some evidence from retrospective and experimental studies suggest that when the authors' names and affiliations are known, reviewers may be biased against papers from unknown authors or institutions (…) [However,] The experimental evidence is mixed concerning status bias present for top-ranked authors and institutions. The evidence is quite compelling that status bias is possible, perhaps prevalent, in [single blind review] for most other authors and institutions, presumably for those papers most needing the critical evaluation of reviewers.[34]

Considering Snodgrass' analysis in the context of Mittell's anecdote, status-bias could have very swayed his colleague towards providing a positive book blurb, but there's no evidence to suggest that status-bias actively promotes work from prominent scholars. On the other hand, Snodgrass concludes that non-prolific scholars face disproportionate status-bias when single blind review, "in which the reviewer is unknown to the author, but the identity of the author is known to the

[32] Snodgrass, Richard. 2006. "Single-Versus Double-Blind Reviewing: An Analysis of the Literature." *ACM SIGMOD Record* 35 (3): 8–21. http://www.acm.org/pubs/prepub. Pg. 15.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid. pg. 11

reviewer,"[35] is used. Further, even though double-blind review attempts to eliminate the effect of status bias by adding an additional layer of anonymity, this hinges on the effectiveness of blinding tactics. As previously discussed, Snodgrass found that blinding tactics were only effective 53% to 79% of the time.[36]

Guided by the portion of double-blind reviews that fail to accurately blind author identity from reviews, journals such as *[in]Transition* resist the power-dynamics inherent to the traditional peer-review process by relying on authors' desire for reputational respect. This is evident in the previous quote from Mittell, and the following—

> "I really like open review (…) because it turns the reviews into a community conversation. You know who you're taking to. (…) Anonymous peer-review does not feel like a good conversation; it feels like you're being judged, you're being assessed. And it's really frustrating when you get comments back, and you think "I don't know where this person is coming from." And that's literally true; I don't know if they are in my field."[37]

While [in]Transition is the only open-review journal interviewed for this study, Mittell specified numerous other journals utilizing open-review or adjacent methods. Another journal, *Screenworks*, likewise publishes reviews alongside the work itself, but each review is anonymous.[38] *Screenworks* "publishes practice research that produces new knowledge in Communication, Media and Cultural Studies, Art and Design, Performing Arts and related fields."[39] Both journals – *Screenworks* and *[in]Transition* – associate open-review with increased collaboration between authors and reviews. Additionally, each journals' publishing medium differs from conventional academic publishing modalities, which mostly come in the form book chapters, research articles, or mainstream news publications. Mittell's experience with open-

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[35] Ibid. pg. 8
[36] Ibid. pg. 15
[37] Jason Mittell ([in]Transition, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 23, 2024, Interview 6, transcript.
[38] Screenworks, 2020. "Screenworks - The Peer-Reviewed Online Publication of Screen Media Practice Research." https://screenworks.org.uk/.
[39] Ibid, "About."

review, and the growing support for tangential methods suggests that academically rigorous work exists outside of journals operating under a double or triple-blind review method.

Expanding Scholarly Representation Through Triple-Blind Review

Unlike *[in]Transition's* open-review model, Journal A opts for a triple-blind review method. Journal A's editor, Evelyn, provides an overview of the process and its ethical justification in the following quotation—

> "[W]e are using a triple anonymous peer review system, which is something that my predecessor believed in strongly. And it's also something that we use to combat the sort of cliquish (…) reputation of the past. And what that means is that the author doesn't know who's reviewing them, the reviewers don't know whose work they're reviewing, and also, I, as an editor do not know whose work I am sending out for review. So, I don't know who the author is when I send it out either. Sometimes I can guess, but I do not know. And the ethical argument there is that this allows for review to be solicited based on the work and the areas of expertise of everyone involved, without reliance upon things like reputation, institution, prior work, that could skew the sort of decision making around a piece. So, if [I, as editor,] don't know who the author is, and the reviewers don't know who the author is, and the author doesn't know who the reviews are from, then theoretically, we are all talking about the work, and none of us are thinking about the identity of the author and making decisions based off that."[40]

Although triple-blind review is almost entirely opposite open-review, both methods attempt to correct similar issues, namely the reputational advantage seasoned scholars have over junior scholars. A few years back, Journal A solicited a 'review of the journal' from scholars who had published in it during a given period. The goal of this review was to understand if Journal A published work aligning with the areas of scholarship promoted by its learned society, and to determine what author demographics were over or under-represented. This report indicated gross underrepresentation of works by Black scholars and the absence of Middle Eastern scholarship.

[40] Evelyn (Journal A, N/A), Zoom interview with author, November 15, 2023, Interview 1, transcript.

Evelyn admitted that these findings bolstered anecdotal evidence of a ‘cliquish’ preference for work by Western authors and indicates a racial bias against work from particular social groups.

Evelyn describes that while the study confirmed some of her pre-existing suspicions about the journals’ reach and author demographics, it failed to account for other important factors contributing to the journal’s intellectual representation. Evelyn contends, “I remember talking to the folks who did this and one of the things they were not tackling in this was the question of institutional affiliation. And I think that is another place where we would see the dominance of a handful of places.”[41]

Additionally, while Journal A currently uses the triple-blind system, Evelyn believes the process was “implemented as a corrective,” she says “it’s possible that 10 years from now, that won't feel necessary in the same way that it did maybe five years ago.”[42] Journal A’s outlook on the peer-review process indicates a willingness for flexibility; while its current process upholds the journals’ ethical standards, Evelyn’s comments support the benefits drawn from non-traditional peer-review methods. Journal A’s internal analysis of its reach, demographics, and areas of improvement mimics the ‘R&R’ level of the peer-review process. By doing this research, Journal A was able to implement measures which would alleviate gaps in author representation. This strategy could be easily replicated at journals using the traditional double-blind review process. Such findings and successive ‘correctives’ could improve representation of scholars from the global South and marginalized scholarly communities.

[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

Mentorship

Ideologically Informed Values

Several journals participating in this study implement ideologically informed language or procedures to ensure their process is representative of their academic values. Two journals, Journal G and Journal J, explicitly used the term "mentorship" in reference to the editorial process. Journal G is a specialized journal, focusing on a media and communication sub-field. On the other hand, Journal J is a generalized journal with a fixed geographic legacy.

Olivia, editor of Journal G, describes what mentorship means to her team, "[we're] robustly intersectional in our vision, and the other goal is (…) mentoring. So, the idea is the review process can be brutal and depersonalized and not helpful. So, it's to offer a more mentoring approach in how we handle manuscripts."[43] For Journal G, mentorship shows up in two primary ways; first, the editorial team mentors authors by implementing empathetic language into correspondences, and second, by training reviewers to provide critical yet depersonalized feedback. Olivia expands on these facets in the following quotation—

> "For mentoring, it's the reviewers. When I send out requests to reviewers, I explicitly include a line that states this is one of the values we uphold, and we'd like our reviewers to embrace that. This means their review should be critical but kind and not personal. They should be clear about their expectations. So, what that looks like is your review can be critical and should be (…) helpful, but it should not be personal. Don't make comments that are sexist or racist. Avoid making personal accusations like, 'Oh, you didn't put in the effort in your argument.' No, instead, find fault with the argument, not the effort that was put into it. Be kind in the best way you can. And then, be helpful. For instance, if you think someone should be engaging with certain kinds of literature, be clear about what you want from them."[44]

[43] Olivia (Journal G, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 18, 2024, Interview 7, transcript.
[44] Ibid.

Beyond guiding reviewers, Journal G also attempts to counteract the longstanding disadvantages facing scholars from less economically developed regions. Olivia describes—

> Another is (…) I won't reject [manuscripts] based on something like, 'This needs proofreading,' or 'Maybe English is not your first language.' (…) I'll give the author a chance to do everything they need to do. But sometimes, if English is your second language, or something like that, proofreading can be incredibly expensive, like formal proofreading services. I don't want language proficiency to be the barrier to you getting published. That's what contributes to the Eurocentrism in a lot of our publishing.[45]

Journal G's concerted effort to bridge the knowledge gap generated by geo-economic barriers serves as a similar 'corrective' to Journal A's triple-blind method. However, unlike Journal A, Journal G uses a traditional double-blind review method, implementing the aforementioned verbiage to make the process more equitable. It's unclear which method yields more desirable results. As a specialized journal, Journal G appeals to a scholarly population embedded within a subfield; as such, researchers within this field might be more receptive to the value informed verbiage they receive as it aligns with the ideological inclinations of the subfield. As a generalized journal, Journal A may have implemented the triple-blind model to *procedurally* alter publishing outcomes, as the verbiage associated with the values of a particular subfield may be ill-received by the larger communications and media studies audience. Both interventions appear to serve the individual needs of the journals, as they are nested in disparate disciplinary communities.

Another generalized journal, Journal J, integrates mentorship in a different manner, while still encouraging reviewers to provide kind feedback. Articles from Journal J are oftentimes picked up by the mainstream press for presenting a countercultural perspective. When this happens, Journal J's editor, Emma, uses her role to reassure authors and advocate for accurate

[45] Ibid.

interpretations of the literature. When asked about how Journal J promotes mentorship, Emma said—

> "[W]hen articles get picked up by the popular press or mainstream press, it's always very exciting and a positive thing. However, sometimes they get picked up for being against the grain or for going against extreme ideas. Sometimes it has been an issue for authors. In my role, I've had to work with authors, especially young authors that may have been picked up by the populist press or right-wing press, and have been treated pejoratively. It's also to mentor the authors and say this is a good thing. Your work is being read, and it's getting noticed. This is the whole purpose now, to question and critique, and often the point that it's triggering someone is a good thing, getting people to question."[46]

Academic literature is increasingly criticized for having little effect on public thought and practical policy. Emma's advice for authors is critical to improving the reach of scholarly research.

In an article from 2022, Schultz contends, "journalists too often rely on press releases when covering scientific research and act as translators of the research, instead of taking part in the conversation."[47] Lack of access to information is one of the primary reasons why journalists fail to reference scholarly research when reporting to the public. Schultz quantitatively analyzed the prevalence of news mentions among a representative sample of gold open access, hybrid/green open access, and paywalled articles from an array of disciplines. The research found that gold open access articles received more news mentions than all other categories; 590,915 articles were included in the study, 77,255 were mentioned in the news, and 41,586 of those with news mentions hailed from gold open access journals.[48] Although gold open access journals received the highest gross mentions in mainstream news, articles from green/hybrid open access journals had proportionately more references. Schultz says, "[o]verall, 13% (77,255)

[46] Emma (Journal J, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 29, 2024, Interview 10, transcript.
[47] Schultz, Teresa. 2021. "All the Research That's Fit to Print: Open Access and the News Media." *Quantitative Science Studies* 2 (3): 828–44. https://doi.org/10.1162/QSS_A_00139.
[48] Ibid, np.

of all articles received at least one news mention. Just 11% of gold OA articles and paywalled articles received a news mention, whereas 47% of green/hybrid OA articles did."[49]

Journal J falls into the green/hybrid open access category; Journal J is owned by Corporate Publisher 1, which recently allowed authors to publish green open access, in which they 'self-publish' a copy of their manuscript in an institutional repository, personal website, or link to the document on their own social media page. Corporate Publisher 1 usually stipulates an 'embargo period' after the article is published, before the manuscript can be green OA. Additionally, Corporate Publisher 1 actively encourages authors to publish 'gold open access' with them; the commercial definition of 'gold open access' differs from the scholarly definition. Corporate gold OA is otherwise referred to as hybrid OA, where authors or their governing institutions must pay Article Processing Charges (APCs) to have an article published open access through the publisher's platform. True gold open access (as colloquially defined by the scholarly community) means that the final version of an article is published in an indexed journal, completely open access, and at no charge to the author or their governing institution.

Expanding the feasibility of true gold open access could improve Journal J's media mentions and increase the prevalence of scholarly research in the popular press – specifically social science and humanities works.

Publishing Platforms

Proprietary vs. Open Access

Project management software is integral to expediting the peer-review process at journals in media studies and communication. Journal ownership and affiliations determine the type of

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[49] Ibid, np.

project management software that is chosen or required by the publisher. Of the eleven journals interviewed for this study, eight are owned by corporate publishers and use the corresponding project management software offered by their publisher. The remaining three journals are not owned by corporate publishers and outsource project management software to three distinct platforms – AirTable, Open Journal System, and Open Library of the Humanities. Open Journal System and Open Library for the Humanities are both publicly funded software packages, while AirTable is a cloud-based subscription service. As such, OLH and OJS can be categorized as 'open access publishing platforms,' while AirTable cannot.

Project management software offered by corporate publishers (proprietary project management software) integrates the submission, peer-review, and publishing processes into a single platform. This way, editors and their teams can upload manuscripts, identify and assign reviewers, track manuscripts' progress, and submit fully reviewed articles for publication.

Proprietary project management software provides publishers greater insight into editors' decision-making. This is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, publishers could use this information to streamline the user interface and tailor it to editors' needs. On the other hand, publishers could use this information to capitalize off editors' struggle points by increasing proprietary services for an additional cost to the editor or authors. Proprietary project management software is then leveraged as a revenue source for the publisher. Additionally, proprietary project management software streamlines communication between the publisher and editors. It also provides a clear avenue for editors to ask technical or compliance related questions of the publisher, and for publishers to send messaging to editors. For some publishers, this software offers live or periodic metrics on journals' acceptance rate, reviewer response time, citations, pageviews, downloads, and more. Again, these statistics serve both editors and publishers. While the information could be used to improve editors' managerial oversight, it also provides concrete data for publishers to exploit for profit.

Open Library of the Humanities

Unlike proprietary project management software, open-source project management software uses GNU General Public Licensing that can be used for free by anyone for commercial purposes. Two of the three journals using non-proprietary project management software (Journals F and I) rely on open-source project management software from the Open Library of the Humanities and Open Journal System, respectively. Both entities are operated by not-for-profit entities; Open Journal System was developed by the Public Knowledge Project at Simon Fraser University and Open Library of the Humanities uses a "Library Partnership Subsidiary" model, where individual libraries contribute a small portion of their open access budget in return for OLH's entire journal collection.[50] OLH claims that the library partnership subsidiary model supports a sustainable, scholar-led, alternative to traditional publishers.[51]

Journal F (*[in]Transition*), which uses OLH, describes how the platform expands scholars' publishing experience—

> The reason why we are motivated to move to a platform like OLH is because it's integrated into the larger publication infrastructure in a way that MediaCommons, our current platform, is not. For instance, we got an ISSN number because we tried to get listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals. We couldn't get listed because we lacked the professionalization, like back-end policies and such. With OLH, every one of our articles will get a DOI number, which is incredibly valuable because then we will start showing up in search engines and databases, which currently, we do not. My own publications in *[in]Transition* don't even show up on Google Scholar because they don't register like my other journal articles do.[52]

[50] Open Library of Humanities. "OLH Model," n.d. https://www.openlibhums.org/site/olh-model/
[51] Ibid.
[52] Jason Mittell ([in]Transition, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 23, 2024, Interview 6, transcript.

Mittell further explains that moving to OLH is both beneficial for authors, and beneficial for the journal's internal structure. Although [in]Transition's previous platform, MediaCommons, initially had the resources to support the journal, the platform – which was built as a scholarly social media outlet – has lost funding over the years. As Mittell describes, while working with MediaCommons, [in]Transition could not assign ISSNs or DOIs to articles because both require financial and structural resources the journal did not have. Mittell also described that all members of the editorial team essentially "volunteers;"[53] considering [in[Transition couldn't afford to assign DOIs to its video essays, it makes sense that the editorial team is likewise uncompensated. OLH "[is] fully independently funded; they get some grant funding, but more so, they receive institutional support from Birkbeck University in London as their host institution. There's no exchange of money whatsoever between *[in]Transition* and OLH."[54] Now, working with OLH, *[in]Transition* can increase the legitimacy of video essays as a valid medium for disseminating high quality research.

Open Journal Systems

Open Journal Systems, used by Journal I, was built by John Willinsky while at the University of British Columbia (UBC), but is now housed by the Public Knowledge Project at Simon Fraser University. Willinsky formed the open access publishing platform alongside a gradute research assistant, Larry Wolfson. After conducting some preliminary research on the state of digital publishing during the early twenty-first century, Willinsky and Wolfson thought,

[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

"What if, we wondered, we could control one part of publishing's financial model by reducing the journal's software design and development costs to close to zero?"[55] Willinsky found that—

> We could do this by creating open source software that was specifically developed to manage and publish journals online. The software could be designed so that it called for no greater technical skills on the part of journal editors than were commonly found among university faculty today, namely word-processing, e-mailing, and web-browsing. This software could also keep publishing costs down by taking advantage of the technical infrastructure and server capacity already in place in most university libraries, which might well be willing to host such a system, given that as more and more libraries undertook this support (whether at a fee to journals or as a public service) would contribute to increased access to the research literature, and ultimately reduce their subscription costs.[56]

And that's just what they did. Over the course of 18 months, a cohort of undergraduate computer science students at UBC were commissioned to create OJS, the first known open access publishing platform. Financially, it cost around $45,000 to launch the journal, then another $110,000 during its first 31 months of operation – leading up to the release of OJS 2.0.[57] Additionally, at the time Willinsky's article was published (2006), OJS required ~$50,000 in annual operating costs. Willinsky says, "[t]he development costs serve as a reminder that open source software is not free."[58]

As Willinsky describes, open source software is not free; however, OJS is accessible, free-of-charge, to open access journals across the world. While open access journals using OJS do not pay for the platform, open access journals can still have high operating costs. Journal I, otherwise known as the International Journal of Communication (IJoC), was founded by Dr.

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[55] Willinsky, John. 2005. "Open Journal Systems An Example of Open Source Software for Journal Management and Publishing." *Emerald Hi Tech* 23 (4): 504–19. https://doi.org/10.1108/07378830510636300.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

Larry Gross and Dr. Manuel Castells at the University of Southern California.[59] Dr. Gross declined the anonymization and pseudonymization of his identity in this report.

IJoC initially chose to publish with OJS because Dr. Gross and Dr. Castells, alongside others in their scholarly network, wanted to prove "that we could establish a highly credible journal, right off the bat, partially associated with the visibility of the Annenberg School and of the editors and the editorial board; (…) that's what counts. It's not the fact that [commercial publishers] or [prominent learned societies] are behind it, it's because of the scholars, that's what people pay attention to."[60] OJS provided the online infrastructure necessary to host an open access journal like IJoC, allowing the Annenberg School to devote resources to other editorial related expenses, which ultimately led to IJoC's success. IJoC is currently ranked 7th among Humanities Journals, and 8th among Communication journals – above many journals associated with prominent learned societies in the field.[61]

Recently, IJOC has attempted to move its extensive repository from OJS' 2.0 (released in 2005), to OJS's 3.0 platform. Dr. Gross describes that, "we're moving from the 2.0 to 3.0, which turns out to be quite a challenge. It's the biggest challenge yet, because we seem to have by far the largest body of files of any of their journals."[62] Part of what makes IJoC's library so extensive is its reviewer database—

> One of our key tools is a database of reviewers, which has literally thousands of names in it of scholars who have done reviews or have signed up on our website to volunteer to review and have listed keywords describing their areas of interest. So, you do keyword searches, and it pulls up, all of the people who said that this

[59] Larry Gross, (International Journal of Communication, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 26, 2024, Interview 9, transcript.
[60] Larry Gross, (International Journal of Communication, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 26, 2024, Interview 9, transcript.
[61] "Communication - Google Scholar Metrics." n.d., https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=top_venues&hl=en&vq=hum_communication
[62] Larry Gross, (International Journal of Communication, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 26, 2024, Interview 9, transcript.

> is among their interests, and then you sort of go down the lists and look for the combination of keywords that suits the article. And also, how many reviews they've done for us. Have they been reliable? Do they do what they say they're going to do? And are they currently doing anything? Because you don't want to ask someone who's already doing something. So, you go through a screening process on these sorts of keywords and find the right reviewers. This database of reviewers is a very powerful resource for us. It's one of the reasons the migration to a new platform is a challenge, because this is a large undertaking. Just our reviewer database is humongous. Thousands of reviewers – I don’t know how many exactly, but thousands.[63]

Proprietary publishing platforms likewise have their own reviewer databases. However, many editors remarked that they chose not to use the reviewer database embedded within the publishers’ platform, or other connected services. Judith, editor of Journal B, says “[w]e also have a tool on the (…) manuscript submission platform that suggests reviewers. I haven't found the system to be that great; it feels a bit random and tends to suggest the same names often, which might not be appropriate for the piece.”[64]

Until recently, OSJ journals did not assign DOIs to articles. Dr. Gross says, “when [we move to OJS 3.0], I think we'll be in a position to institute DOIs, which I don't think we currently have. And that's relevant to some of these impact factors. We do show up in some of the analytics scores there – but not all of them. They're deeply problematic. I mean, as I'm sure you know, there are many critiques of these factors and we're ambivalent about it.”[65]

Open source publishing platforms like OJS and OLH serve as viable alternatives to the traditional publishing model, in which a journal is acquired by a commercial publisher, then operates the journal using proprietary project management software – as mentioned by Journal B’s editor, Judith. Open source publishing platforms ‘combat’ industry norms by removing the financial barriers that restrict open access journals from getting indexed and DOIs or ISSNs. By

[63] Ibid.
[64] Judith (Journal B, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 5, 2024, Interview 2, transcript.
[65] Larry Gross, (International Journal of Communication, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 26, 2024, Interview 9, transcript.

covering the indexing costs, both OSJ and OLH 'legitimize' articles produced by their journals and implicitly promote gold open access scholarship as equivalent to paywalled scholarship.

Publishing Services

Discretionary Open Access

Open access policies differ tremendously across journals; of the eleven journals interviewed for this study only two are open access by default. The other nine journals operate under what's called a 'hybrid' open access model. Schutz defines hybrid open access as, "[a]rticles published in a paywalled journal where the authors have paid a fee to make their specific article open."[66] Emma, of Journal J, describes how open access operates at Journals owned by Corporate Publisher 1—

> Authors have the option for open access, which does come with a fee. Some institutions have arrangements with [Corporate Publisher 1] to cover this cost for their authors. There are different levels of open access. Occasionally, for special issues like anniversary issues or ones with particularly topical themes, I'll request that they make it open access for a few months, and they have agreed to that. So, certain issues have been made open access without charging the authors.[67]

Corporate Publisher 1 operates nearly half the journals interviewed for this study (five); as such, the policy that Emma describes should be consistent across journals managed by the company. Other editors described having latitude over the 'un-gating' of content, specifically for special issues or socially pertinent articles. While it appears that Corporate Publisher 1 (CP1) is lenient, Olivia, editor of Journal G (a journal managed by CP1), describes that her organization must pay for special issues or articles to be 'un-gated.' When asked if she had any leverage over open

[66] Schultz, Teresa. 2021. "All the Research That's Fit to Print: Open Access and the News Media." *Quantitative Science Studies* 2 (3): 828–44. https://doi.org/10.1162/QSS_A_00139.
[67] Emma (Journal J, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 29, 2024, Interview 10, transcript.

access content, Olivia said, “it's up to my organization, the organization that sponsors the journal, to fund that. (…) I don’t feel like I have control over the fact that most of the published work is gated. Like, you must pay for access, or you must go through a university library. I wish we could democratize that part of the process.”[68]

Olivia’s testimony shows that CP1’s discretionary open access policy – in which an editor can request that a certain issue or article be open access – is not universal, even at journals in the same discipline.

Another prominent academic publisher, Corporate Publisher 2 (CP2), manages three of the journals interviewed for this study. Like CP1, CP2 operates under a similar hybrid open access model in which institutions, societies, or scholars can pay to have articles published open access. However, authors from less economically developed countries are automatically published open access in all journals operated by CP2. Journal C’s editor, Alec, describes how open access works at CP2—

> [Corporate Publisher 2] (…) will make its content, not just ours, but virtually everything they publish available to people in non-OECD countries, to scholars at various institutions that meet particular criteria – geographic location, funding, etc. So there is a paywall if you're in a privileged position, but there's not otherwise.[69]

Harriett, editor of Journal D (a CP2 journal), who declined to have her interview recorded, described the ability to ‘request’ certain articles or issues be available open access. However, Harriett explained that it only happens a couple times a year, and she ‘needs to have a good reason’ to make that request.[70]

[68] Olivia (Journal G, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 18, 2024, Interview 7, transcript.
[69] Alec (Journal C, CP2), Zoom interview with author, January 11, 2024, Interview 3, transcript.
[70] Harriet (Journal D, CP2), Zoom interview with author, January 11, 2024, Interview 4, field notes.

Another editor, Carter of Journal H (a CP2 journal), outlines the various open access options at CP2, providing insight into authors' choice of access.

> The journal, like all [Corporate Publisher 2] journals, has a policy where you can purchase gold open access, which is very expensive—something like $3,000 per article. So it's typically only those who have grants with built-in funds for open access who can afford this. Sometimes universities are willing to pay because they have requirements to publish open access. Most of the time, if you don't pay, you can use the silver option, which allows you to upload the preprint—the last non-typeset version of the article before publication—into a repository within a certain number of months after acceptance. This means the article will be accessible after six months, which is the standard embargo period, but it won't be in the same form as the journal version. Some Western European countries have deals with publishers, where if your corresponding author is working in that country, the open access fee is covered by the Research Council. We're in a transition phase where publishers are not yet making enough from open access to abandon the dual model. So in a normal issue, you might have a few open access articles and others that are not. Open access greatly increases downloads, which can perpetuate inequalities because authors based in countries with these deals, or those with grants for open access, will have their research read more. [Corporate Publisher 2] will occasionally un-gate articles temporarily for special circumstances. But they don't want to create a situation where many articles are open access a lot of the time, as that would undermine subscription fees paid by libraries.[71]

Both corporate publishers offer varying degrees of access. Corporate Publisher 1 offers journal editors the space to request particular articles or issues be 'un-gated,' but based on Olivia's testimony, it appears that policy is not universal. Perhaps CP1 has internal policies that dictate *which* journals have 'discretionary' open access privileges? Corporate Publisher 2 offers an alternative solution to the disproportionately low representation of works by global scholars. As Alec describes,[72] scholars from non-OECD[73] countries are entitled to publish and access articles gold open access, free of charge. Further, Harriett maintains that CP2 also allows editors to

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[71] Carter (Journal H, CP2), Zoom interview with author, January 18, 2024, Interview 8, transcript.
[72] Alec (Journal C, CP2), Zoom interview with author, January 11, 2024, Interview 3, transcript.
[73] The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development is a coalition of 37 member countries with market-based economies, that work together to develop economically sustainable policies. https://www.state.gov/the-organization-for-economic-co-operation-and-development-oecd/

request certain articles or issues be published open access – but it is ultimately the publishers' discretion.

Forums

Instead of increasing publishing services by expanding access, some journals are offering additional supplemental scholarly forums. These auxiliary outlets are used to increase authors publishing options and bring awareness to relevant field-based discussions. While many journals exclusively publish periodicals, some journals have expanded amidst the growing professional pressure placed on publishing outcomes. Others have retained existing legacy forums for fear of impending obsolescence.

Journal A offers three extra forums for authors to submit work—

1. A section for 'tiny pieces' that don't go through the full peer review process (OA).[74]
2. Annual supplemental issue (OA).[75]
3. Book reviews (OA).[76]

Journal A's first option for 'tiny pieces' is open access by principle, as these articles are supposed to have a narrow focus on hot-button topics in the field of media studies and communication.

Journal A's second option, the annual supplemental issue, is for articles that were requested open access. Journal A has a reputation for extensive review timelines, Evelyn (editor) describes her own experience with these delays—

> "To use my own example, (…) when I was in grad school, I submitted something to what was then [Journal A]. I got my reviews back within two months. And they were both very positive with like, small changes. At the time, [Journal A] didn't

[74] The title of this section is concealed to protect participant privacy and retain journal anonymity.
[75] The title of this section is concealed to protect participant privacy and retain journal anonymity.
[76] Evelyn (Journal A, N/A), Zoom interview with author, November 15, 2023, Interview 1, transcript.

> even have an R&R process. I got back these sort of, 'accept with revisions,' made my revisions, and everything was handed back to the journal by let's say, July 2009. That piece did not come out until late 2012. Because they had such an enormous queue of people who were ahead of me, in terms of when they had submitted."[77]

To help combat the issue, Journal A instituted a new policy to publish based on review completion instead of by submission date. Even still, all articles fall into some sort of 'queue,' whether it be the traditional publication queue or the open access publication queue. Articles requested to be published open access thus fall into the open access publication queue, and once the review process for that submission is complete, the article is published OA in the annual supplemental issue.

Book reviews are not 'new' or 'cutting-edge' in the academic publishing sphere, but they are becoming less prevalent. Journal A's final publishing service is book reviews – which, like the other two sections, are also published open access. Evelyn says—

> "[A]ll of our book reviews are open access, including the ones that appear in the print journal… frankly, because they're not hugely valuable from a subscription point of view. Nobody subscribes to a journal to get the book reviews; usage and viewership of book reviews is lower than everything else. (…) Book reviews are open so that anyone who needs them for tenure, promotion, etc. has access to them whether or not they have access to the rest of the journal."[78]

Despite the near extinction of print media, scholars' tenure track and promotional decisions are still based on book publishing – especially in the humanities and social sciences. Accordingly, by offering book reviews open access, Journal A provides accessible book reviews for authors who need them – at little to no cost to the journal. Overall, Journal A's robust publishing services provide alternative channels for authors to publish if their initial submission gets rejected, or they are looking for a less rigid publication pathway.

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[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

IJoC also prioritizes book reviews, Dr. Larry Gross says, “we have a very strong commitment to book reviews, which has been a consistent failure in the field of Communication. Journals have not given adequate attention or support for book reviews, even though many of the sub areas in Communication and Media Research put a heavy emphasis on book publishing (…); publishing book reviews is one of our distinct missions.”[79] Dr. Larry Gross goes on to describe that most book reviews are negotiated in advance with potential reviewers, instead of being submitted unsolicited – although a few are. IJoC publishes “close to 100 book reviews a year,”[80] which Dr. Larry Gross claims is “more than the other communication journals put together.”[81] As previously mentioned, book reviews are central to scholars’ ability to achieve upward mobility in the academy; both IJoC and Journal A attempt to retain the value of long-form academic literature by continuing to publish book reviews open access.

[79] Larry Gross, (International Journal of Communication, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 26, 2024, Interview 9, transcript.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.

Structural Forces

Learned Societies

While conducting background research for this study, it became apparent that most scholarly journals are associated with one or more learned societies. Learned societies, like the Royal Society of London,[82][83] were central to the creation of the scholarly publishing industry and remain a beacon of disciplinary community for academics. However, learned societies are increasingly criticized for operating in contradiction to their values. Learned societies exist for the purpose of creating, nurturing, and promoting research within a particular discipline; as such, learned societies *should* use their resources for this purpose. In the article, "The Importance of Scholarly Societies for Research and Community Support," Robert Harington paraphrases Aileen Fyfe, writing—

> The ethos of the academic research community has historically been non-commercial, and the sharing of knowledge had historically been enabled by the generosity of publishing organizations – such as learned societies and university presses – with a mission for scholarship rather than profit. (…) scholarly societies started to realize that they could focus on goals — such as trying to break even — if they sold publications to institutions. (…) [P]ublishing could provide revenues that could be put towards other vital society activities: these include efforts to promote students and scholars directly, through prizes, travel grants, conferences, and other services, but also activities that aim to support the field more generally.[84]

While the above quotation highlights the benefits of learned societies' affiliation with commercial publishers, it doesn't address that a large portion of research published by learned society journals is paid for with taxpayer monies through public funding. Accordingly, learned

[82] Previously mentioned in the Industry Overview and Participant Affiliations section.
[83] Gupta, Sunetra. 2016. "How Has Publishing Changed in the Last Twenty Years?" *Notes and Records* 70 (4): 391–92. https://doi.org/10.1098/RSNR.2016.0035.
[84] Harington, Robert M. 2020. "The Importance of Scholarly Societies for Research and Community Support." *FASEB BioAdvances* 2 (9): 573. https://doi.org/10.1096/FBA.2020-00053.

societies 'resell' research to the universities (and scholars employed by them), who already paid to have the knowledge produced. Although this process does 'regenerate' financial resources for scholars, institutions and/or individuals are likewise required to pay membership dues for each learned society they are a part of. It is thus financially beneficial for learned societies to manage one or more journals, as journals reproduce value for learned societies to distribute back to scholars.

Numerous participants in this study discussed interactions and experiences with their learned societies. Olivia, editor of Journal G, reflects on the relationship between the learned society and publisher that put out her journal— "it's a lot of labor and infrastructure to manage the review process, to do anonymous peer review, for example. How do you do that confidentially? [Corporate Publisher 1 has] that infrastructure. They partially pay my stipend, as does the [learned society]. So, they both contribute money, and the journal gets put out."[85] Another editor, Judith from Journal B, maintains that while the learned societies[86] and corporate publisher have no leverage over editorial procedures, "they do influence our policies and processes, and to some extent, our personnel. I am in regular consultation with [both entities]. We discuss policies, procedures, and our relationship with [Corporate Publisher 1], academically and commercially. They also identify contractual issues or the need for a more financially favorable relationship with the publisher."[87]

The ability to negotiate, generated by dual-society governance, provides Journal B with increased authority – as the journal is first and foremost a subsidiary its societies, not the publisher. In our discussion, Carter, of Journal H, refers to Journal B— "Unlike [the learned

[85] Olivia (Journal G, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 18, 2024, Interview 7, transcript.
[86] Journal B is affiliated with two learned societies, which collectively have a third committee dedicated to overlapping matters.
[87] Judith (Journal B, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 5, 2024, Interview 2, transcript.

societies affiliated with Journal B], which have bargaining power with their publisher, we would just be individuals without such leverage if we decided to leave and start a new journal. [Corporate Publisher 2] could continue the journal with a new editor and editorial board without the approval of any organization."[88] Journal H was never affiliated with a learned society; however, it was created by a prominent higher education institution (and once carried that university's namesake in its title) but has since decoupled from it.[89]

Journal H touches on a key point: learned societies serve as a safeguard against excessive commercial oversight in the academic publishing industry. In my interviews with two other journals, IJoC and Journal C, editors discussed the benefits of remaining unaffiliated. Journal C is among the top journals in media studies and communication, despite and by means of its independence. As a specialized journal, Journal C was the first in the field to focus on emerging media and technology during a time when it was rapidly developing. Alec, editor of Journal C, remarks— "it was kind of clear that there's was a space to publish work on [redacted] that was not going to be bound to a particular discipline. And it was also clear that no disciplinary organization was going to support it. (…) But the flip side of that is, I don't think any of [the founders] wanted it to be a disciplinary thing. Because we the four of us were all multidisciplinary scholars to start with."[90]

Dr. Larry Gross, of IJoC, builds on Alec's comments, saying— "Our point having been correct, as it turned out, that we could establish a highly credible journal, right off the bat, partially associated with the visibility of the Annenberg School, and of the editors and the editorial board. That's what counts – it's not the fact that [Corporate Publishers 1 and 2] or even

[88] Carter (Journal H, CP2), Zoom interview with author, January 18, 2024, Interview 8, transcript.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Alec (Journal C, CP2), Zoom interview with author, January 11, 2024, Interview 3, transcript.

[Prominent Learned Societies] are behind it, it's because of the scholars, that's what people pay attention to."[91] While portions of this quotation were evidenced earlier in this report, Dr. Larry Gross outlines a key differentiating factor between journals affiliated with learned societies and independent journals: independent journals rely on individuals and editorial teams for legitimacy, while other journals derive legitimacy from partnerships with learned societies. Unlike learned society journals, independent journals are not complicit in the 'recycling' of tax-payer money that contributes to societies' various activities. On the other hand, independent journals still cost university libraries a pretty penny, as 36% of the journals interviewed for this study were unaffiliated with learned societies but operated by corporate publishers.[92]

There's no 'right' or 'wrong' way to operate a journal in media studies and communication, but journals' affiliations do contribute to their political and economic significance. As evidenced from Olivia's testimony, learned societies financially contribute to the operations of their journals, while independent journals are exclusively reliant on publishers or their institutions for compensation or labor accommodations. Additionally, learned society journals can 'migrate' between publishers, while independent journals are bound to their publisher, and are more vulnerable to being 'ousted' should internal relations go awry.

Professional Pressures

Unprecedented professional pressure was a common theme across my interviews with journal editors in media studies and communication. Inefficiencies at each step in the publication process result, in some way, to the professional pressure placed on scholarly publishing. These pressures include but are not limited to: institutional obligations ('service' component of

[91] Larry Gross, (International Journal of Communication, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 26, 2024, Interview 9, transcript.
[92] Figure 1.

academic trifecta), lack of professional acknowledgement of journal duties, competition and community induced 'pressure to publish,' and reviewers' uncompensated labor.

When asked, "what are some of the pressures you believe lead authors to push back against rejection decisions?" My interview with Carrie, editor of Journal E, revealed that editors and scholars face 'immense pressure to publish.' Carrie states—

> I think there's a wide range of reasons, but I can't help but feel that colleagues are under immense pressure to publish nowadays. I know, we've been saying this for decades. But I think it's become much worse, particularly for younger scholars. When I started, there was less emphasis on publishing; it was more about doing your best when you felt ready. There weren't as many support systems as there are now, however, there were also fewer pressures back then. The pressure to publish varies by country. I think, in the US, for example, the pressure to publish has been much stronger for a much longer period of time than say in the UK. But I think this is partly what we're, experiencing with the authors who pushed back—there's a sense that there are those pressures hanging over them or they may be in precarious jobs.[93]

Carrie's comments are merited, in fact, a 2017 article from *Inside Higher Ed* displayed data from an analysis of National Science Foundation data, concluding that "as few as one-fourth and as many as one-half of Ph.D.s get hired in academic jobs at all and that only a third of these jobs are on the tenure track."[94] The rising publishing pressure can push scholars towards unethical actions, such as submitting the same article to multiple journals in hope it will be picked up by one, or editor submitting work to a journal whose editor they just published. My interviews with Dr. Larry Gross of IJoC and another editor (whose pseudonym will not be revealed) provide anecdotal evidence that scholars may resort to unprofessional behavior in the face of structural pressure. Dr. Gross observes—

> From time to time we ask a reviewer to look at an article, and a reviewer will say 'I've already read this article for another journal and recommended rejection. I

[93] Carrie (Journal E, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 12, 2024, Interview 5, transcript.
[94] Weissmann, Jordan. "How Many Ph.D.'s Actually Get to Become College Professors?" *The Atlantic*, February 23, 2013. https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/02/how-many-phds-actually-get-to-become-college-professors/273434/

> don't think I should be reviewing it.' If an author is responding to a rejection by refusing to undertake appropriate revisions, and merely sending it to another journal—'journal shopping '—is what I call it, my response is, you didn't change the article I'm not changing the review. And I just put it in the original review. And that's what I suggest to reviewers when this happens. And then as an editor, I write a note to the author, saying 'this is not a good policy on your part A) because of the possibility that you're going to get the same reviewer, and B) because it's disrespectful to the volunteer labor of reviewers who have gone to the trouble of giving you suggestions and not taking their suggestions is a problem.[95]

As bolstered by Dr. Gross, some authors refusal to properly engage in the scholarly review process by 'journal shopping' is time consuming for editors and reviewers. It is likewise detrimental to the authors' scholarly reputation, as reviewers are often scholars working in a similar niche to the author. As Carrie discussed in our interview, authors are under 'immense pressure to publish,' and tenure-track decisions (which are occupationally scarce) usually hinge on publishing outcomes. This combination of 'pressures' leads authors towards unethical behaviors like 'journal shopping' and what another editor describes as a sort of 'quid pro quo.' In our conversation, an editor (whose pseudonym will not be revealed) discussed how editors of other journals or leaders of the learned society their journal is operated by engage in a 'quid pro quo' of sorts. In this dynamic, there is an expectation that if an editor is published in another journal, the other journal's editor should thus get published in that editor's journal. While there are no explicit rules against publishing material from 'important' authors, as that editor explains, publishing work by figures with control over the operations of the journal or its affiliated entities appears deceitful to a lay audience.

As touched on in the 'Traditional Peer-Review Process' section, publication timelines are commonly critiqued in the academic publishing industry. Most interviewees in this study touched on the primary cause for delays in the process—which ultimately relate to scholars'

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[95] Larry Gross, (International Journal of Communication, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 26, 2024, Interview 9, transcript.

individual career status. Evelyn, of Journal A, describes the demographic most effected by these delays—

> "So people who need publications on a faster timeline are generally Junior Scholars, people who are preparing to apply for academic jobs, or preparing for a tenure case. In either case, they often need to have not just the acceptance but final proof of articles to show as evidence of their scholarship and it's larger reception. By contrast, someone who is already a full professor is not on the same timeline. No one is counting on them having another publication before next year in order to advance. So, the time pressures look different across career stages."[96]

Evelyn's journal, Journal A, instituted policies to curb its lengthily publication timeline – which was upwards of three years during certain time periods. Nonetheless, the editorial process takes such a long period of time because it's main workforce is 'volunteer labor.' A 2018 study by Pat Curtin, et al., analyzed survey results from reviewers of the journal, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*. Curtin's survey asked a range of questions about how reviewers perceived their own reviews compared to those they received, alongside a few questions gauging reviewers' inclinations toward proposed 'improvements' to the peer-review process. Several respondents were in favor of various reviewer incentives, such as "giving annual awards to outstanding reviewers"[97] at conferences, which received 75.4% support. When asked about financially compensating reviewers, 42% of the population was in favor, while 37.1% was opposed.[98]

The results of my study build on Curtin's work by providing testimonials from editors at journals in the communication and media studies fields. By and large, the editors interviewed for this study remain wary of the ongoing pressure to compensate reviewers. Even so, numerous

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[96] Evelyn (Journal A, N/A), Zoom interview with author, November 15, 2023, Interview 1, transcript.
[97] Curtin, Patricia A., John Russial, and Alec Tefertiller. 2018. "Reviewers' Perceptions of the Peer Review Process in Journalism and Mass Communication." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 95 (1): 278–99. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699017736031. pg. 291
[98] Ibid, pg. 292.

participants acknowledged that reviewer retention is dwindling, and call for interventions from publishers. Dr. Gross of IJoC states—

> "There's a lot of demand for reviewers, and only so much available labor there. [T]his entire enterprise is completely dependent on the volunteer, unpaid, and basically anonymous contributions of reviewers. It's a gift economy of people contributing to a community of scholarship that they identify with. So it's a remarkable phenomenon that people do this. And they do it with little, if any reward other than the work itself, or their engagement with the community. And it's part of exactly that aspect of the gift economy that makes me particularly irked by the commercial profit oriented behavior of the large publishers, and that was really, one of the prime motives for starting this journal. Because unlike the standard, pseudo open access, we don't charge authors."[99]

Building off this sentiment Dr. Larry Gross says, "people have talked about paying reviewers, but there's simply no journal that can afford to, given the number of articles that need to be reviewed to pay reviewers."[100] Numerous other editors agree with Dr. Larry Gross' statements, in fact, reviewer compensation was a consistent topic of conversation across interviews. Carrie, of Journal E, provides an alternative argument against compensating reviewers, saying—

> If you start paying people, you potentially run into all kinds of dodgy issues. It's a slippery slope, where does that all lead? Do we start paying for good reviews only? (…) I still support the idea of the civic duty of academics to review each other's work. And it's kind of quid pro quo. If I'm reviewing your research, you're reviewing mine. So, it all even evens out in the end. But I think some people are sort of putting forward this argument about payment because again, it's the pressures we're all under. (…) There are some reviewers who don't have full time or permanent jobs. And so the time spent reviewing for free is time spent not making money elsewhere.[101]

The supposed 'gift economy' that Dr. Larry Gross put forth favors seasoned authors and tenured faculty. As Carrie discussed, conducting reviews is a 'privilege' of sorts. Some authors, especially those early on in their careers, must decline reviews or fail to complete reviews on

[99] Larry Gross, (International Journal of Communication, NA), Zoom interview with author, January 26, 2024, Interview 9, transcript.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Carrie (Journal E, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 12, 2024, Interview 5, transcript.

time because of professional insecurity (despite holding advanced degrees). Further, Judith of Journal C concludes that "financial compensation for reviewers is a larger economic issue that publishers must decide, and pressure from academia might be needed to address this."[102] The evidence suggests that although reviewers are theoretically entitled to compensation, the structure of academia allocates 'reviewing' to faculty's service obligations. As such, universities and publishers alike can justify exploiting this labor force, claiming that reviewers also benefit from reviewing. Even though many scholars are happy to conduct reviews, it's clear that thorough reviews are predicated on the assumption that academics have adequate *time,* access to *resources,* and a strong *reputation* (necessary for being solicited to review). Time will tell how the industry responds to studies such as this one, and those which will undoubtedly follow.

Outsourcing of Editorial Labor

The 'Traditional Peer-Review Process' section and Figure 3 demonstrate that academic publishers play a pivotal role in the organization of peer-review. Some journals have an editorial team that screens incoming articles for 'initial checks,' while others rely on the publisher to do so. Several participants in this study mention that their corporate publisher provides additional 'copyediting support' for editors. This 'copyediting' is outsourced to firms in less economically developed countries – some editors suggest India (based on time zone observations), while others are blissfully unaware. Additionally, multiple interviewees remarked that the editing was 'inaccurate' and 'culturally inept,' with a few receiving complaints from authors. Emma, editor of Journal J, describes—

> When an article reaches the acceptance stage, the publisher, which in our case is [Corporate Publisher 1] does the copy editing. Their copy editing is quite basic and not as in-depth as what would be done for a first draft. My understanding is

[102] Judith (Journal B, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 5, 2024, Interview 2, transcript.

> that it's outsourced, likely to South Asia, based on the names and time zones they work in, which differ from mine in [redacted]. I don't have specific details on where the copy editing takes place, but I suspect it's not in [redacted].[103]

Emma and Journal J's experience with their publisher is consistent with another interviewee, whose journal is also distributed by Corporate Publisher 1. Carrie, of Journal E, says "they have outsourced to a firm in India. (…) They don't have a background in the field at all. Their skills are primarily technical, focused on getting papers through the system, and overseeing proofing and copywriting."[104]

Additionally, both Carrie and Emma have struggled with the copyediting they've received and asked their publisher for answers. Carrie claims—

> They've had a number of technical issues with their proofing system, I guess it's somehow automated. It's some sort of weird AI that doesn't quite work. So it does things like repeating names. (…) It's not as big a problem as it used to be, but they would say, John Jones Smith, or Jones Smith Smith (2022). It's like, what is going on here? They tried to explain what the issue was, but (…) I don't understand. It is just something within the actual technology, the software they're using, or whatever it is that they say they've now fixed it. But we were experiencing it for a long time…[105]

At Journal J, Emma describes that authors express disappointment with the final proofing, which she associates with the publisher's use of AI. While she makes it clear this is no reflection of the publisher or journal, Emma says, "I've received feedback from authors who were dissatisfied with the final copy editing. This was due to cultural misunderstandings of words or errors that shouldn't have occurred. For example, an article on country and western music had 'Western' changed to lowercase, which could be an AI error or a lack of understanding by the copy editor."[106] The errors that Carrie and Emma describe are ultimately mitigated through them, as editors-in-chief. Despite having little to do with the issues arising from corporate publishers'

[103] Emma (Journal J, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 29, 2024, Interview 10, transcript.
[104] Carrie (Journal E, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 12, 2024, Interview 5, transcript.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Emma (Journal J, CP1), Zoom interview with author, January 29, 2024, Interview 10, transcript.

outsourcing of copyediting labor, or the implementation of emerging software capabilities like AI, editors-in-chief must assuage authors' concerns while maintain a positive relationship with the journals' publisher.

Journal K is also collaboratively overseen by a corporate publisher and learned society. When the new editor, Derek, took over a few years back, the publisher said, "oh, we will handle the kind of duties and responsibilities of the editorial assistant."[107] In response, Derek described, "I declined because I value the speed at which I prefer to work and believe in the importance of involving graduate students in the process. Working closely with them not only makes the process smoother but also provides valuable experience for the students."[108] I asked Derek for the publisher's response, and he said they were rather indifferent to his refusal.

The scenarios described above illustrate corporate publishers' labor outsourcing to less economically developed countries (with lower wage requirements), to reduce compensation to journal editorial teams. Additionally, multiple editors speculate that commercial publishers are likewise implementing artificial intelligence software to skirt hired labor. While the publisher attempts to offer a solution to the lack of funding available to editorial teams by taking on the burden of proof-reading and copyediting, they do so at the expense of workers in less economically developed countries and for that matter, their journals. Editors-in-chief face the brunt of authors' pushback when the quality of publishers' copyediting and proofing is less than adequate – further shifting responsibility to the editorial team when the publisher is at fault for the initial issue.

[107] Derek (Journal K, CP1), Zoom interview with author, February 6, 2024, Interview 11, transcript.
[108] Ibid.

Conclusion

When I embarked on this research investigation, I had three main goals: maintain an ethical and organized study, attain an in-depth understanding of the peer-review process, and surprise myself. It's safe to say I accomplished everything I set out to do. As an undergraduate, I've had little firsthand experience with the publishing process, so I relied on my interviewees to inform my procedural understanding. While I led each interview, I encouraged participants to interject with any related or tangential thoughts. My initial research questions focused on the relationship between journals' market orientations (i.e. for-profit or not-for-profit) and peer-review procedures; although this question *assumed* there would be a relationship between these factors, my findings bolster this assumption. Even still, other facets of the scholarly publishing process proved far more intractable for editors, scholars, and reviewers.

I was aware of ongoing industry debates from conducting secondary source research, but I expected my interviewees to approach the subject cautiously, as my preliminary research showed that academic publishing outcomes effect professional outcomes. Instead, the participants in this study were incredibly generous with their comments, and for that, I am grateful.

The participant population in this study was most certainly skewed towards journals operated by for-profit entities, many of which expressed criticism of the 'structural forces' regulating the industry. Despite the ownership orientation of these journals, most editors struggled with the negative externalities arising from their journals' market orientation. These externalities include technical issues with proprietary platforms, pressure to compromise article quality for quantity, decreasing financial compensation, publishers' outsourcing of editorial labor, and the use of artificial intelligence. Additionally, numerous editors felt uncomfortable working for a commercial publisher that 'profits off unpaid labor,' as many scholars in the communication and media studies fields are epistemologically aligned with critical theories which promote socio-economic equity. Further, many editors felt apathetic about the future of the scholarly publishing industry, in spite of rising efforts for universal open access. Some editors see the dominance of commercial publishers as deliberately obstructive, relaying the impossibility of universal open access. In contrast, many editors suggested internal policy changes aimed at improving access for vulnerable populations – but not *everyone*.

At journals with not-for-profit orientations, editors are similarly skeptical about the future of scholarly publishing. Editors from both ownership orientations communicated the challenge of finding and retaining reviewers but disagree on potential correctives. While some editors support initiatives to 'compensate' reviewers, other editors critique this argument; alternatively, these editors propose that there are other ways to 'incentivize' reviewers.

By and large, editors in support of alternative solutions to compensating reviewers still believe in the underlying value of the 'scholarly publishing enterprise.' This value is derived from journals' affiliations with learned societies, or independent disciplinary communities. Although the scholarly publishing industry grew out scholars' desire to disseminate knowledge within a particular field, it has become increasingly profit-motivated with ongoing initiatives that undermine intellectual authority. The research gathered in this study builds on recent quantitative and qualitative research, reinforcing the relevance of this discussion. Without comprehensive reform, the scholarly publishing industry is at risk of jeopardizing its reputability. The journal editors interviewed for this study offer a 'pulse' on the industry as it stands, and through their personal experience, point to fixed weaknesses and suggest opportunities for improvement. These editors prove that implementing incremental change results in favorable outcomes for authors. This study points to common weaknesses across media studies and communication journals, while outlining existing interventions. As scholars themselves, editors are well positioned to implement necessary changes, but the question remains: given the results of this investigation, what policy interventions *should be* implemented to yield the most equitable outcomes for editors, authors, and reviewers at journals in media studies and communication?

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON | Research Compliance Services

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

September 8, 2023

Lauren Tokos

ltokos@uoregon.edu

Dear Lauren Tokos:

The following research was reviewed and determined to qualify for exemption.

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Study Title:	A Peer-Review of Peer-Review: Investigating Differing Methodologies Between Traditional and Oppositional Journals in Media Studies
Principal Investigator:	Lauren Tokos
Parent Study ID:	STUDY00000999
Transaction ID:	STUDY00000999
Funding Source:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Lauren Tokos, IRB Exempt Category 2 Worksheet, Summer 2023, Category: IRB Protocol; • Lauren Tokos, IRB Exempt Determination Application, Summer 2023, Category: IRB Protocol; • Lauren Tokos, IRB Informed Consent Form, Summer 2023, Category: Consent Form; • Lauren Tokos, IRB Research Plan, Summer 2023, Category: IRB Protocol;
Approval Date:	8/30/2023
Effective Date:	9/8/2023
Expiration Date:	8/29/2024

For this research, the following determinations have been made:

- This study has been reviewed under **the 2018 Common Rule** and determined to qualify for exemption under **Title 45 CFR 46.104(d) (2)(iii) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (identifiable); and for which limited IRB review was conducted via expedited review.**

The research is approved to be conducted as described in the approved protocol using the approved materials. Approved materials can be accessed in the protocol workspace in the IRB module of the research administration portal (RAP).

All changes to this research must be assessed to ensure the study continues to qualify for exemption. Research Compliance Services has developed specific guidance to help you understand when a modification is required before a change can be implemented. It is your responsibility to ensure modifications are submitted when required and approval secured before implementing changes to the protocol

Continuing Review is not required for this study. **An institutional approval period has been established based on your application materials.** If you anticipate the research will continue beyond the approval period, you must submit a **Continuing Review Application** at least 45 days prior to the expiration date. A closure report must be submitted once human subject research activities are complete. Failure to maintain current approval or properly close the protocol constitutes non-compliance.

With the submission of your request, you agreed to uphold the responsibilities of the Principal Investigator and have agreed to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB module of the RAP.

If you have any questions regarding your protocol or the review process, please contact Research Compliance Services at ResearchCompliance@uoregon.edu or (541)346-2510. The University of Oregon and Research Compliance Services appreciate your commitment to the ethical and responsible conduct of research with human subjects.

Please consider completing our user satisfaction survey. It only takes a few minutes, and we would like to hear about your experience working with our office!

Sincerely,

Research Compliance Services
on behalf of the Committee for Protection of Human Subjects

Interview Questions

PREFACE:

1. You may decline to answer at any point.
2. You may request to stop the interview at any point and void your participation in the study.
3. If after the interview you decide you no longer want to partake in the study, just let me know and I will all erase materials related to your participation.
4. Do you have a preferred "nickname" that I can assign as your pseudonym. Ideally a name that is unrecognizable to your peers. Regardless, I will let you know what your pseudonym is so you know when the final write-up is produced.

Warm-Up Questions:

1. What is the primary academic aim of your publication?
    a. Mission statement, values, goals, etc.
2. In what frequency do you publish? (monthly, quarterly, annually, etc.)
3. Who is your intended audience/market?
    a. How do you reach this audience?
4. What are the subscription fees for your journal?
5. Does your journal publish open access?
    a. What content is open access versus subscription based?
        i. How did you decide on the type of content published OA?
6. About how many submissions do you receive per publication cycle?
7. Can you walk me through your article selection (peer-review) process?
    a. How many do you publish versus reject?

8. Is there a ranking process when sifting through submissions? What factors contribute to those decisions?
9. How do you determine the contents of a specific journal? (i.e. chronologically versus cohesion of the issue)
10. What attributes of an article are most important from a publishing (business) standpoint?
    a. Aka – what sells?
11. Do you ever receive pushback from authors whose articles were rejected?
    a. How do you respond to such feedback?
12. Do you find it difficult to find peer-reviewers?

Substantive Questions:

1. What are some of the main challenges of your position(s)?
2. Can you tell me a little bit about your experience with publishing (from the perspective of a researcher)?
3. If you can change one thing about the review process, what would it be?
    a. From researcher perspective
    b. From publishing perspective
4. What is the ethical justification for the peer-review process at your journal?
    a. [if not double blind] Why does your journal utilize this process rather than double-blind?
        i. What are the challenges associated with double-blind peer-review? (and vice versa)
    b. Do you agree?

5. Do you feel that the process serves the aims of your journal? Why or why not?
6. Is it within your power to override the discretion of peer-reviewers? Have you ever done that? What was the reason?
7. What led your journal to be a subsidiary/ affiliated with of _________(publishing house or organization)?
    a. What was the decision-making process like – or if you weren't personally around during the time this occurred, do you know what factors led your predecessors to this decision?
8. What sort of management oversight does _________(publishing house or organization) have over the operations and content of your journal?
    a. Do you ever have disagreements with ________?
    b. How do you handle these disagreements and what sort of outcomes arise from them?
9. How do you think your peer-review process is similar or different from other academic journals in media studies and communication?
    a. What values does this process aim to uphold? Why are these values important to your journal?

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