

Envoi: Looking Back With Pride and Looking Forward With Optimism

Editorial

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The *International Journal of Communication* (IJOC) was conceived during a luncheon conversation at the USC Faculty Club in 2006 when Manuel Castells and I were sharing our frustration with the state of scholarly publishing in communication and media studies. We decried the failure of the commercial publishers and scholarly associations that published the journals to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by online digital publishing, such as freedom from space and page limits, enforced by the costs of print publishing and the ability to incorporate visual and audio materials into the body of articles, not to mention the option of using full color rather than only black and white images. (These, of course, are options we take for granted when teaching or giving lectures but that were not available when moving our work to the pages of journals or books.) Then, the lack of serious attention to reviewing books in our field was a source of particular frustration to many of us, despite the reality that many of our humanistically oriented colleagues were publishing their most important work in book form rather than in the research articles more familiar to conventional social sciences.

Our mutual frustration was also informed by our familiarity with the growing movement across the academy to free ourselves from the constraints imposed by the increasingly profit-centered dominance of commercial publishers. Over the past few decades, the ever-rising cost of subscriptions to scholarly journals—far outstripping the overall rise in cost of living—had been wreaking havoc on the budgets of university libraries and devastating the ability of less affluent institutions and countries to participate in the scholarly conversation that is the lifeblood of the academic world. For one important example, as library budgets strained to maintain access to journals in the natural sciences, university libraries cut back on purchases of monographs published by university presses. These cutbacks had clear and damaging consequences for the careers of junior scholars in the humanities and some social sciences whose ability to publish books with university presses was a necessary condition for promotion and tenure.

In other words, there was—and still is—a systemic crisis brought about by the system of scholarly publishing dominated by a small number of profit-oriented commercial publishers. Scholarly publishing can well be characterized as a colonial situation in which the “natives”—scholars—produce raw materials that they hand over to the colonial authorities—publishers—for free. The authorities then recruit other natives to perform the crucial labor of editorial review, also without pay, and the finished products—journals—are sold back to the native colonies—universities—at ever-increasing prices.

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To further complicate the situation, the primary scholarly associations in many fields—in communication and media studies these are the International Communication Association (ICA) and the National Communication Association (NCA; both based in the United States)—publish most of the important journals in the field. In the case of communication and media studies, the ICA publishes six journals, through Oxford University Press, and the NCA publishes 12 journals, through Taylor & Francis. In both cases the association's share of the royalties from the journals comprises a significant portion of the association's budget.

It was in this context that Manuel and I agreed that we should take arms against this sea of troubles and use the affordances of digital online publishing to demonstrate that another way was possible. In other words, do it ourselves, in the spirit of the growing movement for open access. As I have noted, the key ingredients for the success of scholarly publishing are those provided by the mostly unpaid labor of the "natives"—authors, reviewers, and editors—and not by the publishers. We believed that between the two of us, we could assemble an editorial board of prominent scholars whose presence would provide an assurance of quality that would draw the attention of authors and readers, and that we could quickly establish the credibility of such a venture.

We were correct.

In 2011 we published a report on our first four years, which began with this overview:

The International Journal of Communication (IJoC) was launched in January, 2007, as an online, open access, multi-media academic journal that adheres to the highest standards of peer review and engages established and emerging scholars from anywhere in the world. Our vision for the *International Journal of Communication* was to create an interdisciplinary journal that, while centered in communication, would be open and welcoming to contributions from the many disciplines and approaches that meet at the crossroads that is communication study. As we begin our fifth year, it is clear that we have achieved our goals, and that the Journal is more than meeting our expectations. (Castells, Gross, & Luck, 2011, p. 272)

The IJoC continues its successful progress, more than fulfilling our hopes when we launched the journal in 2007. One of our goals was to demonstrate that an online-only, open-access, Creative Commons-licensed publication could manifest the highest standards of scholarly publishing. We believe that we have succeeded in meeting this goal, as evidenced by the growing number of submissions, the quality of the work that we publish, the generous cooperation of literally scores of colleagues around the world who assist us by reviewing articles, the large numbers of readers who visit our site, and, certainly not least, by the decision of the major social science indexing services—Thompson Reuters, EBSCO, and Elsevier, among others—to index our content.

The pattern of success has only accelerated over the years since our 2011 report. The number of submissions has increased each year, as has the number of countries from which these submissions originate, thus fulfilling our goal of creating a truly international journal. IJoC published a total of 383

papers (from a total of 1,178 submissions) in 2022—more than the ICA flagship *Journal of Communication*, with 52 published articles for the same period. Our published submissions originate from all over the world, representing 67 countries in the three years of 2020–2022. Even more notable than the number of submissions is the growth in our reach, as our readership has expanded dramatically and steadily. In 2017 we had approximately 15,000 registered readers, which would be a notable figure for any scholarly journal. At the end of 2023, IJoC has 137,286 registered users.

As is customary in scholarly publishing, success and quality seem to depend on our ability to attract many submissions and then reject most of them. Without getting into the problems with this characterization of success, it's notable that IJoC sent 45% of article submissions for review—the rest were “desk rejected”—and of those reviewed, 9% were published, after an average of 228 days since submission (needless to say, COVID has not been helpful to the efficiency of the review process).

One of the core missions we set for IJoC was to mitigate our field's irresponsible approach to reviewing books. Anyone who has had the task of preparing and presenting personnel dossiers for promotion/tenure candidacy for colleagues whose primary focus is on books rather than journal articles will be familiar with the challenge of providing a reasonable number of scholarly reviews. This is in stark contrast, say, to sociology, where there is a journal, *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews*, or psychology, where the 50-year-old *Contemporary Psychology* was reborn in 2004 as *PsycCRITIQUES*, an online journal that publishes around 800 reviews each year. From the start, book reviewing was a central focus for IJoC, and, year after year, we have published more book reviews than all of the other leading communication/media journals combined. However, even then it is the case that we can review only a portion of the books published each year that deserve serious attention.

I will take the liberty of departing somewhat from the focus of this report to quote from an article I wrote for the *ICA Newsletter* in 2012, titled “Conversations: Shame on Us”:

What I am seeing here is a failure of communal responsibility. For many of us, books are the primary forum in which we write, in which we encourage our students to write, and which we turn to for illumination and intellectual enrichment. But we do not—as a community, obviously there are notable individual exceptions—take on the obligation to support, recognize and maintain the viability of this arena of scholarship. As it stands now, while each of us hopes for reviews of our own books—enthusiastic raves, of course, but really, any serious attention to and engagement with the work we have spent years researching and writing—very few of us are willing to invest our own time in doing unto others what we wish they will do unto us. This is shameful. (Gross, 2012, p. 16)

In 2023, IJoC published 103 book reviews, some of them review essays covering several books. As I have said, this is more than the rest of the top communication/media journals combined. It is true, as we all know, that the current assessment regimes imposed on academic institutions do not adequately recognize or reward the unpaid labor of reviewing articles or of reviewing books, as these are not counted as “serious” publications. Thus, it is even more ironic and should be a cause for embarrassment that a disproportionate number of book reviews are written by doctoral students and junior faculty members.

Those of us who are less dependent on the merit indices assigned each year by committees and administrators have no excuse not to contribute to the vitality of the scholarly enterprise we all benefit from by reviewing articles, and, for many of us, by writing book reviews.

Another way that IJoC has been able to expand the opportunities provided by online-only publishing is to provide a platform for contributions not typically found in scholarly journals. We have a section devoted to magazine-like feature articles, opinion pieces, interviews, or other contributions worthy of our attention that do not take the form of traditional research articles. We have published several forums that bring together briefer commentary or other contributions focused on a particular topic. More typically, we have been able to provide a platform for many Special Sections proposed to us by guest editors that undergo the usual rigorous double-blind editorial review process.

One additional venue that we have explored was the publication of e-books that we were able to distribute through the Amazon platform. Initially, we took advantage of this opportunity to extend the reach of some of our Special Sections, but we also were able to work with several of our most distinguished colleagues who were intrigued by the affordances of digital publishing. Elihu Katz, along with junior colleagues Christopher Ali and Joohan Kim (2014), published a novel work, *Echoes of Gabriel Tarde*, that incorporated internal hyperlinks connecting the text of Tarde's important book on public opinion with Katz and colleagues' commentary and an extensive bibliography. Eminent sociologist Howard Becker and his colleague Robert Faulkner (2009) collaborated on the writing of a book, *Do You Know . . .?*, about jazz musicians, entirely by email. Their email correspondence thus represents the exact, entire record of a collaboration, and we published the full correspondence, along with hyperlinks to recordings of jazz performances discussed in the text, as an e-book, *Thinking Together: An Email Exchange and All That Jazz* (Becker & Faulkner, 2013). Another original work was an ambitious, heavily illustrated book, *Warning! Graphic Content: Political Cartoons, Comix and the Uncensored Artistic Mind*, by the award-winning political cartoonist, Mr. Fish (2014).

Unfortunately, while the growth of online-only journal publication is becoming ubiquitous—the ICA and NCA journals are all online-only at this point—the same cannot be said for online book publishing. When Howie Becker told the editor of *Contemporary Sociology* about his new e-book, he was told that the journal did not review e-books, even, apparently, when written by one of the most eminent sociologists around. So, I confess that our venture in book publishing was not among our notable successes, even though I am confident in the quality of these books and hopeful for their future.

I think it is clear that our ambitious goals in launching IJoC have been achieved even beyond our expectations. And, as is usually the case when a venture succeeds, many folks rightfully deserve credit for making this success possible.

From the start IJoC was made possible by the Open Journal System (OJS) created by the Public Knowledge Project, which now supports over 30,000 journals worldwide. It is safe to say that few enterprises have been more consequential in expanding the democratization of scholarly publishing in the digital age. We are grateful for their essential and continuing support.

Then, of course, thanks are due to those who generously provided the financial resources that even a streamlined, nonprofit online publication requires. Our colleagues Jonathan Aronson, director of the then-extant Annenberg Center, and Geoff Cowan, then dean of the USC Annenberg School, provided the necessary support for our technical needs—not a trivial amount, even with the OJS platform—and for our ability to hire a professional managing editor, as well as the critically important contributions of our graduate student assistant editors. Over the years, succeeding deans of the USC Annenberg School, Ernest Wilson and Willow Bay, continued to provide and even expand their support for the journal, allowing us to hire a second managing editor and a webmaster.

The first hiring decision we made as we prepared to launch IJoC proved to be the most important, at least from my perspective as the editor. Arlene Luck, a 25-year veteran editor/marketer at the *Los Angeles Times*, began working with the Annenberg Center, and we were able to capture her for the about-to-launch journal. I have no doubt that my ability to serve as editor of a steadily growing journal (while simultaneously serving as director of the USC Annenberg School of Communication for the first eight years) was due to Arlene's editorial, professional, and diplomatic skills as managing editor. I long ago lost count of the number of times authors wrote to me expressing their gratitude for how Arlene handled their dealings with the journal. Our good fortune continued when Arlene retired, as we were able to recruit a successor, Kady Bell-Garcia, and then a second managing editor for special sections, Chi Zhang, who have kept the journal sailing smoothly even as COVID and the task of upgrading our technical platform have presented unusual challenges.

Through the years, I have had the pleasure of working with numerous graduate students who provided editorial assistance, and, of course, we have benefitted from the advice and assistance of the distinguished members of our editorial board. But there is no doubt that the most important contributions to the success of IJoC and, indeed, of all scholarly journals, are those made by the colleagues who agree to review articles, often through two revisions, providing valuable insight and guidance to our authors. As I titled a report on our first ten years, we have always relied on the kindness of reviewers. While it is impossible to adequately recognize, let alone reward, the contributions made by literally thousands of colleagues around the world, we can send formal letters of appreciation each year to all of our reviewers, and we hope that this small gesture conveys some measure of our gratitude.

A wise colleague once told me that the best way to get out of a role was to locate a suitable and willing replacement. My years of administrative experience demonstrated the truth of this maxim on many occasions, and thus it became clear to me that the continued survival and success of IJoC would depend on our ability to locate and recruit a suitable and willing editor. Once again, fortune smiled on our enterprise, because there was only one person who seemed to me to be the ideal choice to take over the editorship and, when approached, Silvio Waisbord agreed to serve as the next editor of IJoC.

On the safe assumption that Silvio needs no introduction for most folks, I will limit myself to noting that he served as editor of ICA's flagship *Journal of Communication*, where he set a standard of excellence, and is currently the ICA president-elect. His recent books, *Communication: A Post-Discipline* (Waisbord, 2019a) and *The Communication Manifesto* (Waisbord, 2019b), set out an understanding and vision for the

field of communication that make clear why he is the perfect person to take over the role of editor of the *International Journal of Communication*.

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