October 2022

**Dear Larry Gross and colleagues,**

Please find attached our manuscript “Ethical challenges of digital communication: A comparative study of public relations practitioners in 52 countries” to be considered for publication in the *International Journal of Communication*.

Our study examines if PR professionals around the globe perceive digital communication practices (e.g., analyzing target groups based on their personal data or spreading messages through blurred paid channels) as ethically challenging and whether their assessment is shaped by individual dispositions or national backgrounds. We draw on one of the largest datasets in PR research collected to date, with nearly 6,000 responses from communication professionals from around the world.

The article continues the current debate on ethics in digital communication led in the *International Journal of Communication*,building on earlier contributions by K. Crawford et al. (“Critiquing big data: Politics, ethics, epistemology”), D. Lyon (“Surveillance culture: Engagement, exposure, and ethics in digital modernity”), C. Sandvig et al. (“When the algorithm itself is a racist: Diagnosing ethical harm in the basic components of software”), and S. C. Woolley & P. N. Howard (“Political communication, computational propaganda, and autonomous agents”). It also contributes to the discussion on international communication research in the *IJoC*, linking to M. Demeter’s “Nobody notices it? Qualitative inequalities of leading publications in communication and media studies research” and S. Waisbord’s “Communication studies without frontiers? Translation and cosmopolitanism across academic cultures”.

We are submitting as an international authorship team from six different countries in Asia-Pacific, Europe, Central and Latin America, and North America. We acknowledge the support of our 71 research collaborators from 55 countries across these four continents, who contributed to this project through the recruitment of participants in their regions.

An earlier version of this article has been presented at this year’s annual conference of the *International Communication Association* in Paris. Parts of the data used here were already published in the following papers:

* Hagelstein, J., Einwiller, S., & Zerfass, A. (2021). The ethical dimension of public relations in Europe: Digital channels, moral challenges, resources, and training. *Public Relations Review, 47*(4), 1–9.
* Meng, J., Kim, S., & Reber, B. H. (2022). Ethical challenges in an evolving digital communication era: Coping resources and ethical trainings in corporate communications. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal, 27*(3), 581–594.

However, these articles only reported on data from Europe respectively North America and also restricted their analyses to descriptives and group comparisons. The research presented here is the first analyses across the full dataset including all four regions that conducts global cross-country comparisons and applies a multilevel modeling approach.

Thank you for your considering our submission. Please get back to us in case of any questions! We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

The authors team