

**Valerie Kasianchuk**

Publishing and Printing Institute, National Technical University of Ukraine  
«Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute»

ORCID: 0000-0003-1690-0735

## **Selection criteria for manuscripts in scholarly journals on communications**

### **Abstract**

The article analyses the selection criteria for manuscripts in scholarly journals on communications with impact factor. This information is important for authors, readers and reviewers. Selection criteria of these journals include: scientific approaches and methodology, contribution to the subject area, high quality, style, novelty, relevance, originality, international orientation etc. Some editorials create their own "formula" of the scientific content of the article.

**Keywords:** scholarly journals, manuscript selection, methodology, impact-factor, communications.

### **Kryteria selekcji artykułów przez redakcje czasopism naukowych z dziedziny komunikowania**

#### **Streszczenie**

W artykule przedstawiono analizę kryteriów kwalifikowania lub odrzucenia artykułów naukowych przez redakcje czasopism z dziedziny komunikowania i posiadających współczynnik wpływu impact factor (IF). Kryteria te obejmują: oryginalność przedstawianych tez i ich naukową weryfikację, zastosowaną metodologię, wkład w rozwój dyscypliny nauk o komunikowaniu, wysoką jakość merytoryczną, nastawienie na umiędzynarodowienie wyników itp. Większość redakcji tworzy własne – „szyte na miarę” – zasady doboru artykułów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** czasopisma naukowe, selekcja czasopism, metodologia, impact factor, komunikowanie.

### **Introduction**

The contemporary audience of scholarly journals is worldwide one. Now, the international discoverability of the journal means one of its quality criteria by scholarly community. This leads to the emergence of new rules and norms in research periodicals that are not limited by geographical or other boundaries and should meet the information needs of readers from different parts of the world. So, media analysts are faced with the task of finding and developing methods and tools that will help the scholarly journals to be informatively appealing to the international community of scientists.

In particular, it is important to understand what modern requirements are emerged for scholarly articles in order to be relevant to the global audience.

For studying this issue, we should use the experience of leading international journals, especially with impact factor. The need to research them is due to the dominance of the English-language scholarly periodicals. The process of publishing in such journals is often accompanied by difficulties for authors from non-English speaking countries less familiar with world-wide publishing approaches.<sup>1</sup>

In our research, we have focused on journals that reveal communication and media studies. This choice relates to the hypothesis that such subject area can help editorials to follow the modern trends in communication, respond to them, constantly improve forms and ways of information presenting etc. Therefore, in the article scholarly journals with an impact factor are analysed, which have Social Sciences Citation Index (Web of Science Core Collection). The group was formed on the basis of the category "Communication", already made up by the editors of Web of Science. These are the journals that explore verbal and non-verbal exchanges of ideas and information. These include the following areas: communication theory, practice and politics, media studies (journalism, television and radio, advertising, etc.), mass communication, public opinion, speech activities, commercial and technical writing, and public relations.

## State of development of the problem

Scholarly journals on communications have already become the object of studying. T. Feeley performed a bibliometric analysis of them in 2002–2005.<sup>2</sup> N. Poor investigated citation of such journals, adhering to open access policies to articles.<sup>3</sup> E. Lauf carried out an analysis of the national diversity of the authors of 40 leading journals on communications.<sup>4</sup> The work of L. Soley and S. Bonewits is devoted to the features of the editorial policy concerning conflict of interest in articles published in such journals [9]. I. Stumpf researched peculiarities of expert evaluation in scholarly journals, interviewed editors, reviewers and authors of seven journals.<sup>5</sup> S. Perry and L. Michalski applied to the experience of the scientific journals in order to establish the acceptance rate of manuscripts prior to publication.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> S. Kim, M. Chesnut, *Hidden Lessons for Developing Journals: A Case of North American Academics Publishing in South Korea*, "Journal of Scholarly Publishing" 2016, Vol. 47, No. 3.

<sup>2</sup> T. Feeley, *Bibliometric Analysis of Communication Journals from 2002 to 2005*, "Human Communication Research" 2008, Vol. 34, No. 3, s. 505–520.

<sup>3</sup> N. Poor, *Global Citation Patterns of Open Access Communications Studies Journals: Pushing beyond the Social Science Citation Index*, "International Journal of Communication" 2009, No. 3, s. 853–879.

<sup>4</sup> E. Lauf, *National Diversity of Major International Journals in the Field of Communication*, "Journal of Communication" 2005, Vol. 55, No. 1, s. 139–151.

<sup>5</sup> I. Stumpf, *Peer Review in Communications Journals: Viewpoint of Editors, Authors and Referees*. "Perspectivas em ciência da informação" 2008, Vol. 13, No. 1, s. 18–32.

<sup>6</sup> S. Perry, L. Michalski, *Common Acceptance Rate Calculation Methods in Communication Journals: Developing Best Practices*, "Journalism and Mass Communication Educator" 2010,

Scientists from Spain and Latin America are actively involved in research on quality of scientific journals on humanities and social sciences. A. Baladro'n Pazos, B. Correyero Ruiz outlined the main directions of further development of the periodicals during the next decade on the basis of a survey of editors of the new Spanish scholarly journals on communications.<sup>7</sup>

In their scholarly work A. Baladro'n Pazos and B. Correyero Ruiz refer to a series of Latin studies related to Spanish journals on communications. They give an analysis of the current state of the periodicals, bibliometric indicators, presentations online, their role as a platform for scholarly discussions of educational institutions, etc.<sup>8</sup>

E. Giménez-Toledo, A. Román-Román, M. Alcain-Partearroyo analysed national models of research publications aimed at publications in the field of social and human sciences in order to determine the criteria of quality of scholarly journals.<sup>9</sup> Another article was devoted to the functions and structure of the editorial boards of Spanish scholarly journals on communications.<sup>10</sup> S. Torrado Morales, E. Gime'nez Toledo are turning to the publishing practice of British highly specialized journals publishing research on cinema and film industry.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the criteria for the manuscripts selection in scholarly journals on communications with impact-factor have not yet become the subject of research.

## Discussion

The author's manuscript, which is submitted for consideration, must meet all criteria presented by editorials. Information about manuscript selection criteria is important for journal's audience. Authors can understand the necessary level of work, its value, features, etc. Thus, the peer review process becomes clear. Readers can estimate completeness and depth of publication.

Requirements for the article are given in the submission guidelines (instructions for authors) but usually they relate to the technical rules. Occasionally in these instructions there are indications regarding the scholarly content of the article. More often these recommendations appear in the journal descriptions. These are texts which present information about journal, its aim and scope, subject area, mission etc. For example,

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Vol. 65, No. 2, s. 168–186.

<sup>7</sup> A. Baladro'n Pazos A., Correyero Ruiz B. *The Future of Emerging Spanish Scientific Communication Journals*, "Journal of Scholarly Publishing" 2015, Vol. 46, No. 2, s. 175–192.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> E. Giménez-Toledo, A. Román-Román, M. Alcain-Partearroyo, *From experimentation to coordination in the evaluation of Spanish scientific journals in the humanities and social sciences*, "Research Evaluation" 2007, Vol. 16, No. 2, s. 137–148.

<sup>10</sup> E. Giménez-Toledo, A. Román-Román, P. Perdiguero, I. Palencia, *The Editorial Boards of Spanish Scholarly Journals: What Are They Like? What Should They Be Like?*, "Journal of Scholarly Publishing" 2009, Vol. 40, No. 3, s. 287–306.

<sup>11</sup> S. Torrado Morales, E. Gime'nez Toledo, *British Scholarly Journals on Film Studies: Study and Evaluation of Their Internationality*, "Journal of Scholarly Publishing" 2012, Vol. 44, No. 1, s. 75–90.

article criteria are present in texts of 68 scholarly journals on communications. These include: scientific approaches and methodology, contribution to the subject area, high quality, style, novelty, relevance, originality, international orientation etc.

The most popular criterion is using relevant scholarly approaches and methodological techniques in the article. The preference is given to a new look at the problem: "The editors strongly encourage the submission of papers that advance new approaches and new understandings crossing the disciplinary and cultural boundaries" ["Critical Discourse Studies"]. Particular attention is paid to the researches that provide fundamentally new analytical approaches in progress: "Discourse, Context & Media is especially interested in contributions that make use of innovative methods and media for the analysis and presentation of *data*" ["Discourse, Context & Media"].

Choosing manuscripts with innovative techniques editors risk sometimes, because the techniques do not yet have sufficient practice, often have not been tested and not confirmed by the scholarly community. However, the purpose of some journals, in fact, is to be the platform for the presentation, development and improvement of new research approaches: "The Translator <...> provides a meeting point for existing as well as developing approaches" ["Translator"].

In addition, the editorials explain to authors which approaches are more appropriate to use in the articles. For example, it can be related to:

- humanities and social sciences – "The Chinese Journal of Communication welcomes scholarly works using social scientific or humanistic approaches" ["Chinese Journal of Communication"];
- special methods – "Such approaches include, but are not limited to: conversation analysis; ethnomethodology; discursive psychology; critical discourse analysis; and sociolinguistics" ["Discourse, Context & Media"]; "Moreover, submissions including alternative analysis procedures such as the Bayesian approach are welcome" ["Journal of Media Psychology"].

The main editor's message for authors and readers is that the methods used by them must be reliable, carefully selected, relevant, consistent with the questions posed in the article: "Approaches to answering questions should be clearly relevant to the questions asked, rigorous in terms of both argument and method, cognizant of alternative interpretations, and contextualized within the wider body of communication scholarship" ["Communication Monographs"].

The next popular requirement to the methodological basis of the article is interdisciplinary. Editors welcome scientific researches which are conducted at the intersection of sciences or scholarly disciplines, which are the combination of methodologies from different fields of knowledge: "We are interested in scholarship that crosses disciplinary lines and speaks to readers from a range of theoretical and methodological perspectives" ["International Journal of Communication"]. The editorial board of "Critical Studies in Media Communication" explains to readers the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in research: "It particularly welcomes cross-disciplinary works that enrich debates among various disciplines, critical traditions, methodological and analytical

approaches, and theoretical standpoints". The peer review of such articles requires a high level of scholarly expertise, since new scholarly concepts may be unsubstantiated and not scholarly proven.

An important criterion for scholarly research is also its value for the subject field. Journal editors emphasize that article must make a contribution to the relevant subject field: "Manuscripts will be judged by the degree to which they contribute to theory and advance the body of knowledge about the psychology of uses, processes, or effects of the media" ["Media Psychology"]; "Contributions should exhibit high standards for professional scholarship, and should offer new knowledge or advance the discussion on significant issues in the field of rhetoric in ways that address the work and common interests of rhetoricians who reside in a variety of disciplines" ["Rhetoric Society Quarterly"]. In addition, given the interdisciplinary nature of scholarly publications, the role of research increases if it conveys an important content at once for several subject areas: "Since the journal seeks to be a general forum for communication scholarship, it is especially interested in research whose significance crosses disciplinary and sub-field boundaries" ["Journal of Communication"].

Among article criteria there is also listed such requirement as "high quality": "Journal analyses such questions from a global, interdisciplinary perspective in contributions of the very highest quality from scholars and practitioners in the social sciences, gender and cultural studies, communication and media studies, as well as in the information and computer sciences" ["Information, Communication & Society"]. However, this criterion is not easy to estimate. This characteristics is more likely to be useful to readers, because it serves as a testimony to the careful work of editors and reviewers, whereas for the author, by itself, without further refinement, does not give an idea of how the work should be prepared in order to obtain approval for its publication. That is why this criterion often combines with other characteristics, for example, the originality and analytical approach: "The only criteria will be the quality, the originality and the analytical sophistication of its articles" ["Discourse & Communication"].

Essential criterion for article which can be approved for publication by editorial staff is its style. Thus, authors are urged to write reasonably, accessibly and understandably, not to depart from the composition of a scholarly article. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of scholarly journals on communications, authors are advised to avoid specific terminology to allow scientists from other disciplines to take research on: "Discourse & Society is an accessible journal. Its papers are written in a clear and pedagogic style, avoid esoteric jargon, and respect the needs and interests of readers of several levels of expertise in many countries and disciplines" ["Discourse & Society"]; "It ensures that articles are written in transparent terminology and lucid style to render them accessible across the borders of specific disciplines" ["International Communication Gazette"]; "In considering the questions and answers posed in submissions to Communication Monographs, a premium will be placed on cogent arguments and on writing that is clear and understandable to readers across the varied areas of communication research" ["Communication Monographs"].

Authors should also explain the key terms and concepts presented in articles in order to be understood by readers of different qualification. It relates with ambition of leading journals to target not only narrow specialists but also a wide reader audience, which may include industry experts, researchers, and students, and also readers who are inexperienced in English: "Critical Discourse Studies aims to be accessible. It aims for papers that are written clearly, explain key terms and concepts in an accessible way for readers at many levels, and recognize the needs and interests of its diverse community of readers" ["Critical Discourse Studies"].

The presented examples broaden the understanding of article quality in the leading scholarly journals on communications. So, unlike authoritative journals, editors of poor-quality editions perform their functions one-sidedly: they fill the number with materials, but they do not care how their readers will perceive them. For journals of broad topics, it's important that the content of articles should be accessible to audiences with any level of understanding of the topic.

The experience of scholarly journals on communications shows that interaction with the reader has a great role in editors' work. The preparation of accessible and understandable materials is one of the ways that influences the expansion of the reader's audience. Editors, first of all, should take care of the interests of their own readers. Therefore, the quality of the journal is determined not only by the high level of published articles, but also by focusing on the needs of readers, adhering to high standards in communicating with the audience.

Among the criteria of high level of scholarly research, the significant influence on the selection of the manuscript prior to publication has such characteristics as novelty and relevance of the information provided in it. The audience will read and subscribe to the journal that covers its information needs, publish those scholarly reports that have theoretical and practical significance for researchers, provide answers to the urgent questions of the subject area, in our case – the theory and practice of communication processes. In this case, the mission of contemporary journals is more complicated than only article publishing. Now they form an interest for special themes, establish fashion on prior, "hot" topics for researches etc. So, the editors ask to send works devoted to the most important scholarly problems and even challenges for the mankind: "To qualify for publication, research should <...> be directly linked to the most important problems and issues facing humankind" ["Communication Research"].

The attention of leading journals on interdisciplinary research and the international nature of the target audience make adjustments to the criteria for selection of scholarly articles. The journals are interested in choosing manuscripts that are interesting to researchers from any part of the world. For example: "Journal seeks contributions comparing two or more countries or regions and only accept contributions on national issues in case the global significance of such issues is paramount" ["International Communication Gazette"].

Some journals do not impose strict demands to scholarly content of the article, for example: "Its diversity is apparent in the variety of its theories, methods and approaches,

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thus avoiding the frequent limitation to one school, approach or academic sect” [“Discourse & Communication”].

The most comprehensive presentation of the relevant scholarly papers is presented in the journal “Communication Research”. For example: “To qualify for publication, research should, first, be explicitly tied to some form of communication; second, be theoretically driven with results that inform theory; third, use the most rigorous empirical methods; and fourth, be directly linked to the most important problems and issues facing humankind”.

The listed criteria should form the basis for the formation of an own standard of a qualitative scholarly article in journals that only start their scholarly and publishing path. The results of the analysis of authoritative journals on communications show that editors are differently suited to the selection and combination of these criteria, practicing unique conceptual approaches. Thus, the typical scholarly article for “Management Communication Quarterly” has the following characteristics: “Criteria for publication include originality, provocative character, conceptual significance, methodological rigor, and relevance to scholars of communication in management and organizational contexts”.

An additional illustration of the manuscript selection criteria may be the list of requirements for the articles submitted for the . F. Smith prize for the best publication in the journal “Technical Communication”. Judges evaluate the content and form of scholarly work. The work should create new knowledge; give new perspectives and present practical communication techniques. The form is determined by the appropriate style of the manuscript and the correct grammar, the content of the tables and illustrations, as well as the confidence and enthusiasm in the presentation of information.

In the context of explaining the selection criteria, journals also report how the process of expert evaluation of the manuscript takes place. For example: “All submitted manuscripts are subject to initial appraisal by the Editor, and, if found suitable for further consideration, to peer review by independent, anonymous expert referees. All peer review is double-blind” [“African Journalism Studies”]. In the scholarly journals on communications with impact factor, an exceptionally double blind expert evaluation is used. Typically, two readers read the manuscript: “Continuum is a referred publication. All submissions are submitted to two reviewers for blind refereeing. The process normally takes three months to complete” [“Continuum”]. Editorials of “Journal of International Journal of Advertising” practices review by three experts.

In April-May 2018, 100 authors of Ukrainian social media journals were interviewed. Among them 83% are researchers, 15% postgraduate students, 2% – practitioners. 47% of the respondents sent their articles to journal with impact factor, 63% did not send them. 26% of respondents are successful in publishing in impact-factor journals. According to the survey, 83% of authors believe that editors should inform the audience about the article requirements. Therefore, the editorial staff, together with reviewers, should formulate the main criteria that the manuscripts must meet. This will improve



the quality of sent manuscripts, save time for editors and reviewers, and make the process of articles peer review and approving clear and transparent.

## Conclusions

Consequently, very often the editorials of international scholarly journals on communications with impact factor list important criteria for the scholarly content of the research article. In this way, it is possible to improve the quality of the submitted manuscript and to help the author increase the scholarly value of his or her own work.

The content of a scholarly journal is a unique phenomenon. Each researcher wants to get a "recipe" of an article that will satisfy the editor and reviewer. Approving for publication will be received by a manuscript, which presents a new original study with a well-grounded methodological approach. It must be written in an accessible and useful manner for a wide international circle of researchers. Some editorials create their own "formula" of the article.

The journal content is determined by the exceptional features and canons embodied in its editorial policy – interdisciplinary or specialization of research, peculiar scholarly approaches, language, style of presentation, peculiarities of design, etc. Analysis of journal descriptions shows that a significant part of journals determines the high level of quality of work on the following basis: relevance and novelty of research, adherence to the style and structure of scholarly presentation, compliance with technical requirements, the use of theoretically grounded and innovative approaches, etc. All content requirements are aimed to achieve an ultimate goal – to provide the reader with a complete, original, understandable scholarly article with important research results for the scholarly community.

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