

Special Issue: Hidden Gems in Media Studies

Researchers Create Articles and Articles Create Researchers: Introduction to the Special Issue

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Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of
interest was reported by
the author.

Received

7 Apr 2024

Revised

12 Apr 2024

Accepted

13 Apr 2024

"Humans create books, and books create humans" (Shin, 1992)

As researchers, we process numerous scholarly articles. Some articles are briefly cited in a corner of our manuscript, while others receive detailed discussion over a paragraph or two or even across several pages. Most research articles conclude their influence by remaining as a part of other articles. However, some articles transcend their role as mere contributors to existing literature, impacting the entire research trajectory of a researcher. Occasionally, we encounter a paper that induces a "lightbulb moment" (Sundar et al., 2024, p. 11), opening doors to entirely new dimensions of research (Sundar et al., 2024). Borrowing the expression from the epigraph above, we can say *researchers create articles, and those articles, in turn, create researchers*. Such articles and books become invaluable assets to their academic communities. Those articles not only propel efforts towards new discoveries, thereby contributing to the generation and accumulation of new knowledge in that academic field, but also play a vital role in facilitating the growth of the next generation of capable researchers. If an academic community collectively recognizes and remembers such intellectual treasures, it can catalyze cohesion and effective communication within the community. Therefore, collectively discovering, acknowledging, and remembering these treasures holds profound significance.

As part of these efforts, last year, *Asian Communication Research* published a special issue titled "Hidden Gems in Communication Studies." This issue featured contributions from six scholars who play a significant role in the education and research of communication science, sharing their *gems* that have significantly influenced their research careers. The response from the communication research community was enthusiastic, with many researchers sharing the articles on social

media platforms such as Twitter. The six papers have been accessed a total of 3,784 times through the ACR website by the end of March 2024 with the most read paper being by Sandi W. Smith, accessed 770 times (Smith, 2023). This special issue has also been cited in a leading journal in communication studies (Ewoldsen et al., 2023).

In response to the positive feedback received for last year's special issue, we are pleased to announce the publication of the second special issue of "Hidden Gems" in this issue. While the previous special issue was focused on communication studies, this time, we have shifted our focus to media studies, inviting scholars who have played a significant role in the research and education of this field as authors for the special issue. Similar to the last time, the authors responded very enthusiastically, introducing the hidden gem studies they value, along with their anecdotes.

Seven Media Scholars and Their Hidden Gem Studies

The essay written by Shyam Sundar and his colleagues (2024, this issue) vividly showcases several examples of how a single article (in fact, a book, Steven H. Chaffee's [1990] "Explication") can inspire and be utilized in numerous studies. Furthermore, the essay demonstrates how an article can influence researchers beyond a single academic generation and play a crucial role in connecting generations of scholars. Chaffee has passed away, but his book continues to nurture new researchers. This essay will lead readers to appreciate the fortune of the communication academic community in having the excellent gem, *Explication*, and the excellent scholar, Steven H. Chaffee.

René Weber's (2024, this issue) essay introduces Anthony G. Greenwald's (2012) article, which posits that many major scientific discoveries and resolutions of debates have not been made through theoretical discussions but through the development and application of new methods.

In introducing Greenwald's article, Weber vividly shares his thoughts on the communication field's overemphasis on theoretical contributions and the undervaluation of the importance of research methods. He also relates his experiences with publishing papers and faculty recruitment in this context. By citing various studies, Weber ultimately suggests that communication researchers should reject both theory extremism and methodological-analytical arrogance, advocating for a method-theory synergy driven approach to scientific inquiry. This essay is valuable for its contemplation and reasoning on significant issues underlying research activities and the progress of communication studies, while many of us communication researchers are often buried in our studies.

Melanie Green (2024, this issue) introduces a hidden gem (Royzman & Rozin, 2006) that is highly relevant to the research of many media psychologists, especially those studying narratives, but is not well-known among them. Royzman and Rozin suggest defining sympathy as "an emotional state evoked by the misfortune of another" (Green, 2024) and introduce the concept of *symhedonia* (or sympathetic joy), which represents "feelings of happiness evoked by another's good fortune," (Green, 2024) a similar yet distinct emotion. As a media psychologist myself studying narratives, I was unaware of the concept of *symhedonia*. I have been preparing to submit a journal article on the emotional and cognitive responses to success stories of underdogs and their sharing on social media. The concept of *symhedonia* has been incredibly helpful in explaining the experience of joy in underdog stories. Thank you, Dr. Melanie Green, for this help! I hope that many other narrative researchers find Royzman and Rozin's article and Green's essay as helpful as I did.

Mary Beth Oliver and her colleagues (2024, this issue) introduce "*No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*" by media theorist Joshua Meyrowitz (1985), a

book that examines how the dominant mediums of each era have influenced the social behaviors and culture of people of that time. Their essay well summarizes the key thoughts and arguments of Meyrowitz's book, detailing how it has impacted their research group and how they have expanded upon Meyrowitz's concepts and reasoning. As positive media psychologists who primarily study self-transcendent experiences through media, the authors of the essay pay special attention to the concept of social connectedness mentioned in the book as one of the consequences of consuming dominant mediums. They expand this concept into *cognitive empathy* and *synchrony*, introducing their research that extends these ideas. In particular, they present their research program, which applies these concepts to the recent changes in medium-related landscapes. Discussing the influence of Meyrowitz on positive media psychology, they also highlight the challenges and research opportunities for positive media psychology, making it a must-read.

James E. Katz (2024, this issue) introduces an article that, while relatively well-known in various fields of social science, is hardly recognized within the media and communication academic community. The article in question is "*That's Interesting!: Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology*" by phenomenological sociologist Murray S. Davis (1971), who was once Katz's teacher. Davis' article presents a highly provocative argument: "A theorist is considered great, not because his theories are true, but because they are interesting" (Davis, 1971, p. 309). The author of the essay effectively summarizes and introduces the interesting aspects of Davis's work: The first interesting aspect is Davis' development of analytical frameworks and the generalized forms of interestingness to identify the characteristics of interesting theories (e.g., "a theory will be deemed interesting if it can show that seemingly disparate phenomena are in reality various manifestations of a single unifying (if hidden) factor") (Katz, 2024, this issue). Another

interesting aspect of Davis's work is his application of the theory of interestingness to explain three well-known theories: Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious, and Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*. According to Davis, "[those theories] largely lack robust empirical support or accurate predictions" (Katz, 2024, this issue). However, these theories are primarily interesting, which makes "these theories continue to have enduring appeal for their intellectual prominence" (Katz, 2024, this issue).

Ronald E. Rice introduces Archea's (1977) article, *The place of architectural factors in behavioral theories of privacy*, focusing on an architectural view of the built environment as a core source for conceptualizations of privacy and privacy boundary management in particular, and communication studies in general. Rice demonstrates how Archea's conceptualization can be applied to the concept of media affordances in an organizational or online context. Rice also performs a citation analysis of Archea's article to show how much of a "hidden gem" it is for communication and online privacy researchers. Chris Carpenter, one of the associate editors of ACR, responded to the essay, "[This is] a great example of the interdisciplinarity communication claims to prize but in practice usually just means citing psychology journals. ... [It] helps communication researchers see important connections between the architecture of physical spaces and online spaces."

George A. Barnett and Han Woo Park (2024, this issue) discuss two of their studies (Barnett & Park, 2014; Nam & Barnett, 2010) that they consider highly significant for understanding media and communication but have been disregarded by media and communication researchers. They unfold their arguments about why communication researchers are not paying attention to such important studies. The authors express that the current academic field of media communication is not focused on network

analysis studies. According to them, current media communication research focuses on atomic and cognitive aspects, which they argue suppresses the potential for advancement in communication science. They emphasize that to gain a renowned academic reputation from other disciplines, it is essential to utilize new research methods such as network analysis and adopt a broader perspective.

The Academic Fields of Hidden Gem Studies

In 2023, “Hidden Gems in Communication Studies” featured six essays, which introduced 14 hidden gem studies (Carpenter, 2023). In 2024, “Hidden Gems in Media Studies” featured seven essays, which introduced eight hidden gem studies. It would be meaningful to examine the academic fields from which these hidden gem studies were performed. This is because, as previously discussed, inspiring research articles are a valuable asset to their respective fields and can serve as indicators of the discipline’s identity. Additionally, those articles can demonstrate how a field is interconnected with other areas of study. Among the 22 hidden gem articles introduced in the two series, seven were published in media and communication journals, eight in sociology journals, three in psychology journals, and two in general social science journals. Although the sample size is small, making generalization difficult, these results suggest that our communication studies draw significant inspiration from research in other fields, such as sociology or psychology. This also indicates that our discipline is highly open and interconnected with other fields, exhibiting a transdisciplinary nature. Despite the relatively short history of communication studies compared to other disciplines, our field is also producing inspiring research.

Closing Remarks

It is hoped that the 13 essays published by *Asian Communication Research* in 2023 and 2024, along with the hidden gem articles they introduced, will be widely read by communication researchers. It is also hoped that in graduate seminars and research meetings, students will discuss whether the articles introduced as hidden gems truly inspire and whether they hold gem-like value to our discipline. Furthermore, it is hoped that our academic community will continue to discover and share yet unknown hidden gems, contributing to a healthier and more productive scholarly community.

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