How to Write an Impactful Abstract & Cover Letter for Journal Submission

McGill

About Me

- Faculty Lecturer in the McGill Writing Centre

- Most recently researching wellness and fitness influencers on social media

- I teach several science communication courses (WCOM 314, 414, 624/7), as well as Writing the Internet (WCOM 317) and Digital Storytelling (WCOM417)

- Check out McGill Writing Centre website for more info on courses, tutoring and workshops

McGill

Overview

- Audience
  - Person vs. Journal
- Abstract
- Cover Letter
- An annoying takeaway

McGill

Caveats

- This presentation comes from my experience in the social sciences, publishing in largely North American and European academic journals

- Academic publishing in general is facing a crisis of too many papers and too few reviewers/editors (AI exacerbates this)
  - How to make your article stand out is by doing your homework

Terms

- What do we mean by *impactful*?
    - This should not just be about how to get your paper accepted. This is ultimately about showing why your paper matters

Audience

- Think about audience before content

McGill

Audience

- Think about audience before content
  - First stop is someone from the editorial board of the journal to which you're submitting
  - Second stop is peer reviewers

Audience

- Think about audience before content
  - First stop is someone from the editorial board of the journal to which you're submitting
  - Second stop is peer reviewers
- Editor wants to know two things:
  - Is this article interesting/significant in general?
  - Is this article the right fit for our journal?

Article & Journal Fit

- How to know if your article is a good fit:
  - Read aims & scope ([example](#)) of journal
  - Read past articles from the journal

- The goal is to go from "filling a gap in the literature" to "productively adding to the conversation happening in this journal"
  - "Filling a gap" is necessary but not sufficient for paper motivations when submitting to a journal. After you tell me your research fills a gap I will say "so what? Who cares?" And *these* are the questions you need good answers to.

McGill

Abstracts

- In general, abstracts should summarize your paper while including:
  - Motivation for the paper
    - So what? Who cares? Why talk about this subject now? Etc.
  - Approach/method
  - Results
  - Takeaway/Conclusion

- In general think 1-3 sentences per section of your paper
  - This will depend on different abstract word counts so READ YOUR SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

McGill

Abstract Example

ABSTRACT

The attention economy is often used to describe the market conditions of influencers on social media platforms. It suggests new economic logics and marketing strategies governed through accumulating attention. Critically examining this concept, this paper asks: how do influencers understand and manage attention on Instagram? Through 41 in-depth interviews with fitness influencers, this paper found that attention is not always desirable, nor the basis of new forms of economic logics. Further, as participants moved from working part-time to full-time in the online fitness industry, attention-mitigating strategies often replaced attention-seeking ones. This paper critically extends the concept of the attention economy and refocuses influencer marketing efforts on the contextual, rather than universal, use of attention.

McGill

Abstract links to Aims & Scopes

The *JMM* explicitly desires to see all paradigmatic traditions contribute to debates on marketing theory and practice. This includes traditional, predominantly managerial contributions aligned with logical empiricist perspectives, through to interpretive and Consumer Culture Theoretic (CCT) reflections on marketing's role in providing the resources for identity building and self-affirmation, as well as the negative ramifications of consumption on individuals and communities. Studies that engage with both the light-side and dark-side of marketing and consumer practice are welcome.

Going beyond these two research orientations, the *JMM* seeks to support a number of other important paradigmatic traditions including Marxist and Neo-Marxist perspectives, postmodern interpretations of marketing and consumer practice, postcolonial understandings, macromarketing and Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) interventions, to name just a few which further marketing thought. The paradigmatic pluralism of the *JMM* is underwritten by a belief that marketing scholarship must be theoretically embedded and reflexive if it is to enhance our knowledge of marketing theory and practice(s).

McGill

Article Cover Letter

- The goal here is to expand on the following aspects of your paper that will not be fully served by the abstract:
  - Go from "filling a gap in the literature" to "productively adding to the conversation happening in this journal"
  - Motivation for the paper
    - So what? Who cares? Why talk about this subject now? Etc.

- This should be written as an actual letter to your future editor
  - Tell them directly which aspects to care about

Article Cover Letter

- Should also include:
  - Explanation of conflicts of interest (if applicable)
  - Statement that the article has not been published or currently under review elsewhere

- Examples of helpful templates
  - [Taylor & Francis](#)
  - [Springer](#)

- You don't need to reinvent the wheel
  - Follow an appropriate template for your journal
  - What goes inside the template is what matters

Cover Letter Example

- Bad
  - I identified a methodological gap in the literature on the attention economy which was that there were few studies using interviews and many using digital ethnography or textual analysis

- Better
  - Most of our understanding of the attention economy is focused on actions and outcomes. What do influencers do to attract attention, and what are the impacts on social media users? This study advances our understanding of the attention economy by using in-depth interviews to better understand the motivations and strategies of influencers engaging in attention-seeking actions. Investigating why influencers do what they do challenges theoretical assumptions about the attention economy derived only from looking at outcomes and helps explain how it impacts influencers as a subset of social media users.

McGill

Cover Letter Alternatives

- Cover letters are not always required but recommended
- Some journals will require a "summary statement of contribution" (or something similar) either instead of or in addition to a cover letter

Example statement of contribution

- Summary Statement of Contribution: This paper contributes to the understanding of how social media influencers and content creators market themselves by empirically examining their attention-management strategies. This paper critically extends the concept of the attention economy by identifying conditions in which attention is mitigated and undesirable, suggesting the need for a more qualitative appraisal of often quantitative measures of attention on social media.

Annoying Takeaway

- Abstracts and article cover letters often feel like a drag because we think of them as unnecessary and not the important part of the research

- **HOWEVER,** you can reframe these tasks as practices that help you better understand your own research. We might think our own motivations for doing our research are obvious but writing them out gives us a chance to better know our own work and why it matters

Questions

McGill