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## PUBLISHING BOOK REVIEWS IN ACCOUNTING JOURNALS: A LOST ART?

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## PUBLISHING BOOK REVIEWS IN ACCOUNTING JOURNALS: A LOST ART?

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*In a profession dedicated to disseminating knowledge, accounting journals may be missing an opportunity to share knowledge. This article presents original research on dozens of top accounting journals and whether they publish book reviews, including benefits and drawbacks of reviewing and specific key elements to avoid and to include in reviews. The article considers the basic elements of a book review, describes the advantages of publishing book reviews, and provides ideas for how a book review can be published in accounting journals. Results indicate that accounting journals' de-emphasis of book reviews might deprive academics of sharing and dissemination of knowledge that are an essential part of re-search and publication – especially in a post-digital world.*

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Keywords: Book review, accounting, journal, publishing, academic

### INTRODUCTION

Due to the ‘internetization’ of the world and the unique conditions of the twenty-first century business environment, successful book publishing requires precise prediction of cultural trends in order to satisfy dynamic consumer preferences. Extraordinary technological changes, combined with development of the modern commerce infrastructure, helped shift power with regard to book titles, prices, and distribution from publishers to retailers and on to consumers.

For those in the accounting field, as for others, journals can be an important source of book reviews, which can have a significant effect on the commercial and professional performance of books and their authors.

In a profession dedicated to disseminating knowledge, accounting journals may be missing an opportunity to share knowledge through the means of books re-views. This article presents original research on dozens of top accounting journals and whether they publish book reviews, including the benefits and drawbacks of reviewing, and specific key elements to avoid and to include in reviews. The article assesses the basic elements of an effective book review, describes the advantages of publishing book reviews, and provides ideas for how a book review can be published in accounting journals. Results indicate that accounting journals' de-emphasis of book reviews needlessly deprives academics of one vital means by which to acquire the knowledge essential to research and publication.

### BOOK REVIEWS

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a “book” as a “portable volume consisting of a series of written, printed, or illustrated pages bound together for ease of reading” (2014a, n.p.) and an “e-book” as a “hand-held electronic device on which the text of a book can be read” (2014b, n.p.). Carreiro (2010) stated that e-books have “an advantage over regular books in terms of creation, revision, dissemination, use, and access control” (p. 221).

Beginning with Gutenberg’s Holy Bible in 1455, printed books gained rapid acceptance. By the mid-1600s, their impact had increased even further because of “their ability to disseminate information quickly and to a

wide audience” (Keh, 1998, p. 106). In modern times, books have come to be “one of the most important information carriers for knowledge distribution, academic research, cultural heritage, and preservation” (Yaming, 2003, p. 8). Some even see books are “a repository of permanent knowledge and play an important role in its dissemination” (Zinkhan & Clark, 1995, p. 106). In the field of education, book reviews are an important source of information and play an important role in the diffusion of knowledge.

A book review offers a brief picture of a work (whether in print or electronic). It inquires about the purpose, content, and quality of the work. Also, it facilitates decision-making for intermediaries and consumers in the channels of distribution.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLISHING A BOOK REVIEW**

For an industry in which the dissemination of knowledge is foundational, it is alarming to learn that most faculty members in the United States (U.S.) self-report having never published in a peer-reviewed journal and having never published a book (Belcher, 2009). These data decidedly do not lend credence to academics or practitioners. Publishing provides many advantages and benefits to those faculty engaged in it—from enhancing professional and academic reputation to offering proof of scholarly productivity, contributing to the body of academic research, advancing knowledge in their field of expertise, gaining professional recognition, and enhancing their personal brand. In essence, publishing is one of the very few tangible “proofs of excellence” that can be an effective tool for building reputation, gaining prestige, and enhancing one’s personal brand in higher education (Klingner, Scanlon, & Pressley, 2005; Gringarten & Fernández-Calienes, 2014).

The book publishing industry underwent spectacular growth in the past 50 years in terms of both numbers of titles and dollar values. In 1963, 25,784 titles were published with revenues of \$1.68 billion (Keh, 1998). Today, traditional print books published in the United States generated about \$13.4 billion in 2012 with about 301,642 titles, “driven almost exclusively by a strong self-publishing market” (Bowker, 2013). As seen in recent years, scientific and technical publishers generate the highest profits, followed by education and trade (Publishers Weekly, 2013). Technology enables authors, editors, and reviewers to write at a faster rate and higher level of quality than ever before, while publishers can focus upon niche markets and produce targeted products and distribute at a cost, speed, and efficiency unimagined years ago.

Each year, the number of new books published is enormous. Distribution channels for these works include large chain stores with 27% share and e-commerce that represents more than 20% of books sold, while consumers’ decision to purchase a book depends usually on subject (43%), author (29%), and good recommendation (11%) (Eco-libris Report, 2014). Since it is challenging for consumers to determine a book’s quality before they buy it, they increasingly rely on title, author, or book reviews (Ashworth, Heyndels, & Werck, 2010). They also place greater reliance on secondary cues such as packaging (Kotler, 2002) or word-of-mouth (cf., e.g., Huang & Yang, 2008, 2010). Some scholars specifically affirm that positive or negative book reviews affect book sales as well as future author market success (Berger, Sorensen, & Rasmussen, 2010).

“Research findings showing the ubiquity of Pareto and ‘power-law’ distributions in the social and organizational worlds” (McKelvey, 2011, p. 90). This means academic books are likely read according to the power law (i.e., the 80-20 law) versus any normal distribution. The 80%-20% law is a rule of thumb – known by several names most commonly “Pareto’s Law” – that 80% of outcomes may be attributed to 20% of the causes for that particular given event (Morrow, 1996, p. 89). It follows that the book reviewer has an important role in that worthy books that would remain unread in a Pareto-ruled world will have a greater exposure due to a quality book review. Pareto’s law suggests that the academic community will neglect works of significant merit that do not gain a critical mass of attention.

In effect, a book reviewer can aid in information availability and improve the quality of the marketplace of research ideas (cf., Leblebici, 1996). One author has gone so far as to propose, “book reviews, not books, are the principal engines of change in the history of thought” (Belcher, 2009, p. 145). A positive review can

improve the standing of a reviewer as an expert in his or her field. In some cases, it can enhance his or her individual and professional brand presence.

## **WHY PUBLISH A BOOK REVIEW IN AN ACCOUNTING JOURNAL?**

The accounting field in academia has evolved and grown in the last 30 years from 4,700 faculty members in 390 universities in 1984 (Bonner, Hesford, Wim A Van, & Young, 2006) to about 7,900 faculty members in more than 900 universities across the U.S. (Hasselback, 2014). Book reviews in the accounting field did not keep pace with this expansion in academia: Our survey results of the top accounting journals indicate that only 20 percent of journals published book reviews in 2013. Accounting journals as a group do not publish book reviews frequently; in light of the foregoing discussion concerning the value of book reviews, this represents a disservice to the academy.

Book reviews may increase readership for books that might otherwise have a slight following. Books for accounting may not be cutting edge news for the profession but can give the reader context and history for topics which journal articles may lack. Time pressed professionals, practitioners, and academics need the guidance and signals that quality book reviews provide in selecting high value-added reading materials.

The structure of a book review in accounting journals aligns substantially with those in other fields (cf., Gringarten & Fernández-Calienes, 2014). The bibliographic and descriptive sections are generally the same, but the specific difference is in the analytical and evaluative sections. The reviewer assesses the applicability and usefulness of the work under review to the general field of accounting and, as appropriate, to any specific area within accounting.

## **BOOK REVIEW PUBLISHING STRATEGIES**

### **Choosing Books to Review**

Reviewing books can help reviewers create, maintain, and enhance their personal brand and professional image. Creating the required personal image for a reviewer begins with the decision of what books to review. To identify the most suit-able book for review, a reviewer should consider the following:

- Positioning strategy – According to Ries and Trout (1986), who started “the positioning era” with their series of articles in *Advertising Age* in 1972, positioning is how one positions one’s product or service in the mind of consumers relative to competing products and services. Book re-viewers are perfectly poised to position themselves as expert in their field or on a certain subject, by reviewing appropriate and well-targeted books.
- Personal branding – Kotler and Keller (2009) noted that branding is the act of creating differences between products. Companies do not compete between the products they produce, but between what they add to the products such as packaging, advertising, and to the other value added functions that together form the brand. Tom Peters argued that personal branding proceeds from the imperative to “be distinct, or be extinct” (1999, p. 13). By creating and following personal positioning strategies, book re-viewers can help to create the brand image and reputation that play a vital role in building (or eroding) their own personal brand equity. In this regard, the types of books an individual reviews should always create a unique, strong, and positive secondary brand association for the reviewer. Brand associations are anything that consumers connect to the brand and help position the brand in the mind of consumers. Reviewing the *AI-chemists: Inside the Secret World of Central Bankers* by Irwin (2013) creates a very different brand association than reviewing the latest generic novel. Choosing titles that fit one’s own positioning strategies and books published by noted publishers will help to create a good secondary brand association with a “seal of approval” from a known publisher.

- Identifying books for review – A reviewer should search online using keywords related to his or her field of expertise. Many good sources exist today for finding new books. Pre-publication media such as The New York Times Book Review, Kirkus Review, Publishers Weekly, or Library Journal can be a great source for “just published” or forthcoming titles. Online searches on BN.com, Amazon.com, or publishers of Accounting or Finance books can be good sources as well.
- Categories of books – Some book categories are more popular for reviews than others. When best-selling novelist Robin Cook was starting out, he tried to determine what book categories made the bestseller list among unknown authors. He realized that the mystery-thriller genre did the best and he wrote *Coma* in 1977 (New York Times, 2014).
- Positioning versus personal taste – A reviewer should allow the interests of editors and readers to dictate the books selected for review, rather than the reviewer’s own personal taste. Editors usually look for celebrated authors, or current and interesting subjects in new and forthcoming books, published by reputable publishers. As a rule, reviewers should select a current and interesting work or a popular book within the ambit of the reviewer’s expertise; if the selection happens to fit the reviewer’s personal taste, this is a pleasant happenstance, but not one that should dictate selection.
- Reviewer background – Good reviewers should, first and foremost, love books and possess or develop good writing skills; ideally, the reviewer also will have “experience reading books, experience reading reviews, and experience writing reviews” (Hooper, 2010, p. 58). Effective reviewers can claim expertise or experience in the book’s subject matter that will substantially increase the reviewer’s credibility with the reader. University professors, graduate students, practitioners, and subject matter experts with other types of qualifications all can bring unique insights to their reviews. For doctoral students or recent doctoral graduates, writing a review can help change the focus from the rigors of academia to the professional and social imperative to communicate the selected research to a wider audience. Reviews also can serve as a building block for the reviewer’s resume and personal brand.
- Contribution to knowledge – A book should advance the reader’s understanding or contribute to the body of knowledge in the field, and it should be considered as an added value to the reader and the journal that publishes the review. Whenever possible, the reviewer should address in the review two or more related books or articles, as the juxtaposition of multiple works could advance synergistically the reader’s understanding of the subject matter.
- Contribution to the reviewer – The reviewer should review books that can add to his or her body of knowledge, expertise, and preferred research areas and that can help create, maintain, or enhance his or her professional image.

### **Finding an Accounting Journal for Your Book Review**

A prospective book reviewer must weigh the venues in which he or she might publish the review. To identify the most suitable outlet for his or her work, a reviewer needs to assess possible journals as outlets. To this end, the authors have compiled Table 1 (below), which lists journals by internationally established grades and indicates whether each journal includes book reviews (as of the end of 2013) and whether each accepts unsolicited manuscripts. The researcher’s verified data received from journals with actual reviews published in those journals. That is, if a journal editor indicated the journal publishes reviews, the researchers then looked through the journal to check for the date of the last published review. If the journal published its last review more than five years ago, that journal was considered as not publishing reviews and placed in the “No” category.

Table 1 shows that only a minority of top accounting journals include book reviews (7 of 35, or 20%), and a large majority of those sampled across the rankings do not include them (28 of 35, 80%). In contrast, the data

in Table 1 also show that a majority of top accounting journals do accept unsolicited reviews (30 of 35, or 85.7%).

**Table 1: Top Accounting Journals and Inclusion of Book Reviews**

Grade	Journal Title	Includes Book Reviews?	Accepts Unsolicited Manuscripts ?
G4	<i>Journal of Accounting Research</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Journal of Accounting and Economics</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Accounting Review</i>	Yes	Yes
	<i>Accounting Organizations and Society</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Review of Accounting Studies</i>	No	No
G3	<i>Contemporary Accounting Research</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Abacus</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Accounting and Business Research</i>	Yes	Yes
	<i>Accounting Forum</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Journal of Accounting Literature</i>	No	Yes
	<i>European Accounting Review</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Critical Perspectives on Accounting</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal</i>	No	Yes
	<i>British Accounting Review</i>	Yes	Yes
	<i>Management Accounting Research</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Financial Accountability and Management</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Journal of Accounting and Public Policy</i>	No	Yes
	<i>International Journal of Accounting</i>	Yes	No

	<i>Accounting Horizons</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Journal of Accounting, Auditing and Finance</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Behavioral Research in Accounting</i>	No	Yes
G2	<i>Auditing: A Journal of Practice and Theory</i>	No	Yes
	<i>International Journal of Auditing</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Journal of Applied Accounting Research</i>	No	Yes
	<i>British Tax Review</i>	Yes	No
	<i>Advances in International Accounting</i>	No	No
	<i>Journal of Management Accounting Research</i>	No	No
	<i>Journal of International Accounting, Auditing, and Taxation</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Accounting and Finance</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Journal of International Accounting Research</i>	Yes	Yes
G1	<i>Managerial Auditing Journal</i>	No	Yes
	<i>Accounting in Europe</i>	Yes	Yes
	<i>Journal of Accounting and Organizational Change</i>	No	Yes
	<i>International Journal of Accounting Information Systems</i>	No	Yes
	<i>International Journal of Accounting Auditing and Performance Evaluation</i>	No	Yes
		Sub-Total "Yes"	30
		Sub-Total "No"	5
		Total	35

Note. To secure the data for Table 1, the authors selected 35 top journals from the Association of Business Schools (2010) Academic Journal Quality Guide, and then reviewed each journal's Website and contacted editors directly to confirm the data. The authors are aware the International Guide to Academic Journal Quality (2014) still was forthcoming and due in late 2014.

Table 2 (below) shows only those top journals that do accept reviews and one can see that the majority fall within Grade 3 and only a few in Grades 1, 2, and 4.

**Table 2: Top Accounting Journals that Publish Book Reviews**

Grade	Journal Title	Includes Book Reviews?	Accepts Unsolicited Reviews?
G4	<i>Accounting Review</i>	Yes	Yes
G3	<i>Accounting and Business Research</i>	Yes	Yes
	<i>British Accounting Review</i>	Yes	Yes
	<i>International Journal of Accounting</i>	Yes	No
G2	<i>British Tax Review</i>	Yes	No
	<i>Journal of International Accounting Research</i>	Yes	Yes
G1	<i>Accounting in Europe</i>	Yes	Yes
Sub-Total "Yes"		7	11
Total		35	35

Table 3 (below) shows the rates of inclusion for book reviews in ABS-graded accounting journals are as follows: Grade 4 is 20%, Grade 3 is 18.8%, Grade 2 is 22.2%, and Grade 1 is 20%. Thus, on a percentage basis, and in general terms, the likelihood of an author having a review included in an ABS-graded accounting journal appears to be even across the grades of the journals.

**Table 3: Accounting Journals that Include Book Reviews (by ABS Grade)**

ABS Grade	No. of Journals in Grade	Includes Reviews	
		Number	%
Grade 4	5	1	20.0%
Grade 3	16	3	18.8%
Grade 2	9	2	22.2%
Grade 1	5	1	20.0%
Total	35	7	20.0%

Some book categories are more popular for reviews than others. We surveyed all book reviews published in 2013 in the top accounting journals and identified the most reviewed book categories. Table 4 (below) shows the categories of book subjects most reviewed in 2013 in the top accounting journals as follows: Financial Accounting was the most popular topic and accounted for 21% of books re-viewed while Managerial Accounting accounted for 13%, Tax 10%, Accounting His-tory 8%, Corporate Governance 8%, Law 8%, and International Accounting ac-counted for 6% of reviewed books.

**Table 4: Categories of Book Subjects most Reviewed in 2013 in the Top Accounting Journals**

Category of Book Subjects	Percentage
Financial Accounting	21%
Managerial Accounting	13%
Tax	10%
Accounting History	8%
Corporate Governance	8%
Law	8%
International Accounting	6%
Other	26%
Total	100%

### **Key Elements to Remember**

A prospective book reviewer also should keep in mind several core factors that affect an editor's decision to publish the review or not:

- Is the topic current? Will members of the professional community find the topic of interest? Certain books, while used by book consumers, do not have a current focus and will not pique the interest of journal editors.

- Does the book reviewed add to the current knowledge base of the profession? If the readers consider the book to be a rehash of information that is already available, the chances of being published drop substantially. The reviewer should attempt to relate the book content to the intellectual progression of the topic in the field. The major themes of the book and competing themes by other authors should be fit into a mosaic.

The review should critically assess the book content indicating whether the presentation was readable and interesting, the arguments effective, fair, and convincing, and the overall contribution to the issue. Overall, does the book enhance the reader's understanding of the theme or content of the book?

### **CONCLUSION**

Writing a book review for accounting journals can be a stepping-stone to professional development, academic recognition, and enhanced personal brand. Due to accounting journals' de-emphasis of book reviews, it will take practice, perseverance, and patience to get published. In the process, reviewers should be able to improve their book choices, their areas of expertise, and their writing skills. Due to limited opportunities to publish reviews in accounting journals, publishing a book re-view can be challenging, but also a great opportunity for a reviewer to distinguish oneself and thereby to enhance their professional and personal brand.

## APPENDIX

Below is a sample book review guideline based on the format of the Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (<http://www.jmrpublication.org>). You can see many of the elements the authors describe in this sample, specifically as these relate to structure, scope, and style.

### Book Review (Sample)

#### Book Details (no word limit)

Gleeson-White, J. (2013). *Double entry: How the merchants of Venice created modern finance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 304 pages, paperback, ISBN 9780393346596.

#### Reviewer (up to 25 words)

Paz Doe, Ph.D. (include highest degree earned)

#### Synopsis and Evaluation (up to 400 words)

The book offers a thorough overview of the current theories and practices in the field of accounting. In chapter one, for example, it covers...

(or)

This book is an excellent story of the first system that allowed merchants to actually measure the worth of their businesses and...

#### In the Author's Own Words (up to 100 words)

"Accounting generates annually published financial statements that are meant to [guarantee]..." (p. 5).

#### Reviewer's Details (up to 150 words)

*Dr. Paz Doe (pd@abcd.edu) is an Associate Professor in the School of Business at ABCD University, in Miami, Florida. Her area of expertise is in accounting and finance, with a specialization in corporate accounting. Her research interests include corporate accounting, and financial strategies. Her article in the most recent edition of the Journal of Multidisciplinary Research addressed the topic of finance strategies in the corporate world.*

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